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Emotional Motivations of Islamic Activism

Autobiographies and Personal Engagement in Political Action

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Abstract

The article examines autobiographies of persons who have belonged to different Islamic groups. The so-called cycle of engagement of an individual person – a “personal protest cycle” – to the Islamic activism is examined through the autobiographies. The main questions will be: how did one become an Islamic activist; how did the actual engagement occur; how did the activism evolve and how did the disengagement from the activism take place? Politics of emotions forms a general framework for understanding political activism and, more generally, protest or oppositional politics.

Keywords: Islam, activism, autobiographies, emotions, protest cycle

Introduction

Over recent years transnational and global forms of Muslim politics have characterized international politics. Muslim terrorism, the so-called caricature crisis and other examples have shown that the political dimensions of Islam have a powerful appearance in the transnational public sphere. Different manifestations of politicized Islam have been the objects of intense research, however the importance of personal level considerations has been undermined in favor of an ideological, structural, or organizational-level analysis (see, for example, Wictorowicz; Akbarzadeh and Mansouri; Seib and Janbek).

The empirical focus of this contribution is in the autobiographies of people who have belonged to Islamic groups. Autobiographies are personal testimonies or narratives on how individuals perceive their location in a socio-political sense. The examined autobiographies are written in English, and they are undoubtedly targeted mainly at people living in the West,

but presumably also to other Muslims. In this work, seven autobiographies, published in 2005 or later, are examined. In three cases the activist actions took place in diasporic situations within Europe or the United States, and in four books the activism was mainly based in the Middle East.

Even though autobiographies are personal affairs, they reveal an important understanding of politics and political action in general. In this contribution, it is argued that political activity is motivated and empowered by collectively expressed emotions. The meaning of emotions in political theory has conventionally been seen as a rather marginal issue. “Real” politics is understood as a rational and goal-orientated activity, in which emotions appear as a troublemaker or a problem to be solved (cf. Ost). However, the hypothesis of this work is that emotions are an increasingly important part of political discourses and practices in both Muslim and non-Muslim political contexts. As Dominique Moïsi argues, “[i]n an age of globalization, emotions have become indispensable to grasp the complexity of the world we live in” (9).

The analysis related to the autobiographies is based on their narrative interpretation. Through the autobiographies cycle of engagement of an individual person, a “personal protest cycle” to Islamic activism is examined (cf. jihadist cycle in Jenkins: 123-32). The main questions posed are: how did the subject become an Islamic activist; how did the actual engagement occur; how did the activism evolve; and how did the disengagement from this activism take place? In these contexts, for example, how are the emotions of anger, frustration, and hope linked to the logic and motivations of the political actions of the Islamic activists that will be considered? In this way, the politics of emotions forms a general framework by which to understand political activism and, more generally, protest or oppositional politics. Islamic history and traditions as well as the socio-political situation of the Muslim world provide a rich basis for various emotional responses and motivations.

All in all, the examined autobiographies are interesting in terms of understanding transnational Islamic politics and political actions. They participate in the debates about the nature and motivations of transnational Islamic activism: their audiences are diverse, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Through them it is possible to try to understand the non-violent activism, but they also probably give some indications to assess the emotional basis of violent, terrorist-related activism, in particular, joining the groups and being exposed to politically articulated Islam. This type of information is also interesting from the point of view of fighting against terrorism.

Politics of Emotions and Collective Action

Transnational and national forms of Islamic activism differ considerably from each other in their historical background and context, motivation, and political goals. Also, the level of radicalization is a major dividing element between different Islamic movements around the world. Terrorism or militant extremism has been a relatively exceptional form of Islamic activism and non-violent activism has remained a prevalent pattern of politicized Islam. This variety of Islamic activism means also diversified involvement in activism at the personal level: there is a wide range of personal paths to activism.

There are different explanations as to why people take part in collective action (see Barnes: 464). Kılınc and Warner direct attention to explanations of religious activism indicating, for example, scholars who employ social movement theory and focus on social networks. They rightly comment that social movements theorists' explanations "leave open questions of individuals' motivations for engaging in the movements" (4). Another group of scholars to which they refer frames social issues through religious ideas and topics in mobilizing religious adherents. According to Kılınc and Warner, these "scholars do not examine how these frames resonate with individuals' own understanding of their faith and its consequences for social action" (4). They also draw attention to scholars who apply economic theory to develop micro-level explanations of why people contribute to group activities. They argue that even though scholars are interested in micro-foundations of social action, "they base their explanations on the rational calculations of the relevant actors and mostly ignore the beliefs and pro-social inclinations of individuals" (4).

In this work, contrary to the above-mentioned ways of explanation, the argument is that collective action, or political activism including Islamically articulated politics, is very much related to personal experience and human emotion. In other words, politics and political actions are produced and performed by human beings, and therefore feelings, emotions, and passions cannot be ignored. By combining emotions and activism, the intent is not to exoticize Islamic politics or to "non-rationalize" the behavior of Muslim people. The argument here is that emotions are central to all politics, not only to opposition movements and social activism, but to mainstream politics as well. Politics requires, as Ost argues, "the mobilization and sustaining of powerful feelings" (240).

