



The Role of Leadership and Rhetoric in Identity Politics: Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a Case Study

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"Nations are born in the hearts of poets; they prosper and die in the hands of politicians."

-- Muhammad "Allama" Iqbal

"I shall remain loyal to the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Altaf Hussain my whole life [...] I swear that I shall accept Altaf Hussain's decision as final in any matter and obey all his decisions [...] and will have blind trust in Altaf Hussain."

-- MQM oath

INTRODUCTION

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) plays a pivotal role in the current coalition government that presides over Pakistan. Indeed, the period 2002-2011 has shown that a lack of support from the MQM can threaten Islamabad to the point of dissolution. However, the MQM has not always enjoyed this lofty status.

Theirs is a story intertwined with the modern history of the Muhajir people. It is a history that is associated with mass riots, murders, street terrorism, illicit taxes, and the cult of personality that is Altaf Hussain: the political, and many also argue spiritual, leader of the MQM.¹ In establishing the party in 1985, Hussain's goal was to give the Muhajirs political representation in Pakistan. Hussain has since navigated the MQM through a turbulent period (1992-1999) – in which party workers and supporters were actively

hounded, detained, and killed by state security forces – to an influential player around the political table in Pakistan. Concurrently, he has defined and cultivated a political identity for the ethnic Muhajirs.

As such, an understanding of Altaf Hussain is central to an understanding of the MQM and Muhajir nation at large. This paper will evaluate Altaf Hussain's rhetoric, seen most clearly through his speeches, in order to measure and precisely explain this phenomenon. This paper begins by outlining the broader debates in ethnic conflict and identity politics' literature, followed immediately by a focus of this literature upon the South Asia, specifically the Pakistani, context. This discussion underpins the evaluation of Hussain's rhetoric. Thereafter, events leading to the rise and subsequent descent of Muhajir stock in Pakistan will provide the context in which Hussain's political consciousness surfaces. Hence, a close study will be undertaken only of Hussain's rhetoric in evaluating the MQM's development as a political party. In tandem with an analysis of Hussain's rhetoric, the surrounding political and social context will be explicated. This interplay – between content and context – is critical to elucidating the impact of Hussain on molding MQM ideology and the party's move from a position of political and cultural marginalization to being critical to the state machinery.

This paper uses Hussain's renowned speeches as a lens for examining MQM ideology and its development. The framework to carry out the analysis will be divided into three phases: (i) 1985-1992, defining ideology; (ii) 1993-2002, exile and development; (iii) 2003-2010, gaining legitimacy. This paper concludes that, while the core of MQM ideology – social justice and the eradication of corruption² – has remained consistent, Hussain displays dexterity in innovating auxiliary components to this message by adapting to the shifting political and social trends in Pakistan. This adaptability has brought the MQM to the fore of politics in Pakistan,

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incrementally built a political identity for the Muhajir people, and cemented Hussain's position as the party's undisputed *Shahenshah* (king of kings).³

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Within the ethnic conflict paradigm, political participation is predicated on group identity.⁴ The two theories that have traditionally explained this paradigm and, in so doing, explicated identity formation and mobilization based on ethnicity, are primordialism and instrumentalism.⁵

Primordialism views ethnicity as a subjectively held sense of shared identity. This occurs as a natural phenomenon that is largely embedded in human psychology and social relations.⁶ As a result, in culturally plural societies – particularly those where class divisions are crippled or non-existent – ethnic mobilization is critical to political life.

However, an immediate critique that surfaces is that shared identity is not the sole determinant of the politics of ethnic groups or nations. In fact, cultural symbols that may provide a sense of shared identity can be (and in the Pakistan context certainly have been) manipulated, changed, and reinvented to serve the mass politics of ethnic groups.⁷ This paper is therefore influenced by instrumentalist arguments, which have greater utility in explaining identity politics in the Pakistan context.

Instrumentalist approaches hold that the concept of ethnicity can morph in different contexts and serves as a tool in furthering the interests of political entities. Economic, as well as political, competition leads political entities to mobilize identity based on ethnic demarcation. In the first instance, competition over resources and wealth can serve as an impetus to choose ethnic groupings if identity mobilization holds the prospect of economic gain.⁸ In the second, the use of identity mobilization in certain political structures may allow for political gain and thus cultivate a leadership that capitalizes upon identity.⁹ Here, the political system is likely to demonstrate identity mobilization and conflict. Together, then, identity mobilization is the "creation of elites [in the social and political realm], who draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to [...] gain political and economic advantage."¹⁰ Therefore, the role of political leadership – particularly the strategies leaders adopt – is key in mobilizing, and in some cases forming, identities that foment ethnic conflict.¹¹ Such mobilization serves as a central tool both for a community's drive to gain economic advantage and for a political leader's attempt to consolidate power.¹²

