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# The Life of Egyptian Extremists: A Comparison between Mohamed Atta and Shukri Mostafa



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**ABSTRACT:** The investigation of extremism is likely to take a place after the occurrence of the occurrence. Few of the people that investigated the life of extremists understand how their life is completely influenced to shift them from ordinary citizens into extremists to cease the increase of extremism globally. Thus, this research examines the life of the most extremists in the Egyptian history, Shukri Mostafa and Mohamed Atta, by investigating their past, peers and family. Shukri and Atta are both Egyptians who fatefully believed in extremism approach to implement their own agenda based on Islamic perspectives. Hitherto, Shukri and Atta still have cohorts who consider their sacrifice as the best method of jihad, albeit the Islamic clerics grappled their ideologies. According to literature, the story of Shukri and Atta is vigorously intrigued for governments, politicians and researchers to augment in their accounts that extremists are currently well-educated and most of them belong to well-to-do families.

KEYWORDS: Egypt, Extremism, Shukri Mostafa, Mohamed Atta.

## INTRODUCTION

Extremism has taken place in the Middle East, since the existence of Islamic movements, hitherto. The Islamic movements, however, are segregated into trinity groups. Firstly, the intermediate Islamic movements, which are represented by the Muslim Brotherhood (Knudsen, 2003). Secondly, extremist Islamic movements, which are represented by Takfir wal-Hijra, Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Thirdly, the Islamic missionary movements, which are represented by Tablighi Jamaat (Horstmann, 2007). Tablighi Jumaat is known as a peaceful movement that eschews politics. Hence, it does not crucially involve disputedly topics among its members (Alexiev, 2005). However, the scholars of political Islam ascertain that most of extremist Islamic movement are born within the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood is reckoned as a terrorist movement in various countries, particularly in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirate (Darwich, 2017). Arguably, despite the oppression towards the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East, the movement is practicing its political agenda on the European soil freely without vexation from the European governments. Thus, this brings the attention for the researchers to seek the concealed agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood. Also, raises the question, why is the movement oppressed by the Muslim government in the Middle East? whilst it has ample political emancipation in the West. In some political scholar's accounts, most of extremist individuals have learned and became pupils in the Muslim Brotherhood schools. Briefly, this research is examining the life of the most extremist individuals in the nineteenth century Shukri Mustafa and Mohamed Atta. This research will ascertain the life of both individuals besides their relationship with the extremist Islamic movements and the Muslim Brotherhood.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper serves as a journal article that adds available information for the literature that ascertains the strategy of the extremism, emphasizing socialization and its effect on the prospective individuals of each extremist. For obtaining such information, the open resources have been acquired, including written and verbal materials such as journal articles, newspapers, books and reports (Richelson, 2008).

#### The Early Life of Shukri and Atta

Shukri Mustafa was born in 1942 to fellah in Asyut. Antithesis from normal childhood, Shukri relapsed with his childhood when his father 'the mayor' of a town, divorced his mother and married a dancer. At this juncture, Shukri was a subject to mortify and the vacuous jokes as his stepmother was a dancer. Also, his mother married a cruel man, who used to birch her in front of his eyes. This had a negative impact on Shukri's life; therefore, he abnegated his father and mother, and decided to live alone (Farghali, 2019).

