Exploring the Impact of Cultural Capital's Intellectual Influences and the Development of Extremist Culture in Saudi Schools, with Reference to Pierre Bourdieu.

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Abstract:

This study examines the impact of the culture of extremism's intellectual influences in Saudi education. The media have dominated public discourse on the roots of extremism, with very few scholarly studies examining extremism from a cultural perspective. Educational institutions are undeniably a space for cultural representation where students may be subject to intellectual influences through cultural activities. Accordingly, this study elucidates schools' intellectual influences on students' practices. It also ties in such cultural representation with the autobiography of a Saudi journalist who experienced cultural extremism at school. The study links the cultural practices in schools to Pierre Bourdieu's work on cultural capital and "habitus" to explain groups' inclusion and exclusion according to cultural practices.

Keywords: Culture of extremism, Islam & media representation, Saudi school cultural activities, Pierre Bourdieu, Cultural capital

المستخلص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تأثير ثقافة التأثيرات الفكرية للتطرف في التعليم السعودي. وسيطرت وسائل الإعلام على الخطاب العام حول جذور التطرف، مع وجود عدد قليل جدًا من الدراسات العلمية التي تتناول التطرف من منظور ثقافي. المؤسسات التعليمية هي بلا شك مساحة للتمثيل الثقافي حيث قد يتعرض الطلاب للتأثيرات الفكرية من خلال الأنشطة الثقافية. وفقًا لذلك ، توضح هذه الدراسة التأثيرات الفكرية للمدارس على ممارسات الطلاب خلال النشاط الصفي والأنشطة الصيفية. كما أنه يربط في مثل هذا التمثيل الثقافي بالسيرة الذاتية لصحافي سعودي عانى من التطرف الثقافي في المدرسة. تربط الدراسة الممارسات الثقافية في المدارس بعمل بيير بورديو في عمله حول رأس المال الثقافي و "الهابيتوس" لشرح شمول المجموعات واستبعادها وفقًا للممارسات الثقافية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ثقافة التطرف ، الإسلام ، والتمثيل الإعلامي ، النشاط الثقافي المدرسي السعودي ، بيير بورديو ، الكفاءات الثقافية

1. Introduction

In the past ten years of education, "extremist culture" has become a buzz word not only in Saudi Arabia but also in other parts of the world, such as the United States, where they have made the accusation that schools offering religious education encourage young people to practice extremist culture of hate and rejection of others. These accusations began to be leveled after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which comprised a series of coordinated suicide attacks by Al-Qaeda on the United States on September 11, 2001. The revelation by the US Government that the 19 hijackers were Muslim Arabs mostly from Saudi Arabia filed the editorial pages of American newspapers with articles discussing Arab educational systems, and particularly in schools in Saudi Arabia (Friedman, 2002).

This study is an attempt to explore and shed light on the elements that may influence the culture at schools, in other words, to identify what are the publicly acceptable actions, behaviors, and knowledge at schools in Saudi Arabia. It will focus on the impact of intellectual influences, cultural capital, and the development of extremists' culture at schools in Saudi Arabia with particular reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

1. Methodological concerns

Data was collected for this study in both Arabic and English. The sources of the material comprise visual media, cyberspace, which is popular even among well-known Saudi intellectuals who use the space to start open discussions where they reply to questions directed to them. The material was divided into two sections. The first comprises the biographical reflection of a Saudi author who has had experience influenced by extremism's culture. The second comprises the attempts made by many intellectuals and some academics in Saudi Arabia to reflect on the issue of the influence of extremist culture on schools. Research in this area is very limited if not rare, and this has made it difficult for to find resources other than those in newspapers. On the other hand, newspapers seem appropriate in this area because they have documented this issue in Saudi Arabia heavily. Further,

the majority of the authors whose articles have been published in these newspapers are either professors or teachers at schools and universities and each has varied experiences in dealing with the different circumstances and manifestations of this issue.