Here the notion of ethnicity is of central importance to a political leader's narrative.¹³ The creation of the "other" occurs with identification of one's "in-group," leading to the construction of archetypal "good" and "evil." Scholars writing within the South Asia context have demonstrated how the collective distortion of local disputes by political leaders serves as a mechanism to rally constituents to a particular cause.¹⁴ These local "trigger" incidents then aggregate to cause macro-level clashes as the number of stakeholders increase. Such examples underscore the effectiveness of transferring aggression and threats to identity as a whole.¹⁵ However, these theories generally focus on identity projections moving from the local up to the nation. In the case of historically contingent identities, as the scholar on South Asian history Ayesha Jalal notes, identity formation emerges from the nation passed down to the local. Jalal's articulation of identity mobilization in Pakistan explores the theme of sacrifice born out from the partition of India and the realization of a new nation: Pakistan.

The role of Altaf Hussain's leadership in the formation and mobilization of Muhajir identity can be observed on the theoretical level in the debates within instrumentalism. On the ideational level, Hussain draws his rhetoric from the development of a historically contingent identity: the sacrifice of the Muhajir people for the independence of Pakistan. Such rhetoric provides the cultural, historical, and political context in which the Muhajir political identity emerges and evolves.

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PARTITION, MUHAJIRS, AND ALTAF HUSSAIN

Pakistan is made up of a variegation of in-exhaustive cultures, ethnicities, languages, and religious sects. Despite the granularity with which people are demarcated, ferocious devotion to power and politics exists throughout the state. This should be of little surprise given the origins of the country. In August 1947, the partition of India took place. This severance created Pakistan, a nation born out of a political epic. The actors at that time were part of a complex production, disfigured within a script of nationalism and communalism. Their efforts culminated in the 1947 Independence of India Act, which sparked the largest migration in human history.¹⁶ Over 17 million people were uprooted, two-thirds of whom headed westward.¹⁷ Although the majority

of these settled in India's Punjab region, a small portion of migrants settled in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh. These settlers became known as Muhajirs.¹⁸

"Muhajir" is a loaded term, which has critically different connotations depending on whether one interprets it culturally or politically. Literally, it refers to the Urdu word for refugee, or migrant, and historically it refers to the Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from India and settled in Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur: the urban centres of Sindh.¹⁹ The term also surfaces in the history of Islam. In A.D. 622, under the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad²⁰ Muslims left their homes and livelihoods and migrated from Makkah to Madinah because they had chosen Islam over the polytheism of their ancestors. These first converts to Islam were known as the Muhajirs. The term thus bears a positive association for Muslims. Indeed, in the early days of

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Pakistan, the perception of the Muhajirs was favorable, or at the very least, neutral. This Urdu-speaking community, after all, was central to the political forces that created Pakistan. As such, during Pakistan's infancy Muhajirs, who had backed the Muslim League wanted a stake in establishing the new bureaucracy. The high levels of literacy within the community also strengthened their claims.

Karachi, chosen as the capital city of Pakistan in 1947, provided a setting for the educated, middle-class Muhajirs to settle in close proximity to the centre of "power, patronage, and official ideology."²¹ This Urdu speaking salariat (a segment of lower and middle class people with aspirations to government jobs) had witnessed their careers in the previous All-India context threatened by the rise of a Hindu salariat.²² As part of the Muslim League, these would-be Muhajirs championed the cause of a separate homeland for the Muslims, and avidly supported the steps toward partition taken by Mohammad Ali Jinnah. After partition, they were also active in setting up the state apparatus in the newly formed nation, and it was from within the Urdu-speaking community that the first Prime Minister of Pakistan hailed: Liaquat Ali Khan (1947-51).²³

Muhajir stock began to decline, however, with the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan on October 16th 1951. Following the imposition of the One Unit policy (which sought to eliminate ethnic and parochial prejudices) by the president of Pakistan, General Ayub Khan (1958-69), the

educated Punjabis and Sindhis began to challenge the Muhajir community. The proportion of jobs, which had so far favoured the Muhajirs, began to trickle down to other ethnic and regional groups. This challenge was compounded by the native elites of the new territory, Pakistan, reasserting their significant power, born primarily from their sheer wealth. The landed elites in Punjab (Jagirdar) and Sindh (Wadera) were the central actors at this stage. As one former Muhajir bureaucrat puts it, "immediately we realized that the real power players were the landed elites. India was abolishing its feudal structures, while the system in Pakistan was too young, and too weak, to keep them out. There was little we could do to limit their [landed elites] growing influence."²⁴ Thereafter, the nation's capital was transferred from Karachi to Rawalpindi, a move that further disturbed the Muhajir community, as they had gravitated toward Karachi for its centrality to the seat of political power.²⁵ Within the space of a few years, the military-run establishment and the landed elites began pushing the Muhajirs to the margins of politics. The seeds of resentment were sown.

