

Education: Developing a Counter Hegemony against the Terrorist Ideology

* Ahmreen Malik, PhD Scholar (Corresponding Author)

** Dr. Shagufta Begum, Professor (R)

Abstract



This article aimed to analyze Antonio Gramsci's concepts of Cultural Hegemony and Counter Hegemony in the context of Terrorist Ideology and the US War on Terrorism. Using qualitative analysis, it was examined how educational institutions play a pivotal role in enforcing or preventing an ideology from penetrating public life and changing its course in a war for hegemony. Violent ideologies seep through societies and push them into chaos. The war on terrorism is an effort to establish US hegemony. Gramsci's philosophy of passive revolution can be used to eradicate extremist beliefs and cultural and social tensions within society. The term "indoctrination" has a negative connotation attached to it. Still, it can be used in a very positive way to ingrain impartiality and democratic values in the minds of our youth. The conclusion drawn from this research showed that education based on political awareness is required to unmask the hegemonic narratives that sustain inequities and violence. Counter-hegemony can teach young minds to accept the plurality of perspectives reflected by fellow humans with an open heart and mind. It further proved that Pakistan needs to develop a counter-hegemony or a Passive Revolution to fight the threat of religion-based violence.

Keywords: Hegemony, Counter- Hegemony, Ideology, Passive Revolution, Subalterns

Introduction

Pakistan has been the hub of terrorist activities since the US invaded Afghanistan. Different religious ideologies are at play, and the country is seeing an alarming rise in religious extremism resulting in sectarian violence. From the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979) to the US invasion in 2001 and its withdrawal in August 2021, Pakistan remained involved in a forced war on terrorism. The Pakistani nation never had a choice to say no. The spillover effects of the Afghan situation have left Pakistan susceptible to cross-border terrorist activities. Within the state itself, members of terrorist groups and religious extremists pose a constant threat to its peace and stability.

In the wake of terrorist regrouping, increasing unrest in post-US Afghanistan, rapidly strengthening IS Khurasan, rising religious extremism and the paradox of pleasing two rival superpowers, China and the US, Pakistan is left with few options. Pakistan has tried military force, and more than 80,000 Pakistanis perished in terrorist attacks and those military operations. The solution lies somewhere else and must be a rational solution. Terrorist ideologies have penetrated deep into Pakistani society in the form of religious intolerance. There is a need to develop a counter-ideology, or a "counter-hegemony", as the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci puts it. The word "hegemony" is derived from the Greek word that means "to lead" and is taken in the meaning of "to dominate" or to "control." Gramsci gave his philosophy in the context of communism and economic growth, reducing all political and cultural phenomena to the economic structure. Still, it can be applied in the Pakistani scenario.

Research Objective

The major objective of the study was to examine how education can play a positive role in countering the terrorist ideology.

Role of Ideology in the Rise of Terrorism

Social and political practices in Pakistan entail inequality, oppression, and extreme religious intolerance. Some groups and communities are marginalized and unhappy with how different governments have dealt with their problems. The rising number of terrorist attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, after a relative period of uneasy peace, is a warning for the government and establishment. Twenty years of war against terrorists has not made us any safer

* University of the Punjab Email: ahmareenphil@gmail.com

** University of the Punjab Email: dr.shaguftabukhari@gmail.com

because aggression leads to more aggression. The root cause has to be eliminated. Various commonly held convictions are questioned and found to be inaccurate, inconsistent and irrational.

The political boundaries of a state do not determine the composition of the society within them (Maoz & Henderson, 2020). Geopolitical, economic, social, cultural, and religious factors affect the members of a community. Peace and stability within a society are determined by the relationship between people and their governing institutions (Maoz & Henderson, 2020). What concerns political philosophers are the circumstances that lead individuals and groups to a violent confrontation with the governing authorities. In Muslim states with low literacy and economic conditions, the political elite manipulates religion to advance specific goals. These goals usually include oppressing certain religious groups (often in the minority) with charges of rebellious intentions. The political elite is often supported in this by the religious elite.

Most extant literature revealed that religion alone does not motivate violence. It is discrimination on religious, political and economic matters, as well as the presence of hostile foreign elements that act as motivators of terrorist violence. In Pakistan, numerous factors are at play, aiding and abetting in the rise of terrorism. There are sectarian and ethnic divisions, further aggravated by political and economic discrimination, corruption and imperial ambitions of foreign powers, a perfect recipe for rising terrorism. Mobilizing people based on religion and ethnicity against the ruling authorities are easier under these circumstances. The trend of promoting one religious sect to counter another is deepening the divide. The politicization of religion is inherently risky and results in political resentment and opposition (Suleman, 2018).