Emotions have long been an underrated topic in politics (see Hoggett and Thompson: 1). According to Berezin, those who study politics "view emotions as extrinsic to the study of politics" (34). There are a considerable number of counterarguments against the relevance of emotion in the context of politics. One of the main arguments is related to reason and rationality, which are considered incompatible, and reason has been represented as superior to emotion (cf. Hampshire: 640). Traditional understanding of politics emphasizes rational choices, and, accordingly, it is understood that good decisions are based on logical and coherent thinking (see Mercer 2005: 80).

What, then, is the connection between emotions and reason? As a basic rule, ordinary people as well as scholars consider emotions as the opposite of reason. The dualistic approach is clearly present in the following relations: passion vs. reason, emotion vs. cognition, irrational vs. rational, unconscious vs. conscious, unintentional vs. intentional (Mercer 2006: 289; see also Ratner: 5). Emotions are seen distinct from rationality (Mercer 2005: 92-93) and a representative political action is seen as a rational choice between different alternatives. Emotions are regarded as "an inappropriate category of analysis, unless accounting for psychological and behavioral pathology, in which case the emotions are held to predominate" (Barbalet: 1).

According to Mercer, emotion plays a role for political scientists when explaining irrational choices or mistakes. Emotions are a somewhat separate and irrational part of human action: "Scholars view emotion as a cost or benefit to be modelled, a toll to be manipulated to send signals or impart credibility, or as an inevitable but unfortunate aspect

of human decision making” (2005: 92-93). In other words, emotion is understood as a source of misperception or to explain a deviation from a rational baseline: emotion causes mistakes, and seldom prevents them (2006: 291).

Even though emotion and reason are defined as opposite entities, an increasing number of scholars try to define an alternative model for the dichotomized ideas of reason and emotion and view “some emotions as strategic and therefore rational.” In other words, emotion could be utilized to pursue short-term self-interests (Mercer 2006: 293). Nevertheless, in these cases emotion is seen as subordinate to rationality. A more balanced idea of the relation between emotion and rationality emphasizes that “emotion is not merely a tool of rationality but instead is necessary to rationality” (Mercer 2005: 92-93). Ratner criticizes, “[t]he most fundamental error is dichotomizing emotions and thinking and attributing them to different processes,” and stresses that emotions are feelings that accompany thinking: “Emotions never exist alone, apart from thoughts” (6).

There are many different ways to approach emotions. Depending on the scholar, three to ten basic emotions can be identified, including fear, anger, disgust, surprise, happiness, enjoyment, shame, guilt, grief, and sadness (see e.g. Bucy: 79; Burkitt: 682). According to Solomon, our lives are defined by emotions, “we live in and through our emotions” (10). In order to understand the political dimension of emotions, they should not be regarded merely as individual and somehow “internal” phenomena (see Burkitt: 679) or as responses to external stimuli. It follows that emotions are not passive reactions to external forces, but emerge as a part of the relationship between an individual and a physical, social, and cultural context. Emotions should not be located within the sphere of subjectivity alone (see Emirbayer and Goldberg: 486). On the contrary, emotions are in social relations (Barbalet: 4), i.e., politics of emotion is a relational issue characterized by reciprocity. Different emotional reactions enhance each other: “Emotions influence the ways in which we respond to and engage with our relationships” (Porter: 97).

In conventional political theory emotion is understood primarily as a consequence and rarely a cause in political processes (see Mercer 2006: 290) – politics and other actions cause different emotions, but emotions do not cause politics. The starting point here and contrary to the conventional position, is that there is no action without emotional involvement (Barbalet: 2). Mercer argues that “without emotion we have neither motivation nor direction nor creativity” (Mercer 2006: 292). Emotions are therefore closely intertwined with actions: “Emotion precedes choice (by ranking one’s preferences), emotion influences choice (because it directs one’s attention and is a source of action), and emotion follows choice (which determines how one feels about one’s choice and influences one’s preferences)” (Mercer 2005: 94).

Emotions also show a direction to values and political ideals and thus determine what is good and right: Emotions “play a role in our thinking about the good and the just, and therefore in evaluations of political ideas and ideals” (Burkitt: 682). Also Porter (97) emphasizes the role of emotion in relation to political values and practices. He states that “[e]motions reveal what is important to us, what we value, how we perceive situations, what affects us, and how we should respond ethically.” Emotions provide motivation and direction to political actions: emotions influence choices, and emotional reactions are a result

of choices made (Mercer 2005: 94). According to Ratner (5), the etymology of emotion is “to move something” – emotions lead to change and establishing values and political ideals (see also Vince: 1190). Political behavior and action emerge from different emotions – such as fear and anxiety – which are related to the direction and consequences of change (Vince: 1190). Wright-Neville and Smith when speaking especially of violent politics, argue that “understanding the long history of humiliation, anger, resentment, envy and frustration . . . is a critical step towards understanding the deeper dynamic forces which drive the urge to violent political behaviour in the modern world” (93). In that way, emotions could be understood as an energy that might change social reality and have effects on the structures and cultures of a society (Turner: 179).

