

Analysis?

“Jihad is our Way,” reads a sign in the picture heading an article titled “Analysis: The roots of Jihad”. To too many Americans the sign reads, “Terrorism is our way” and the title of the article indicates nothing more than an exploration of an inferior and perverse culture. Being fortunate enough to have had a liberal upbringing and a deeply rooted sense of compassion, I see a cross-cultural misunderstanding of the meaning of a word, and possible insight into this misunderstanding.

The article begins by pointing out that the literal translation of jihad is ‘struggle’. The author goes on to give an account of the “concept of jihad in the modern world.” The historical platform for this account begins with two Islamic revivalists, Hassan al-Banna and Syed Abul Ala Maududi, who formed Muslim organizations that “blamed the western idea of the separation of religion and politics for the decline of Muslim societies.” The author proceeds to show how Maududi and al-Banna’s ideas gained influence throughout the Muslim world by inspiring “a whole generation of Islamists”. The revolutionary Islamic ideas gained more strength during the fight to liberate Afghanistan from Soviet control. Abdullah Azzam, “dubbed the ‘Emir (prince) of Jihad’”, and his student at university in Saudi Arabia, Osama Bin Laden, were among the first Arabs to join the Afghan mujahideen.

The author continues to state that, after the Afghani victory, the extremist Egyptian Islamic Jihad movement wanted to use Afghanistan as a platform to liberate the rest of the Muslim world. In closing, the author shows that it was this idea combined

with the United States use of what was considered sacred land (Saudi Arabia) to attack Iraq in the gulf war which gave rise to Bin Laden's "declaration of war" against the United States.

To me this article is less an Analysis of the "roots of jihad", and more a representation of American closed-minded/shortsighted analysis. The first and most obvious clue to this shortsightedness is in understanding that when the author says "early 20th century" in reference to the rise of the two figures, al-Banna and Maududi, she means early to mid 20th century. Al-Banna's organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Maududi's organization, Jamaat Islami, weren't founded until 1928ⁱ and 1941ⁱⁱ respectively. Indeed it seems absurd to think that a three-page article with a historical basis of less than eighty years could explain the roots of a religious term that has existed for centuries.

The closed-mindedness of this article is apparent in that it is focused exclusively on the evolution of Islamic fundamentalist interpretations of the word jihad alongside the executions, assassinations and wars associated with this interpretation. The article says nothing of the way in which less radical, and undoubtedly more numerous, groups of people interpret the word. By failing to give a well-rounded, more complete account of the word, the author has instead strengthened the association between the word and radicalism.

The conclusion talks about Bin Laden and his "declaration of war" on the United States, and indeed upon re-reading the article one sees very little progression through the branches of the different interpretations of the word towards its root, but rather an ascendance up a branch towards the fruit of a single interpretation. This article is not

about what created a word, but about what created a man. The unfortunate thing about this is that by titling the article “Analysis: the roots of jihad” one only further associates the term directly to Bin Laden, his declaration of war, and the terrorism that ensued. The article itself has not Saddest perhaps of all is that in the end this article might after all be an exploration of a perverse culture. However, instead of that culture being the one this article was supposedly written about, it is the culture that reads the article and accepts it as an analysis of the cause of terrorism.

ⁱ <http://www.al-banna.net/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.dalitstan.org/books/yechuri/yech10.html>

All quotes and data not cited are from:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/middle_east/newsid_1603000/1603178.stm

BBC news; Symon, Fiona; 16 October, 2001