During research on terrorism, researchers noticed that ideology plays a crucial role in the rise and spread of violent extremism and global religious terrorism. Ideology may not be "the" only factor, but it is responsible for creating divisions among different groups in any society, giving rise to hatred and violence. Terrorism may not be restricted to the presence of some set of ideologies. It is the outcome of a complex set of processes. Commitment to an ideology that endorses violence may not often lead people to get involved in terrorism, but it does lead to a quiet approval of the use of violence (Lea, 2014). Terrorism is politically and religiously motivated and poses a challenge to the existing norms of society.

Religious ideology leads to terrorism in many cases. The Fourth Wave of terrorism is religious and the longest so far, engulfing almost all of the Arab world and affecting a large part of the developed world (Rapoport, 2013). It is paradoxical that terrorists, driven by religious extremism, often do not know about religion. They are mostly ignorant of the tenets of the religious belief system. Terrorists may not be religious, but they use religion to rationalize their brutal actions (Holbrook & Horgan, 2019). The question is, how do ideologies encourage collective violence?

People identify with groups based on their shared cast, creed, and religious, political or social beliefs (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2011). Such groups employ collective action if they feel wronged or deprived. However, these groups hardly ever resort to large-scale violence. Terrorism is perpetrated by individuals who share the group's grievances, so their actions are designed to speak for the group. The perpetrators are not the only culprits: there are other manifestations of collective actions such as writing and uploading hate literature, fund-raising or terror financing, and publicly expressing support for violence. Therefore, all the actions mentioned above are relevant to terrorism, violence being the most obvious.

Ideologies prove very effective and serve a more holistic purpose when tried in all aspects of life. They are a complex and multifaceted reality. Ideologies may be old, based on religious beliefs, making up a heritage passed on through successive generations. They may acquire agency through political entrepreneurs, promoting a particular vision of the world, thus, mobilizing specific communities to resist the status quo (Holbrook & Horgan, 2019). There are diverse conclusions in the study of ideology as a contributing factor towards promoting terrorism. Some of these ideologies have confrontational characters, making them far more destructive (Wojciechowski, 2016).

Hegemony and Counter Hegemony

Gramsci was an architect who taught how to construct a social movement in a given context. He distinguished between social, political, and military forces at work in a state. According to him, we must first consider the social forces, the economic relation between classes, and political forces. Social movements have three levels; economic, corporate level, economic class level, trade unions etc., and political level, i.e. formation of political parties and their contest for hegemony or rule over

weaker groups. The weaker groups (subalterns) would initially resist the dominant group with a politico-military force because they cannot afford to have a head-on confrontation with a stronger opponent. They would use a political strategy to weaken the dominant group's military or power potential (Nayar, 2015). In the present case, they resort to terrorism to weaken the strong. However, this strategy leads to contradictory outcomes (as happens during military operations against terrorists who, in turn, not only fight the military but also attack innocent civilians).

How are we to change the situation? The purpose of the analysis was to find out the points of least resistance at which the opponents can be brought, and forces of will can be most fruitfully applied. Terrorists cannot fight everyone and everything because, in this way, they not only weaken themselves but also multiply the forces of resistance against them. Hegemony requires compromises with other movements. It is how the ruling group manoeuvres and convinces the subalterns that the changes they intend to bring are suitable for all. An ideology only becomes hegemonic if it successfully forms alliances with other groups. The key to achieving cultural hegemony is to develop a worldview that appeals to a wide range of groups. The message that is successfully sent down is that the particular interests of the hegemon are those of the society at large. To validate this claim, the dominant group makes selective accommodation to the desires of the ordinary people. The dominant group in any society has the power to shape the attitudes and values of society.

The political struggle has to be for the common people, so it should not be reduced to a series of personal affairs between those in power and those fooled by their leaders and yet follow them. Problems arise when rulers refuse to make compromises because they believe in objective laws of historical development, just like natural laws. They believe there is a kind of religious predetermination about their inevitable victory and that a favorable change will occur in some mysterious way. They fail to see that they cannot succeed unless they have a practical and carefully thought strategy involving compromises rather than relying on miracles (Nayar, 2015).