2. Schools as an Intellectual platform of Influence

Some Saudi authors stress that the influence of extremist culture and practices at school can lead to the hijacking of these students' education, and this influence seems to be an extreme one. Teachers who have their own agenda and ideology have hijacked student education since they have marginalized mainstream education to bring in education on their culture, which presents their idea of what an individual is supposed to be. The early efforts of a few authors and intellectuals to expose the main source of such influence on education were confirmed officially by Education Minister Al-Essa. In a statement issued in 2018, Al-Issa traced back such extremist influence to the Muslim Brotherhood's leaders and members who fled Egypt in the 1960s and 1970s and settled in Saudi Arabia, where they became involved in teaching at public schools and universities. In such educational posts, they extended their influence over some officials, supervisors, and teachers leading to the reformulation of religious curricula. Most importantly, they also dominated students' activities and to be influenced by the Brotherhood's ideologies ("Saudi Arabia revamping curricula," 2018). This has been done through both in-school teaching and the use of non-curricular school activities.

Knowledge has significant status within Islam, as evidenced by more than 800 references to it in the Qur'an alone (Al-Attas, 1985). Children learn from an early age that the Prophet Mohammed said, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim." Thus, the younger generation begins to respect the school from the inception, and this respect comes from the philosophy that practicing learning is considered a holy act. Consequently, the traditional relationship between students and teachers has already been shaped in such a way that students always respect and look up to their

teachers as models and also that teachers exhibit a sense of parental care toward their students.

The context of school is a complex one because students and teachers come from different backgrounds and play certain social roles in this context. Yet, the danger comes when the school is used as a context to develop certain cultures with the intention of influencing students in certain ways. This leads to the development and implementation of hidden curriculums at schools, which undoubtedly influences students.

Skelton (1997) described the hidden curriculum that is apt to this study as follows:

> That set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes. These messages may be contradictory, non-linear and punctuation and each learner mediates the message in her/his own way (p.188).

Skelton (1997) argued that he shared an interest in documenting features of the hidden curriculum such as the rules, routines and relations of educational processes. These concerns should be very useful for any applied research on hidden curriculums and extremist culture in schools in Saudi Arabia, not so much to expose them as to identify that these practices are not the norm, as has been implied for a long time.

The extremist culture violates Islamic principles that stress on social diversity and the need for more human communication to get to know and understand each other. The following verse from the Quran emphasizes this message:

> O mankind we have created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you (Quran 3:5)

The extremists are not following Islam in their culture since the principle is portrayed in a simple yet very strong message that human beings all around the world, in different nations and tribes, are to "know each other." There are two elements that these extremists are deviating from in the Quranic principles, both locally and internationally. First, they force one culture as the ideal that is meant to be practiced by young people at school and extend their representation of the self beyond school. The second is when extremist culture encourages the rejection of others because they are different. In doing so, they are violating a very direct message from the Quran. King Abdulla of Saudi Arabia also addressed similar issues in his speech at the Interfaith World Conference on Dialogue, where he stressed on this definite Islamic principle and said:

> It is therefore incumbent upon us to declare to the world that difference must not lead to conflict and confrontation, and to state that the tragedies that have occurred in human history were not due to religion, but were the result of extremism with which some adherents of every divinely revealed religion, and of every political ideology, have been afflicted (Saudi Press Agency. (2008).

In Saudi Arabia, the school system is divided into three stages. Learners first go to primary school for six years. They then move to another school, which serves as the intermediate level, for three years. They finally move to secondary school for the final three years at school. In all these stages, there are non-curricular school activities that each school organizes. There is a budget for these activities, put together through grants from the Ministry of Education and through the school's own monetary resources. These non-curricular activities include a morning assembly program, weekly school societies, and the celebration of national occasions.

