Ostracism And Violence In The Contemporary History Of Religions

Muhammad Mubashir Saleem
Lecturer in History
Govt. Maulana Zafar Ali Khan Graduate College
Wazirabad, Pakistan
fmsaleem558@gmail.com

Abstract

Psychology explores the motivation for certain kinds of behaviour such as violence. This study investigates the correlation between religion-based violence and ostracism. There is evidence to suggest that those who are chronically ostracized could become involved in forms of extremism and violence that is not necessarily inspired by their religious tradition. Religious minorities belonging to any faith sometimes join extremist groups after being ostracized in order to compensate for their basic human need to belong. If Islamophobia is understood as the exclusion of Muslims from western societies, it is one form of ostracism. Some Muslims in Europe feel that the wider society does not recognize them as full citizens. Moreover, anti-Semitism and negative attitudes to the Christian community in Pakistan are also examples of ostracism. Policy-makers could take steps to reduce the danger of the violence provoked by ostracism.

Keywords: Correlation, violence, ostracism, Islamophobia, basic human needs, religious minorities

Introduction

The psychological phenomenon known as ostracism, which refers to the process of rejection and exclusion of individuals or groups from society, (Kipling D. Williams, 1997) has the potential to produce violence and terrorism. This article will discuss questions such as: "is there any correlation between ostracism and the

subsequent recourse to violence by an ostracized minority group in the contemporary history of religions?" and "can we find real examples of this correlation between ostracism and violence in the Muslim and non-Muslim minority communities?" This article will highlight the correlation between ostracism and violence in the name of religion by discussing examples taken from the contemporary history of religions. The findings and results of this research will be useful for policy-makers who wish to understand the motives and subsequently the correct response to violence acted out by religious minority communities.

Ostracism is the term used to describe the behaviour by which one individual or group ignores or excludes another individual or group. The term can refer to a single person being excluded or a group of people being excluded. (Knapton, 2014) Ostracism can be observed in various kinds of human groupings (Gruter & Masters, 1986). According to the theoretical model of ostracism outlined by Kipling D. Williams, an ostracized individual will experience an immediate threat to four basic human needs (namely, belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence) and will subsequently be driven to restore these needs. (Knapton, 2014; Kipling D Williams, 2009) For instance, when one loses a certain degree of control of a situation, the desire to restore one's control can outweigh the desire to be liked or accepted and could lead to some form of aggression or violence. (Hales & Williams, 2018; Warburton, Williams, & Cairns, 2006) Ostracized individuals may resort to some form of anti-social behavior or even prefer to withdraw completely from social interaction as a response to ostracism. (Lei, Li, Lin, Zhang, & Yu, 2024) Although it may be possible to draw parallels between violence and terrorism as two comparable responses to ostracism, it cannot be said that terrorism is an ordinary or regular example of violence. Instead, terrorism has to be defined as a very definite form of 'programmatic violence', which is meant to produce an effect at different levels of society. (Pfundmair, 2019)

I do not intend to exclude Christianity or Islam or any other faith tradition from my critical analysis. Followers of all faiths can and do perpetrate violence. It is better to avoid the 'us' versus 'them' way of speaking in debates involving sensitive matters such as violence committed in the name of religion. Lister defines 'othering' as a 'process of differentiation and demarcation by which a line can be drawn between 'us' and 'them' in terms of less and more powerful social actors. Social distance can be recognized and maintained in this way (Adil, 2020). In the contemporary history of religions, however, it is unacceptable to understand 'their' violence as religious and therefore irrational and conflict-ridden and 'our' violence as rational, necessary and a means to peace building.