Gramsci stated that governments do not always exercise control through coercion. It is often dictated by cultural control. He dedicated a considerable amount of his work to discuss the question of political control or political hegemony. For him, the most important question was why the subalterns or the marginalized classes let the dominant become dominant. How do they maintain their privileged status and control once they get it, even though their interests are at odds with the well-being of the common people? Gramsci called it the "cultural hegemony" that helps the dominant group to remain dominant (Gramsci, 2011).

Beliefs are more vital than physical force and weapons. Controlling the beliefs of people means controlling them and their loyalties. Gramsci believed that ideas control people. The concept of cultural hegemony can help us understand how ideologies control the lives and the thought process of people. Ideas get put into people's heads and then take control and make them exhibit specific behaviors. These ideas are of a political, religious, economic and ethnic nature. People accept these ideas passively, and they govern all their actions. People need to realize why they do certain things in specific manners. Different ideas that people are exposed to collectively influence their actions.

The leadership of the dominant group may only sometimes be beneficial for the majority. However, they are able to rule through consent. This consent is secured by popularizing the worldview of the ruling class. In other words, the dominant group rules through cultural hegemony. The cultural dominance is so thorough that people consent to be ruled in every moment of their lives as they work, pray, or go to school. This consent is much more subtle than the use of violence. Gramsci called this "passive revolution" (Gramsci, 2011).

Gramsci's philosophy of passive revolution can be used to eradicate extremist beliefs and cultural and social tensions within society. This can be used in Pakistan to counter terrorist ideologies. Passive revolution can be achieved by successive small waves of reforms made up of social struggle rather than by a violent revolution or terrorism. Passive revolution is a kind of restoration revolution, a revolution from above. It involves the passive participation of subalterns from below. Extreme measures are taken to achieve conservative ends. It leads to gradual molecular changes, a slow metamorphosis in society.

The rule of cultural hegemony can work in Pakistani society very well. People can be led to change their thoughts and feelings about cultural, religious and social differences in society. A counter-hegemony or counter revolution has to be launched to reverse the philosophy of violence. The government can do this through mass media, art, culture, and educational and religious institutions.

The governments must build concrete institutions that can expand the capacities available to the people for democratic participation. Gramsci (2011) advocated building the type of institutions that would enable people to participate in the political process leading to their self-emancipation.

Hegemonic ideas manipulate the common people's ideas, language, culture and morality. Mass media and educational institutions can present the counter hegemonic narrative as the true version. This has to be a well-planned enterprise, implemented in a way as to make it a thing so natural and obvious that it becomes a matter of common sense for the people. This is the purpose of an ideology. It is the system whereby the powerful or the dominant group reinforces and continues to reimpose their domination. Cultural and religious practices are the devices through which an ideology is perpetuated. The dominant group decides which ideals to inculcate in the people and the kind of belief system they must possess.

In a similar style, terrorist indoctrination is so imperceptible and thorough that people come to see it as common sense. Young children are brought up with an ideology, a system of thinking that convinces them, as they grow up, that their natural role is to do what others do (Gramsci, 2011). People do not resist because they are convinced, through this ideology, that this is best for them. Terrorists implement exploitation through ideology. Gramsci thought that no ideology is a hundred per cent adequate and always has a counter-ideology. Influential ideologies have an invisible system of transmission and a trickle-down effect. It is this counter-ideology or cultural hegemony that a government can adopt and then, by using the same methods of transmitting it down to the masses, change the people's opinions towards religion-based political violence.

Role of Education in Countering Terrorist Hegemony

In a hegemonic hierarchy, educational institutions, especially schools, can influence society and are effective for the passive revolution. Education can guide and transform youth and counter any extremist inclinations in them. Education is the transformation of self and society. Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire(1921-1997) introduced critical pedagogy. He developed this theory in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. His theory was inspired by Marxist critical theory. It is meant for the needs of the oppressed and marginalized members of society. Critical pedagogy encourages students to critically analyze power structures and question social and political inequalities and the status quo (Elbih, 2018). It is an amalgam of education, political economy and social justice. The role of the teacher is to give political awareness to students.

