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Oskar Verkaaik: Migrants and Militants

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Introduction

ON SEPTEMBER 26, 2001—fifteen days after the suicidal attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon—a large public gathering was held in Karachi, Pakistan, to demonstrate the city’s solidarity with the thousands of victims in the United States and to offer sympathy and support for the United States-led campaign against terrorism that would soon lead to the bombing of Taliban and Al Qaeda targets in Afghanistan. In the early days after September 11, when international television networks were quick to broadcast any public articulation of anti-American or pro-Taliban feelings, this huge gathering, reportedly two hundred thousand people large, was a rare sign of public support for the pro-United States stance of the Pakistani government led by General Musharraf. A two-minute silence was observed out of respect for the victims in the United States, followed by speeches proclaiming Karachi a liberal-minded city with no place for *jihadi* groups. A resolution was issued stating that the people of Pakistan in general, and of the southern province of Sindh in particular, believe in religious harmony and condemn any kind of religious extremism.

Although this “rally against terrorism” failed to make headlines in the international press, it was remarkable for two reasons. First, it was held in Liaqatabad, an inner-city neighborhood of Karachi, which flaunts a reputation for its hard-boiled anti-state militancy. In the 1960s it had been the site of anti-government riots, playing a prominent role in the revolt against then president General Muhammad Ayub Khan. In the 1980s, when Karachi became notorious for its violence among various ethnic groups, Liaqatabad virtually became a “no-go-area” for both non-inhabitants and the police. In 1992 when the army was sent into Karachi to put an end to the so-called kalashnikov culture, which included political assassination, nepotism, blackmail, burglary, and car theft, the army’s intelligence services identified Liaqatabad as a major “terrorist den” and a “hotbed of anti-state extremists.” Military and paramilitary forces had a hard time fighting the armed groups of political activists from this area. And yet the largest demonstration of public support for General Musharraf during those troublesome days following the attack on New York and Washington was held in this very place.

Second, it was held by a political party called the MQM or the Muttehid Qaumi Movement (United National Movement). This party, formerly called the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (National Movement of Muhajirs), claimed to represent the Muhajir population of Pakistan, that is,

the families of migrants who had traveled from India to Pakistan after independence in 1947. They were part of a mass migration of people following the partition of British India during which millions of Hindus and Sikhs traveled to India, and even more Muslims went in the opposite direction. A large portion of these migrants came from the eastern part of the Punjab and settled in the Pakistani part of that province, where they quickly assimilated and were no longer recognized as migrants. In the southern province of Sindh, however, most migrants spoke Urdu and hailed from Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Bombay, and Andhra Pradesh. Most of them settled in Karachi, as well as Hyderabad, the second largest city of Sindh. Today approximately 50 percent of the population of both cities, housing twelve million and two million people respectively, is Muhajir. For a long time the most loyal supporters of the “Islamic” parties, such as the Jam’iat-i Islami, that propagated the introduction of an Islamic Republic of Pakistan as well as the implementation of the *shari’at* or Islamic law were found among these Muhajirs of Sindh. But that was before the MQM was founded in 1984. Once established, the party embarked on what soon became one of the most remarkable examples of political mobilization in the history of Pakistan. In 1988 the young party, led by largely unknown young men from insignificant family background, swept the polls in Karachi and Hyderabad, luring the population of both cities away from the Islamic parties. Instead the party declared that Muhajirs were an “ethnic group” or *qaum*, on par with other ethnic groups like the Sindhi, Punjabi, Pakhtun, or Baluchi, and entitled to the same rights. It also proclaimed Muhajirs to be essentially urban, middle class, liberal, and broad-minded, and as such opposed to both fundamentalism and feudalism. Under the banner of this new political identity, the MQM in urban Sindh not only won several elections in a row, but also enabled groups of young party members in city areas like Liaqatabad to terrorize their neighborhoods and rule them like a state within a state. Paradoxically, the city areas that used to yield considerable support for the Islamic parties were now not only known in Karachi as places of thugs and terrorists, but they also housed the most vocal critics of religious extremism and political Islam, staging a rally against terrorism at a time when the public opinion in Pakistan as a whole showed little love or admiration for the United States and the pro-United States regime in Islamabad.

This anecdote shows how inconsistent, complex, and paradoxical politics in Pakistan can be. No clear or fixed boundaries can be drawn between the oppositional categories that are widely believed to inform Pakistani politics, such as ethnicity versus Islam, terrorist violence versus democratic politics, or modernity and liberalism versus Islamic fundamentalism. This book departs from the observation that these seemingly clear-cut oppositional pairs often conceal the internal complexities and ambiguities of