Conclusively, Shukri studied agriculture at Asyut University, where he was recruited by the Muslim Brotherhood. Those who had close contact with Shukri stated that he was an intelligent man and articulately with decorum in his utterances as he was a poet (Kepel, 2003). Shukri followed the Muslim Brotherhood during the movement dispute with Abdul Nasser, the second Egyptian president. Thus, his knowledge according to the movement's credo and ideology was finite. At this juncture, the Muslim Brotherhood challenged oppression and deprivation of political rights. Of course, Shukri had his own part in this oppression, he was incarcerated during his university study. The incarceration at this time witnessed tortures and enforcement disappearance towards the Muslim Brotherhood members (Sarmanlou, 2015). On the other side, Mohamed Atta was born in the northern part of Egypt, Kafr el-Sheikh in 1968, to a well-to-do family. During his early life, Atta had no link with the Islamic movements. Albeit, his family moved to stay in Giza, particularly city el-Omraniya, where the extremist Islamic movements were active. Hitherto, it is obscure whether Atta had a contact with the extremist Islamic movements in his city or not. Still, this is not in people's accounts as at this juncture, Atta used to socialize with women and had a very open mind. Yet the transmission of Atta's ideology is obscure, whether he shifted from normal Muslim to extremist individual in Egypt or Germany, where he left to continue his postgraduate study (Lincoln, 2010). Notwithstanding, after accomplishing his engineering studies, Atta joined the Egyptian Engineers Syndicate, which at this time constrained beneath the Muslim Brotherhood. Equivocally, it was abstrusely indicated by Atta's mates if he had contact with the Muslim Brotherhood at this juncture of his life (Lillian, 2006).

#### The Shift to Extremism

According to sociological scholars, people focus on terrorists and extremists, while neglecting the crucial constitute of the individual prior shifting to extremist. This is known as the socialization process of each individual, when he/she go through a long process of learnings during their lifetime (Bassis, Gelles & Levine, 1998). Besides, sociological scholars assume that there is no individual born violent. Yet, the process of socialization is crucially the most influenced part of the individual's life. Thus, Shukri and Atta have been impacted through their life by various incidents that shaped their characteristic from ordinary citizens into extremist individuals. Shukri himself was subjected to coercion and tortures inside the incarcerations. The prison is considered as resocialization, where the individual strips off his previous norms and values and acclimatize new values that felicitous with the society (Bassis, Gelles & Levine, 1998). Alas for Shukri, the incarceration had negatively impacted on him. The incarceration inculcated abomination and acrimonious into Shukri toward those who torture him. Formerly, Shukri believed that those who torture him are not Muslims, but infidels. He emphasized on fighting them. At this juncture, inside the incarcerations, Shukri had to verse the Muslim Brotherhood members who rebuffed his idea of takfir blasphemy for various reasons. Crucially, considering a Muslim who believes in God and Prophet as infidel means that particular Muslim must be killed (Ahmed, 1990). Indubitably, the emergence of this idea had brought tension between the Muslim Brotherhood members and their dissenters led by Shukri Mustafa inside the incarcerations. It was seemingly disavowed for the Muslim Brotherhood to believe in Shukri's ideas as the Muslim Brotherhood did not seek vindictiveness against the regime. As a result, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Hudaybi wrote the book 'Preachers not Judges', which disowned Shukri's ideology after he successfully recruited dozens of the ex-Muslim Brotherhood members at incarcerations (Al-Hudaybi, 1977). However, after the liberalization of the political prisoners during al-Sadat, the third President of Egypt, Shukri had fortuitously seized the advantage to accumulate more members into his new organization Takfir wal-Hijra Excommunication and Emigration, which means to consider the society as an infidel society and abandon it until the retribution of God take place against it. Sociologically, the incarcerations is the place where the individual becomes re-socialized and learns new norms and values that is felicitously accepted in the society. Arguably, the incarcerations, however, became the crux of the emergence of Takfir wal-Hijra (Livesey, 2005). Towards the end, the political emancipation during al-Sadat for the Islamic politics had catered the field for Shukri and his cohorts to mobilize and promulgate their concealed agenda among Egyptians (Gleis, 2005).