The Meaning of Ostracism

Ostracism has been part of human life since the beginnings of recorded history. Originally, the ancient Greeks chose to ostracize individuals from their community as a form of punishment. Exile and banishment were extreme and complete forms of ostracism. However, the phenomenon of ostracism is also visible in less intense behaviour patterns such as refusing to speak with someone or avoiding eye contact. (Sheikh Sajid Mohammad, Nazir A Nazir, & Shah, 2021) Hales, Wood, and Williams (2024) provide a study on the relationship between ostracism, extremism and violence in their article: "Ostracism and Extremism: How Extreme Groups Can Address Threatened Needs". They argue that humans are fundamentally social and it is, therefore, not surprising that people are drawn to associating in groups, some of which are morally questionable and show signs of extremism. One factor that appears to play an important role in motivating people to explore and perhaps join extreme groups is the experience of having been recently (or chronically) ostracized. (Hales et al., 2024; Pfundmair, Hales, & Williams, 2024) However, these authors do not provide real examples from the history of religions that show how religious people can turn to violence as a result of being ostracized.

In her paper: "The Recruitment and Radicalization of Western Citizens: Does Ostracism Have a Role in Home-grown Terrorism?" Holly Melissa Knapton argues that ostracized individuals may try to join radical groups in response to the "Four Basic Human Needs" proposed by Kipling D. Williams, which I mentioned earlier. She draws our attention to the social exclusion of Muslims living in the West who have experienced Islamophobia since 9/11. The author concludes, however, that there is lack of research on the role of ostracism in urging individuals to commit acts of violence and extremism. (Knapton, 2014) It seems to me that the link between the social exclusion of Muslims and the increase in home-grown violence and terrorism needs further investigation. For this reason, I intend to examine the correlation between ostracism and violence done by Muslims. (Knapton, 2014) But we need to include the effects of social ostracism on other religious traditions as well.

In her article: "Ostracism promotes a terrorist mindset," Muchaela Pfundmair presents the hypothesis that ostracism can encourage and promote a terrorist mentality and even lead to acts of terrorism. To test her hypothesis, she conducted two studies in which participants were introduced to a terrorist organization. They were assessed as to how far they would cooperate with such an organization and its acts of violence if they themselves were the victims of ostracism. (Pfundmair, 2019) In both these studies, participants felt a loss of control and experienced a high level of uncertainty as a result of being ostracized. In response to their experience of ostracism, the participants showed signs of aggression in the hope of regaining control of their situation. (Pfundmair, 2019). However, her study does not provide actual examples of the correlation between ostracism and violence as this has occurred in different faith traditions. For example, the ostracism experienced by non-Muslim minorities (such as the Christian minority in Pakistan) was not even mentioned.

The authors to whom I have referred above, however, do present the phenomena of ostracism and violence in the name of religion as a correlation

between two variables. The term correlation refers to a sociological concept that recognizes a relationship between two variables without establishing a causal relationship between them. For example, ill health is related to poverty but it cannot be said that ill health causes poverty because some sick people are not poor and some poor people are not sick. Similarly, the link between ostracism and violence is not such that one causes the other. The most that we can say is that there have been situations of ostracism that have led to religious violence. It is equally possible and valid to say that some incidents of violence, which were committed in the name of religion, were not responses to ostracism because these acts of violence could have been motivated by political or other considerations.

It would be more helpful to identify the correlation between ostracism and violence on the basis of a case study of the actual lives of ostracized individuals or groups. In addition, a significant sociological method known as the longitudinal study of ostracized individuals and minority groups could help us to understand the long process of becoming ostracized and the way in which ostracism ultimately forces people to resort of violence or terrorism.

I will discuss the nature of ostracism according to three levels. Firstly, I will examine the correlation between ostracism and the subsequent violence committed in the name of religion. Secondly, I will discuss the experience that Muslim minorities have of ostracism and, thirdly, I will deal with ostracism experienced by non-Muslim minorities. My first section is a overview of the theoretical framework, which is supported by longitudinal as well as case studies. The last two sections illustrate the way this correlation has been experienced by minority groups in real life situations and the violence that has erupted from it.