Pakistan's identity politics. Forces that are seen as dichotomous in fact often stand in a much more dynamic and complex relationship to each other. For many Muhajirs, the Islamism of the Jam'iat-i Islami, for instance, does not have to be radically opposed to, say, General Musharraf's authoritarian liberalism, as both are rooted in (albeit different) traditions of Islamic modernism and revivalism. Violence, even terrorist violence or ethnic cleansing, is only partially in opposition to democratic politics. As I will argue in later chapters, the MQM's electoral success was as much the result of the non-elitist political style of its leaders during election campaigns as of the party's involvement in ethnic riots. But perhaps most problematic of all is the dichotomy between ethnicity and religion. As these are the most crucial forces of identity politics and political mobilization in the history of Pakistan, they are also key issues in this book. Both inside and outside Pakistan, it is quite common to consider Islam and ethnicity as mutually exclusive objects of identification. Islam's claim to universalism, symbolized in the *hijra* or Islamic exodus that gave birth to the Muslim brotherhood or *'umma*, is often mentioned to argue that Islam transcends ethnic differences. In this view, Islam is considered an integrating force rather than a fragmenting one. This book, however, will show that Islam and ethnicity are often intermingled. The boundaries of ethnic groups are often drawn on the basis of particularistic trends and traditions within Islam. We will see, for instance, that Sindhis portray themselves as being inclined to mysticism and esoteric Sufism, as opposed to, say, Muhajirs, who are believed to be more orthodox. Similarly, the Pakhtun, who made up a large proportion of the pro-Taliban protesters in the public demonstrations in the fall of 2001, are typically depicted as staunch and uncompromising followers of the *shari'at* as well as tribal laws, compared to which the urban Muhajirs appear broad-minded. It was precisely this ethnic self-image of liberal moderates that the organizers and participants of the rally against terrorism wanted to show to the audience in Karachi and beyond.

This book is an ethnography of Pakistani identity politics, including ethnic and religious violence, which means that it seeks to deconstruct, defy, and go beyond the somewhat deceptive dichotomies that paint an oversimplified picture of the many paradoxes, ambiguities, and internal complexities at play. This book focuses on the MQM. This movement provides an excellent case study because it reveals the ongoing struggle with ethnicity and Islam in Pakistan. This book will also document and analyze how and why ethnic-religious identity politics can escalate into various forms of violence, such as vandalism, ethnic riots, anti-state militancy, terrorism, and state power abuse.

In 1984, during the heyday of the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq when virtually all political activities were banned, the MQM was

formed by a group of former students who had earlier founded a student organization named the All Pakistan Muhajir Student Organization. It radically changed the political spectrum in urban Sindh and brought to power young politicians from the vast inner-city areas of Karachi and Hyderabad that the other political parties had mostly neglected. It was not only a revolt—and often a violent one—of the lower class and the low caste but also spearheaded by the urban youth. It helped spoil the relationship between Muhajirs and other ethnic groups in Karachi and Hyderabad, notably the “autochthonous” Sindhis as well as the Pakhtun, who arrived more recently from the northern areas of Pakistan. The MQM was the third-largest party in the national assembly of Pakistan, and it was a coalition partner in various governments in the 1990s. Its followers have, however, also been branded as “terrorists” and have been heavily persecuted by the army and the paramilitary. As a result its charismatic leader, Altaf Hussain, has been exiled in London since 1992, and it is unlikely that he will return soon.

The MQM has not only been shaped by the paradoxes of Pakistani politics, it has also added its own paradoxes, or even contradictions, to an already complex political landscape. Perhaps the most puzzling has been its combination of “fun” and militancy. As an anthropologist engaged with the Muhajir Qaumi Movement since the late 1980s, I have tried to study the MQM not just as a political party that takes part in elections, negotiates with other parties, and in doing so responds to a political culture shaped by the complementary forces of Islam and ethnicity. My ambition was also to write an ethnography of the MQM as an urban movement. One of my main concerns was why so many young Muhajirs, most of them male, joined the MQM and made it into a true mass movement. This is a question that cannot simply be answered in terms of an already existing political identity among the Muhajir youth. Although MQM supporters regularly complain about discrimination against Muhajirs (for instance in language policies or the reservation and allocation of government jobs), this is rarely their main reason for joining the movement. Similarly, it is too simple to see the MQM merely or primarily as an expression of an upcoming middle class frustrated in its effort to get access to state power and government jobs. More important, the MQM constituted for its supporters both a spectacle and a sacrifice. It was an adventure and an excellent pastime to belong to the movement and take part in its public gatherings, which were often described to me as joyful and liberating. The MQM seemed to have offered the joy of provocation and transgression. The powerful were ridiculed, social conventions were temporarily set aside, and ethnic and religious stereotypes were uprooted through role inversion and grotesque exaggeration. This ludic character of the MQM often went hand in hand with the vandalism carried out by the young male peer groups, that is, locally organized groups of friends, which played a major role in

the recruitment and mobilization of new party members. All this was expressed in the term *fun*, an emic term, adopted by the young Muhajirs like many other English words. *Fun* was a boundary marker, which set the MQM apart from the established political parties, condemned for their grave, solemn, hollow, ideological language. *Fun* was even, to some extent, considered a feature of Muhajirness, part of the metropolitan, cosmopolitan Muhajir culture and a far cry from the supposedly rural dullness of other ethnic groups. Yet at the same time the MQM was also deadly serious to its followers. It evoked Islamic and nationalist traditions of martyrdom and sacrifice in the face of state persecution and tyranny. It revived a diasporic identity of Muhajirs as persecuted people throughout history in search of a homeland. Many young Muhajirs were willing to become full-time militant activists willing to kill and risk death, exile, torture, and long-term jail sentences for their political convictions.