At this point, alienation crept into Muhajir identity.²⁶ Two events elucidate this feeling of isolation: first, the dubious re-election of General Ayub Khan as President of Pakistan; second, the language riots of 1972, when the official language of Sindh was changed from Urdu to Sindhi by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a Wadera.²⁷

The 1965 presidential elections proved a watershed moment in Muhajir history.²⁸ The bureaucratically astute Muhajirs were scathingly critical of General Ayub Khan's waffling around the electoral process,²⁹ and believed it to be a guise for the president's authoritarianism.³⁰ As such, the community threw its weight behind Fatima Jinnah, the younger sister of Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Hoping to revive the impact the older sibling had on their community, the Muhajira rallied in support of Ms. Jinnah during the elections. However, the election results favoured Khan, and the Muhajirs responded with accusations of vote tampering.

It was within this context that the wrath of Gohar Ayub Khan, the son of President Ayub Khan, arrived. Gohar Khan led the Pakhtun community into the heart of Karachi to carry out a series of clashes against the "non-Muslim" Muhajir opposition in 1965.³¹ Gohar Khan viewed the Muhajirs as essentially Indian, and not authentic Pakistani. His logic equated being Indian with being Hindu (a fall out from the "two-nation" theory narrative), and the Muhajirs, therefore, as an enemy of Pakistan.³²

It was, however, the language riots that condemned Muhajir identity to the political and

social fringes of Pakistan. The Muhajir community viewed the nation-wide adoption of the Urdu language as a source of unity and identity in Pakistan. However, the Sindhis viewed this as an attack on their historical culture and traditions, which pre-dated the creation of Pakistan and the arrival of Muhajirs. Steps taken in Sindh province to replace Sindhi with Urdu in educational institutions in the 1960s became a cause of insecurity among the ethnic Sindhis, and fostered hostility toward the Urdu-speaking migrants from India. Sindhi leaders argued that those who had migrated to Sindh at the time of partition should assimilate to the local culture, instead of expressing what they considered cultural bigotry – bigotry underscored by the Muhajirs’ monopoly in business, trade, and government jobs, which created further resentment among Sindhis. This tension came to a head between 1972 and 1977 during violent confrontations between the two communities.

The most notable of these occurred in July 1972: the language riots. The trigger was the passing of a bill by the Sindh assembly that month recognizing Sindhi as the language of the province. The bill was passed despite the adoption of Urdu as the official language by the provinces of Balochistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as NWFP), and Punjab. The Urdu-speaking population protested because it considered the act a mechanism for promoting Sindhi nationalism. The riots created bitterness and hostility between the Sindhi and Muhajir communities, dividing the province along ethnic lines. The Sindhi-speaking population migrated to the rural areas that they traditionally dominated, while the Urdu-speaking population shifted to urban areas. The introduction of a reservation system further increased tensions.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the Prime Minister of Pakistan (1973-1977), introduced a quota system through a constitutional amendment in 1973. The aim was to improve the quality of life in rural Sindh by limiting the number of jobs and college places for urbanites, reserving these positions instead for rural Sindh citizens. In short, an invisible demarcation of the province into rural and urban classes was established. The system could only work for an interim period, and only if measures were taken to simultaneously improve the rural areas to create socio-economic uniformity in the province. This did not, and has never, occurred.

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For the Muhajirs, the quota has proved a sore spot. In 1999, the population of Karachi was approximately 13 million (about 10% of Pakistan's entire population), yet the city had a job quota of only 2% in government organizations, and the city's representation in the National Assembly was only 6% (4% less than its population warrants).³³ Despite the population explosion that has altered the country's demographic pattern in the years since, these numbers did not change. Muhajirs, who largely preside in the Karachi voting bloc, see this as direct discrimination and have voiced their anger since the 1970s through protests and violence.