In research, the emotional side of politics has many times been linked to social movements and oppositional politics (see Hoggett and Thopson: 5-6; Barnes: 464-8). Political and social movements are studied frequently in terms of resources or power positions, but the emotional perspective emphasizes collective psychology and the re-conceptualizing of emotions in contentious politics (c.f. Emirbayer and Goldberg:470). In this sense belonging to a political and social movement is a thoroughly emotional experience: recruitment to a movement, staying in and dropping out, all could involve a strong emotional aspect (Adams: 85). When we try to understand Islamic action in its different forms it “requires an understanding of the emotionality that both motivates and is generated by action” (Barnes: 468).

What is, then, the role of religion in the context of emotions and Islamic activism? Religions in general provide not only a spiritual but also a cultural, social, and political toolkit for emotional experiences, and it can therefore be expected that religion performs in many ways a major role in the emotional politics of Islamic activism as well. Religion provides a bridge between individual and collective experiences, and also between this world and the afterlife. Religions are able to answer “a permanent emotional need in individuals, the need to love something greater than the self” (Shilling: 17). To love something greater than the self is often comparable to being or becoming greater than the self. According to Kemper, ideologies, including absolute faith in God “can turn even the weakest actors into highly dedicated, highly destructive combatants, willing to suffer self-immolation as long as they exert disproportionate injury to an enemy” (62). The feeling of belonging to an omnipotent and eternal entity could be an important emancipatory power. In a way, religions can create symbolic spaces which attract people to commit to religiously based collectives and movements, and, furthermore, “influences members’ emotion that keeps people from leaving a movement and contributes to its strengths” (Adams: 86). In this sense, religion could also be seen as “emotional capital” for the Islamic activism; it is a “recourse for mobilizing potential participants and for sustaining their involvement” (Dunn: 235).

Religiously motivated emotions are closely linked to the concepts of identity and community. The emotional side of identity is also relevant in order to understand the psychological dimensions of communities and collectives. The idea of a global Islamic community, *umma*, is one of the cornerstones of Islam. There is a profound basis for the construction of community of emotions which are “emotional responses to events that lie outside institutional politics” (Berezin: 38, 43). Emotional experiences are not bound to a certain historical situation; many emotions are preserved over years and even decades.

However, emotions do not need to be active all the time or to control the life of an individual; rather, they can remain latent, even for a long time (see Solomon: 6). Through emotions, the past, present, and future become connected to one single experience, with emotions linking different times and generations (see Ahmed: 202; Solomon: 6).

Autobiographies as a Research Material

In this contribution, the collection of material is comprised of seven autobiographies written by males who belonged to politically active Islamic groups. The authors are Ed Husain (*The Islamist*); Daveed Gartenstein-Ross (*My Year Inside Radical Islam*); Omar Nasiri (*Inside the Global Jihad: How I Infiltrated al Qaeda and was Abandoned by Western Intelligence*); Walid Shoebat (*Why I Left Jihad*); Kamal Saleem (*The Blood of Lambs*); Mosab Hassan Yousef (*Son of Hamas*); and Abdul Salam Zaeef (*My Life with the Taliban*). Three biographies deal with political action taking place in the diasporic situation in Europe or the United States (Husain, Gartenstein-Ross, and Nasiri), three mainly in Palestinian areas and Israel (Shoebat, Saleem, and Yousef), and one mainly in Afghanistan (Zaeef). In most of the biographies, the events and activities take place in several countries, and in some cases both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. In the biographies which are related to Palestine and Afghanistan, armed and suicide related terrorism is placed in a central position. In those which are related to diasporic situations in Europe and the United States, unarmed activism is central. The narrative analysis focuses specifically on the activists who have experienced the whole cycle of engagement with activism including the exit process; it excludes narratives by activists who have remained in the groups.

Even though “an autobiographical narrative seems simply personal, it is anything but merely personal” (Smith and Watson: 31). Analyses of autobiographies and their authors differ in many ways from each other, for example in terms of motivation of political activism, socio-political reasons for activism, and socio-economic backgrounds, but their emotional narratives share many common features. This does not imply that that Islamic activism is created by homogenous political figures. A common ground is based on the very processes of engagement and disengagement of political groupings, not in the assumption that Islamic activism could be understood as a unitary phenomenon. In other words, the emotional experiences related to those processes could be very similar regardless of the nature of the movement.

The context of the examined autobiographies is a transnational public sphere (see the concept in more detail in Olesen; Linjakumpu 2011). The books are written in English, and are undoubtedly targeted mainly to people living in the West, but presumably also to other (diasporic) Muslims. However, it should be remembered that “the study of audiences for autobiographical narratives is not a developed field” (Smith and Watson: 99) and, therefore, it is difficult to verify the intended audience of these autobiographies. The audiences might be rather diversified collectives “for whom certain discourses of identity, certain stories, certain truths make sense at various moments” (Smith and Watson: 97). On the one hand, these biographies respond to the needs of Western countries to gain insight into Islamic thought and action. A non-Muslim person living in a Western country may not be able to grasp the perspectives of Muslims on phenomena related to political Islam, but autobiographies make the Muslim perspective more accessible. On the other hand, these

biographies provide Muslims and the Islamic world with first-hand information about the processes of engagement and disengagement in Islamic activism (cf. Kundnani: 52-57).