I take this paradox of *fun* and violence as the lens through which to look at the MQM and the changing political culture in Pakistan of the past fifteen years. This enables me to focus on an important feature the MQM shares with other present-day urban political movements, such as the Hindu nationalist movement in India and possibly several Islamist movements in parts of the Muslim world—namely its ambiguous relationship to a political culture I will call postcolonial state nationalism. This is a far from monolithic way of talking about the nation, its relation to religion, the place of ethnic groups within the nation, as well as several issues that have been on the political agenda for the last decade, including corruption, terrorism, and democracy or politics (*siyasat*) itself. State nationalism is, as I will argue in the next chapter, a form of ethnonationalism, taking a perceived primordial bond of the people as the essence of the nation, and in that sense it is different from Anderson's notion of "official nationalism" that takes the state as the center from which the nation emerges (Anderson 1991: 86). As I use the term, state nationalism is a state-promoted form of ethnonationalism, taking into account that it is notoriously difficult to talk about the state as a clear-cut entity neatly separated from society, as I will argue more fully in chapter 6. The main point about state nationalism is that it was developed in the dual process of state formation and nation building after independence, although it of course fed on earlier intellectual efforts to modernize Islam and to think about the distinct place of Muslims in India. It was and continues to be produced by groups of people occupying or aspiring to occupy positions within the state apparatus. To some extent the MQM is a product of this state nationalism, and a rather radical one to boot. Its ethnic language, for instance, takes the ethnic undercurrent of the Pakistani political culture to its extreme. As an urban movement, however, the MQM is also part of a new phase of identity politics. This includes the emergence of popular movements that, although never un-

touched by state nationalism, are sufficiently independent of it to introduce a new style of democratic politics, plebeian, streetwise, low caste. In that sense, a new political style is introduced that is different from the postcolonial style disseminated by the main established political parties—such as the Pakistan People’s Party and the Pakistan Muslim League—as well as the army. As an urban movement, the MQM operates in public spaces such as parks, bazaars, and gyms, where it contributes to what I call street nationalism or a nationalism of the neighborhood. This street nationalism of local groups of young, male MQM supporters is characterized by key values such as competitive masculinity and physicality, displacing the high cultural Islamic modernist values of state nationalism. I believe that the MQM’s success can partly be explained by its ability to speak both the language of the state and the language of the street.

This intermingling of both forms of nationalism significantly changes the democratic process. It challenges the hegemony of the state in the formation of political identities and shifts the site of contentious politics from the rural areas to the cities. Contrary to the 1960s and 1970s, when regional movements with a strong rural base were the first to contest the authoritarian modernism of the postcolonial state, today’s protest movements are primarily based in the underprivileged sections of large cities, where often more than half of the population is under twenty-five years old and state surveillance is often incomplete. Hence, it is important to focus on urban popular culture, particularly urban youth culture, to understand why movements such as the MQM can be so attractive to young city dwellers. There are several traditions of research that may be helpful. First there are the social historical studies on working-class culture, including the work of E. P. Thompson and Roy Rosenzweig. In both cases we see specific public spaces of leisure such as taverns and saloons, strictly separated from working spaces, become centers of “sub-political consciousness” (Thompson 1964: 55–59). This semi-public sphere of leisure could become a hotbed of an alternative popular culture (Rosenzweig 1983). Sports also offered public opportunities for performing an urban popular culture (MacClancy 1996). In a comparable argument on the construction of urban popular culture in twentieth-century North India, Nita Kumar (1988) argues that particular forms of leisure became important markers of the social boundary separating the common people from the elite. Pnina Werbner, in a study on young Pakistani immigrants in the UK, makes a similar argument about urban popular culture as implicitly subversive of elitist and state-promoted ideology:

Unlike high cultural Islamic traditions, South Asian popular culture is “fun”: it celebrates the body and bodily expressiveness or sensuality through sport, music, dance and laughter. If Islamic high culture is controlled, rule-bound and cere-

bral, South Asian popular culture is transgressive, openly alluding to uncontrollable feelings, sex and other bodily functions. It glorifies physical strength, beauty and prowess. It mobilizes satire, parody, masquerade or pastiche to comment on current affairs, to lampoon the powerful and venerable, to incorporate the foreign and the Other beyond the boundaries. (Werbner 1996: 91)

This focus on sport and leisure is instructive because, as we will see, the MQM recruited and mobilized its supporters in public spaces such as parks and gyms.

Second, in a different tradition of research on American metropolitan inner cities, which includes the work of W. F. Whyte (1940) and, more recently, Philippe Bourgois (1995), a picture of street culture emerges that is more violent, less organized, more racially and ethnically biased, and more excluded from mainstream society than early-modern working-class culture. In Bourgois's words, such a street culture is "a complex and conflictual web of beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values, and ideologies that have emerged in opposition to exclusion from mainstream society." It is "not a coherent, conscious universe of political opposition but, rather, a spontaneous set of rebellious practices that in the long term have emerged as an oppositional style" (Bourgois 1995: 8). As Sallie Westwood (1995) has argued in an article on racially organized inner-city areas in Leicester, such street cultures offer an alternative forum for attaining personal dignity and social prestige based on a somatic form of masculinity. Away from the permanent gaze of the state, inner-city enclaves frequently generate a masculine culture of physical strength and courage in opposition to partly condescending, partly anxious, partly jealous middle-class views on those enclaves as dangerous, chaotic, irrational, and sensual. Urban masculinity is also an important theme in Thomas Blom Hansen's work on the Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena movement in Bombay. Hansen focuses explicitly on the notion of masculinity as it is played out in the movement's rhetoric and recruitment strategies. In his view, young Hindu men seek to "recuperate" from the Muslim the image of masculinity. In Orientalist writings most Hindu groups were typically portrayed as soft and feminine, an image that reappears in postcolonial nationalist discourse. By employing an aggressively masculine rhetoric, a military style of drilling new recruits and eventually anti-Muslim violence, the movement gave young Hindu men the opportunity to liberate themselves from the feminine stigma (Hansen 1996b). This emphasis on the gendered notions of otherness is also relevant in the case of the MQM as young Muhajirs, according the ethnic stereotypes, can also be considered gentle, weak, unmanly city boys compared to the more robust rural Sindhis or Pakhtun.