Non-curricular activities encourage students to practice activities such as reading, hobbies, developing skills, sports and competition. Students are influenced by these activities from an early age and start to think about the kinds of activities and school societies that they would like to get involved in and the kinds of skills they would like to develop. The principal goal of these

non-curricular activities is to offer students an opportunity to develop their skills and participate in school societies.

Activities are important in schools. It appears that these activities have been targeted by extremists in order to make their culture the dominant culture of normal individuals and to emphasize that who do not represent this dominant culture are "outsiders." Al-Sabug (2009) drew a line demarcating two periods of time with respect to non-curricular activities. The first was when non-curricular school activities served as a platform for students to bring forth their creativity and their diverse ideas while simultaneously learning from each other. The second period started in the 1980s which was characterized by extremists who controlled these activities to represent their ideas and ideologies. They encouraged and included only those people who represented their ideas and culture. Hamza Al-Mezaini (2003) explains that some of these non-curricular activities take a direct approach to guide students on the only "road" that can be taken by a Muslim if they are not born Muslims and do not live with Muslim parents in a Muslim society. He warned that such activities influenced some children to see their parents and families differently, as though they are not doing the right thing.

Language is a very strong example but, at the same time, is also complex. Extremists created a language that became appreciated. Students learn it as the language that they should use and even correct others if they do not speak the same. The language is classical Arabic, and is full of religious phrases that would usually be used by scholars of religious studies. For example, until the 1980s, the norm was to greet with "good morning" and good evening." At school, greet students with an Islamic greeting: "Peace be upon you and Allah's mercy and blessings." They also ask students not to stand during greetings, which is the practice at schools. Other teachers require all students to stand until the greeting session finishes. Also, instead of saying "thank you," such teachers may say special short prayers that have a very positive personal impact. In the beginning, this was odd and strange, but with time it became the norm and the language of even young children at the primary school level. Practicing the use of this language gave students the opportunity to show that they belonged to this culture even if they

themselves were not convinced or felt that it was an unusual thing to do. Yet, what encouraged them to keep using this language was the acceptance from and the influence it had on others and the power they felt while speaking it. It also played a role in introducing them to other similar groups as an identity. This language also created a new genre in modern times, involving the use of the Arabic language mixed with this culture of extremism. This language exists heavily online, where extremists control several major forums.

After spreading their culture, the extremists began to dictate and influence the nature of school activities as well, and extended the imposition of their own specifically tailored culture. Although school societies retained their original names, the nature of the activities they engaged in emerged from a specific religious culture that was picked by extremists.

Al-Mezaini (2008) explained that the extremists took over these activities, and later these very activities became their instruments to wield power and influence over people as well as their conduct and practices. On the other hand, teaching subjects at schools also suffered extremely as a result of extremist teachers' practices. It brought in elements of power and extremist discourse into the curriculum, which had been absent from the Saudi context until then, especially in education. It appears that these practices resulted in the worst influences on students at different stages of education. Islamic culture requires teachers to strive to achieve the highest respect from their students, since education is considered the greatest thing in which a human engages in life. Teachers were treated in the same way as parents.

According to Islam, no one can judge a person's actions or intentions since only God knows about each one's intentions and actions. Muslims pray five times a day; again no one can interfere with a person and his prayers because only God can look at it. However, in extremist culture, these actions and students' intentions for why they do what they do are questioned. This brought the element of power to school in a way that had never been known in Saudi Arabia. Students began to fear teachers and started to believe that these teachers had the right to interfere in such matters.

Furthermore, Fawzyah Al-Baker (2009) presented an example of teachers who encouraged learners for the good work they did by giving them "happy face" stickers. Al-Baker explained that an extremist teacher chose to do something different: he would give a student a sticker, but not that of a happy face. The new sticker had prayers and religious verses, and the teacher would ask the student to memorize what was written on the sticker. The student obeyed, and the teacher would keep giving the student more such stickers to encourage them to memorize the content. She explained that these stickers were not related to the subject that the teacher was teaching. Slowly, the learners were made to think that memorizing these stickers was more important than studying the subject itself. Al-Baker (2009) emphasized that marginalizing a school subject was problematic, and sending hidden messages while teaching and using the context of school and school-based curriculum to practice power was even more problematic.

