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Masood Ashraf Raja Ph.D.
University of North Texas, mraj@unt.edu

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Neoliberal Dispositif and the Rise of Fundamentalism: The Case of Pakistan

Masood Ashraf Raja, Ph.D.

University of North Texas

mraj@unt.edu

Abstract

While developmental theorists rely heavily on analysis of macro and micro economic theories and developmental sequencing, not much attention is paid to the undeniable linkage between the post-seventies liberalization of global economies and the rise of different kinds of religious fundamentalism. This article suggests that there is a strong connection between neoliberal economics and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan can be directly linked to the insertion of performative religious acts, predominantly Islamic, into the national public sphere during the rule of Zia-ul-Haq. Since that time, the public sphere in Pakistan has been increasingly Islamized, and the space of minorities within the public sphere has constantly diminished. Furthermore, this rise of fundamentalism is inextricably linked with the deregulation policies adopted for Pakistan. Thus, as the state fails in its redemptive functions, the private religious charities encroach upon the civic functions of the state, which enables such entities to shape and imbue the public consciousness of their beneficiaries with an exclusivist and chauvinistic view of the world. The fundamentalist Islamic ideologies, that of the Taliban for example, must posit a threatening “other” in order to mobilize support and legitimate their own view of the nation; In most of cases, minorities become an easy target for this process of othering. In case of the Taliban, the same principles of exclusion are also extended to various Muslim sects that may not conform to the purist view of religion espoused by the Taliban.

There is tendency in the metropolitan Western scholarship about Islam to capture the figure of the fundamentalist in its presence as a fully realized subject of its own will by foreclosing any discussion of the material conditions that construct such a subjectivity. In such an engagement with the figure of the fundamentalist, the genealogy of fundamentalism is traced directly to the pernicious ideologies that construct such a subjectivity. Such explanations of the Islamic fundamentalism, obvious especially in the works of American conservative scholars, presuppose that a subjectivization such as that of the Taliban can, somehow, take place outside of history and is hence, completely unavoidable.

“Fundamentalists,” suggests Terry Eagleton, “are basically fetishists,” and “a fetish is whatever you use to plug some ominous gap” (2003, p. 208). Eagleton further suggests that what the fundamentalists fear the most is “nonbeing,” which they attempt to fill “with dogma” (2003, p. 208). Thus, as a cursory reference to Eagleton’s discussion of the fundamentalist suggests, the gap that the so-called fundamentalist attempts to fill necessarily preexists the desire to fill it; it is part of being human in the world, for “nonbeing is what we are made of” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 208). Eagleton recuperates this sense of being in the world through an acute reading of David Hume. The basic assumptions of Hume’s discussion of human understanding can be gleaned from one interesting passage provided in the beginning of his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*:

But though our thought seems to possess this unbounded liberty, we shall find, upon a nearer examination, that it is really confined within very narrow limits, and all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience. (Hume, 1977, p. 11)

It is this particularly empiricist and experiential explanation of thought and ideas by Hume that allows Eagleton to provide an instructive suggestion about the impossibility of a stable self, for, in Eagleton’s words, “because we are historical animals, we are always in the process of becoming, perpetually out ahead of ourselves,” (2003, p. 208) and that is one reason why we “can never achieve the stable identity of a mosquito or a pitchfork” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 208). Resultantly, Eagleton suggests, “[W]e cannot chose to live non-historically: History is quite as much our destiny as death” (2003, p. 209).