Autobiographies are a form of life narratives in which people express their own lives: life narrative “is a record of self-observation, not a history observed by others” (Smith and Watson: 6; see also Anderson: 9; Maftai: 17-19). Life narratives are stories and interpretations by the individual and autonomous subject, and so differ from biographies which are made by an external biographer. Life narrators use personal memories as the primary archival source, making autobiographies an “imaginative act of remembering.” In that way they “address readers whom they want to persuade of their vision of experience” (Smith and Watson: 7). According to Robert Sommer, an autobiography can be defined as “an extended and cohesive narrative written by a person describing her or his life or portions of it” (199). Autobiographies are a specific type of literature in which “life is transformed into a story” (Karpiak: 101), which help explain the relationship between self and other, and also connect events in the past and present (Karpiak: 103).

The authors studied describe the time they became involved in activism; they were all relatively young at that time. The autobiographies are not truth about Islamic activism, but interpretations of personal experiences in that context. An autobiographical truth “is an intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of meaning of life” (Smith and Watson: 16). Autobiographical narratives are not historical documents nor “sources of evidence for the analysis of historical movements or events, or persons” (Smith and Watson: 13). Therefore, autobiographies cannot be understood as historical record, rather they offer subjective interpretation of certain events, time, and people. Life narrators are “justifying their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of others, settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable futures, among others” (Smith and Watson: 13; see also Maftai: 17-26).

Problems can arise when ex-members have biased attitudes towards their former groups and the elected autobiographies may differ in the representations of their former groups. Those with Palestinian background have a relatively critical attitude towards the actions, aims, and ideological background of their former groups. Because autobiographies are personal accounts, they are somewhat biased accounts and interpretations of each author’s life and prioritize certain aspects of the life at the expense of others. Autobiographies of both current and ex-members reveal certain differences in their emphases. Ex-members have presumably experienced some negative feelings and experiences which caused the disengagement. Those who are still in movements may have similar feelings, but have remained in the movement for the time being.

The emotional narratives include positive and negative elements. However, emotions are not wrong or right; they describe human experiences as they are felt. This article focuses on Muslims who have experienced the whole cycle of involvement in activism, that is, a wide spectrum of emotional experiences from the optimistic excitement of engagement to the antagonistic feelings of the disengagement process. As Stuart Wright emphasizes in his study of ex-members of religious groups, “most are faced with both positive and negative components that are not easily synthesized into one simple and harmonious explanation”

(181). The heterogeneous nature of Islamic activism exhibited by the authors examined in this study demonstrate a common cycle of involvement.

This paper will analyze the cycles of engagement and disengagement. The cycles have been named “prelude,” “joining an organization,” “being in an organization,” and “farewell.” They represent different stages of activism and how emotional dimensions occurred for the authors of the autobiographies. For example, before joining an organization, one experiences emotions such as disappointment and anger toward political and social conditions that direct him or her to politically active behavior. In joining an organization, emotional needs are met and nourished by the recruiters and people in the organization. After engagement, one needs emotional fuel to remain active in a politically motivated occupation. The process of disengagement involves some sort of doubt and disappointment toward the movement.

Prelude: Disappointment and Anger

Personal engagement in activism requires a suitable background and social context: political activism does not emerge without justifiable conditions and without specific needs on the part of the potential activist (Venhaus: 2). The examined biographies usually cover life from early childhood to middle age. From the point of view of this article, the experiences of childhood and youth are especially interesting: why has a person become interested in Islamic thinking and activities and what kind of emotional shift or “mental transition” (Venhaus: 4) to activism and even terrorism has occurred? Furthermore, what kind of an emotional transition or mobilization phase can be detected in this shifting towards activism?

The backgrounds of the Muslims behind the autobiographies studied here are varied and take place in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. There are some similarities and unifying features, both factual and also in terms of experiences and emotions. The starting point of the autobiographies is generally a disappointment in an existing personal, social, and political situation and an attempt to find something better and more meaningful. On a personal level, there may have been a degree of nonconformity to immediate surroundings and everyday things, for example school, work, or study. Conceptually, the needs in their lives were not answered, and in a certain situation, the possibility to “live differently” opened in one way or another. Maladjustment may also be related to personal situations:

. . . I had some intense spiritual questions. Not only did I feel isolated at Wake Forest, but I also came close to dying twice before I turned twenty-one. After a couple of brushes with death, I was acutely aware of emptiness in my life. . . . The three biggest things that were missing from my life were friendship, a sense of purpose, and a relationship with God (Garterstein-Ross: 9, 13).

On the other hand, the sense of maladjustment, isolation, and strangeness may be nourished by an unsatisfactory position in society, both in the diaspora or within Muslim countries themselves (Venhaus: 2). The humiliation of Muslim people is especially seen as a basic circumstance outlining the authors’ emotional responses. The problematic position of many Muslims in the diaspora can be combined with the humiliation stories that have generally been in circulation within Muslim countries. Thus, the personal experiences of the individual

interrelate to the reality of the Islamic world and to its earlier history. The narratives of humiliation can also be a contributory factor toward marginality (cf. Hall and Fine: 186), which can lead to the emergence of political participation.