The Correlation Between Ostracism and Violence

From a psychological point of view, the correlation between ostracism and violence can be explained by reference to the Four Basic Human Needs (that is,

belonging, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence). The first basic human need is the sense of being included in a group. Simply put, it is the need to belong. Since this sense of belonging is a fundamental need, people who do not have a sense of belonging because of ostracism can try re-discover this experience of belonging by becoming attached to extremist or radicalized groups. The second fundamental need is the sense of self-esteem that a person feels when he or she is being appreciated and enjoys good interpersonal relations. On the contrary, when this is missing, extremist or radicalized groups could provide the needed sense of self-esteem. The third basic human need is the need for control, which means that an individual or group has the power to make a difference and achieve their goals by contributing to society. When individuals or groups are deprived of this sense of control, they are sometimes attracted to join an extremist group, which enables them to regain their sense of control by using force or violence. The final basic human need is to be noticed and recognized by others. A threat to this need is closely linked to a threat of death and non-existence for that group. Extremist groups are actively engaged in bestowing a sense of significance or meaningful existence to people who feel ostracized. (Hales et al., 2024; Knapton, 2014) Since such groups promise the restoration of some or all of these threatened needs, people who experience ostracism become a target of extremism and violent groups. This kind of analysis leads to the conclusion that there is a correlation between ostracism and violence.

But the question arises as to how the presence of ostracism can be detected in an individual or a group. The rejection or exclusion of one individual or minority group cannot immediately be labeled ostracism. Kipling D. Williams developed a method to detect ostracism based on the identification of three stages. (Kipling D Williams, 2009; Kipling D Williams & Jarvis, 2006) Firstly, in the Reflexive Stage, individuals and groups become aware of ostracism. They realize that they are considered outsiders and ostracized by others. Secondly, in the Reflective Stage, minority groups consider and recognize the causes of ostracism in society and are

motivated to restore needs that have been threatened. In the third and last stage, the Resignation Stage, people realize that their experience of ostracism is persisting and that they have not been able to restore their threatened needs (Hales et al., 2024). Since such people experience alienation and a meaningless existence, they are more likely to become involved in violence and extremist action.

To discover the possible link between ostracism and violence, case studies were conducted of fifteen US school shootings between 1995 and 2001. After an investigation of these school shootings, it came to light that the potential cause in 87% of the cases was ostracism in the form of severe or chronic denial and rejection involving bullying and so on. (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003) This showed that, in an everyday social setting, ostracism can lead to violence.

In a longitudinal study, moreover, it became evident that ostracism was the cause of violence in elementary and middle school students. The study revealed that violence and extremism increased in proportion to the intensity of ostracism and social exclusion. It is also true that there are factors which can reduce an aggressive response to ostracism (known as the outcast-lash-out effect) and can prevent anger provoked by ostracism from becoming sheer violence. (Warburton et al., 2006)

Muchaela Pfundmair tested the hypothesis that ostracism has the power to promote a terrorist mind-set. After completing two studies, she concluded that the violent actions of terrorist groups were not directed at the source of the ostracism but were rather directed at uninvolved third parties. These studies were designed to create circumstances similar to real cases of terrorism. In particular, such misdirected violence in response to ostracism was not only aimed at those responsible for the ostracism that had taken place but also to other persons who were not involved in the ostracism. This situation was also observed in case studies of school shootings in which the aggressors used violence against primary perpetrators as well against an uninvolved third party. (Pfundmair, 2019)

She adds that the need for control, which is one the basic human needs, is a basic motivation that drives ostracized people to action. This illustrates how reactions to ostracism can occur when people feel that their basic human needs have been threatened. Her analysis confirms the hypothesis that violent responses to ostracism are an expression of efforts to recover control. The link between reduced control and violence as a result of ostracism is also confirmed by practical examples. For instance, in one study, the need to regain control illustrated the direct link between ostracism and violence. Separate research showed that the recovery of control after the experience of ostracism resulted in reduced violence. (Pfundmair, 2019).