A third aspect of this inner-city youth culture is its connection to global cultural trends to which young people are connected through the mass

media. A growing body of work on the impact of globalization on the politics of identity shows that the homogenizing tendencies in the field of economics, international politics, and mass media do not necessarily lead to an uniformization in cultural styles and expressions. They instead intensify the production of locality and local identity in cultural terms (see, e.g., Appadurai 1996; Featherstone 1990; Meyer and Geschiere 1999). In order to emphasize the interconnectedness of local identity and cosmopolitan cultural forms, Appadurai and Breckenridge (1988) have proposed to use the term “public culture” rather than “popular culture” as an analytical concept to study urban culture, partly because the notion of popular culture is traditionally related to the notion of cultural closure and therefore inadequate for today’s urban cosmopolitanism and to get away from such dichotomies as high versus low culture or mass versus elite culture. Although I agree that the term *public culture* is better able to deal with “processes of globalization within which the local operates” (Pinney 2001: 8), I prefer to use the term *popular culture*, precisely because the MQM street culture is often self-consciously and explicitly anti-elitist. Part of this street culture is that it discursively revives the distinction between the folk and the elite, or the “common people” (*am log*) and the “Westernized rich,” a distinction that finds its spatial expression in the gated communities that have created recreational, cultural, and educational enclaves that are almost entirely apart from the rest of the city. Neither these “ghettos of the rich” (Hasan 1997: 188) nor the inner-city streets, however, are sites of local, in the sense of enclosed, cultures. The globalization of the mass media in particular, including satellite television, video- and audiocassettes, mobile phones, and the Internet, connects the streets to a range of cosmopolitan cultural trends. The imaginary of the MQM martyr/terrorist, for instance, is a mixture of East Asian martial art traditions, Middle Eastern styles of Muslim militancy, Hollywood cinema, and Bollywood pop music.

The MQM has managed to successfully weave this latently subversive urban youth culture, with its aspects of gender, leisure, and global youth culture, into an ethnic-religious ideology of protest and revolt, thereby contributing to a political crisis that seriously undermines the legitimacy of the state. The recent career of the state in Pakistan can be compared to that of India, where the charisma of the state as once “spectacular, mysterious and distant” has vanished and been replaced by a less grand perception of the state as an everyday nuisance (Kaviraj 1997). State corruption has become one of the primary complaints in public debate, adding to a vigorous popular condemnation of politics as such. This has a lot to do with the inability of the state to monopolize the means of violence. As the state monopoly of coercion crumbles, “competing myths of authority and fear cluster around the real perpetrators of violence” (Hansen 2001: 63).

These “real perpetrators of violence” are most often local groups of strong-arm boys and their leaders. Obviously, the distrust of the state within inner-city areas grows with every story of state power abuse, human rights violation, extra-judicial persecution, and the omnipresence of secret intelligence services. However, this widespread suspicion of state forces and state officials does not necessarily indicate a popular rejection of state power as such. On the contrary, popular talk of corruption and state power not only indicates that state officials and politicians increasingly violate the rules of transparent and bureaucratic conduct but points to a growing public awareness of these very notions of transparency and impartiality that the modern state stands for (compare Gupta 1995; Parry 2000; Varma 1999). A growing line of work, indebted to Philip Abrams’s distinction between the “state-idea” and the “state-system” (Abrams 1988), focuses on how the notion of bureaucratic state power can be used to legitimate as well as discredit the works of the state apparatus (Bourdieu 1999; Fuller and Harriss 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Mitchell 1991, 1999). Following this argument, it can be said that the crisis of governability in Pakistan is to a large extent due to a growing discrepancy between the rhetoric of accountability on the one hand and rampant corruption on the other. The public cynicism regarding politicians and state forces prevalent in the inner-city areas that make up the backbone of popular movements like the MQM, however, does not result in anarchy nor a renewed longing for authoritarianism. Rather, the public imagines itself increasingly in opposition to a state captured by corrupt politicians. This opposition between a fragmenting, corrupt state and the nation calling for the rule of law helps explain the public support for a “politics beyond politics,” be it in the form of ethnic purity, an Islamic revolution, or even, insofar as the military has successfully portrayed itself as the only institution capable of discipline and integrity, a military takeover. All these options promise an alternative to the fussiness and fragmentation of democratic politics, but only the latter has actually been implemented, most recently in 1999.

The emphasis on urban youth culture in relation to present-day protest movements has several ramifications for ongoing debates on political—ethnic or religious—violence. It is primarily to this theoretical debate in anthropology and beyond that this book makes a contribution. In the 1990s a perspective on processes of othering and purification became the dominant approach in the anthropological study of political violence. This approach focuses on instances of ethnic and religious violence in times when both the state and the modern ideology of identity seem to be in crisis. Zygmunt Bauman, for instance, links ethnic or religious violence to the anxiety caused by a postmodern blurring of boundaries. Drawing on Mary Douglas’s work on purity and danger (1966), Bauman argues that the progressive postmodern frustration of the modern project for clear-