Under appropriate circumstances, these emotions could become associated with anger. The formation of anger requires an increase in social and political awareness: for example, the diasporic Muslims' understanding of political situations in Muslim countries, their relations to non-Muslim countries, historical grievances, or perhaps a difficult situation on the part of diasporic Muslims could create both a motivation and a basis for hate (see Nasiri: 22-24). In this way, the smooth transition to radicalization becomes acceptable and understandable, and at the same time, it is motivated by the actions of others. The basis of politics lies in the mobilization of emotions, insults, and hostility against a certain group of people (cf. Venhaus: 8-9).

In the examined cases, the authors becoming frustrated and the experiences of anger have been a basis for the change and transition to a politically active phase. According to Ost, anger is a central emotion in politics "both as a diffuse, untargeted sentiment citizens experience, and as the emotion political organizers need to capture and channel, which they do by offering up an 'enemy' they identify as the source of the problem" (230). In the autobiographies the development of the feeling of anger is not something sudden, but takes shape gradually, either through different events or a conscious adoption. Shoebat mentions that "[h]atred develops like drug addict" (13). In such situations hatred is needed more and more to develop sufficient motivation and encouragement for the person's actions. In order for anger to be transformed into action, there must be a sense of where to direct the anger and the consequences of the action, and this creates the emotional combination of anger and hope, in which hope creates a window of opportunity out of an existing unsatisfactory situation.

The activation of feelings of hate and frustration to an Islamically articulated political action is possible through the earlier experiences of the person and through an existing "cultural toolkit." In these cases, religion has at least at some point played a meaningful and probably positive role in the lives of the authors, either personally or in the context of family (see Husain: 11-14; Garterstein-Ross: 2-4; Saleen: 20-22; Yousef: 5-8; Zaeef: 1-6). The autobiographies describe how Islam has been transformed from a purely religious, cultural, or social sphere of life, into a political issue. The political dimension of Islam, politicization, has not been an obvious element in the lives of these people, but has evolved over time.

Joining an Organization: Feeling Special

What were an author's final reasons for joining an activist group or organization and what has been the definitive turning point in the transition to concrete action? According to the autobiographies, engagement with Islamic activism does not take place at an organizational level but through individual and informal encounters. Thus, the intensification of emotions and a mental shift towards activism does not happen in an abstract manner or without external intervention. It requires encounters with other people and an appropriate basic understanding and knowledge that confirms both one's own reasoning as well as a suitable socio-political situation, in which one's own experiences appear relevant. In the autobiographies, the role of a mentor or a mediator is decisive, specifically, that there is

somebody who has acted as a guide to new ideas and possible activities (see Garterstein-Ross: 11-23; Nasiri: 22-24; Saleem: 55-61).

The encounters with a mentor and new comrades are fed by feelings of anger and disappointment, but, at the same time, something else is provided as a substitute. Access to circles of activists and a feeling about the relevance of one's own existence provide a motivation to enter deeper into a particular ideology and actions. According to the autobiographies, the access to activist circles itself cannot be seen as a self-evident course of action; the groups have nurtured the feelings of the candidates that they, of all people, are important and noteworthy. By example, Saleem refers to comments he received from his comrades: "You are chosen! He is saving you for a specific time to do glorious things!" (116). Whilst an individual author might have lived in an unfavorable social situation, the engagement towards Islamic activism could most likely generate respect towards him or her.

In light of this, the experiences of comradeship and togetherness rise as an important factor in the autobiographies (see Husain: 30; Garterstein-Ross: 22-23). To somebody who has been an isolated social outcast, the emotional connection to like-minded people and their acceptance can be a very powerful motivating factor in the final transition to activism. As Husain argues: "I was genuinely impressed by his tender and brotherly behavior" (30). Joining a movement or activity could become a natural choice if there are no other equally attractive future prospects, and the transition to activism could take place mentally and emotionally very quickly if the situation is suitable and the person is prone to change: "Looking back, I am still astonished by how I became so confident so quickly following my affiliation with the Hizb" (Husain: 92).

To be part of a purposeful organization and to work with comrades sharing a common ideology and goals may create a strong sense of belonging: "Former terrorists, when asked what they miss about their lives as active members of such groups, often talk about the closeness they felt with group members, the sense of shared risk and common purpose. In their eyes, life as terrorist had an intensity and purpose that life outside the organization noticeably lacked" (Silke: 192). Joint activities and missions go hand in hand with constructing the comradeship. In many instances, Islamic activists have lived or at least worked together intensively and created a strong feeling of togetherness. This kind of life can effectively fulfil ones need to belong to a group which defines one's identity, role, friends, and interaction with society (Venhaus: 10). If a certain group has a strong feeling of group identity, this "leads to sharing, cooperation, perceived mutuality of interest, and willingness to sacrifice personal interests for group interests" (Mercer 2005: 96). People must invest emotional significance in groups in order to "care about them; if people do not care, they neither cooperate nor compete" (Mercer 2005: 96). As such, shared feelings and emotions are essential to collective identifications:

What a brotherhood we had among the *mujabedeem*! We weren't concerned with the world or with our lives; our intentions were pure and every one of us was ready to die as a martyr. When I look back on the love and respect that we had for each other, it sometimes seems like a dream (Zaeef: 43).