After 9/11, there were efforts to diagnose and eliminate the role of extremist culture and extremist teachers. The easiest part of the effort involved arriving at an agreement among the officials that there is indeed a hidden curriculum that influences students to think that such extreme ideas are inherent in their own religion. However, the hardest part is identifying ways and steps to re-educate teachers who choose to take this culture to represent themselves and their religion.

Several meetings and television interviews with high officials have taken place to raise awareness of how the extremist culture has been disseminated at schools and educational institutions be it through the hidden curriculum or through the "appreciated culture." Prince Khaled Al-Faisal stated that the extremist culture did not exist before and that it had come from outside many years ago. He explained that when it found its way to Saudi Arabia, there were certain people who found it appealing. Prince Khaled Al-Faisal explained that the problem was that this culture was spreading in different ways (Dankowitz, 2005).

Al-Ghamdi (2006) advised that these non-curricular activities had to be examined periodically to eliminate any influence that controlled such activities for a long time. In a conference in Saudi Arabia in 2004, the hidden

curriculum was discussed among intellectuals and university teachers. Some of the participants also indicated that teacher preparation programs had to be deployed to find a way to help both teachers and school officials in a way that would not leave traces of such culture behind (Dankowitz, 2005).

A project launched by King Abdulla in 2005 for the development of public education which cost a total of US$ 3.1 billion. The project that the Ministry of Education implemented seeks to improve the overall quality of education. This project emphasizes non-curricular activities at school for the purpose of developing the intellectual, creative, and communicative skills of students.

3. Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus in analyzing extremists' culture

The extremist culture is non-Islamic and it was for this reason the extremists relied on formal practice to grant themselves a place to begin with. In this study Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus and the cultural capital was utilized to helped understand the culture created by extremists at schools in Saudi Arabia

Islam, for Muslims, is much more than a moral philosophy of life, a system of belief, or spiritual order; it is a "complete and comprehensive way of life" (Geertz, 1971, p.136).

Yet, extremists are most ignorant of the implications of the name of Islam itself. The name of this religion is Islam, the root of which is "Salem" and "Salam," which means peace. Salam may also mean greeting one another with peace. One of the beautiful names of God means that "He is Peace." Islam means more than that, as it includes submission to the One God, and to live in peace with the Creator, within oneself, with other people, and with the environment. Thus, Islam is a total system of living. A Muslim is supposed to live in peace and harmony with all these segments; and hence, a Muslim is any person anywhere in the world whose obedience, allegiance, and loyalty are to One God, the Lord of the Universe (Sakr, 2009).

Therefore, extremist culture has no support or evidence in the Quran or the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed. This seems to be an explanation for why they needed power and control to deliver their ideas. In the Quran, there are many messages encouraging the facilitation of dialogue between different people in order to get to know one another. Extremists choose to ignore these verses since they do not serve them or represent their ideas. The best way for them is to create and deliver their own ideas through culture because in that culture, people are forced to follow specific principles and practices. Thus, their followers became the victims of their culture. This was recognized by officials in Saudi Arabia belatedly and inspired the Saudi government to create programs to help those who were indoctrinated. They set up a counseling program to re-educate and rehabilitate extremist sympathizers as part of the effort they were making to fight against extremism in Saudi Arabia. The origins of these programs lay in the recognition in Saudi Arabia that something had to be done to address extremist sympathies and the effort was a tacit acknowledgment of the threat that this culture posed (Boucek, 2008).

Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus in the cultural capital at schools is suitable for this study. Central to Bourdieu's theory of practice is the notion of "habitus," or the cultural capital and the field. Bourdieu (1991) explained that the dominant culture, specifically that which was legitimated by the school system, took on forms of sacredness and rituals that could be analyzed in a manner similar to the classical sociological analysis of religion. Bourdieu's hierarchical distinction between religious specialists and the dispossessed laity is a tightly structured model of structuring that seems more foreclosed than one might expect from Bourdieu's general emphasis on the relational nature of cultural production. The clarity of the boundaries of Bourdieu's categories derived from his economistic approach to religious production. Bourdieu (1991a) argued that

> religious capital depends, at a given moment in time, on
> the state of the structure of objective relations
> between religious demand (i.e., the religious interests
> of various groups or classes of laity) and religious

> supply (i.e., religious services, whether orthodox or heretical) that the various claimants are brought to produce (p.22).

Nevertheless, the above shows some of Bourdieu's views on the religious capital which is not irrelevant to this study because the aspects of religion that Bourdieu discussed are those that are not related to the extremist culture in Saudi Arabia and the space of this assignment does not allow for more analysis in that strain.

Bourdieu's work in the field of education has been discussed widely, and some have suggested that Bourdieu's focus on the visible social world of practice is not particularly original. However, the importance of his work is emphasized by his attempts to construct a theoretical model of social practice by considering the "wider patterns of social life" (Jenkins, 1992, p.68).

Bourdieu's (2004) argument on how cultural capital brings about the domination of practices and the inclusion or exclusion of groups is appropriate for this study. He states that cultural capital

> participates in the process of domination by legitimising certain practices as 'naturally' superior to others and by making these practices seem superior even to those who do not participate, who are thus led, through a negative process inculcation, to see their own practices as inferior and to exclude themselves from legitimate practices" (p.24).

This explanation serves as a good start to clarify how Bourdieu's cultural capital meets the domination of extremist culture in schools in Saudi Arabia. Extremists seek to make one culture for all and make all practices at school to follow that of one group. It is the "legitimate practice" that is used by extremists at schools to justify their "version" of cultural activities. Thus, these cultural activities are considered "legitimate practices" and as factors that bring about the superiority of their culture over others'. The resulting

influence is that all schools do and practice the same culture that is appreciated and looked at as legitimate practice.

Bourdieu (1977) argued that the objective of homogenizing a group or class habitus resulting from "the homogeneity of the conditions of existence, is what enables practices to be objectively harmonised without any intentional calculation or conscious reference to a norm." (p.80). Bourdieu's definition of habitus suggests that it "functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (p.83). Practice, then, is seen as mediating between an individual's habitus and the social world. It is through practice that habitus is created, and, in this process of practice, habitus creates the social world. In this regards, Bourdieu further explains that

> ...because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products - thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions - whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings (p.95).

It is important to note from the above that habitus is an embodied and internalized schema that structures but does not determine actions, thoughts, and feelings. Bourdieu (1990) argued that habitus becomes "automatic and impersonal" (p.58). It is useful to mention Acciaioli's (1981) remarks here, that the

> ...habitus must be seen not simply as an historically produced structure that functions to reproduce the social system that generated it, but as a set of schemes both imposed and imposing. It is in the interest of certain groups that a particular manner of doing, a specific standardized mode of achieving all the diverse tasks posed by social life, be considered the only possible way of acting. The official representation of practice is an imposition of meaning, a continual enactment of symbolic violence, that

coercively, yet unobtrusively, channels how participants can construe the social world (p.29).

Bourdieu (1977) states that "It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing and that what they do has more meaning than they know" (p.79). Habitus implies that people act in particular ways, but that such conduct is also generative. Social reproduction only takes place through the interaction between the habitus and its social context. For Bourdieu, this social context can be thought of as a "market" within which various kinds of "capital" are exchanged and acquired. Formal institutions such as religion, education, family, and government serve to grant authority to specific kinds of capital and thus legitimize them with greater value. The habitus is thus not simply forced on people but is rather shaped by their efforts to maximize their own symbolic capital (Friedman, 2005).