The emergence of the figure of a Talib (the Pashto pluralization of which, “Taliban,” has now become an established concept in English) can also not be traced and discussed outside of history. Even though some American conservatives suggest that “the Arab and Islamic worlds are not products of Western colonialism and Imperialism,” (Palmer, 2007, p. 235)—thus tracing the problems of Islam to its own sacred texts—the figure of the Talib is not only a production of Islam but is also a composite figure constituted by the power of global capitalism. I suggest that the rise of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization is the ultimate plane of emergence for the Taliban as well as other global fundamentalist movements¹. As such, what I am suggesting is that the Talib is not a non-historical figure, and, therefore, its emergence as a subject cannot be understood without the material and ideological terrain within which this subject attempts to fill the hole of its nonbeing with dogma. Furthermore, the rise of this figure also impacts the larger culture in which it seeks to fill its emptiness. I will, henceforth, provide a brief discussion of neoliberalism as a system but also as a conceptual and material ground for the emergence of the

figure of the fundamentalist and then trace the impact of this configuration on the role and space of minorities within the *nomos* of the Pakistani nation-state.

While the “globalization” part of the term “neoliberal globalization” is fairly transparent and often invoked in defense of a universalist cultural paradigm (and to challenge all anti-globalist discourses), it is the “neoliberal” aspect of this term that has more drastic consequences for the global periphery. According to Saskia Sassen, the restructuring of the global economy constructs a specific kind of global economy that involves “the formation of a global market for capital, a global trade regime, and the internationalization of manufacturing production” (Sassen, 2007, p. 14). Despite claims of the global economy bringing development and progress to the entire world, Sassen also points out, the power dynamics of this new global economic regime are still lopsided, and, importantly, “the center of gravity of many transactions . . . lies in the North Atlantic region” (Sassen, 2007, p. 58). This also means, in other words, that while the labor-intensive manufacturing jobs are exported to the global periphery, the upper management and flow of profits is still directed toward the metropolitan centers. Thus, globalization, despite claims of its leading to a free market economy, is still a system of global hierarchies in which the so-called “playing field” is not as even (nor is the world as “flat”) (Friedman) as one is led to believe.

The neoliberal aspect of globalization has the more pernicious effects, and I will now briefly discuss what I mean and understand by neoliberalism. John Rapley provides an extensive list of particular attributes that mark the neoliberal regime, some of which are cited below.

In the neoliberal regime, the locus of accumulation shifts more unambiguously to the private sector. Via politics of privatization, the state renounces its direct role in accumulation, and shifts its function from ownership to regulation But it is not simply accumulation that shifts toward the private sector; so too does distribution. The welfare state is pared back and streamlined: some functions are left to the private sector altogether (private charities have taken up much of the work of poor relief in some countries, particularly in the Third World) Thus, the government both reduces taxes and shifts the burden of taxation from income to consumption, with an eye to putting more money in the hands of those most likely to invest it. (2004, p. 40)

What becomes obvious through this brief reference to neoliberalism is that, within neoliberalism, there is a drastic shift in the functioning of the nation-state and its engagement with the people. A neoliberal state, by focusing on accumulation, must forsake the welfare functions of the state in order to create efficiencies that ensure a stable, consumption-based economy. This, then, ends up privatizing nearly all redemptive functions of the state. Now, Rapley’s critique of neoliberal globalization is based in the dissonance between these two important functions of the state: accumulation and distribution. Rapley theorizes these two functions of the state by presupposing certain legitimizing strategies essential to the creation and sustenance of political regimes. The dominant political regimes, Rapley suggests, “depend on the assent of the mass support bases over which they preside,” (2004, p. 33) and, accordingly, “when an elite can consolidate its hegemony over rival elites, a regime comes into being” (2004, p. 33). Thus, the neoliberal regime, with the attributes cited above, is perfect in its accumulative function, for those who

have money are likely to make more, but it fails miserably in its distributive function. It is precisely this concentration of wealth upward and the failure to distribute wealth downward that Rapley posits as the ultimate moment of crisis for the current neoliberal state, for, as he sees it, a regime enters its moment of crisis as a result of a “sudden change in the distribution of resources” or a situation that “brings rival elites onto the scene” (Rapley, 2004, p. 32). Having failed to legitimize itself through good works or the redemptive functions of a welfare state, the state, thus, seeks other modes of legitimation to maintain the balance required to sustain the elite-masses’ consensus, and it is this moment that becomes the ‘originary moment,’ so to speak, for the rise of a more Islamized and fundamentalist public sphere in Pakistan.