In the autobiographies related to armed terrorism, the significance of the camps that train terrorists is emphasized: the training of potential terrorists took place together with

others and under the management of more experienced jihadists, and the camps collecting activists appeared as central modes of action leading to the jihadist life and thinking (see Nasiri: 105-244; Saleem: 89-97; Zaeef: 34-35). In these camps, one learns of the importance of the personal commitment in addition to concrete practices. After such a mentally and emotionally profound training, it is difficult to withdraw from these jihadist activities because of the sacrifice of financial and mental input made by other comrades on behalf of the cause.

Being in an Organization: Emotional Fuel

Following the transition to activism, the activities still require emotional fuel; being an activist is not motivated by itself. One noteworthy aspect of activism is that while the goals of activism could be rather ambitious, the attempt to try to achieve them is made through small steps. Thus every activity, strike, or act is a part of a larger plan in which all actions are significant. Even if an act would have no immediate practical effect, confidence in a great shift or victory maintains the meaningfulness of the action: “With no real chance to destroy Israel, and with defeat after defeat, we still dreamed of that single victory, since we believed that was all it would take to destroy the Jews” (Shoebat: 32). While the policy of small steps is, generally speaking, a common activist method, at an individual level it requires a gradual and ever deeper commitment to activities and ideologies. Garterstein-Ross also describes how this commitment can be a conscious desire to achieve certainty of one’s own faith and hence also of the other issues:

I was beginning to more fully understand what made me refer to myself as a Salafi in my phone conversation with al-Husein. I didn’t want to straddle two worlds with my commitment to Allah battling my passion for “social justice.” I didn’t want to be racked by doubts and uncertainty. I didn’t want to be regarded as a heretic by my brothers and sisters in faith. No. I wanted to live a life of conviction – like Abdul-Qadir, like al-Husein. I wanted a clear guide for telling right from wrong (154).

Steady routines lasting decades do not fall within the emotional logic of activism but, on the contrary, in the case of an individual, there is an effort to reach an increasingly intense level of activism: nothing is enough. Especially in those groups that are involved in suicide attacks, activities culminate in fatal attacks, which are the fulfilment and root cause of all actions. Even though suicide attacks are fearful acts, they might function as “vitalizing emotions” (see Barnes: 467). Hope attached to death and a perspective of salvation give activism a mighty flavor (cf. Linjakumpu 2007). In the autobiographies related to Palestine and Afghanistan, the commitment and tendency to suicide attacks is apparent: even though none of the authors were directly associated with suicide missions, their influence and importance was noticeable. According to Stone, war and killing is perceived as a “holy task of renewing the community” (56-57), and he calls this “a sacred participation, a divine transgression, since it is carried out in the name of community, purifying it, returning it to its myth” (55).

The politicization of emotions has a rather uncompromised and non-negotiable nature and follows the logic of politicized emotions in general. In conventional politics, interests between different groups potentially cause conflicts, but those conflicts, according to Walzer, “can be negotiated, principles can be debated, and negotiations and debates are

political processes that, in practice and in principle, set limits on the behavior of those who join them” (617). In other words, interest-based politics are somehow manageable through negotiations. Emotion or passion-based politics on the other hand, are beyond negotiations or mutual understanding – it is the politics of “all or nothing.”

The opponents of Islamic activists also form part of the motivation and emotional aspect of politics. As emotional politics is a relational concept, “the enemy” also defines the content of one’s own politics. The more evil the enemy, the more effective the basis for emotional politics: “The passionate intensity of terrorists and murderers is, at least sometimes, matched by their most heroic and effective opponents. If there were nothing awful to oppose, there would be no need (and no occasion) for that kind of emotional engagement” (Walzer: 622-23). In this context, the meaning conveyed by media is essential, since it is through media that considerations related to enemies and friends become visible. The importance of the reactions of the enemies and the impact of media visibility are emphasized by Husain’s narrative. He tells how important news coverage and reporting of activities were in terms of one’s own motivation and general visibility:

Boosted by the intense media interest, we went from strength to strength. Nothing gave us greater motivation than to hear our ideas being amplified in the national media, reaching new audiences of millions. To us it did not matter whether the coverage was favorable or otherwise. We were resigned to biased reporting, but we knew that there was a crucial constituency of Muslims who would look upon us as their leaders, their spokesmen against the attacks of the infidels. It was this recognition we needed more than anything else (103-104).

Issues other than media reactions are important. Husain tells of the actions and reactions of police: “So easily bending the police to our will made us feel immensely strong” (117). From the point of view of the activists, noticing their own power could create a positive circle and new situations and encounters could strengthen self-esteem. Husain writes that former acquaintances frequently considered him a meaningless and unimportant person. His later comment reflects the strong satisfaction he felt when he could show previous classmates his new power: “It amused me to see the faces of some of my old classmates from Stepney Green as they wondered at my transformation from school misfit to powerful student leader with hordes of adoring followers” (59).