In the theory of habitus, strategies are rather subordinated by unconscious dispositions and objective conditions. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) claimed that "the lines of action suggested by habitus may very well be accompanied by a strategic calculation of costs and benefits, which tends to carry out at an unconscious level the operations that habitus carries out in its own way"(p.131).

It also should consider the way in which a group intervenes in ordinary language, for example to develop the "official language" in order to maintain "the symbolic order from which it draws its authority" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.21). Commenting on "official language," Bourdieu (1977) wrote that "the system of concepts" that the members of a given group use for representation of their social relation "sanctions and imposes what it states, tactically down the dividing line between the thinkable and the unthinkable, thereby contributing towards the maintenance of the symbolic order from which it draws its authority" (p.21).

Bourdieu (1990) explained that the theory of practice centers on the idea that the "objects of knowledge are constructed" and that the principle of this "construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always orientated towards

practical function" (p.52). This is essential for my study since what has been constructed by extremists is mainly for "practical function" which is used to dominate and influence schools with one culture. Bourdieu (1990a) has discussed this practice of habitus in the following terms:

> The source of historical action, that of the artist, the scientist, or the member of government just as much as that of the worker or the petty civil servant, is not an active subject confronting society as if that society were an object constituted externally. The source resides neither in consciousness nor in things but in the relationship between two stages of the social, that is, between the history objectified in things, in the form of institutions, and in the history incarnated in bodies, in the form of that system of enduring dispositions which I call habitus (p.190).

3.1 Public Self Reflection by Abdullah Thabit

Abdullah Thabit is well-known as an author both in Saudi Arabia and internationally thanks to one of his books, *Terrorist Number 20* which is a reflection on his teen life where he considered his experience as student at school is an experience of an extremist (Thabit,2006).

Thabit's books and writings present a new genre that has gained much respect and attention locally and internationally. Some of his books have been translated into many languages. Thabit and his book have been highly praised by critics, who regard the novel as the best narrative to recognize the role of school and higher education in shaping extremism culture.

In his book, he revealed the life of the protagonist Zaini, through whom he presents his own autobiography of how he was led to believe in extremist culture. He explained how he was manipulated by extremists in order to expose their culture to a larger audience.

In his book titled *Terrorist Number 20*, published in 2006, he recounted his years as a religious extremist. As a 37-year-old school administrator, Thabit chronicled his life among extremists led by a loosely knit group of public-school teachers in the southern Asir region of Saudi Arabia who recruited

him when he was in the ninth grade. At the age of 15, Thabit attracted the attention of a network of extremist teachers as a result of his excellent grades. These teachers dispatched a classmate with an invitation to him to play soccer with the "accepted" children. He jumped at the chance to join the group, which included the high school's most remarkable students and was supervised by the most devout and respected teachers.

While satisfying his emotional needs, the group also indoctrinated him in extremist ways. He could not play soccer as the infidels did. Instead of applauding or whistling like the infidels, he could only shout "Allah Akbar!" The extremists inducted him into their cult of ideology, where all those who do not share their religious beliefs are considered infidels that are to be rejected.

One of the things he first learned was that the other students were "infidels" and that he should neither act nor look like them. It meant that he was not to dress in training pants or listen to music or watch television as the infidels did. Thabit was expected to show his enthusiasm by shouting "God is great." He was also taught that music, television, and cigarettes were sinful.

It was not an easy life for Thabit within the culture of domination after he published his book. Many other Saudis were angry about the revelations in his book. Thabit was bombarded with hundreds of nasty e-mails each day with people calling him both a traitor and an infidel. Some threatened to kill him, and there were threats through phone calls as well. Consequently, he moved from Abha, in southwestern Saudi Arabia, up north to Jiddah on the Red Sea, where he now lives. In an interview with *The Washington Post,* Thabit describes the death threats he has received since leaving the group and said "They are like a mafia, a gang, and I am revealing their secrets. They want to silence me," he explained (Ambah, 2006).