From here the term “Muhajir” would turn on its head, and become an anathema. From the early-1950s until the early-2000s the Muhajir population witnessed a steep descent from their privileged position of cultural and bureaucratic superiority. From their perspective, this demise was caused by Pakistan's leaders, who blocked Muhajir participation and development: first, through a military general, a dictator, in the form of Ayub Khan; and then a landed elite, a Wadera, in the shape of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. From here on, Muhajir political consciousness would equate political and social marginalization with military authoritarianism and the landed elites. Their alleged corruption and self-interest would form the corpus of MQM ideology and, between 1965 and 1977 many would witness ethnic clashes that have today become commonplace in urban Sindh, and synonymous with Muhajirs.³⁴ One of these observers was a young Altaf Hussain.³⁵

Altaf Hussain was born in Karachi on September 17, 1953.³⁶ Upon migrating from Uttar Pradesh, India, his family settled in a small Karachi town with other immigrants from India. Hussain's father, Nazeer Hussain, a former stationmaster in Indian Railways, took up a job as an office worker at a local mill in Karachi.³⁷ The Hussain family shared two traits with their Urdu-speaking brethren: their education, and a twin pride in country and religion. Hussain's grandfather had been grand Mufti of Agra (Mufti-e-shehr), India, and his maternal grandfather Hafiz Raheem Bhux was known in India for his religious scholarship.³⁸ Hussain, though, preferred to focus on matters of the state and his community's role within it.

Upon graduating from City College in 1970, Hussain eagerly joined the Baloch Regiment of the Pakistan Army.³⁹ It is here that he first faced discrimination due to his background. Recalls Hussain: “I saw victimization [...] I had never

seen this or heard of this at home. I wanted to kill Indians like the others and then become a martyr. Then when I went there (training), it was different. [During one incident] the chief called me over and said: 'your mother is bent, your men are like women, you Hindutva⁴⁰ why are you even here?'"⁴¹ This discriminatory experience crushed Hussein's ideal of his nation and his place within it. The Army was multi-ethnic – Punjabi, Baloch, and Pakhtun, all served – yet Hussain the Muhajir was perceived through ambivalent eyes.

Pakistan was at war with India, and here, in front of Army officers, was a group of immigrants viewed as an embodiment of Indian existence. This ambivalence exists to this day. A

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common perception of the MQM is that it is the product of an Indian attempt to infiltrate the Pakistani state, and therefore, as per the political milieu, antithetical to the betterment of Pakistan.

On his return to higher education in 1978, Hussain founded the All Pakistan Muhajir Students Organisation (APMSO), a precursor to the MQM.⁴² His objective in doing so was to provide political representation

to the Muhajir community, who he felt was becoming increasingly stigmatized and marginalized in Pakistan. In 1985, the organization was elevated to a political party called the Muhajir Qaumi Movement. Today, Hussain is its supreme leader. Since 2002, the party has emerged as a strong political force in Pakistan,⁴³ where Hussain has been central to nominating candidates with better "brand name" recognition, such as former-television compere Khush Bakht Shujaat in one of the Karachi districts.⁴⁴ In 2005, Hussain's nominee for Nazim (mayor), Mustafa Kamal, was elected in Karachi. Kamal then embarked on a campaign to transform the city, initiating several construction projects to create better transport routes. Kamal was even mentioned, among others, as "Mayor of the Moment" in *Foreign Policy* magazine (2008).⁴⁵ Elsewhere, in the current context of blasphemy killings,⁴⁶ Hussain surfaces as a sane voice for justice and reason.⁴⁷

Yet this begs the question: how has a party once found housing terror cells, allegedly co-opting with Indian authorities, and rumoured to demand bhatta (illicit tax) from locals, returned to

a position of influence in Pakistan? A complete answer requires the deconstruction of several components of MQM history. Above and beyond, the key to the success of the MQM has been the ability of their self-styled Quaid-e-Tahreek (leader of the struggle), Altaf Hussain, to project his political ideology through speeches that mobilize Muhajir identity and motivate and fuel party growth.

IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE THEME OF SACRIFICE

The power of charisma lies in animating the centres of a society.⁴⁸ That is, the many symbols of power that surround the charismatic person. A charismatic figure, then, draws his appeal from his associated symbols of power. Anthropologist Oskar Verkaaik applies this definition to Hussain.⁴⁹ For Verkaaik, Hussain possesses the ability "to transform himself into a living symbol of the Muhajir nation."⁵⁰ However, I differ from Verkaaik's assertion that Hussain, by "present[ing] himself as an ordinary man, almost without character traits of his own," allows his followers to transform Hussain into a saint, a sufferer, and a brother all at once. While Hussain does achieve this, simply highlighting these effects make the causes appear too simple.

Hussain did not reach his position as the driving force behind the MQM – and its resurrection – by presenting himself as without character traits. On the contrary, Hussain achieves this very much by projecting his character traits. Hussain relates to all echelons of Muhajir society, and encapsulates their being; but this is complimented by, and cannot be divorced from, his political agility and cunning. This is precisely why Hussain's speeches have become so crucial to MQM discourse; they serve as a platform utilized by Hussain to execute his political ideology.