Our traditional system of education indirectly supports the dominance of powerful groups. It teaches students to resign to the status quo, the hegemony of the oppressor. There is no creativity on the part of the student, who is disempowered and indoctrinated in the ideology of the powerful elite. It is important to raise consciousness among the students to make the oppressed aware of their condition. This awareness can encourage them to focus on their social condition, strive for their rights and resist oppression and manipulation. Students do not simply serve as passive receptacles for knowledge. After home, educational institutions are the first and foremost platform for passing on religious and cultural values to successive generations. Under a totalitarian hegemony, these institutions become the sites for promoting greater repression, militarism, and forced patriotism, changing how people think (Elbih, 2018).

The problem before Gramsci was the consent of the subalterns and their acceptance of capitalist hegemony (Gramsci, 2011). The theory put forward for a communist revolution can be applied to understand and fight terrorist and totalitarian rules. It is a dilemma how terrorists establish and maintain their hegemony and its nature. The people need to find the most effective strategy to counter the culture of terrorism. Terrorist groups and their supporters, in any state, manage to establish hegemonic control over the population through organized indoctrination carried out on a massive scale. Terror tactics reinforce it. Education based on political awareness must unmask the hegemonic narratives that sustain inequities and violence (Baeg, 1991).

Educational institutions serve various intellectual, social and economic purposes, including the transmission of cultural heritage. Whatever the political system of a state may be, liberal democratic or totalitarian, education assists in maintaining and providing a rationale for the dominant politico-social system and the prevailing conditions in society (Wojcik, 2010). Schools can serve as mediums of societal transformation by inculcating youth with dominant values. A teacher under the totalitarian rule is a technician who is to transmit ideological information and convince students of the rationality and ethic of employing terrorist tactics against the regime's opponents—official

educational policy centers around ideological indoctrination (Wojcik, 2010). Teachers must ensure that their students can make informed decisions about the future. Students' ability to draw lessons from the past makes them more informed about their present (Noguera & Cohen, 2006).

Terrorist hegemony advocates a particular brand of ideology, an aggressive mode of governance and a "public pedagogy", including sources of information beyond the institutional border (Elbih, 2018). This out-of-school information may come from social groups, family members and, social media, and it can lead to an exaggerated individualism, disregard of social obligations and, an attitude of authoritarianism. One thing leads to another, and education divides people instead of teaching impartiality, tolerance and pluralism. Blind patriotism, xenophobia, the culture of fear, rigidity and the use of violence to resolve problems have become rampant. People must be warned against sectarianism as it can undermine democracy and all efforts to eliminate inequality.

Terrorists or totalitarian regimes are not the only ones to indoctrinate their populations with a philosophy of "us versus them." The Western or US cultural hegemony is equally dangerous, which takes on the garb of democracy and neoliberalism. The War on Terror (WoT) exposes the imperial intent of the US and its allies. War on terrorism is a valid excuse for imposing US hegemony on the states whose policies are not in unison with US interests (Jacoby, 2005). Weak states have several advantages for the US. It has taken it upon itself to save the Middle East, the Arab World, Afghanistan and Pakistan from the scourge of terrorism. The US has the knack for explaining the faults of weak states without implicating outside forces. For example, Arabs and other Muslim states like Afghanistan and Pakistan are always held responsible for harboring and supporting terrorist groups and sponsoring terrorism worldwide.

The activities of terrorist groups like Al-Qaida and the Islamic State (ISIS) provide the US with the justification of preemptive military intervention in the affairs of "troublesome" states. The world has examples of Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. This gives the US a chance to impose its policies (political hegemony) on the state in the name of political transformation. The intervention is to remove the "inherent threat", which actually is a threat to Western interests ((Jacoby, 2005). As a result of the political transformation, a pro-West government is formed, paving the way for future convenience for the US. The economic growth of underdeveloped countries is condemned as primitive. Hence these states become prey to the "advanced" world. They claim moral authority to impose their terms for development in these "backward" states.

A state qualifies for the US hegemonic expansion/intervention only if it has geo-strategic or economic importance. This unique position is usually accompanied by weak infrastructure, the resistant nature of local cultural patterns, ethnic or religious sectarian tensions that threaten to turn into violent conflicts, high levels of corruption and judicial partiality and weak political institutions (Jacoby, 2005). The failure of states to adopt Western cultural norms has a considerable effect on the well-being of that state. In the post-colonial period, the imbalanced and unnatural geographical borders have provided Western policymakers with excuses for widespread human rights abuses and environmental degradation, blaming these conditions on the state itself (Spanish,2021). As the leading world power, the United States has the potential to change international norms, about the use of force, in self-defence, against terrorists (Jacoby, 2005).

