EMOTIONS AND THE ENGLISH SCHOOL:
A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

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Abstract. In his 1977 book *The Anarchical Society*, Hedley Bull, one of the founding scholars of the English School of International Relations, critiques the idea of actor rationality, problematising the distinction between reason and passion and contending that passion is "a faculty present in all men." More recently, the events of September 11, 2001 brought the question of whether terrorists can be considered rational actors to the forefront of International Relations, with poststructuralists, constructivists and feminists theorising on the role of emotion in political acts. Taking the lead from Bull, this paper argues that it is time for the English School to follow suit, making room in its theoretical framework for a consideration of emotions. Referring to Barry Buzan's contemporary redefinition of the English School's world society level of analysis, which is contextualised by "a new world disorder" wherein transnational inter-human identities have become increasingly palpable, it considers how appeals to emotion that refer to transnational identities may be a contributing factor in twenty-first century terrorism. Through the example of global terrorism, it thus seeks to test the capacity of the English School to incorporate emotion into its theoretical framework.

*Key Words: emotions, English School, terrorism*
Introduction

There is a long tradition in International Relations of Realist analysis that emphasises the pursual of power by states to further their national interests (Donnelly 2005, 29). The English School theory of International Relations has played the role within the discipline of maintaining continuity with the Realist tradition while embracing novel developments in thinking on International Relations through its methodologically plural approach (Little 2000).

In an early challenge to the Realist assumption that states are rational actors that “think intelligently about how to maximize their prospects for survival” (Mearsheimer 2009, 214), acting “in terms of interest defined as power” (Morgenthau 1978, 4), English School theorist Hedley Bull (1977, chap. 5) questioned the reason/passion dichotomy that underlies the rational actor assumption. He argued that there was “no such thing as rational action in an objective sense,” since rational action referred only to action that was both internally consistent as well as consistent with specific goals (Bull 2000, 259). Building on this critique of the notion of actor rationality, he posited that rational action was widely considered to mean action stimulated by reason rather than passion, and that reason was assumed to be a faculty that everyone possessed and one that guided everyone to act in a similar way. For Bull (1977, 125-26), however, it was clear that what theorists really meant when they referred to rational action undertaken by a state was action that was consistent with the behaviour normally expected of a state. However, he pointed out that state leaders often did not act in such a predictable fashion.
A more contemporary critique of the rational actor assumption is found in Bleiker and Hutchison’s (2008, 121) work on the place of emotions in world politics. Echoing Bull, they argue that “people hardly ever behave rationally in a consistent manner or even manage to agree on what doing so means in the first place.”

Bleiker and Hutchison contribute to a burgeoning literature on the role played by emotions in International Relations. Mercer (2014) has shown how group-level emotion can encourage feelings of national identity and identity with social groups other than the nation-state, a dynamic that influences international politics. As he explains, “[G]roup members share, validate, and police each others’ feelings; and these feelings structure relations within and between groups in international politics” (Mercer 2014, 515). He also points to the interdependent nature of emotion and group identity, emphasising that it is caring about a group identity that lends significance to that identity (Mercer 2014, 522). Moreover, he highlights the cultural framing of emotion, the contagiousness of emotion, and the group-level shared reactions to traumatic events as further evidence of the existence of shared emotions at the levels of the group and the state (Mercer 2014, 523-30).

Crawford (2014) draws on biological literature to reveal that emotions are a biological fact, one that has an impact on the human body, thus underlining the relevance of emotions to human behaviour in society and in international politics. Her work reveals how emotions such as fear and empathy become institutionalised when states or political parties undertake military action or,
conversely, opt to engage in a process of reconciliation. Ross (2006, 197) has sought to assess the ability of constructivist theory to incorporate a consideration of emotion in its framework. And Wright-Neville and Smith (2009) have studied how emotions affect the behaviour of Islamist terrorists.

In light of the emerging trend of including emotions in analyses of International Relations, this paper addresses the question of how emotions should be considered through an English School lens. Based on the central role of historical interpretation in English School analyses, which is highlighted by key English School texts such as Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight’s (1966, 17-34) *Diplomatic Investigations* and Hedley Bull’s (2000, 253) writings on international society, this paper examines terrorism in Pakistan through the twin lenses of history and emotion. This emotional approach offers a fresh perspective on the country’s history, and the combination of history and emotion as an analytical frame holds the promise of previously unexplored insights into the roots of terrorism.