cut social categories results in an obstinate desire to purify the social world from the in-between (Bauman 1997). We find similar arguments on modernity and social purity in a range of recent studies on group violence. Liisa Malkki (1995), for instance, introduces the discrepancy between social classification and social displacement or exile to interpret ethnic violence in East Africa. E. Valentine Daniel argues that the violence between the Tamil and the Singalese in Sri Lanka signifies a growing feeling of uncertainty about the boundaries of ethnic-religious identities. “A people’s willingness to fight for, kill for, and die for a reality is not a sign of their certainty of that reality but indicates that the reality in question has been brought under the crisis of radical doubt” (Daniel 1996: 67). Arjun Appadurai borrows from Baudrillard the term “implosion” to make a similar argument. For Baudrillard, “implosion” denotes the disappearance of the modern distinction between reality and its representation. According to Appadurai, ethnocide can be called an implosion of modern ideology insofar as it enables one to replace everyday ambiguity by the imagination of strict categorization. In the act of killing the other, his or her identity is restored and fixed once and for all. “In ethnocidal violence, what is sought is just that somatic stabilization that globalization—in a variety of ways—inherently makes impossible” (Appadurai 1999: 322). In all these cases, the crisis of modernity, and the modern state as the main promoter of ethnic and religious categories, is taken as a critical explanatory factor for ethnocide, genocide, or religious violence.

This approach is primarily concerned with the distorted relationship between violent groups and their “others.” An older anthropological approach to political violence, however, focuses on social and cultural processes within groups of perpetrators of violence. This approach can be seen as an ongoing critical engagement with crowd theory as it was developed by Gustave Le Bon (1897), Emile Durkheim (1995), and Sigmund Freud (1923). Whereas Freud and Le Bon were pessimistic about the impact of the crowd on the behavior of the individual as they thought that participation in crowd activities damaged the rationality and morality of the conscious mind and brought to the surface uncontrolled instincts, Durkheim had a much more positive view on the crowd as potentially generating the notion of the sacred that makes social solidarity possible. Yet, Marcel Mauss already acknowledged that the crowd’s euphoria could as well be aroused by collective violence as by other more positive collective actions. Mauss applied Durkheim’s notions of collective effervescence and ritual communion to the Nazi celebrations of power and solidarity and recognized how these violent rituals produced collective emotions and representations of identity (in Lukas 1973: 338).¹ In other words, this approach opens the possibility to study collective violence as constitutive of social identity, in contrast to the above-mentioned postmodern perspective that

explains political violence from the anxiety of failing social identities. The focus shifts from processes of othering and purification to processes of group identification through collective aggression. This includes studies by social historians like E. P. Thompson (1973), Natalie Zemon Davis (1973), and Charles Tilly (1978) on the moral economy of violence and the work of Stallybrass and White (1986) and others working in the spirit of Bakhtin (1984) on collective transgression. I would also like to add more recent works such as David Apter's study of militant organizations as "discourse communities" (Apter 1997) and Martha Crenshaw's analysis of terrorist groups as communities accommodating a variety of individual needs such as social status and recognition, excitement, and material benefits (Crenshaw 1988). Recent ethnographies of militant organizations such as Allen Feldman's book on the IRA (1991) and Joseba Zulaika's work on the ETA (1988) pay attention to the disciplining into an aggressive masculinity, the competition for status and prestige, as well as the aestheticization of violence and death.

Although these two sets of approaches are usually separated in recent studies on political violence, they can easily and fruitfully be combined. Both can be used to overcome the weak points of the other. The former approach can be criticized for assuming the omnipresence of a modern ideology of identity, while not dealing with how, under which circumstances, and in which social groups these identities become so politicized, polarized, and pressing as to lead people into radical violent action. The former approach typically focuses on the national, ethnic, or religious identity of the perpetrators and victims of political violence but does not answer questions about other features of identity, such as generation, gender, or class. It often fails to recognize that the perpetrator of violence has a relationship not only with his victim but also with his fellow perpetrators. The latter approach is therefore better equipped to highlight the dynamics within violent groups. However, we also need to engage the processes of radical othering within the groups that are involved in collective violence. These groups are, after all, not cultural enclaves but are constantly under the influence of various and competing articulations of ethnic, national, and religious social identities.

This book, then, tries to give a detailed account of how groups of perpetrators of ethnic or religious violence relate to dominant discourses on ethnic and religious nationalism. Very often these groups are bound together by a "street culture" in which key values such as masculinity, physicality, and a lack of respect for these dominant discourses are expressed in explicitly plebeian, transgressive, and ludic practices. The *fun* of these practices is often self-consciously contrasted to the seriousness of state nationalism. We therefore cannot simply expect these groups to abide by dominant discourses on nationalism, ethnicity, and religion, and yet they

are often in the forefront of ethnic and religious violence. This is the puzzle of *fun* and violence: how can we explain that groups of people who express their profoundly ambiguous feelings about official nationalist discourse in collective ludic practices of transgression are also willing to sacrifice themselves for the ethnic-religious cause? I will try to solve this puzzle by presenting an analysis of political violence as a process that gives due attention to the peer-group dynamics of militant activities, the effervescence of collective violence, and their political aspirations in opposition to the state and other ethnic groups.