The awareness of other similar struggles or actors reinforces the confidence in one’s own actions. Different locally based Islamic networks do not necessarily have a specific link at the transnational level, yet the feeling of belonging to a wider network of Muslims builds a perception that you are not alone with your political and religious mission:

Hakim and I spent a lot of time talking about politics, about the injustices inflicted on Muslims all over the world. It was the end of 1993 and the war in Bosnia had been going on for almost two years already, as had the war in Algeria. I had been aware of all this long before Hakim returned to Morocco. Every Muslim was. But it was the war in Afghanistan I knew most about . . . And like everyone else, I hated the Russians (Nasiri: 22).

On a personal level, progress in a movement could strengthen self-esteem – one can feel able to do necessary things and to succeed in them. As Saleem describes: “As a young boy rescued from ethnic street violence, I drank in his teachings in all its simple, childlike clarity. The teachings of the Brotherhood gave me power, authority, and ultimately, a gun” (70). Movements also use emotional strategies in a conscious way. When they try to contact new potential activists or when they try to inspire other Muslims, movements aim to affect their emotions and feelings. Husain tells how he and his comrades used the feelings of guilt, shame, and humiliation on other Muslim students (63).

Activist leaders try to create and legitimize emotional norms, how activists “should feel about themselves and about dominant groups and how they should manage and express the feelings evoked by their day-to-day encounters with dominant groups, often through ritual; as such, movements may contain their own emotion culture” (Adams: 87). According to this idea, emotions are not voluntary and certain kinds of activist groups certainly try to control their members’ emotional and, accordingly, ritual experiences. Religions and their emotional history construct a cultural capital that can be used for political purposes. Past and historical emotions are manipulated and manufactured for the use of contemporary societies and for shaping human consciousness. As such, the use of emotional history is selective; suitable events and occasions are utilized yet others are neither memorized nor remembered (Carrette: 279, 287).

Farewell: From Doubt to Disappointment

When studying collective action, the focus is normally on the processes by which individuals engaging in social movements. Less attention has been paid to processes of disengagement and de-radicalization, i.e. how individual members of movements exit circles of collective action and activist ideologies (see e.g. Barrelle; Disley et al.; Horgan). The examined autobiographies are complete narratives about engaging and disengaging from activism. Thus, they do not cover stories of how activities would have continued further. The autobiographies are illustrations of how the authors have strongly committed to a specific ideology and forms of actions. The commitment has been comprehensive and, therefore, it is understandable that maintaining such intensity has not been simple: it requires increasingly extreme contributions, or ultimately, one must withdraw from it. The emotional link between an individual actor and an organization may have been very strong, yet emotions cannot be entirely forced. In other words, emotional politics may be of an uncompromised nature, but they have to be based on voluntary actions to be effective. This is also apparent in the case of Islamic movements. Although many organizations have been very successful in their emotional politics, a possible weakness also exists within it. An emotional commitment to an organization can change or disappear and, therefore, politics based on “constant mobilization of emotion” (Ost: 237) can be unpredictable.

The transition to activism and the forms of action seems have similarities among the different activists in the autobiographies; the experiences of their withdrawal and de-radicalization also follow a similar logic. At first one begins to suspect the legitimacy and justification of the activities: ideological or behavioral de-radicalization (Barrelle) is also related to *emotional* de-radicalization. Shoebat (22) tells how he felt sorry for the children whom he was planning to kill. For him, this was a culmination or trigger “that calls into

question a person's commitment to a radical organization" (Rabasa et al.: 13); the situation no longer met his expectations of the activities and the movement. Step by step, hatred against the ideology and people involved in the movement arose (Shoebat: 35). Yousef also refers to similar feelings: "I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Something had to be done to stop this rolling madness. I knew the time had come for me to begin working with Sin Bet. And I went at it with all my heart" (135).

In addition to suspicion, an increased awareness of different activities has affected the withdrawal of the authors of the autobiographies from their organizations. Husain reflects on his life and tells how he slowly became aware of how deep *Hiẓb ut-Tabrīr* had permeated into his life and his "teenage mind" (157). Activities were going too far and they were about to become too concrete; they were no longer just speeches and rhetoric, but also demanded more straightforward efforts (154). Husain was not prepared to engage in all that the ideology required. Garterstein-Ross, in turn, was suspicious during almost his whole period of activism, but despite of that, he went deeper and deeper to the hard-edged activism until he also began to gradually separate from it (105, 108, 110, 136, 210). This behavioral disengagement process was associated with a feeling of uncertainty, as can be seen from his reflections:

When you become Muslim, you thought that the moderate interpretation was clearly right. You thought that extremists were either ignorant or manipulating the faith for their own gain. Your time at Al Haramain has made you question this. As your cherished vision of Islam collapses, you're left feeling depressed, helpless and confused (224).

Suspicion is also linked to the disillusionment of the results achieved and their meanings, that is, discordance between the ideals of the activists and reality (Barrelle: 11; Disley et al.: 13-14, 32). Expectations are not met, which causes disappointment in the activities and actions (Husain: 187). Nasiri describes how his increasing proximity to violence gave him a reason to disassociate himself from the group to which he belonged:

It was the first time I truly felt how close I was to all this horror. . . . I bought the guns for Yasin because it was exciting, and because I needed the money. Often I fantasized the weapons were going off to Bosnia or Chechnya, that they were being used to fight legitimate wars against the enemies of Islam. Of course I knew most of the stuff was going to Algeria, but it didn't bother me at the beginning. I had come to feel differently as I read more, and as the GIA become more vicious. Everything was different now. The people on the plane were real to me: Arab immigrants living in Europe who loved their families and their land, and wanted to go home for holiday. The GIA had tried to kill them all. It was horrifying to me, and when I heard the tape I knew that I was connected to it. I hadn't pulled the trigger, but maybe I had supplied the guns and the bullets. I was a killer, just like them (Nasiri: 59).