Antithesis from Shukri, the transmission of Atta from a postgraduate student with trinity languages to an extremist individual had witnessed several incidents during his life. Momentously, Atta lived within a well-to-do family and had been socialized among peers from high class families. He did not graduate from a religious school, but he sought to acquire the Islamic knowledge based on his beliefs (Kolar, 2006). However, thematically on European soil, Atta has entirely morphed from an ordinary person into an extremist. For Arabs, Europe is known as the emancipation land, where they gamble and have inebriation without being bannable. On the contrary, the comparison between Atta and other Arabians is not nuance. There are numerous incidents accentuated that Atta is on a dissimilar trajectory. For instance, his uniforms were designed Islamically to indicate his Islamic character. Likewise, his utterances were mostly revolving around the American influence on the Middle East. Consequently, his flatmates were not reluctant to defenestrate him from the flat. Hence, being ostracized did not cease Atta for seeking new mates who share mutual understandings with him. Also, it was contrived for Atta to become an extremist individual as he had never been socialized on military or physical training. Notwithstanding, it is not a decisive matter for the individual to be born to extremist parents to become an extremist. As just, peers and media have an ample savvy to re-socialize the individual and strip off his previous beliefs to a new one ((Bassis, Gelles & Levine, 1998). At this juncture, Atta was influenced by his new peers who recruited him to become a member of Al-Qaeda. He believed that jihad is the sole method of fighting the United States. Albeit, Atta accomplished his master in Germany, it was not

arduous for him to continue his study career elsewhere. Yet, he preferred the vaguest trajectory among Muslims, which is jihad. Deficiently, Atta was qualified to meet Usama Bin Laden, who chose him to lead the September Attacks (Immelman, 2002).

### The Ideological Influence

Most of Islamic scholars concede that people belong to Islamic extremist movements, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Still, the concealed agenda of several extremists brought a mind- boggling questions among researchers; Why and How the persons from well-to-do families become extremists?

However, Atta had the intention to become an extremist prior joining Al-Qaeda. He solely sought for someone to flaunt him the trajectory of jihad and vindictiveness towards the United States. Whilst Shukri who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood had experienced no physics or military socialization. Crucially, Shukri and Atta had no Islamic background to reckon the community as infidels, which gives them the opportunity to consider the society as kafir infidel and they must fight it. Particularly, Shukri established Takfir wal-Hijrah, the most extremist Islamic movement during al-Sadat aeon, the third Egyptian President. Shukri, however, became ostracized by the Muslim Brotherhood inside the incarcerates. Therefore, he became victimized of ostracization by the Muslim Brotherhood members, who rebuffed communicating and praying with him due to his extremist ideologies. In Shukri's account, the Muslim Brotherhood and his tortures are atoned (Muadi, 2014). They are not Muslims, rather infidels and they must fight the infidels for the sake of God. The curriculum manhaj of the Muslim Brotherhood is not considered as an extremist curriculum. Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood has a great popularity in the United States and Europe. Similarly, the Muslim Brotherhood is not a terrorist movement in their point of view. Arguably, there are dozens of the movement's members who bifurcated from the Muslim Brotherhood and commenced their extremist agenda, for instance, Shukri Mustafa. Nevertheless, most of the emerged Islamic movements are originated based on Islamic knowledge; The Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat Islamic, the Nation of Islam, Tablighi Jamaat, and Islamic Republic Party in Iran. These movements have nexus of clergy who had been socialized and educated based on Islamic knowledge. Antithesis from these movements, Takfir wal-Hijra, which entrenched by Shukri who has been languished in incarcerate. Furthermore, during his existence in the Muslim Brotherhood, he was not hierarchical in high position. Therefore, it is tremendously palpable for Shukri with his deficiency of knowledge in leadership and Islamic knowledge to entrench such a movement (Karamm, 1998). In one hand, beneath the pressure and oppression inside the incarcerations, Shukri became a dignitary among his peers, who believed in his idea and disowned the peaceful technique of the Muslim Brotherhood against their tortures. On the other side, Mohamed Atta had no link with any Islamic movement prior his joining with Al-Qaeda. He lived in internal dispute regarding the right trajectory of jihad. Moreover, Atta was socialized and educated by Usama Bin Laden personally. This brings a crucial question: how did Usama Bin Laden learn the Islamic knowledge to inculcate in his cohorts the Islamic values of jihad? Bin Laden had no Islamic knowledge, but he graduated from faculty of Engineering, University of King Abdelaziz (Wright, 2006). Referring to the relationship between Atta and Usama Bin Laden, another question emerges in mind: why did Bin Laden choose Atta to lead the September attacks, albeit the latter had no military experiences, and he was known as insubordinate individual?