Democracy in terror-hit countries fails to consolidate (Docena, 2017). In Pakistan, there is a political dominance of the elite, continued narrowness, marginalization of the middle class and a disempowered poor. Under such conditions, there is no room left for democracy. Thus, without a central consolidating force, different social groups promote their hegemonic discourses and practices, imposing them on others and shaping how people identify them. There are numerous parallel cultural and political hegemonies in our society, all trying to influence the public narrative. Neither religion nor nationalism could bring people on a single platform. Faith in democratic institutions and fair elections is eroded. The discourses of different classes and religious groups deepen instead of overcoming the divisions among them. These divisions prevent people from working together to reduce social and religious inequalities. Hate speech has become a part of the daily lexicon (Docena, 2017).

A major problem with education is that it has been secularized in the name of science and technology. Education is meant to develop a broad perspective of life. Much research has been done in the field of curriculum design and development of effective strategies for teachers as well as learners. However, academic studies fail to engage religion as a formative core of moral and civic

identity. Religious knowledge combined with public education can cultivate the moral and civic qualities of society (Engelhardt, 2009). With the rise of religion-based terrorism, more than ever, the study of religion has become crucial. There is a need to acknowledge the multiplicity of cultural and religious beliefs of people and their diverse heritage. Religious education is essential to fight the manipulation of religious beliefs.

Even though growing secularism pushed religious studies out of mainstream education, religion continues to affect human life. However, this negligence resulted in the manipulation of faith by advocates of religious extremism. The diminishing role of religion does not mean that people no longer need it or that there is something wrong with it. This is because religious conceptions do not align with government power (Engelhardt, 2009).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Education plays a significant role in developing counter-hegemony against prevailing violent religious trends. Education and educational institutions require special government attention in Pakistan. Severe and honest curriculum reform is required. The curriculum should be designed to equip students to counter society's rampant wrong social and religious narratives. They should be able to see that the militant cause is not always the religious cause. Hence it should not be supported on this basis. Religious studies should be more comprehensive than just Madrassas. However, the government should censor and stop the circulation of terrorist narratives from Madrassas and social media. Religion is an inseparable part of people's lives and should be taught with other social and science subjects. Textbooks should not forge an identity exclusively based on a single version of Islam. The classroom environment should be conducive to the development of critical thinking. The teacher should encourage questions and discussions. Textbooks should include a complete and unbiased view of history. Educationists should introduce a more enlightened public discourse and a system that encourages making a better and more inclusive policy.

References

- Baeg, I. H. (1991). Hegemony and counter hegemony in Gramsci. *Asian Perspective*, 115(1), 123-156.
- Docena, H. (2017). Can we achieve democracy by shunning "moral politics?". *Philippine Sociological Review*, 65, 195-206.
- Elbih, R. (2018). How teaching can change the world? *Counterpoints*, 360, 7-27.
- Engelhardt, C. S. (2009). The necessary role of religion in civic education. *Counterpoints*, 374, 163-186.
- Gramsci, A. (2011). *Prison Notebooks*. Columbia University Press.
- Holbrook, D., & Horgan, J. (2019). Terrorism and ideology: Cracking the nut. *Terrorism Research Initiative*, 13(6), 2-15.
- Jacoby, T. (2005). Cultural determinism, Western hegemony & the efficacy of defective states. *Review of African Political Economy*, 32 (104/105), 215-233.
- Kinacioglu, M. (2012). War on terror and hegemony: International law-making regarding terrorism After 9/11. *International Relations*, 8(32), 67-83.
- Lea, V. (2014). Introduction: Constructing critical consciousness: Narratives that unmask hegemony, including "race" and ideas for creating greater equity in education. *Counterpoints*, 414, 1-13.
- Maoz, Z., & Henderson, E. A. (2020). *Scriptures, shrines, scapegoats, and world politics: Religious sources of conflict and cooperation in the modern era*. University of Michigan Press.
- Rapoport, D. (2013). The four waves of modern terrorism. *Terrorism Studies*, 63-82.
- Suleman, M. (2018). Institutionalization of Sufi Islam after 9/11 and the rise of Barelvi extremism in Pakistan. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 10(2), 6-10.
- Wojcik, T. G. (2010). The role of school-based civic education in Poland's transformation. *The Polish Review*, 55(4), 387-403.
- Wojciechowski, S. (2016). *Radicalism and terrorism in the 21st century: Implications for security*. Peter Lang AG.