Thabit's book, *Terrorist Number 20,* is one of the first ones to describe how extremist teachers in Saudi public schools used apparently innocuous schools to spread extremist culture. There were also after school activities such as soccer training, Quran memorization lessons, and camping trips to separate

the teenage boys from their families and to indoctrinate them slowly in the "takfiri" ideology.

Thabit recounts in detail the cult-like atmosphere of the extremist group he belonged to, and how it instilled a sense of loyalty to the group, and hatred and mistrust of the enemy. He explained, "We were taught that our Islam was correct and everyone else, including our families, was going to hell, a hell that resembled a slaughterhouse. And I wanted to be one of the select few who made it into heaven." (Ambah, 2006).

Thabit also wrote that one of his mentors, Yahya, took him on weekly trips to the cemetery after midnight, where they would lie for hours in freshly dug graves and listen in the dark to a sermon about hell being played on the car cassette player. The cleric would describe hell as being filled with snakes, leaping fire, and sinners stripped naked hanging on hooks with their skins peeled off. "Life is temporary and the hereafter is forever," the cleric warned. Thabit often wept from fear. He wrote, "When we left from there, I wanted Yahya to tell me anything I could do to be saved from hellfire and from that terror."

3.2 Extremist culture and the implementation of cultural capital influence schools

In Saudi Arabia, every school has its own set of cultural activities where students develop and produce a program on a weekly basis under the supervision of a teacher. The original idea behind these activities is that they were meant to address student interests and educate them about different cultures and develop their skills. The activities were also flexible and were not fixed on certain ideas. They were open and facilitated creative thinking and hobbies. It is important to mention that, although these cultural activities served as part of the school activities, they were never seen as authoritative toward students, in that they did not strive to direct the students' behaviors or culture. Furthermore, religion was not part of these cultural activities. The change began in the late 1980s when certain teachers who had views of an extremist nature began to supervise some of these activities. The influences

operated from the perspective that only one culture was accepted as the culture of schools and of students. Thus, the change itself had two aspects: first, there was a change in the nature of the activities in that they became exclusively religious in nature, and second, there was an emphasis on influencing students themselves to show them what was acceptable as school culture, which was of a religious nature. At this point, it should be emphasize that the odd thing about this culture is that it is directed toward Muslims students. This implies that it is this version of the culture that is appreciated, and only those who practice this culture are accepted as a part of school activities. It is important to note that the majority of the students and teachers were not aware of the change as it unfolded in the form of an "unconscious" acquisition. This is where drawing upon Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and symbolic capital will explain this phenomenon.

Cultural capital, in this study, refers to the practices of extremist culture in Saudi Arabia. It acquired power and legitimacy from the idea that it is related to Islam. It appears that this legitimacy was the reason why it spread fast and that it was difficult to resist. Furthermore, from an early stage until recently, it appears that the idea of resistance has not been presented as an option, because there is nothing tangible to set this culture apart from society and to discuss it as a matter separate from the people themselves. This factor worked as an extra advantage that gave the spread of extremist culture great power. The process of acquiring and legitimizing this culture resulted in the production of the concept of cultural capital, which went beyond schools and universities and reached society.

Bourdieu's (1986) definition of cultural capital is as follows:

> Cultural capital can be *acquired*, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite *unconsciously* [...] It thus manages to combine the prestige of innate property with the merits of acquisition. Because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more *disguised* than those of economic capital, it is predisposed to function as symbolic

capital, i.e., to be *unrecognized* as capital and recognized as *legitimate* competence, as *authority* exerting an effect of (mis)recognition (p.245).