In most developed economies, the state, having lost the mode of legitimizing power, transforms into a security state, and so “the defense of the territory—the ‘safe home’—becomes the pass-key to all doors which one feels must be locked” (Bauman, 1998, p. 117) in order to safeguard against all perceived threats. Thus, securing the bodies and, by extension, the possessions of the citizens becomes the new form of a mostly biopolitical regime.

In the case of Pakistan, the rise of neoliberalism coincides with two important markers of Pakistani history: the Soviet-Afghan war and the beginning of the illegitimate dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq. These two events reconfigure the legitimizing structure of the Pakistani *nomos*² both in symbolic and material terms. The symbolic shift in the Pakistani *nomos* was already evident in the unfolding of the 1977 elections. For the first time in the fraught electoral history of Pakistan, two parties (the Pakistan People’s Party and the Islamic Democratic Alliance) fought for the very definition of what would and could constitute the *Bios* and the *Zoē* of Pakistani *nomos*. While the Pakistan People’s Party mobilized, despite its actions against the Ahmadies, a sort of politics that was seemingly inclusive and would have included the *Zoē* (the non-Muslims) within the larger *nomos* of the state, the Islamic political parties, through an Islamic perception of the nation, stood for a specific *Bios* (the Muslims), and thus had the capacity to exclude the minorities as *Zoē* by default.

It is in this symbolic scenario that the post-election coup of General Zia-ul-Haq unfolds, for as he had ousted the so-called secular Prime Minister, he thus mobilized the symbolic affinities and political alignments of Bhutto’s opponents: the *Ulama*. Thus, Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamization project is deeply caught up within a zone of indistinction, in which religion and “qualified life” can no longer be differentiated but rather come together to legitimize his claims to leadership. Let us not forget that the mid-seventies is also the very period in history when the global economy is being restructured and shaped by a process we now understand to be neoliberal globalization. We must also interpret the rise of Islamism (and its attendant fundamentalism) within the very specifics of Pakistani history, for, after all, one person, no matter how charismatic or powerful, cannot reshape the symbolics of an entire nation. As Aijaz Ahmad points out, “the precise developments which are causing this rapid shift within Islamicist movements, from moderate electorally inclined Islamism, to armed extremist movements” (2008, p. 25) must be read within their spatial and temporal specificities.

While India has always provided the necessary foil, in the shape of an outside threat, for the Pakistani leaders to structure and articulate their messages, Zia-ul-Haq also found the Afghan-Soviet war to be another legitimizing narrative. Called the “Afghan Jihad” in the local parlance, the Afghan-Soviet war, while providing General Zia-ul-Haq with an ideal material condition to foster his rule, also centers Jihad as the main signifier of a purely Muslim identity within Pakistan, specifically, and also more generally within the Islamic world. This combination of material circumstances—a failing distributive regime and a “religious” war next-door—

provide ideal bases for Islamizing Pakistan and for the emergence of a subjectivity called the Taliban.

This shift to an Islamized identity is more performative than substantive, as the emphasis is on the appearances and not necessarily on the deeper aspects of religion. In this sense, one could say that the particular attempt to Islamize Pakistan, though enacted through ritual, appearance, performance and law, is in direct conflict with the importance accorded to such rituals and practices by Al-Gazaali in *Ihya Ulum Al din*, a work that, according to some scholars, “achieved the reconciliation of Sufism and orthodoxy” (Campanini, 1996, p. 264) by emphasizing, beside other things, the role of *muhabbah*, love, in the life of a true Muslim. The daily rituals of Islamic practice, therefore, were intended to represent a means by which to create a sort of human subject who could love God and His creations. The problem with the rise of Islamism during Zia-ul-Haq’s regime and its eventual unfolding in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan is that the rituals and performative acts are taken to be the *ends* (as opposed to the means) of this process. Ritual, thus, loses its transformative power and becomes the absolute horizon of spiritual desire and quest.