Answering this question conducive the article to give a glimpse into the past of Usama Bin Laden, and his relationship with his people. Profoundly, Bin Laden is one of the most extremist Islamists in the last century. Albeit Bin Laden had no Islamic knowledge that draws the trajectory for him to lead a nexus of Arabs to fight in Afghanistan. Yet his teacher Mohamed Qotb, taught him the Islamic politics and was a good instance for him had profoundly influenced him Islamically. Mohamed Qotb, who's Sayed Qotb's brother, the Islamic scholar and the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood became an inspired tool for most of the Islamic movements globally, including Al-Qaeda, Jamaat Islamic, Tahrir Movement, and ISIS. Therefore, Bin Laden chose Atta among other 18 assailants, just for his willingness to die in the sake of Allah and for accentuating peremptory toward Bin Laden and his *Minhaj* curriculum.

## The Influence of Peers

Sociological scholars assume that the role of peers on the individual is profoundly the most curial constitute of building enthusiasm into the individual to continue his plans with a group of people (Bassis, Gelles & Levine, 1998). In one hand, both Atta and Shukri, did not succeed in their extremism individually. They both sought for peers who share the mutual understandings with them. Shukri, however, recruited dozens of the ex-Muslim Brotherhood members in the incarcerate. Those recruited cohorts nominated Shukri to become the leader of the movement, albeit his lack of Islamic knowledge, social life, and of course his lack of judging on the people. Undoubtedly, Shukri clasped the advantage of being a leader, then he commenced teaching and socializing his peers through inculcating such an aberrant Islamic teaching. For instance, Shukri declared that he is the awaited Mahdi, who most of Muslims believe will be the survivor of the nation and will grapple all the heresies until he procures the victory for the Islamic nation. Alas, his cohorts with showing no skeptically, followed his utterances. As well, in terms of education, Shukri inveigled his cohorts to cease learning and educating themselves to become illiterate as the pacemaker prophet Mohamed. Arguably, the Muslims state that the prophet Mohamed was illiterate as an evidence that the Koran was not written by him, but it was a revelation from God to his apostle Mohamed ((Rahim, 2018). However, Shukri urged his cohorts to learn Koran solely and to abnegate the learnings of philosophy and other teachings. Also, Shukri commanded the women to abound their husbands, who were reckoned as infidels in

Shukri's account. Thus, the divorced women had to marry new husbands who are in the same group with Shukri. Towards the end, Shukri's cohorts followed his instructions and heaved peremptory for him. They were utilized as a tool of assassination as Shukri commanded them to kill each member defect from the movement (Farghali, 2019).

On the other side, Mohamed Atta had not obtained much influence and leadership on his peers such as Shukri Mostafa. Atta's life was teetering on the brink of collapse. Which means that his life witnessed both, extremism and entertainment. He had a girlfriend from Finland and also had extremist peers who put him on the extremist trajectory. In terms of entertainment, his girlfriend from Finland claimed that Atta was her lover. Additionally, she stated that Atta wore expensive perfumes and drove expensive cars. Arguably, having a girlfriend is not accepted in Islam. Also, man cannot meet woman alone. Hence, this was discrepancy with the thoughts of Islam. Yet, Atta did not walk for a long time on this trajectory. He had a doubled life (Mcdermott, 2002). Whilst he used to meet his girlfriend, he also used to meet his extremist peers in various countries in Europe. Sociologically, Atta did not have many friends since his childhood as he used to follow his father's instruction solely. On the European soil, Atta did not seek to have many friends; he was a man with many secrets. Those who had close contact with him claimed that Atta was a powerless man. For such a reason, this could be a sufficient argument for Atta to seek his ascendancy to see himself as a sturdy man. Therefore, many young people join extremist and terrorist movements to feel the ascendancy, and fulfill the gap they feel during their life (Bachman & Alvarez, 2017). On the other side, Atta's colleagues described him as an intellectual man. He did well regarding his studies. His supervisor noticed his intelligence and articulately decorum in his utterances. Yet, his characteristic was vividly morphed from a delight and intelligent person into an extremist. After his repatriation from Egypt, August 1995, Atta had a hairy beard. Moreover, the introduction of his master thesis started with "Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds", which translated from his supervisor as the first sign of Atta to embrace a new ideology in his lifetime.