Ostracism and Muslim Minorities

I will now illustrate the correlation between ostracism and violence by discussing the case of an ostracized Muslim minority group. I am aware that both Muslim and non-Muslim minorities face ostracism by majority groups and that these ostracized groups have responded with various forms of violence. A minority group is defined as:

A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language. (Ali, 2015, pp. 108-109)

The ostracism of Muslim minority groups is commonly referred to as Islamophobia. The phenomenon known as Islamophobia is also known as anti-Muslim prejudice, Islamo-fascism and Muslimophobia. The term originated in 1910 from the French word Islamophobie, which refers to hostile, inimical and negative feelings towards Islam (Sadia, 2019). Present-day Islamophobes perceive all Muslims as members of a transnational ummah that aims to sabotage the entire western civilization.

(Veracini, 2022) Svend White discusses several forms of ostracism of Muslims such those expressed in the form of cartoons in Europe, which disregarded and even insulted Muslim sensibilities. In the case of the notorious image portraying Muhammad (PBUH) with a bomb in his turban, there was an obvious intention to offend. (White, 2007). White elaborates that perpetrators of such ostracism always appeal to the equality of all citizens and the freedom of expression. Yet they ostracize those who do not share their values. Citing the late Edward Said, White argues that, when it is a question of opposing Islam, the standards of rationality are discarded. Moreover, Muslims are considered as essentially "other-beings". In short, the most dominant stereotype is that Muslims are fundamentally disposed to violence. (White, 2007)

The common distinction between "us" and "them" developed because of ostracism motivated by Islamophobia. In the West, the radicalized "Muslim Other" has become a popular "folk devil" of the modern age. This process did not begin with the event of 9/11 but it has spread rapidly since this event to influence the phenomenon of multiculturalism in several societies. Unfortunately, this moral terror has affected Muslims globally and it has led to Muslims being searched and abused verbally as well as physically. The European Monitoring on Racism and Xenophobia reports frequent occurrences of discrimination. According to one respondent, Islamophobia is a daily occurrence in the form of jokes or comments expressed in a loud voice so that all can hear. (Gabsi, 2019)

Many examples can be given of violent incidents committed by Muslim minority members in response to being ostracized. Case studies and biographical analyses describe the ostracism experienced by Muslim minority groups. For example, London was attacked on 7th of July 2005 when its transport system was targeted during peak hour traffic. Investigations revealed that these terrorist attacks were not planned or executed by Al-Qaeda. Instead, three British Muslim citizens were involved. Such revelations led to the term "home-grown" terrorism, the term

coined to refer to terrorist groups in the United Kingdom. The case study exposes the kind of violence or terrorism committed by Muslims born in England. The conclusion is that Islamophobia can lead to ostracism, which results in the response of violence and terrorism. (Knapton, 2014)

Another example is Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway in 2011. Though not a Muslim, he was habitually ostracized in his life before the attack. According to the analysis of a journalist, the fundamental motive of his violent action was the constant disgrace and humiliation he had to endure. Yet another example of a home-grown terrorist is Foued Mohamed-Aggad, who killed 90 people in Paris in 2015. Biographical analysis shows that he was excluded and rejected by the army and the police before he became radicalized. (Pfundmair, 2019) Other case studies and biographical analyses also show 'otherization' and 'outsiderism' to be a risk factor for the formation of a terrorist mind-set. The radicalization process usually begins with a cognitive appraisal and ends with a final step of 'doing something incredible' after becoming gradually motivated to use violent means. (Pfundmair, 2019) In short, the frequent link between ostracism and violence leads to the conclusion that ostracism has the power to provoke aggression and violence.