In such a scenario, all those who do not appear to be Muslims (or in the worst case scenario, are not Muslims at all) become suspect, become “bare life,” a life excluded from the body politic and, sometimes, a life worthy of being ended, without legal repercussions or, at the least, any kind of remorse. Furthermore, during the Zia-ul-Haq regime, this bare life, this killable/controllable life becomes a crucial part of the body and law of the sovereign state. My claim relies heavily on Giorgio Agamben’s theorization of bare life and sovereignty, so I provide below a brief excerpt from his work:

The Sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice and a sacred life—that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed—is the life that has been captured in this sphere. (1998, p. 83)

Thus it is, Agamben adds, that “what is captured in the sovereign ban is a human victim who may be killed but not sacrificed: *homo sacer*,” and, Agamben further adds, “the production of bare life *is* the originary activity of sovereignty” (1998, p. 83). In the case of the Islamization of Pakistan during the Zia-ul-Haq regime, the capture and creation of this *homo sacer*, this bare life, is a natural outcome of the state policies, for, after all, only what is *not* Islamic—(be it culturally or juridically defined)—is absolutely essential to constructing an “Islamic” public sphere and system of law. That is to say, the sovereign—in this case the state of Pakistan and Zia-ul-Haq—cannot exist without the presence, capture, and isolation of this elusive figure: the bare life. The minorities, naturally, provide this necessary ingredient for the stabilization of an Islamic sovereign power. That the minorities in Pakistan have always had the role of the *homo sacer* is undeniable. The recent case of death penalty against Aasia Bibi (whose death sentence is discussed later in this essay) is a good example of that: Her punishment in juridical terms is an expression of the full force of the law on the body of bare life in order to forestall and strengthen the writ of the sovereign law. Also, in the popular domain, I have heard, that a local Maulvi offered five hundred thousand Pakistani rupees to anyone who would kill this woman, which is another example of the importance of bare life even to the self-legitimizing strategies of powerful “Muslim” private citizens.

There are two other important ways in which the system of power changes in Pakistan after the Zia-ul-Haq coup: (1) those in power structure their system through “constituting power” instead of “constituted power” and (2) a return to Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia) accentuates the differences between active rights and passive rights of citizenship. Let me first unpack the four terms that I have used to describe this shift within the Pakistani public sphere.

Agamben suggests that the most acute aspect of the “paradox of sovereignty” (1998, p. 39) lies in understanding “the problem of constituting power and its relation to constituted power” (1998, p. 39). Agamben provides the following appraisal of the role of constituting power in contemporary times:

Today, in the context of general tendency to regulate everything by means of rules, fewer and fewer are willing to claim that constituting power is original and irreducible, that it cannot be conditioned and constrained in any way by a determinate legal system and that it necessarily maintain itself outside every constituted power. The power from which the constitution is born is increasingly dismissed as a prejudice or a merely factual matter, and constituting power is more and more frequently reduced to the power of revision foreseen in the constitution. (1998, pp. 39-40)

Of course, Agamben’s discussion of the differences between the “constituting” and “constituted” power is specific to his European experience. In the case of Pakistan, during the Zia-ul-Haq regime, the constituting power becomes transcendental and timeless and comes to haunt the constituted power at every turn. A return to Sharia, even if it is a gesture, is the ultimate assertion of an originary constituting power into the very fabric of the constituted power of the Pakistani state. We must also remember that this prominence of an originary and absolute constituting power is posited as an ultimate solution against the symbolics of people’s power mobilized by Z. A. Bhutto. The mere fact that his political party was named the “Pakistan’s Peoples Party,” regardless of whether or not it truly was a “people’s” party, captured and excluded any Islamic constituting power and replaced it with the will of the people as the ultimate constituting power for the constitution. This gesture (and that is all that it was) had the potential to unleash the most democratic and transformative politics, for if the people were the ultimate force of construction and revision, then none of them could be excluded or devolved into bare life through law or in the name of an originary, unchangeable, extra-human—divine—constitutive power.