THE ARGUMENT AND THE PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

My analysis of the Muhajir nationalist movement differs from most studies about this phenomenon. Even though Pakistan—urban Sindh in particular—cannot be called an over-researched part of the world, there is recent scholarship on the MQM and Muhajir nationalism. But apart from two master's theses (A. A. Khan 1991; Verkaaik 1994), there are no studies based on anthropological fieldwork in Muhajir communities from which the movement originates. The bulk of the work done thus far looks at the rise of Muhajir nationalism from a national-level perspective. These studies interpret the MQM as a movement of an upcoming would-be middle class that tries to get access to state institutions and opposes economic discrimination by the state. The argument has been most elaborately developed by Hamza Alavi (1988, 1989, 1991), who uses the term “salarial” to denote a societal group of white-collar workers or those who aspire to such a position. The new nationalist movement is said to be a salariat-led movement. For others, the MQM is primarily the reactionary revolt of an urban middle and lower-middle class that is modernist in culture (F. Ahmed 1998; I. Malik 1997: 223–56; Zaidi 1992). The question of why a class struggle takes the form of ethnic polarization is answered by reference to the ethnic and linguistic policies of the state (Rahman 1996; J. Rehman 1994).

In my view, however, the Muhajir nationalist movement cannot so easily be reduced to a distorted class struggle, just as, say, the Hindu nationalist movement does not simply reflect the dynamics of caste politics in India (Hansen 1999: 17). Present-day nationalist movements certainly do empower groups that were previously marginalized, but these groups do not neatly coincide with classes or castes. For one thing, almost everyone in urban areas in South Asia now claims to belong to the middle or lower-middle class, but neither the MQM nor the Hindu nationalist movement represents everybody—despite the MQM's claim that it speaks for 98 percent of the Pakistani population. Furthermore, present-day nationalist movements attract followers and supporters from a wide social spectrum.

It is true that the MQM is poorly represented in the overly rich and the overly poor sections of Karachi and Hyderabad, but it is also clear that the movement is home to both university students and low-status artisans such as shoemakers. Socially upward as well as downward mobility is an aspect of the nationalist movements of the 1980s and 1990s, but it is not their only or single most important aspect. In the case of the MQM, I will show that there are many other factors at play, such as gender, generation, kinship, education, place of origin in India, place of present residence, and possibly several others. The multitude of such aspects blurs the picture and makes it impossible to locate the movement's following in straight sociological terms.

I rather propose to take the Muhajir nationalist movement as primarily a popular movement that is "street nationalist." Although the MQM originated in a student organization established on university and college campuses, it soon left—or rather was forced to leave (see chapter 3)—educational institutions and began to campaign in the streets of the densely populated neighborhoods of Karachi and Hyderabad. Rather than mimic and strive for a middle-class modernist lifestyle, it mocked and ridiculed high cultural and Islamic modernist values. In this sense, it marked a new phase of democratic politics throughout South Asia.

To make these claims I will be most concerned with the "streets." That does not mean that the broader picture will be left out; in fact, chapter 1 will examine the relevant political and cultural developments that have taken place on a national and provincial level. This chapter discusses processes of state formation and nation building and analyzes them in relation to the simultaneous emergence of Sindhi nationalism. It also examines the response of various segments of the Muhajir population to this dual process of nation building and ethnicization. Chapter 2 describes the rise, heyday, and imminent decline of the Muhajir Qaumi Movement within the broader framework of national and provincial politics.

I will then focus more explicitly on the "street aspects" of the movement, starting with a general introduction of the neighborhood where I did fieldwork. This inner-city area in the city of Hyderabad, named Pakka Qila, has a peculiar spatial setting, as it is located within the fortifications of the former palace of the Sindhi kings. After the British conquest of Sindh in 1843, the royal palace became a military camp of the British colonial army and was off-limits to civilians. As a result it was largely an empty spot when Pakistan became independent in 1947 and large numbers of Muslim refugees and migrants began to pour in from India. Located in the vicinity of the railway station where most migrants arrived, it was turned into a refugee camp and later became a permanent settlement with a population of about forty thousand people, virtually all of them Muhajir. Most inhabitants are self-employed artisans with a large number

of shoemakers originating from Agra. Although Sindhi nationalists claimed the citadel as a symbol of Sindhi history and autonomy and demanded that the Muhajir settlers be relocated, Pakka Qila became one of the most well-known and devoted strongholds of the MQM and in 1990 played a major role in the most gruesome case of ethnic violence in the history of Pakistan, leading to cases of ethnic cleansing that subsequently subdivided the city of Hyderabad in Muhajir and Sindhi areas. Chapter 3 will introduce this area to the reader.

The remaining chapters aim to describe and analyze the interrelations between violence and nationalist ideology from a processual perspective. Chapter 4 discusses street humor and competitive masculinity as means of mobilization. I will analyze violent group action in its ritual and effervescent aspects and offer some ethnographic descriptions of how the ludic may lead to violent acts such as looting, arson, and rioting. I will argue that youthful group aggression helped spoil social and ethnic relations within a wider context of fierce and often violent political competition. It led to equally violent reactions from militant organizations of rival ethnic groups and increasingly also from the state, which was party to the ethnic tension. When aggression was answered with aggression, the neighborhoods associated with Muhajir militant nationalism came under siege, as happened during the summer of 1990. Chapter 5 is devoted to an analysis of these large-scale violent events with special focus on to the dynamics between violence and the interpretation of violence by young MQM supporters transforming themselves into full-time militants, martyrs, and “terrorists.” Chapter 6, finally, looks at similar issues in more recent years. Having discussed young male peer-group violence in chapter 4 and large-scale ethnic violence in chapter 5, I will examine a third, more recent and more routinized form of violent conflict including state persecution and anti-state militancy. This chapter also discusses the discourse of terrorism employed by state forces to justify extrajudicial methods of persecution and maintaining law and order. It also focuses on how MQM activists reversed the terrorist stigma and turned it into a matter of pride and identity. Discussing public perceptions of the state, this chapter also deals with how this atmosphere of ongoing violence has generated an increasingly nostalgic and diasporic collective identity among Muhajirs.