(i) Ideology (1985-1992)

In 1989, four years after the formation of the MQM, Hussain's core political ideology – social justice and the eradication of corruption – was in full swing. Hussain delivered a speech in Lahore, next to the Minar-e-Pakistan (Minaret of Pakistan) at Iqbal Park.⁵¹ The tall minaret was built to commemorate the Pakistan Resolution: a formal statement adopted by the Muslim League in 1940, which called for greater Muslim autonomy in British India. And so, the leader of the MQM stood, calling for similar autonomy for his mazloom (innocent) followers.⁵² Revolutionary in his own party's claims, Hussain bellowed:

What has been done in twenty years by the government? [...] Today we (the country) have our hands spread out,

begging for money and help [...] The faces change, but the policies are the same [...] Why haven't people changed anything against the Jagirdars and Waderas (landed elites)? We (the Muhajirs) will work hard, day and night [...] build our own cars, build everything within this country by ourselves [...] our youth will take this country to the point where we don't have to beg in front of people.⁵³

Hussain then contrasts such grand claims by describing himself as an example to follow: "I am the biggest example. I am not a landlord. Listen to me: you can become leaders in government; you don't have to be from these [landed elite] classes. I am not."⁵⁴

Only a year later, as Hussain's narrative moved from speeches aimed only at Muhajirs to minorities as a whole, we observe him stamping his vision upon MQM ideology to seek a broader political base. During another speech in Lahore, Hussain illustrated his ability to understand and leverage the political and social context in which he navigates.⁵⁵ In 1989/1990 the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) implemented Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) aimed at streamlining the economies of developing nations. These policies cut social services in Pakistan, which had a major impact on the poor in particular.⁵⁶

"I don't care if people like what I say or not," Hussain shouted, "MQM firmly believes that this country can be maintained in the way it should. That is, when the poor and middle classes throughout the country get to the same level as the poor have under the MQM."⁵⁷ Hussain is also aware of recent history in Pakistan, where ideas of socialism gathered pace. Hussain claimed: "All these people talking about Leninism, and socialism. Communists in this country insult Islam; you want to see real socialism and real Islam? [You want to] talk about how the poor live in this country? Look at the MQM and how we provide for our party workers and constituents."⁵⁸ Such rhetoric illustrates a recurring theme in Hussain's ability to recognize trends and discontent in Pakistani society, and propose MQM as the solution.

(ii) Development (1993-2002)

1992-1994 proved the perigee period in modern MQM history. Operation Clean Up (officially known as Operation Blue Fox) was a military operation led by the Pakistan Army in Karachi. Sanctioned by Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif (1990-1993), the operation sought to cleanse the city of "anti-social" elements. The main target of the operation was the MQM. This period is regarded as the bloodiest in Karachi's history, with thousands being killed and the leadership fleeing in the fighting. In the mire of the Operation, Hussain's life was in grave danger, and he fled to the UK. These years of political exile would alter Hussain's rhetoric. It would be a development that would envision larger representation in the MQM. Catering to the needs and demands of all minorities and the "98% population of politically disenfranchised and disengaged"⁵⁹ in Pakistan would become Hussain's political goal.

This goal became evident on television screens in August 1994, when Hussain addressed the nation on Pakistan Independence Day. It is apparent here that the move toward a wider-encompassing political representation narrative was in full development. As such, Hussain showed how auxiliary components exist outside the central core of his ideology that permit reinvention and adaptability to the political and social context. "They [the ruling power] tell us to expand our circle. When we try to expand, they block us. This is making everyone fight for political space."⁶⁰ His tone was calmer than the emotional speeches earlier, and his Urdu, perfectly eloquent: he was seeking to appeal to a wider audience. Moreover, he began to caveat earlier sweeping assertions: "people can be from the elites, but they must be there [in government] on merit, and be ready for the long haul of politics."⁶¹ Elsewhere, he proclaimed, "I'm not saying everyone in government is like this [authoritarian], but many are. They are against their own people. These landlord elites are even oppressive

toward the people who work for them!"⁶² This nuance was crucial in gaining him support among the non-elites throughout the country, not just urban Sindh. As such, this was one of the first speeches in which he refers to the MQM as Muttahida (united).