Another revolutionary aspect of invoking the people, or the citizens, was that such a politics could not posit an exclusivist view of the people, for in such a symbolics, all national subjects were citizens possessing active rights and not divided between those with “active rights” and those with “passive rights.” This takes me to a brief explanation of the terms “active” and “passive” rights. While explaining the development of the discourse of rights in the Western tradition, Agamben suggest that “at the very moment in which native rights were declared to be inalienable and indefeasible, the rights of man in general were divided into active rights and passive rights” (1998, p. 130). Needless to say, this distinction between holders of active and passive rights is inherently gendered, racialized, and theologized. In such a scenario, those deemed “proper” citizens tend to hold active rights, with a right to actively participate within the political sphere of a nation, whereas those with passive rights are in a sense relegated to the bare life and, as such, can only hold the right to live within the national political sphere, without

access to any form of political power. Thus, there is a constant drive, Agamben argues, in the modern biopolitical sphere of a national space to “redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside” (1998, p. 131).

While this applies to the rise of the Islamized nation of Pakistan, there are, however, certain specific permutations of the inside and the outside, the active and passive bodies within the national space. The increased Islamization of the Pakistani public sphere has immediate consequence for women and minorities: Both in juridical terms as well as through social pressures, the women and minorities, despite being native citizens of the Pakistani nation-state, are transformed into passive bodies, bodies discouraged from being active right-holders within the public sphere. And this transition is accomplished by foregrounding the defining power of the constitutive power of the state—the Sharia—as an absolutely unchallengeable body of law, as opposed to the constituted power of the Pakistani constitution. Thus, the constitutive power, instead of receding and becoming suspect or irrelevant, captures these bodies with full force as the only living power within the political sphere. Pakistan, sadly, has never recovered from this reconstruction and articulation of constituting power as an absolute, irreducible presence. Surprisingly, however, the figure of the refugee, posited by Agamben as the ultimate emblem of crisis in the national space, is not seen as an outsider, at least not within the sovereign’s attempts to legitimize itself. In fact, the figure of the Afghan refugee becomes the ultimate symbol of masculinity and a legitimizing emblem for Zia-ul-Haq and his followers. Thus, at the very moment that neoliberal globalization is unfolding in the world, the Pakistani nation’s self-legitimation is connected to the most international symbol of the global human crisis: the refugee.

This refugee, however, is not an average displaced figure. This particular refugee is inscribed in the most potent masculinist project in Islam, for he is a “Mujahid.” It is his status as a Mujahid that is incorporated into the national paradigm of sovereignty and, resultantly, Jihad becomes the ultimate point of arrival for a male Muslim subjectivity. This international Jihad, supported by the West and fought by the Afghans and their international volunteers, thus becomes the ultimate self-legitimizing concept for the sovereign power in Pakistan. It is this confluence of material and symbolic currents that creates the ideal conditions for the rise of the Taliban not just as a movement but also as a mode of being in the world.

It is no secret that during the Afghan Jihad, the Pakistani government was actively engaged in supporting the Mujahideen, but we should also remember that Zia-ul-Haq used Jihad as a symbol to support other jihadist groups in the world as well. It is this prehistory of modern Jihad that has constructed, both symbolically and materially, Pakistan into an ideal space for Jihadists from all over the world. We must also remember that the concept of Jihad that underwrites Zia’s regime (and also the current politics of the Taliban) is an extreme reading of the concept itself. As I have argued elsewhere³, a Talibanistic reading of the term “Jihad” is a ‘limit reading’ of the concept, just as their reading of the Sharia is a ‘limit reading.’ In this act of reading the concepts at the limit of their semiotic and semantic forces, a Talibanistic imagination focuses only on the most literalist and the most extreme interpretations of the concept. Thus, even though Jihad is made central to their project, what is meant by “Jihad” is actually “Qital,” which is the ultimate end point of the concept, not its beginning. Similarly, in terms of justice, *Hadd*, the strictest punishments available under the Islamic law, become the norm. The system of being in the world and the act of being human, thus, get inextricably connected with the power to kill and the power to punish. Sharia is thus reduced to a simple system of swift justice practiced through harsh punishments.