Taken together, chapters 4 to 6 argue that the history of the Muhajir nationalist movement can be described in terms of changing forms or phases of violence: “playful riots,” ethnocide, and anti-state militancy or “terrorism.” It is not my intention to argue that these different forms are separated or that the one follows neatly after the other. Forms of violence different in mood, scope, and direction often overlap, but it is nevertheless possible to distinguish different phases in which any one of the three mentioned forms of violence dominates. These different phases also generate

changes in rhetoric, discourse, and collective fantasies. If youthful aggression goes together with physical symbols of masculine might, the confusing and life-threatening incidents of large-scale violence evoke images of martyrdom, suffering, and purity. In more recent years, there is clearly a relation between violent state persecution by the military and an emergent culture of war, militancy, and terrorism among full-time MQM activists. By highlighting these changes in the dynamics of violence and the imagination, I hope to show the processual and interrelated character of both.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

To end this introductory chapter I want to say a few words about the circumstances under which the research was conducted and about people who have significantly influenced the research. As the volume titled *Fieldwork under Fire* (Nordstrom and Robben 1995) illustrates, anthropological fieldwork on political violence has various difficulties. In a society reigned by fear, mistrust, and violence, it is often nearly impossible to establish rapport with key informants. Moreover, several MQM activists from the neighborhood of Pakka Qila were in jail where I could not visit them. Others lived in exile or were in hiding, and in order not to damage the delicate trust I had built up, I had to refrain from making inquiries as to their whereabouts. I could of course hang out in places where men, especially young men, gathered. On the other hand, I did not have to make a living in one of the neighborhood's workshops nor did I have to maintain a family there. With some exceptions I did not have access to the seclusion of private homes. I know very little about the women of Pakka Qila. Above all, Pakka Qila was not a place one could just go to and rent a place to live. Most houses were simply too small to accommodate a guest for an extended period of time.

So I lived elsewhere. I rented rooms from a family I had come to know during my earlier visits. The house was located in the suburb of Latifabad, a part of Hyderabad that had been built in the 1960s. Since the ethnic riots of 1990, practically the only non-Muhajirs who lived there were small communities of Sindhi goatherds. Initially I thought that not living in the area of study was a disadvantage. Later I began to appreciate the advantages of staying elsewhere. It enabled me to draw comparisons between Latifabad and Pakka Qila. Social control and neighborhood solidarity in the latter, for instance, appeared to be stronger than in Latifabad. The part of Latifabad where I lived was home to shopkeepers, schoolteachers, low-ranking bureaucrats, and others who would be categorized as lower-middle class in Pakistan, and they hailed from various regions in India, whereas the population of Pakka Qila was more homogeneous in terms of

occupation and place of origin. Kinship ties tended to be more prevalent. There were many other differences that gave me a comparative perspective I would not have had if I had lived in Pakka Qila.

For similar reasons I decided to do fieldwork in Hyderabad. I had worked in Karachi for three months in 1993 and again for three months in the spring of 1996 when I consulted newspaper archives on the MQM and Pakistani politics. I found that Muhajir nationalism in Karachi had a different meaning than it had in Hyderabad. In Hyderabad the term *Muhajir* connoted ethnic exclusion much earlier than it did in Karachi. Studies on Muhajirs and the MQM have thus far focused on Karachi only. These studies tend to deny the differences in position of several regional branches of the MQM and fail to see the many local variations that Muhajir nationalism may take.

But of course staying outside made it more difficult to find my way into Pakka Qila. Fortunately I received the help of two men who have played an important role during my fieldwork. First there was Aqeel, with whom I had worked in Karachi in 1993. He had a Muhajir background himself. His late father had been born in Allahabad, India. Having arrived in Pakistan, his father preferred Hyderabad to Karachi as a place to settle because he did not like the humidity of the seaside. He opened a dairy shop, keeping buffalos for milk just outside the town. Aqeel, the second of five sons, was considered the brightest and was granted the privilege of going to college. He later studied sociology at Sindh University. The family wanted to have one son working in the civil service while the others would run the shop. Originally not rich, the brothers did reasonably well financially.

The violence of May 1990 that had started in Pakka Qila had considerably changed Aqeel's life. Anticipating that they would one day have to leave Hyderabad because of ongoing ethnic violence, the family decided to buy a house in Karachi and establish a branch of the family business there. Having just completed his studies, Aqeel was singled out for this task. When I met him in 1993, he and his young wife lived in a house that was far too big for them. He did not find it easy to start a business in a city where he had few friends and relatives. Helping me was a welcome side job, which he performed with great skill and energy.

In 1994 and 1995 the violence shifted from Hyderabad to Karachi; 1995 was an especially bad year for Karachi. More than two thousand people were killed in ambushes, bomb blasts, and shootings among state forces, the MQM proper, and the breakaway MQM-Haqiqi. Meanwhile Hyderabad became much safer, and the brothers decided to leave Karachi. Aqeel went back to Hyderabad and opened a new dairy shop in the center of the city, but this was not without difficulties either. In addition to regular armed robberies, there was the nuisance of strikes. Almost weekly the MQM called for a shutdown of the market to protest the killing of its

activists in Karachi. It was a major loss of revenue for dairy shops, butchers, and others who make a living selling perishable goods. One day, when a rival Sindhi nationalist party had called for a strike, Aqeel ignored the call and a grenade was promptly thrown through his window, seriously injuring two of his employees.