Ostracism and Non-Muslim Minorities

Non-Muslim minorities also face ostracism directed at them by Muslim majority groups. As a result, such non-Muslim minorities could use violence to regain their sense of control, status and identity in society. For example, Jews have been ostracized in history in the way that resembles the ostracism experienced by modern Muslims. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are correlated in facing the same negative attitudes. (Veracini, 2022). Jonathan Freedland and Mehdi Hasan point out that the attitudes toward Jews and Muslims are clearly correlated. They believe that people who express negative opinions about Muslims are more likely than others to

express negative views about Jews. According to a study based on a Gallup Poll in the US in 2010, people who say they feel hatred and prejudice toward Jews are about 32 times as likely to report feeling prejudice toward Muslims. Freedland and Hasan conclude that those "people who hate one of us are more likely to hate the other too." (Freedland & Hasan, 2019)

Christians in Pakistan also suffer from chronic ostracism, which is expressed in the form of direct violence in the form of the burning and destruction of their churches and houses. One example of such hostile ostracism occurred on 9th March 2013 when a mob of over 7000 people attacked Joseph Colony in Lahore. Violent mobs ransacked and burnt about 125 Christian homes. There was also an attack on a Christian man and his pregnant wife who were accused of desecrating a copy of Holy Quran in Kot Radha Kishan, Lahore. A mob of around 4000 people threw their bodies into a brick kiln. (Weiss, 2020)

In addition, Coptic Christians, who comprise 95% of Egypt's Christians, also face chronic ostracism. The term Coptic refers to all orthodox Christians who kept their faith following the Arab conquests of Egypt in the 7th century. (Mogib, 2012; Mujeeb, Summer 2012). In January 2010, there was a drive-by shooting attack on Christians in front of a church in southern Egypt that left seven dead. In March, around 3,000 Muslims attacked a Coptic community in north-west Egypt. In November 2010, there were numerous days of unrest in the south of the country as Muslim groups destroyed Coptic Christian districts and killing twelve people. A few months later, on 1st January 2011, a suicide attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria killed 23 people. (Riemenschneider, 2022). These attacks are examples of chronic ostracism against Coptic Christians in Egypt.

An Important Question

An interesting question remains to be investigated. Do ostracized Christians in Pakistan or Egypt make efforts to redress their basic human needs, such as control

and meaningful existence, by resorting to violence or terrorism? It is possible that research into this issue would overrule the correlation established in this article so far between ostracism and violence. However, this article has suggested that ostracism takes place at various levels. For instance, if moderating factors manage to reduce the anti-social behavior before it gets out of hand, violence may be avoided. Moreover, we saw that not all violence was directed against the actual planners and executors of ostracism. Studies discussed earlier in this article made it clear that violence was sometimes directed to a neutral third party. The question remains as to whether ostracized Christians in Pakistan or Egypt resort to violence or terrorism. A negative answer to this particular question, however, would not justify the ostracism of the Christian minority by the Muslim majority. Ostracism and violence can be justified neither by the majority or by minority communities.

Practical Implications

The recognition of ostracism as a risk factor allows it to be included among counter-terrorism policies. The provision of support groups that promote social harmony may be a good strategy to reduce violence as a result of ostracism. For example, radicalization of universities is considered a high-risk factor. Consequently, it may be useful to provide support for fellow Muslims in European states and encourage activities that promote social cohesion. Finally, a violent response to the perpetrators of ostracism may be prevented if those who are enduring such ostracism are encouraged to re-connect with the community.

Recommendations

My intention in this article was to link violence in the name of religion with real examples of ostracism of both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The following aspects of this issue remain to be addressed by subsequent research:

1. The need to work on solutions and remedies to violence that takes place as a response to ostracism.

2. Ostracism can also be exercised against a particular group or individual that has also begun to use violence. In other words, those who use violence may be made to endure ostracism themselves.

3. It would be helpful to undertake case studies on ostracism directed towards non-Muslim minority groups such as Christians in Pakistan and in other Muslim majority countries.

4. Analytical studies of the ostracism-violence correlation that take the historical context into consideration would provide greater understanding of the nature of ostracism and the subsequent violent responses made by ostracized groups.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, we have raised some of the issues concerning the phenomenon of ostracism. It has become clear that violence and terrorism are the expected consequences of ostracism. Hence, when trying to prevent ostracism, policy-makers can consider the causes of violence, terrorism and radicalization. Finally, in dealing with the effect of ostracism on minority communities, the paradigm of "us" and "them" (meaning 'Muslims' and non-Muslims') is not suitable.