In the traditional anti-Islamic writings in the US, all these developments are attributed to the inherent flaws in the “Islamic sacred,” thus precluding any room for a materialist explanation of the term Jihad].” In fact, in one of my earlier projects as a graduate student, I myself was guilty of making such hasty judgments.⁴ But in order to fully engage with the rise of fundamentalism in Pakistan, one must go beyond ideology and look at the material processes by which fundamentalism is precipitated and one must acquire an intimate understanding of the *dispositif*, or the apparatus within which subjectivity such as that of the Taliban finds its expression. Michel Foucault, describes the term *dispositif* in one of his interviews in 1977:

What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the [programme] of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. (Foucault, 1977, pp.194-228)

Thus, in a way, one could say that all subjects are articulated or expressed within a complex array of material and symbolic expressions of power, and one cannot, thus, attribute the creation of subjects to just one locus or cause. In order to understand the rise of Taliban, therefore, one must also, at least, attempt to understand the particular *dispositif* that structures Talibanistic subjectivity. In Agamben’s explanation of Foucault’s usage of the term, a *dispositif* or apparatus “is a decisive technical term in the strategy of Foucault’s thought,” (Agamben, 2009, p. 1) and, Agamben suggests, “for Foucault, what is at stake is rather the investigation of concrete modes in which the positivities (or apparatuses) act within the relationships, mechanisms, and ‘plays’ of power” (2009, p. 6). The *dispositif* that structures Talibanistic subjectivity must, therefore, be studied within this complexity. I believe that it is the neoliberalism, the Afghan-Soviet war, and the rise of Zia-ul-Haq’s regime that constitute a sort of *dispositif* that becomes the ultimate ground of expression of Talibanistic subjectivity.

This apparatus, or plane of emergence of the Taliban, however, also has its peculiar differences from Foucault and Agamben’s discussions of biopolitics. In fact, as the *bios* and *politics* of this *dispositif* are mobilized to affect human bodies, the state and the sovereign come to increasingly define themselves through their power to kill and punish and not through, in Foucault’s words, “the right to *take life* or *let live*” (HS, 1990, p. 136).

The Afghan-Soviet war also provided the necessary conditions and the human capital to be reshaped into not only the masculinist and Jihadist models of a so-called Islamic subjectivity but also the purist model. Conceptually, while the culture foregrounded Jihad—in its version as *Qital* as the main signifier of its masculinity—materially, the orphans produced by the war became the docile bodies to be shaped into a particular kind of social weapon. According to Ahmad Rashid, the Afghan Jihad provided Jameat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan a unique opportunity to “set up hundreds of madrassas along the Pashtun belt in the NWFP and Baluchistan,” (1989, p. 89) and these madrassas become crucial in shaping and structuring these orphans into what they would eventually become: the Taliban.

Defined through Jihad and a purist idea of a Muslim subjectivity, the Talib is a self constantly attempting to fill the hole of non-being with dogma. If modernity and all its signifiers become contaminants to a pure identity, then reshaping the entire project of modernity becomes the ultimate quest, and any conceptual or material threats to this pursuit become suspect. Increasingly, while these subjects are taking shape, emerging within the current state of international capital, the state, having bought into the myth of progress through neoliberalism, has lost any means of offering more complex (or secular) modes of experiencing the national life.