Another first within this speech was the direct and open criticism of the military generals: "in any country in the world, you talk to children,

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teenagers, mothers, or elders and no one knows the name of the Chief of Army Staff. But in Pakistan, we know the names not only of the Army Chief, but even Junior Officers!"⁶³ From 1977-1988 Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq ruled as military dictator of Pakistan. He dipped the country into the hands of extreme Islamic conservatism. The memory of Zia-ul-Haq's rule is firmly entrenched into the minds of all Pakistanis. Not only did his serve as the longest dictatorial rule in the country's history, but also dubious laws such as the Hudood ordinance were passed. Such laws meant that the punishment for robbery, for example, was the amputation of the right hand of the offender from the wrist; and his left foot from the ankle. Hussain revived the awful

Hussain announced, "Punjab? We will go there because people want us there. Who will stop us? [...] No one has the power and courage in Punjab to prevent MQM from giving the Seraikis their right."

memory associated with militarism in Pakistan, and by doing so, underscored the importance of social and political justice. He warned his audience: "those who took the side of the British, and went against the Muslims, they got the big estates and positions of power [in Pakistan]. And these are the Jagirdars the Waderas, and of course we must not forget the

Generals. Lest we forget, they remain the real oppressors today."⁶⁴

An overarching theme in Altaf Hussain's rhetoric, and in MQM discourse, is that of sacrifice. This theme has been indispensable in Hussain's rhetoric to form and mobilize MQM identity. The dangers of ethnically rooted identity politics, more broadly, are that they cast as authentic to the self or group an identity that is in fact defined by its opposition to the "other." Reclaiming such an identity as one's own merely reinforces its dependence on this dominant "other," and further internalizes and reinforces an oppressive hierarchy. A fall-out from the consciousness associated with such identity formation is that it promotes a victim, or marginal, mentality.

In "Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining," Jalal notes that the articulation of identity relies on differentiating the positive from its negation: be it right from wrong, or just from unjust. In particular, this is the case for historically contingent identities, which is precisely where Hussain roots the identity of the Muhajir people, and subsequently shapes his narrative. "Projecting the 'us' as the positive self in creative imaginings,"⁶⁵ writes Jalal "entails slating 'them' as the negative other."⁶⁶ Such internal, political

contestations in Pakistan are then used to discredit and undermine opponents. We see this most clearly when studying the origins of partition, where the Muslim "us" was the positive self against the Hindu "other," or "them."

Since the independence of Pakistan, the Muhajir community has spoken at large about their tale of grief and loss, which led to them being completely uprooted and forced to migrate from their "physical and cultural habitats" in India. Theirs, they claim, is the true sacrifice for Pakistan. Hussain spared little time in highlighting the importance of this sacrifice. Indeed, during the teleconference speech highlighted above, Hussain said:

We are left with half-achieved independence. Muslims got the country, but we are still slaves. Before it was the foreigners, the colonialists and today we are slaves to our own people. We went through many sacrifices. Muhajirs never were, or have been, enemies of Pakistan. Don't push us away.⁶⁷

In an interview with Jalal, Hussain proclaimed, "Pakistan is the gift of the sacrifice of our elders. [...] Hindustan's minority province Muslims sacrificed two million lives. We are the heirs to those two million. [...] We are the Muhajirs, the founders of Pakistan. [...] We gave blood for it."⁶⁸

In his later speeches, Hussain ardently remained with the theme of sacrifice. As his rhetoric moved to incorporate the "disenfranchised and disenchanting" throughout Pakistan, he also altered his use of the theme of sacrifice, though with the same effect as before. In the development of this narrative, instead of talking at length about Muhajir sacrifice and how it is disregarded and undermined, he began to focus on how the military generals and landed elites co-opted with the British colonialists and went against Islam. The narrative moved from Muhajir oppression to the oppression of all poor, working class, and underprivileged. Most clearly, this is seen through the official name change of the party from the Muhajir Qaumi Movement, to the Muttahida (united) Qaumi Movement in 1997. Here, the "united" are all those who do not encompass the landed elites and military generals. The "us" vs. "them" framework that Jalal alludes to thus remains intact.

This should be of little surprise given the effectiveness with which Hussain orates. As Jalal confirms: "for astute political operators, the diversity of Pakistan's constitutive regional mosaics allow for a dazzling number of possibilities to explore and exploit the theme of sacrifice."⁶⁹ Jalal continues, "together with their

own linguistic and religious minorities, these regionalisms, with their multifaceted and rich contours are potent sources of inspiration for those at the margins of power,"⁷⁰ such as the MQM. Politicians such as Hussain have therefore been afforded the ability to "blast the remnants of that same emotion that fired the demand for a Muslim homeland."⁷¹ This emotion is what drove the Muhajir commitment to the creation of Pakistan in the first place: the "two nation theory," and the seamless logic of Islam, Muslims, and Pakistan.