References

Adil, Y. (2020). Dealing With Exclusion and Otherization: A Case of Ahmadi Muslims in India. *JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY*. Jadavpur University, *11*(11), 99-120.

Ali, Z. (2015). Identity as a form of human insecurity: the case of religious minorities in Pakistan. *JOURNAL OF HUMAN SECURITY STUDIES*, *4*(2), 108-126.

Burhani, A. N. (2014). Hating the Ahmadiyya: the place of "heretics" in contemporary Indonesian Muslim society. *Contemporary Islam*, *8*(2), 133-152.

Freedland, J., & Hasan, M. (2019). Muslims and Jews Face a Common Threat from White Supremacists. We Must Fight It Together, *The Guardian, April 4*.

Gabsi, Z. (2019). Towards Demystifying Islamophobia: A Muslim's Perspective. *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, *4*(3), 1-18.

Gruter, M., & Masters, R. D. (1986). Ostracism as a social and biological phenomenon: An introduction. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, *7*(3-4), 149-158.

Hales, A. H., & Williams, K. D. (2018). Marginalized individuals and extremism: The role of ostracism in openness to extreme groups. *Journal of Social Issues, 74*(1), 75-92.

Hales, A. H., Wood, N. R., & Williams, K. D. (2024). Ostracism and Extremism: How Extreme Groups Can Address Threatened Needs. In M. Pfundmair, A. H. Hales & K. D. Williams (Eds.), Exclusion and Extremism: *A Psychological Perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

Knapton, H. M. (2014). The recruitment and radicalisation of western citizens: does ostracism have a role in homegrown terrorism? *Journal of European Psychology Students, 5*(1), 38-48.

Leary, M. R., Kowalski, R. M., Smith, L., & Phillips, S. (2003). Teasing, rejection, and violence: Case studies of the school shootings. Aggressive Behavior: Official *Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression, 29*(3), 202-214.

Lei, Y., Li, M., Lin, C., Zhang, C., & Yu, Z. (2024). The effect of ostracism on social withdrawal behavior: the mediating role of self-esteem and the moderating role of rejection sensitivity. *Frontiers in Psychology, 15*, 1411697.

Mogib, M. (2012). Copts in Egypt and their demands: between inclusion and exclusion. *Contemporary Arab Affairs, 5*(4), 535-555.

Mujeeb, M. (Summer 2012). Coptic Discrimination and the Exclusion of the State in Egypt. *Omran, 1*(1), 189-212.

Pfundmair, M. (2019). Ostracism promotes a terroristic mindset. Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 11(2), 134-148.

Pfundmair, M., Hales, A. H., & Williams, K. D. (2024). *Exclusion and extremism*: *A psychological perspective*: Cambridge University Press.

Riemenschneider, M. (2022). *SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA*: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS).

Veracini, L. (2022). Islamophobia, antisemitism, Zionism, settler colonialism. *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, *7*(1), 96-107.

Warburton, W. A., Williams, K. D., & Cairns, D. R. (2006). When ostracism leads to aggression: The moderating effects of control deprivation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 42*(2), 213-220

Weiss, A. M. (2020). *Countering violent extremism in Pakistan: local actions, local voices:* Oxford University Press.

White, S. (2007). Jyllands-Posten and the Otherization of Europe's Muslims. *The Cartoon Debate and the Freedom of the Press. Conflicting Norms and Values in the Global Media Culture*, 173-180.

Williams, K. D. (1997). Social Ostracism. In R. M. Kowalski (Ed.*), Aversive Interpersonal Behaviors* (pp. 133-170). Boston, MA: Springer US.

Williams, K. D. (2009). Ostracism: A temporal need-threat model. *Advances in experimental social psychology, 41*, 275-314.