According to literature, Atta did not impact his peers, whether in Egypt or Europe. His existence in Europe witnessed a dereliction of recruitment for Al-Qaeda, which is one of the most crucial pillars of Al-Qaeda doctrine. Notwithstanding, Atta was impacted by his peers to join Al-Qaeda, not family either school or media. However, the recruitment of Atta in Europe, opens the field for an intriguing topic, which is, the recruitment of *mujahideen* in Europe. Towards the end, Atta was recruited and profoundly influenced by Zamar, a Syrian man with a German passport. He met Atta in Germany and invited him several times to Syria, where Atta clandestinely met the other members of Al-Qaeda, but used his master research as a cover of the true purpose of his visiting to Syria (Ponraja, 2017).

### The Religious Discourse with Extremists

Political discourse is constantly a choice for solving a problem. It may help two sides of politicians to agree according to a point. However, in terms of extremism and terrorism, the political discourse is rebuffed in some people's accounts (Van Dijk, 1997). The violence against these extremist groups may help to cease their violence and circumscribe their network recruitment. The fact of this claim bears two paradox approaches.

According to an interview Aljazeera conducted with an extremist 'Abdo Rabu' who was involved in the assassination of Farag Foda, the Egyptian professor who fought the Islamic clerics and their participation of politics. However, Abdu claimed that they utilized the violence approach after the abnegation of the government toward the al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, in Egypt. He claimed that the government closed all political discourses with them. Further, they were banned from preaching, giving lectures and ultimately, they were ostracized completely in the community. Thus, the extremism approach was the merely available method to cease the ideologies of Foda (Aljazeera, 2020). On the contrary, the minister of religions during the immensity of Shukri's ideology, especially among youths and students in the universities. Consequently, Shukri claimed his intelligence and willing to have a magic ascendancy, had unglued in the religious discourse and discursive with the minister of religion sheikh al-Zahabi. For this reason, a dozen of Shukri's cohorts left the group: therefore, he commanded his stalwart cohorts to kill those who left the movement. Of course, sheikh al-Zahabi was a subject to abduction from his home, when a nexus of Shukri's cohorts broke into the sheikh house and forcibly abducted him. At this juncture, Egyptians believed that even political and religious discourse will not cease the extremist groups from conducting their extremism. Alas for Sheikh al-Zahabi, he was killed by an ex-police officer who believed in Shukri and obeyed his instructions. Islamically, rewards depend on the kind of deed, albeit Shukri did not kill the sheikh personally (Ford, 1987). However, his ideas had reached to the point of no return, and thus he was executed in 1978. As just, the incarcerate was the best place for Shukri to continue his extremist plans. However, prior to his execution, Shukri declared a behest to his cohorts to dissolve the group as he believed it's elusive for him to die before attaining his political and Islamic objectives (Farghali, 2019). On the other side, Mohamed Atta, who grow up in a well-to-do family, had a marvelous relationship with his family. His father believes hitherto, his son is still alive. He emphasizes that Atta is detained at Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp. Still, his claim is obscure and has no evidence-based. Unrelatedly, Atta lived with double faces with his peers in Europe and with his family in Egypt. His family noticed no shred of evidence that Atta will become the devil incarnate on the global news. Of course, there had been a dereliction of the family socialization. Which led Atta to abandon his family's teachings, socialization and culture. As a result, he embraced a new norm that paradoxically does not agree with the Islamic teachings or even the humanity. He instigated thousands of innocent victims at the September attacks. Consequently, Atta gave the legitimacy to the U.S., to conquer Iraq and to disseminate