Therefore, claims of sacrifice as the basis for increased rights have served as a powerful source of inspiration for the Muhajirs, echoed effectively by Hussain. Hussain's dexterity here has critically contributed to the development of the MQM.

By 1997 the transformation of the MQM was well underway, and Hussain used his acute political skill to reach out to the Pakistani diaspora in the United Kingdom (UK). In Birmingham, Hussain delivered a speech in front of the Pakistani diaspora community, largely from Punjab. In the UK, different towns and cities have drawn migrants from different regions of Pakistan. In Birmingham, the largest composition of Pakistani diaspora is from the Punjab region. Hussain fully appreciates this. He understands that north of Sindh his popularity remains low, and that to have any form of political success in Pakistan he must gain traction among the Punjabi community that makes up a large portion of the military establishment and government. The province is home to the political apparatus of the country. Hussain does not allow his physical distance from Pakistan to be a limiting factor. His continued, self-imposed exile leads him to innovate new ways to draw Pakistanis to the MQM. Considering the high level of communication between locals in Punjab and their diaspora in the UK, Hussain makes recourse to rally the latter. This is a creative move by Hussain.

As well as desiring to appeal to the ethnic Punjabis (who make up a large portion of the military establishment and its leadership; industrialists; and landed-elites), Hussain was adamant to make distinctions among them. Once again speaking in eloquent Urdu, Hussain sought to draw a distinction between the military establishment and Jagirdars and regular Punjabis. "My problem is not against the institution of the army, 98% of which is good. I am talking about certain leaders. My problem is with the Generals, not the man on the border, or the local office army man. The average officer is not to blame."⁷²

The Pakistan-India dispute over Kashmir is a sore spot for most Pakistanis; this is particularly true for the Punjabis, given both their close proximity to the region and the fact that many

Kashmiris live in Punjab. Hussain spares little time in evoking the emotions on this topic. He exclaimed, "What are we doing about Kashmir? Only we [MQM] can sympathize. We have experienced similar hurt. We should let the Kashmiris decide what they want! I want the same for the ill-treated Balochis, Pakhtuns, and Punjabis."⁷³ As though this is not enough, Hussain also spoke about partition violence, a particularly sensitive issue for Punjabis who suffered by far the highest levels of violence: "we did not do that [partition violence] for nothing! We will create Pakistan, we will make Pakistan prosperous – even if people kill us as they did then [partition]."⁷⁴

(iii) Legitimacy (2003-2010)

The MQM has made efforts to re-brand itself as a national party that transcends ethnic boundaries. Today, it is the Pakistani parliament's fourth-largest party with 25 lawmakers in the 342-seat National Assembly, and its withdrawal would leave the coalition government with only 158 seats in parliament: below the 172 needed for a ruling majority. Contrary to Hussain's barbed attacks on elites and the military, the MQM has teamed up at various points with both of the main political parties as well as the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf in order to help secure dominance in Karachi. Elsewhere, since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, the MQM has consistently presented itself abroad as the West's friend in Pakistan. The group's extensive media arm reaches out to the foreign press to highlight apparent counterterrorism successes in Karachi and to warn of Islamic militant infiltration in the city. The Governor of Sindh, Ishrat ul-Ebad Khan, and former Mayor of Karachi, Mustafa Kamal, make regular visits to Washington, D.C. and London to present at conferences and speak at events. Such figures capture the leap to legitimacy of a party once hounded by state security forces a mere eighteen years ago. This gargantuan progression is not lost on their leader, Altaf Hussain.

During a speech in London in October 2008, Hussain exuded confidence. His rhetoric also drew far more reaction from the audience. Unlike before, he spoke more at length about the MQM

The narrative moved from Muhajir oppression to the oppression of all poor, working class, and underprivileged. Most clearly, this is seen through the official name change of the party from the Muhajir Qaumi Movement, to the Muttahida (united) Qaumi Movement in 1997.

and their success in implementing social justice. Indeed, his approach no longer seemed that of a man seeking an audience or imploring support. On the contrary, his rhetoric was couched in humor and he came across as more animated. Interestingly, this confidence led him to look down upon other political groups and assume a position of aloofness. Hussain announced, "Punjab? We will go there because people want us there. Who will stop us? [...] No one has the power and courage in Punjab to prevent MQM from giving the Seraikis (an ethnic minority group in south Punjab seeking their own province) their right."⁷⁵ He went on to say, "It is my interest and hobby to challenge the Jagirdars, Waderas and Generals."⁷⁶ Despite the clear hypocrisy of this latter comment, Hussain was open in his declarations. Hussain knows his position is strong electorally, and his rhetoric has changed to reflect this.