Disappointment could also be directed against other Muslims. The diasporic Muslims often have an underlying idea of unity amongst all Muslims with shared values and ideologies: they have an idealized impression, especially of Muslims living in Muslim countries. The struggle of achieving Islamic hegemony is often linked to the perceived future

of those countries. Husain aptly describes the feeling of disappointment in a situation where Saudis on holiday in London were not interested in the common cause (Islamic hegemony), but only in their own pleasure (137). Furthermore, the autobiographies show the disappointment in their life as an activist, where the comprehensive commitment leaves no room for joy and the normal things in life – life becomes grave and joyless. Being an activist can provide fulfilment for certain needs, but one’s personal life can be emotionally empty. Therefore, in the long run, it does not offer enjoyment or emotional response.

The activist lifestyle is tightly focused and defined by several rules, and normal social relations and activities do not easily fit into it. When something other than religious and activism related issues and relationships become part of an activist’s life, withdrawal is easier (Disley: 11-13, 28). In particular, love affairs are likely to fundamentally change the perception of the priorities of one’s own life (see Garterstein-Ross; Husain; Saleem: 284-87). In these cases, a change of priorities in life is also an indication of a change in emotional commitments and the former emotional environment within activist circles no longer appears emotionally appealing.

Among the autobiographies, the withdrawal from activism and activist ideologies has been diverse and life after this transition has not necessarily been without complication. The transformation to an “ordinary” Muslim and an ex-activist does not happen immediately, but involves a similar kind of transition and identity building process as experienced when entering into the activist circles (see Horgan: 4; Rabasa et al.: 12). Uncertainty about the direction and meaning of life creates an instability that can persist for a very long time after the activism phase (see Nasiri; Husain: 177; Garterstein-Ross: 269; Yousef). Withdrawal from activism is challenging; the process of activism may itself have been traumatic and emotions can efficiently enforce and sustain social activism, but, at the same time, activism can be emotionally puzzling (Disley et al.: 34-35; Horgan: 4-5).

Final Remarks

What could a study based on emotions offer in terms of Islamic politics? The autobiographies considered here are interesting since they provide an understanding of the logic related to persons who are inclined to activism and extreme actions: why has one engaged in activities and what is the cycle of such actions? The examination has sought to get rid of certain self-evidences, e.g., how extreme Islamic activity takes place. It is easy to think that joining an activist group and acting in such a group are somehow involuntary or automatic processes within a certain socio-political context. Additionally, explaining Islamic activism is often based on meta-level models, such as economic or political issues, which are expected to somehow affect the forms of social and political actions in a straightforward way.

An examination based on these autobiographies illustrates well how the transition to activism has not provided a sudden solution for these people and furthermore, politically articulated Islam is not a self-evident form of religion. On the contrary, the autobiographies show how the transition to activism has been a product of a conscious effort. Politically motivated Islam has also caused trouble in the relations between the authors and their circles of acquaintances. Instead of families, relatives, and friends, there have been people who have been facilitators towards activist ideologies and activities. In the backgrounds of individual

activists and jihadists, there can be greatly varying personal stories, regarding their disappointments in life, conflicts with family and relatives, etc. In these situations, the Islamic organizations can offer the feeling of the solidarity, friendship, and a religious-ideological care. Charismatic mentors and leaders of activist groups can easily create emotional bandages, yet the activist way of life portrayed in the narratives emphasizes the significance of tight personal and social connections based on common objectives and mutual companionship.

Activism gets its initial power from the emotions of disappointment and anger, and at the same time, feelings of solidarity and comradeship provide the motivation to belong to a certain activist group. Participation in activist activities can, however, create a vicious circle. It is easy to go deeper and deeper into activism and positive feedback supports a gradual development towards a more intensive commitment. The autobiographies also describe how gradual withdrawal from activism follows a similar pattern. At first, the activist may begin to have doubts regarding their actions and ideological goals, and emotional emptiness or gratuitousness follow. Actions no longer seem to be meaningful or to provide the emotional basis for commitment. The activist's life is essentially socially limited, effectively preventing ordinary social and family relations.

The emotional logic of activism is to go ever deeper *or* to withdraw from it completely. According to the autobiographies, there are no in-between forms of involvement. Recruitment to activist groups does not happen to many people, but those who end up in these groups are likely to be in a kind of deadlock with no easy chance to pull out of the situation. Isolation and strict concentration on the group's ideology strengthen commitment, and the natural end of which may well be carrying out a suicide attack.

This article has focused on Islamic activism. The logic of emotional motivation of engagement and disengagement with radical organizations is not exclusive to Islam. The findings of this study could be valid for radical organizations and groups that are neither Islamic nor religious. Politicization of emotions could be perceived as one of the most distinctive features of current politics, challenging effectively the conventional understanding of politics as a rational choice.

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