In such a scenario, the figure of the other (the minority, the woman) becomes the ultimate marker of otherness. An otherness that must first be reduced to the role of a passive right-holder and then mobilized to foreground the power of the state. The case of Aasia Bibi is a prime example of such juridical and extra-judicial mobilization of passive bodies for the project of power. While Aasia Bibi, a Christian citizen, was sentenced to death for alleged blasphemy under the Pakistani blasphemy laws, the judge deciding her case went beyond his mandate to ban any commutation or pardon of her sentence by the president of Pakistan, a power vested in the presidency by the Pakistani constitution. Furthermore, so far, those who have attempted to speak in support of Asia Bibi have also been silenced through private acts of violence: Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab, was murdered by one of his own security guards⁵ for his vocal opposition to the blasphemey laws, and Shahbaz Bhatti, the federal minister for minorities, was also murdered for his stance against the Asia Bibi's sentence and the blasphemy laws. It seems that in case of Pakistan, the state and the Taliban may not be able to provide any redemptive material help to their citizens, but they will certainly punish those who pose a threat to Islam or insult its sacred symbols.

Thus, to sum up this inconclusive argument, death and the power to punish become the ultimate mode of sovereignty in the Pakistani public sphere, and the minorities, as passive citizens, become crucial to asserting the juridical power of the state and the power to kill with impunity that has now come to be the hallmark of the politics of death espoused by our Taliban brothers.

I will conclude with one example from Islamic history, without, as you might have noticed, offering any neat solutions to the troubling questions that I have raised in this paper. As a scholar, I believe, my primary job is to pose questions and not to provide neat or conclusive answers. In his theorization of power, Foucault provides us the image of power as a web rather than a hierarchical structure, for power, according to Foucault, “is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (HS, 1990, p. 93). In this web of power, Foucault also acknowledges the existence of resistance as a “pre-given node” within the tentacles of power. To add to this fascinating theory of power, one could say that in its expression within a particular *dispositif*, power also performs a two-pronged move: It moves upward to seek the body of the sovereign, and it courses through the body politic, seeking the

weakest and the most vulnerable nodes within its web. Thus, in this two-pronged movement, power latches on to the preexisting powerful nodes and intensifies its force by literally affecting the very bodies and souls of the most vulnerable, the most disenfranchised within a specific sphere. The ideal role of political power in Islam, in Sharia, had been to forestall and redirect this two-pronged movement of power, which is best described in the words of Abu Bak'r, the first caliph of Islam:

I have been given the authority over you, and I am not the best of you. If I do well, help me; and if I do wrong, set me right. Sincere regard for truth is loyalty and disregard for truth is treachery. The weak amongst you shall be strong with me until I have secured his rights, if God wills; and the strong amongst you shall be weak with me until I have wrested from him the rights of others, if God wills. Obey me so long as I obey God and His Messenger. But if I disobey God and His Messenger, ye owe me no obedience. Arise for your prayer, God have mercy upon you.

This was the initial, revolutionary potential of Islam that made Islam one of the most dominant religions of its time: its potential to force power to move against its natural flow, its natural drift. Unfortunately, our Taliban brothers and their sympathizers have only adopted a part of this message: They all believe in social restructuring of the society and distribution of resources, but they have forgotten that the primary role of the sovereign in Islam is to bend power so that it redeems and enables the weak and that it does so without making the weak and their bodies the very site of power's self-presentation as absolute.

¹ I have consistently suggested this in some of my previously published work as well. For details, see Raja 2007 and 2010.

² I am relying here on Georgio Agamben's discussion of the Greek terms *Bios* and *Zoē*, according to which *Zoē* "expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings" and *Bios* "indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group" (1). Within the symbolic terrain of 1971 election, both the parties would have treated the minorities as *Zoē* (as bare life), but the chances of the minorities' inclusion as *Bios* (as qualified life) were higher within the class-associated politics of the Pakistan People's Party, especially since the party was not mobilizing Islam as the leading signifier of national identity.

³ See Raja 2009.

⁴ See Raja 2005.

⁵ The murderer was received as a hero by the fundamentalist groups and individuals, which points to the degree of decay of the Pakistani public sphere.

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