its influence on the Arabian countries. Also, the racism and discrimination against Arabs raised in the U.S., and globally. However, in terms of political discourse with Atta, his personality had profoundly believed in jihad and reprisal from the U.S. Atta thought that U.S. is the main culprit of consigning the Middle Eastern countries to retrograded position. Thus, the political discussion and discursive had no place in Atta's accounts. His arrogance led him to the point of no return. In actual fact, Atta owns the complete responsibility of establishing the clandestine plan to attack the Twin Towers. He chose the date, place and even his abettors to conduct the attack with him. On the other side, since the attack of the Twin Towers, there is a question that is still unanswered: if Atta had a dispute with the American interfere in the Middle East, then, what is the reason of killing thousands of innocents who had nothing to do with Atta and the American dispute? Albeit Koran says "you have your religion and I have my religion" which translates as everyone shall follow his own beliefs without harassment from the opposite part. This brings another issue as well, which is the meanings of Koran. Essentially, the interpretations of the Koran were interpreted without Islamic knowledge by Bin Laden who was illiterate in the matter of Islamic sciences.

They might have learned the Islamic concepts through various *ustaz*, clerics, or professor, but they had not learned the Islamic sciences and knowledges academically or in a religious university such as Al-Azhar. Still, Islamic clerics assume that the person who explains the meanings *tafsir* of Koran MUST have profoundly knowledge of understanding the grammar and meanings of the Arabic language. Additionally, jurisdiction *figh* and recitation science are compulsory for explaining the interpretations of Koran.

#### SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Similarities: The characteristics of both Shukri and Atta revolve around arrogance. Both had arrogance that drawn the possibility for whose lives should continue and who should be vanished. They also believed in violence as the sole method of approaching the jihad. Shukri led his own group by enforcing them to bear peremptory for him. On the same trajectory, Atta had the full responsibility of September Attacks. The mutual-understanding of both Shukri and Atta is revolving around the influence of ascendancy over the people. For them, it is not important to be involved in political discourse to understand such a new phenomenon related with Islam. But they both believed the political discourse might weaken abate their group. Thus, especially Shukri, rebuffed the idea of political and religious discourse with the clerics. He emphasized to his cohorts that they are the soldiers of Allah or in other utterances, they are the chosen group of Allah to fight the infidels. The same utterance Bin Laden inculcated into his cohorts, particularly Atta, who was seeking the truth of Islam. He and his crime partners were told personally from Bin Laden, that they are the soldiers of Allah on the earth. Also, they have to shift of jihad from the Middle East to the land of infidels, which means the West.

The process of re-socialization in both Shukri and Atta met after being ostracized from the society. They became a subject of mockery by their previous peers. Shukri, however, was ostracized by his previous mates in the Muslim Brotherhood movement during his incarceration. They boycotted communication with him because of his extremist ideologies. In one hand, Atta was also ostracized by his flatmates, who recognized him as ignorant and still adopting the eastern cultures. Therefore, he sought to meet people who share the mutual-understandings of thoughts and culture with him.

**Differences**: The difference between Shukri and Atta is palpably noticed in the way of the early life. Shukri was again ostracized by the society, family and peers. Of course, in this situation he's a subject to follow such an arduous way without paying attention to the consequences. Consequently, Shukri wanted to become a poet, but at the end, he became an extremist. He instigated the emergence of the extremist Islamic movements.

On the other side, Mohamed Atta was socialized in a well-to-do family. He acknowledged the Egyptian culture and Islamic teachings from his family and school, until the dereliction of the process of socialization during his study in Germany.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Extremists do not need platforms to propagate for their agenda. Either they do not need ideologies to inculcate them into their cohorts. Yet, they need peers and peremptory from their cohorts to continue their extremism. In this instance, Shukri and Atta had a good quality of education; however, they had an abortive attempt regarding their continuum study. According to literature, Shukri entrenched the first extremist group in the modern history of Egypt, Takfir wal-Hijrah. Whilst Atta became the lure of Al-Qaeda on the European soil to lead the most terrorist mission in the last century. However, the paper examines that the continuum of extremism will continue as long as there is no technique to study the behaviors of extremists. Their behaviours should be studied as well as the factors that lead them to abandon their ordinary life to familiarize with extremist ideologies which lead them to two ways: incarceration or death.

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