In the next section, this paper draws on Barry Buzan’s (2004, 1-2) work on globalisation and the English School’s world society concept to consider how global identities interact with the phenomenon of terrorism. In his pathbreaking book *From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation*, Buzan (2004, 137) contends that

> there is a new world disorder defined by the degree to which interhuman identities, whether kinship, ethnonational, religious, political-ideological, cultural or epistemic have spilled out of state containers, often with the encouragement of the state, though frequently also against its will.

Applying this notion to the transnational militant groups operating in Pakistan, this
section of the paper explores the role played by interhuman identities in South Asian terrorism.

Finally, this paper takes account of Andrew Linklater’s (2014) use of the English School concept of international society to consider through the perspective of emotions the development of shared norms in the European society of states during the eighteenth century. Widening the scope of this paper, this section sheds light on additional avenues for research that incorporates emotion into the English School’s theoretical framework.

**The English School and Emotion**

The incorporation of emotion has the potential to address deficiencies in the school’s analytical structure. While shared norms are a central element of English School theory, constituting one of the pillars of an international society of states, the school neglects the culturally defined nature of norms in International Relations. Mercer’s (2014, 521) assertion that there is an emotional aspect to norms provides a foothold into such an analysis. Examining how emotions are filtered through culture and such culturally mediated emotions shape shared norms at the regional level and in the globalised context could be paths towards the development of an English School that is capable of incorporating diverse cultural perspectives.

Secondly, Buzan’s (2004, 137) discussion of interhuman identities that transcend state boundaries fails to explore the nature of identity. Mercer’s (2014, 515) exploration of the dependence of identity on social emotion could bolster
Buzan’s (2004, xiii-137) effort to develop the English School’s world society concept by considering non-state identities.

Lastly, according to Linklater and Suganami (2006, 265), the English School has been criticised for failing to adequately explicate how historical knowledge can enhance scholars’ understanding of contemporary international politics or inform their predictions regarding the course of international affairs. The continuity of group-level emotion through time offers a possible means of linking the past with the present, as the following discussion will demonstrate.

**An Emotional-Historical Account of Extremism in Pakistan**

Bleiker and Hutchison (2008, 122) emphasise the historical dimension of emotions, asserting that this historical dimension is key to understanding the development of collective identities such as national identities. The relevance of history to studies of emotion in International Relations is also invoked by Ross (2006, 199-214) when he refers to the shared memories that sustain collective identities. The English School’s predilection for historical interpretation lends itself readily to studies that trace the origins of shared emotions in a given society. For Bull (2000, 253), “[G]ood theoretical work takes place in conjunction with historical study,” while Martin Wight (1966, 33), another of the English School’s founding scholars, posits that historical interpretation is to international politics what political theory is to politics.

An illustration of such an application of the English School’s historical sociology method to the study of emotion is provided here in the form of an
analysis of the roots of terrorism in Pakistan that considers the emotional trauma that accompanied the creation of the country. Authors such as Beg and Bokhari (2009, 224), Johnson and Mason (2008) and Mullick (2012, 93) have highlighted the centrality of Pakistan to global radicalisation. However, Talbot (2012, 2-211) stresses the importance of understanding “the country and its people in their terms,” as well as suggesting that there is a connection between radicalism in Pakistan and the mass migration and religious riots that accompanied the birth of the country in 1947.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 uprooted between twelve and sixteen million people, making it the largest migration in twentieth-century world history. The religious riots that led up to and followed the partition killed between 200,000 and two million people. In addition, 30,000 women were abducted and 100,000 women were raped during the violence (Butalia 2000, 3; Roland 2010, 387; Talbot 2007, 151-52; Talbot 2012, 58).

Discussing the traumatising effect of the India-Pakistan partition, Roland (2010, 387-88) calls attention to people’s dislocation from communities and spaces that their families had inhabited for centuries, their witnessing of violence, and their fear for their own and their families’ safety. Roland (2010, 385) remarks on the intergenerational nature of trauma, referring to Holocaust studies on the subject. While clinical studies on the children of Holocaust survivors have shown a transgenerational effect, community-level studies have been more circumspect (Levav, Kohn, and Schwartz 1998, 758; Song, Tol, and Jong 2014, 240). However, a recent societal study conducted in Burundi revealed that stress among former
child soldiers was transmitted to their children (Song, Tol, and Jong 2014, 247). Research on intergenerational war trauma among Palestinians also shows that the children of fathers who have suffered war trauma are at an increased risk of mental health issues (Palosaari et al. 2013). Laboratory tests on rodents have revealed that specific fears may be transmitted from mothers to offspring, thus explaining how emotional trauma can embody an intergenerational character (Debiec and Sullivan 2014).