An inevitable consequence of the strong position that the MQM and Hussain now occupy is a potential new descent into political bigotry. As discussed earlier, one of the primary reasons for the rise in anti-Muhajir sentiment in urban Sindh was the cultural aloofness that the Muhajirs exuded. This manifested itself through the Muhajir insistence on the universality of the Urdu language in Pakistan, and through their claim to governance in Pakistan due to the fact that the Muhajirs had been part of the Muslim League in the founding years of Pakistan, and hence "sacrificed" more than any other group: a claim quite starkly untrue, which served to antagonize other communities in the new nation. Today, Hussain borders on adopting a similar aloofness. Jalal's aforementioned paper elucidates:

Situating power in its dialectical relations with the creative component in imaginings can demonstrate how and when the self-definitions of collectivities slither into the path of implicit, if not always explicit, agenda of bigotry towards internal selves, as well as external others.⁷⁷

Therefore, though Hussain's leadership and rhetoric has fully established the identity of the Muhajirs, he will certainly have to cease to focus on the "other" in his discourse if he is to avoid a descent into bigotry. It is critical for the growth of his party that he maintains the core objective of his ideology – social justice and the eradication of corruption – and not retreat to Muhajir dominance, but rather work to actualize the message in his rhetoric. Otherwise, Hussain risks awakening the same bigotry that brought about the collapse of Muhajir stock in the first instance.

Indeed, tough questions have begun to emerge, but for now Hussain seems to bat away the curve balls of how his narrative fits in with gaining legitimacy in government. In short, an inevitable question from a political legitimacy perspective is: how does the MQM manage relations with those institutions and entities whom it has rallied against for years? If Hussain is true to his message, why does he attach his party to any leader or party who gains power in Pakistan? After all, the MQM worked with Previous Prime Minister's Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, and also worked closely with General Pervez Musharraf's regime; today, it is a coalition partner of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) whose leadership includes renowned Waderas Asif Ali Zardari, Yousaf Raza Gillani, and Zulfikar Mirza, among several others. In a 2010 interview, Hussain displayed his ability to maintain his rhetoric and still toe the proverbial politics line. "Why did you support martial law (in 2007)?"⁷⁸ he is asked. Hussain remained unmoved:

I didn't support it, but I did say that the country loving Generals should seek to change the country through some strong action, similar to martial law: there's a difference. [...] I haven't invited martial law. MQM is a democratic party; we will never endorse martial law. Four times martial law has come into the country, and each time the country has been ruined. [...] Waderas, and Jagirdars have sat on the lap of Generals during martial law and the educated, qualified people within the country have never been able to rise.⁷⁹

On another, equally provocative question, Hussain attempts to circumvent the bubbling contradictions between his rhetoric and the context in which he maneuvers his party. "Why are you in government if you have so often criticized the set-up?"⁸⁰ Hussain retorted: "There is no point leaving government. What will be the alternative? Another government will be built by the same Waderas and Jagirdars. I want to bring to light, and change, the corrupt nature of the system. I can only do so by being in the system."⁸¹ There is little doubt that Hussain's deftness in adapting his ideology to the political and social context in which he navigates is critical to the legitimacy that the MQM enjoys today. After all, for the Muhajir people, Hussain's potent ideology and powerful rhetoric has created Muhajir political and social representation, and the development of a political identity.

CONCLUSION

The trajectory of the Muhajir people, and the political party established out of their identity, the MQM, is complex. This paper has sketched the history of the Muhajir community since 1947. Within this context, the paper introduced Altaf Hussain, the leader of the MQM who provided the Muhajir community with a political identity in Pakistan. Throughout the past thirty-three years, Hussain's rhetoric has been central to the party's move from a position of political, social and cultural marginalization, to being central to the state apparatus. However, it is critical for the growth of the MQM and, perhaps more importantly, the assimilation of the Muhajir community, that Hussain not continue to indulge the "us" and "them" narrative born out of the theme of sacrifice and partition. Indeed, while this may have proven integral to creating an identity for a people viewed with ambivalence in the early

years of Pakistan, it must not fall into the trappings of bigotry and cultural aloofness – or the MQM, and Muhajir nation, may find itself politically and culturally sidelined once again. For now, the rhetoric behind MQM ideology remains consistent: social justice and the eradication of corruption.⁸² Overall, Hussain displays dexterity in innovating auxiliary components to this message, by adapting to the shifting political and social trends in Pakistan. This adaptability has cemented Hussain's position as the MQM's undisputed *Shahenshah* (king of kings).⁸³

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

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