

Pakistan's Ahmadiyya Paradox: Fighting Extremism While Practicing Takfir

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May 12, 2014: In the half rural-half industrial town of Sheikhpura four men were arrested by Punjab police . Their crime was tearing down posters filled with hate speech directed at their community plastered outside a shop in their village. The shopkeeper immediately filed a complaint with local police claiming that the posters contained Quranic verses. The men were charged with blasphemy.

May 16, 2014: A 16 year old boy walked into the police station and shot one of the men, 65 year old Khalil Ahmad, dead.

Earlier today a Sessions Judge, Mian Javed Akram, sentenced the other three men to death for the crime of blasphemy.

The most persecuted minority in Pakistan, Ahmadiyya Muslims believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835-1908) was the Messiah and Mahdi (divinely guided redeemer) prophesied in the Ahadith. A group of clerics in Pakistan led by Maulana Maududi started a movement against the community in the nineteen-fifties. They accused them of not believing in the finality of Prophethood residing with Prophet Muhammad and therefore heretics. Their goal was the excommunication of the entire community. on September 7, 1974 they got what they wanted: the Second Amendment to the constitution of Pakistan declared Ahmadis non-Muslims and reclassified them as a religious minority.

In April 1984 General Zia ul Haq promulgated Legal ordinance XX which criminalized the profession of allegiance to Islam and the use of Islamic signifiers and monikers by the Ahmadi community.

And even that has not sufficed to satiate the sadistic impulses of many Pakistani Clerics and politicians



who continue to fabricate lies and conspiracy theories about the Ahmadiyya community. Who continue to use anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment as a multipurpose tool for recruitment, electioneering and distraction from political problems.

This year there have been at least six targeted killings of Ahmadi Muslims-and that is far better than they have fared in the past. The deadliest attack on the community occurred on May 28, 2010 when 94 people were killed and 120 injured in simultaneous attacks on two mosques in Lahore.

I would invite every Muslim who agrees with the right to deprive Ahmadi Muslims of their allegiance to Islam to practice an empathy exercise. Imagine for a moment that the nation you live in is taken over by a theocracy of a different sect. This sect passes a law that declares you a non-Muslim. You are prohibited from calling yourself a Muslim and from calling your places of worship Mosques. You must put up with constant accusations of conspiring against the country and the religion. You encounter posters in public places cursing you and condemning you to hell. There are certain shops that have put up signs saying they will do no manner of business with your sect.

That is what Ahmadi Muslims endure. If you are okay with this please dig a little deeper to check if you have any humanity left at all.

Just two days ago a leader of the ruling party, Captain Safdar, demanded on the floor of the National Assembly that all Ahmadis in the military and judiciary be removed from office. He furthermore declared Ahmadis a threat to Pakistan and adherents of a “false” faith.

Meanwhile day after day we hear condemnations of religiously themed violence and “takfiriism”- the arbitrary excommunication of supposed heretics and “apostates” by extremists-from government and military leadership. It is impossible not to sense the tragic and monstrous irony in this paradoxical behavior of the state.

This is what this comes down to. A state cannot fight extremism while practicing it. The perverse, unislamic and potentially lethal practice of Takfir cannot be vanquished till the state’s very constitution practices it.

Yes, let me say that again: the constitution of Pakistan is a Takfiri constitution as long as it contains the Second Amendment and Ordinance XX. Whatever legal and theological contortions people may come up to challenge this assertion it requires no further proof than the text of these despicable laws. You cannot institutionalize extremism and persecution and expect to be successful in curbing its appeal among the nation’s youth.

If you keep creating what you are fighting, do not expect triumph, gratitude or adulation. There are no heroes in such a war-only losers and the dead.

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