Scholars such as Nytagodien and Neal (2004), Erikson (1976) and Alexander (2004) have introduced the idea of collective trauma that operates at a societal level. This notion corresponds to Mercer’s (2014) work on group emotion and its pervasive influence on the citizens of a state. Pakistan lies at the heart of the north-western region of South Asia that bore the brunt of the 1947 partition, and it is likely that the trauma from the violence and dislocation still lingers among Pakistanis, especially in light of the recent research on intergenerational trauma (Mayer 2010; Talbot 2007, 151-52; Talbot 2012, 58).

Talbot (2012, 209-11), Hussain (2007, 53) and Markey (2013, 99-100) point towards such a possibility when they posit that the radicalisation of Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, the leader of the militant Lashkar-e-Taiba group, is linked to his family’s forced migration and exposure to violence during the 1947 partition. Talbot (2012, 209-11) takes this theory a step further, noting that the leader of the militant Jaish-e-Muhammad group, Maulana Masood Azhar, is also from a partition-affected family, as are many residents of the south Punjab districts of Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rahim Yar Khan and Rajanpur,
which are strongholds of the Punjabi Taliban. While it is difficult to ascertain which individual militants belong to refugee families, it is true that Akhram Lahori, one of the leaders of the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi militant group, hails from Bahawalpur, while Malik Ishaq, another Lashkar-i-Jhangvi leader, is from Rahim Yar Khan. Furthermore, Maulana Umar Qasmi, who heads the Ahrar-ul-Hind militant organisation, attended a seminary in Bahawalpur, which indicates the influence of radicalism in southern Punjab on militant groups in the country (Abdullah 2014; Faruqi 2013; Khattak 2013; Rehman 2014). Although Talbot (2012, 209-11) focuses on families that were uprooted by the partition, in fact religious riots occurred across Punjab and surrounding areas and people who did not migrate will have been nevertheless exposed to the violence. Hence, the traumatising impact of the partition is unlikely to have been limited to refugee families; the effect on Pakistanis more generally was probably widespread.

According to Staub (2011, 218-20), a group’s past experience with violence makes it more likely to become a perpetrator of violence under certain conditions. He explains that mistrust and fear cause such groups to respond to threats with disproportionate aggression. He surmises that the Germans suffered group trauma as a result of World War I, on account of the loss of lives, losing the war, economic strife and domestic political conflicts. Implicitly drawing a link between this collective trauma and the subsequent Holocaust, he also perceives a connection between colonial rule and the conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis in Africa. Arguing that the Hutus were victimised by the Belgian colonial rulers as well as their Tutsi representatives, he recounts the brutality of Belgian rule in
Congo and contends that this cultural history of victimisation, woundedness and violence made way for the Rwandan genocide to lead to subsequent violence between Hutus and Tutsis in Congo. A third illustration he provides is of the Libyan city of Darnah, from which a large number of men travelled to Iraq to fight US forces. He explains that the Italians brutally ruled the city in the early twentieth century and suppressed a rebellion by a locally revered Islamist leader. Coupled with the current conditions of economic hardship and exposure to televised images portraying devastation in Iraq, he opines that the history of brutal colonial rule has a role to play in these men’s decision to fight in Iraq, as do American expeditions to Darnah in the 1800s to fight pirates. Staub’s perspective adds weight to Talbot’s speculation about the possible connection between the India-Pakistan partition and the emergence of terrorist groups in Pakistan’s Punjab province.

Thus, the English School’s emphasis on the relevance of historical analysis to International Relations research could be adapted to trace the history of collective emotion in a society and its connection to political phenomena. Such analyses have the potential to offer fresh insights into international issues such as terrorism, even if they are difficult to prove empirically. As Bleiker and Hutchison (2008, 126-28) point out, emotions are intangible and sometimes elusive – not only are they impossible to quantify, they are often difficult to even articulate. Even so, as they contend, there is value in scholarship that conceptualises the influence of emotions on political events, if such studies are able to throw new light on old questions, even if such insights are impossible to prove. In Bleiker and
Hutchison’s (2008, 122-26) view, interpretative work that recognises the historical dimension of emotions and the significance of this emotional history to collective identity formation would be of value in understanding the role of emotions in International Relations. The English School’s predilection for historical interpretation lends itself to such an agenda.