Bourdieu included the possibility that cultural capital can be "acquired unconsciously." He argued that this was because the social conditions of its "transmission and acquisition" were more disguised than those of economic capital. Furthermore, he describes its effect on subjects as being "legitimate," and this is because of the authority and power it exercises. This reflects the extremists' practices and culture. Extremist culture presupposes legitimacy and consequently influences people by wielding power. Yet, the most powerful element is the unconscious acquisition of this culture by the people themselves. It appears that schools where power and authority can be exercised easily, is the main reason for the speedy acquisition of this culture. Thabit clarified that he withdrew from the group when he was 20 years old, having joined the group when he was 15 years old (Thabit, 2006). This indicates that this took place after his school years. Indeed, the school context is vital in "reproducing" extremist culture. Thus, symbolic capital arises as a legitimate demand for recognition and deference. The practices of extremist culture came to Saudi society as legitimate and were consequently recognized before it gained power. Bourdieu (1977) describes this power in the following words:

> Every power to exert symbolic violence, i.e., every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relation(p.xv).

Hence, in this context, power can be conceptualized as a cultural force (Gorder, 1980). The extremists seem to practice their culture within this concept of cultural force. Thabit referred to his experience of changing to another culture. For example, his practices and culture prohibited him from listening to music or reading newspapers. Some of those who acquired the extremist culture had been influenced by the power of its communication. Bourdieu (1991) argued that relations of communication are always power

relations. The agents or institutions involved in communication have different degrees of "symbolic power" and that is the power of "making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world" (p.170). Bourdieu' argued that those with a relatively high symbolic power are able to present views that people will conform to or are able to transform views altogether. The symbols serve the function of creating a consensus among individuals in society. This power, according to Bourdieu is "a power that can be exercised only if it is *recognized.*" The result is that in the "very structure of the field in which *belief* is produced and reproduced" (p.170).

School students, even at a very young age, can recognize one who does not practice or endorse the extremist culture, and can identify that it is not normal. They have even gained confidence to give "advice" to such a person to act "right and normal." The issue of giving "advice" is also a recognizable culture among extremists and this has also brought more power and authority for young people.

It appears that the extremist culture has been passed on to students at school through the power of communication irrespective of whether the teachers used cultural activities when they taught. This can then be linked to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and in its simplest usage could be understood as a set of acquired patterns of thought, behaviors, and tastes. These patterns, or "dispositions," are the result of the internalization of culture or objective social structures through the experience of an individual or a group. Thus, cultural capital reproduces what has been passed at school as the singular dominant culture.

Conclusion

This study focused on the extremist culture in Saudi Arabia in the context of education, particularly its influence on cultural activities at schools. This study employed the terms extremists and extremism to refer to groups that endorse the culture of terrorism. It discussed the domination of extremist culture on these activities at schools and addressed the influence it had on students. This research drew upon Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus

and cultural capital and discussed this in relation to the influence of extremists at schools in Saudi Arabia. Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus and cultural capital are suitable tools to explain and understand the domination of extremist culture at school and the power of that culture. Bourdieu stressed that power had sophisticated and hidden methods to impose a culture on others. This study argued that the school context played a vital role in the "reproduction" of extremist culture because of the complex role of power in such a context. The study drew upon the biographical reflections of a Saudi author who had experienced extremist culture. Thabit brought to life his experience as a teenager with his extremist teachers and explained how he began to withdraw from his family and his previous style of life to suit the new culture and its practices (Thabit, 2006). His book, *The Terrorist Number 20,* is an important text that looks at the practices and culture of extremism, while also explaining the influence these factors have on a school student at a young age.

This study concluded that cultural domination at schools is a serious issue. As this study shows, the roles that power and extremist discourse play at school are complex and "hidden." Several intellectuals and high-level officials have already addressed the danger of such practices. The study suggested that documenting the practices and cultural activities is a good starting point in that it has the potential to convince those who still doubt the existence of "extremist culture." This study proposes that academic work in this field is necessary to bring assurance to schools and educational institutions and to search for solutions.

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