**World Society and Inter-Human Identities**

Another way in which the English School’s framework is amenable to research on emotion is the flexibility offered to scholars by its world society concept. As defined by Buzan (2004), world society consists of transnational non-state actors and is particularly salient to contemporary research in the context of globalisation, since transnational inter-human identities have become increasingly palpable.

In Wright-Neville and Smith’s (2009, 86-87) view, globalisation has lessened the emotional pull of nationalist narratives, while expanding the room for individuals to develop emotional attachments to groups other than the nation-state. Globalisation has given rise to multiple loyalties that are not confined to the state. This has made way for global terrorist organisations such as the al-Qaeda network to prey on and encourage feelings of victimisation, oppression, humiliation, anger and frustration, while also activating and channeling the emotions of pride, solidarity, loyalty and love.

In the case of Pakistani militant groups, the transnational inter-human identities of Kashmiris on both sides of the India-Pakistan border, and of Pashtuns
on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, have a role to play. However, the globalisation of identity extends beyond the South Asian region in its interplay with Islamist extremism in Pakistan. Defining globalisation as “the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual,” Praja (2007, 32-36) characterises the contemporary brand of globalisation as American imperialism. He draws attention to the emotions of anger and frustration that he claims are prevalent across the Muslim world towards American foreign policies, highlighting the imposition of sanctions against Iraq and against Pakistan over its nuclear programme, as well as the perceived neglect of Chechnya and Kashmir and the American military presence in the Gulf (Praja 2007, 36-37). Furthermore, he points to the globalisation of communications that has allowed non-Western media outlets such as al Jazeera to broadcast coverage of violence occurring in Muslim countries that can give rise to anger against perceived injustices perpetrated by the US and other Western powers (Praja 2007, 37).

By equating globalisation with Americanisation, colonisation or, in Scholte’s (2005, 58) words, the “far-reaching subordination by the West of the rest,” Praja shows how the assertion of Western political and moral ideas globally has triggered an emotional and physical reaction in the East and led to a rejuvenation of regional identities that transcend the state (Hurrell 2007, 130-37; Thompson 2005, 161-68). In addition, Praja demonstrates how the globalisation of communications has enhanced the emotional pull of transnational identities such as religion. His work indicates that these collective emotional phenomena have a
role to play in global terrorism as it manifests today.

**International Society, Shared Norms and Tamed Emotions**

While Buzan (2004) advocates a broader application of the English School’s world society level of analysis, the school is better known for its conceptualisation of an international society of states based on shared norms, rules and values. Linklater (2014) demonstrates how emotions have been managed and destructive emotions have been tamed as a result of shared norms in international society over time. He points to the discouragement of displays of anger, passion and violence in diplomacy in eighteenth-century Europe, as well as the further suppression of emotions perceived as being destructive as the nuclear era and economic interdependence discouraged war. While unrelated to this paper’s focus on global terrorism, Linklater’s work illuminates an additional way in which English School theory can embrace analyses of emotion in world politics.

**Conclusions**

Taking the lead from Ross’s (2006) work on constructivism and emotions, this paper has sought to demonstrate how the English School’s agenda might be broadened to include considerations of emotion in its analyses of world politics. Responding to Bleiker and Hutchison’s (2008, 124) lament about the paucity of “studies that systematically analyse how emotions matter in concrete political settings,” this paper has focused on the issue of militant groups in Pakistan to consider how emotions have influenced the growth of violent extremist
organisations in the country, employing first a historical and then a globalist perspective. While this geographically limited approach takes heed of Hurrell’s (2007, 132) postulation that global security threats usually have local contexts, there is room for further studies of localised emotional contexts for terrorism that are then pieced together with the global research puzzle posed by terrorism.

Linklater’s (2014) analysis of emotion and the development of norms in international society opens the way for English School studies on the cultural filters through which emotions pass, and the impact of these culturally mediated emotional norms on international and regional institutions. Such an approach could help the English School move beyond its orientation towards the European society of states, and towards a more global and contemporary understanding of international society.
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