When I met him again in September 1996, he was busy, working ten hours a day, seven days a week, but he nevertheless found the time to discuss plans and strategies with me. In the evening he would often come up to Pakka Qila to help me. His introductions were invaluable. He and his wife also welcomed me as a brother in their home. And thanks to Aqeel I had a major breakthrough after three months of fieldwork.

Next to the Qila Gate, which is the main access to the fort, is a police station. Since the patrolling policemen never stopped me to ask what my business was as a foreigner, a rumor spread that I was sent by the government. There was a reason for this. When I started fieldwork, Benazir Bhutto, who was deeply distrusted by the inhabitants of Pakka Qila, was the prime minister. Her party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), ruled in Sindh and the provincial government was involved in a major effort to crack down on the MQM. A few months before I arrived, a film crew from Britain had obtained permission to interview MQM activists in the Central Jail in Hyderabad and then made a film that was highly critical of the MQM. In Pakka Qila this was considered a state-sponsored piece of propaganda. If Bhutto had not been behind it, then how had the film crew managed to get permission to film inside the prison? Perceiving that sending foreigners was a new trick of the PPP government to spread anti-MQM propaganda, one man bluntly asked me how much Benazir paid me.

After some months, however, I had a stroke of luck, although it did not immediately appear that way. A printing press owner with whom Aqeel and I had spent an evening talking turned out to be an informer from one of the intelligence agencies operating in Hyderabad. For some time men identifying themselves as intelligence agents came to Aqeel's shop for information. At the same time my request for a visa extension was refused, but I never knew whether there was a connection with the printing press owner. Thanks to a member of one of the leading families of Hyderabad, who apparently knew the way to the higher authorities of the agency, the issue was resolved. I did have to leave the country to have my visa extended, however.

While I was abroad, Aqeel told the customers of his shop that I had been forced to leave because we had had an argument with the printing press owner, whom Aqeel knew was generally considered a hypocrite (*munafiq*). We had been told that the local MQM had left the man untouched because influential men of the PPP protected him. The day the PPP lost the provincial elections in February 1997, the man cleared out his work-

shop and disappeared. Aqeel's handling of this matter caused people to be much more cooperative after my return. Sharing an enemy proved to be a fertile ground for trust. As a word of welcome someone said to me: "So now you are a terrorist, too."

A second episode, however, was even more important in establishing a workable relationship with the men of Pakka Qila. It happened shortly after the affair with the printing press owner. During the two weeks I was out of the country I quit smoking cigarettes. I did this because I thought not smoking was healthier than smoking, but almost immediately after I quit, I developed an extremely violent cough. A friend from Holland came over for Christmas and gave me some pills, which did not help. I bought an ayurvedic syrup (a medicine made according to the traditional Hindu system of medicine) from a local doctor, but it did not help either. It may be a throat infection, I thought, and took amoxicillin—an antibiotic. Halfway through the course I had such a coughing fit that I strained the muscles connecting my ribs. Now even breathing was painful. I got up from chairs stiff as an old man. Finally I went to see a regular doctor. She said, "Try Augmentin," a different antibiotic. But I remembered what a Sindhi singer-poet had once told me: "Prayers are like antibiotics. If you take them too often, they no longer work." I thought it wiser to start smoking again.

The problem was that by now Ramzaan, the month of fasting, had begun. As a Christian I of course did not have to fast, but smoking in front of a group of people who are collectively longing for a cigarette but cannot have one in public is a rather uncomfortable situation if one does not have an excuse other than Christianity. So I spent my time in the communal garden of Pakka Qila, which had a reputation for being a place where you could do anything you liked without recrimination. In the shade of the Mosque of the Date Palm Tree you could have anything you fancied in the month of Ramzaan: tea, marijuana, hashish, cigarettes, etc.—generally speaking, anything that is "drinkable" (in Urdu, the verb for drinking also covers smoking). The consumption of solid food, however, was discouraged.

The man who was in charge of this little garden, which also featured the seven graves of the May 1990 victims, was Pir Sahibzada Syed Mazhar Hussain Moini. I was reading *Anna Karenina* then and did not understand what the author meant by men with moustaches—in plural—until I met this Mazhar Sahib. He was a seventy-year-old widower with several white moustaches and had been an influential man in the neighborhood till the younger generation had deprived him of his power base. He was very proud of his titles and genealogy (*shajra*), which he had, after many requests, recently received in writing from relatives in Ajmer, India. During one of our first meetings he took me to his house to show me the

document. Under his name was written in pencil “gone to Pakistan,” which to me appeared not unlike the “expired” written under the names of those who had died without heirs. But it did not bother Mazhar Sahib. What mattered to him was the written proof that he had a respectable background.

For weeks Mazhar Sahib had watched me blundering in my first efforts to do fieldwork, but he had a great sense of compassion and an even greater sense of humor. I explained my problem to him and asked him if he would employ me as the caretaker of the park and its graves and allow me to smoke on the grounds during Ramzaan. Apart from the seven martyrs of May 1990, there were two more graves: one of a Sufi saint belonging to the Chishti order who had died in Hyderabad in 1992; and the other of Nawab Muzaffar Hussain Khan, a member of the provincial assembly in the early 1970s who was buried there in the early 1980s. “No problem,” Mazhar Sahib replied. “Start looking for diamonds.” He meant removing the litter people had left behind. I felt stiff at first, but the exercise did me good.

Although this was not fieldwork in the strict sense, now that I had become Mazhar Sahib’s employee, the regular visitors of the park began to see me as his protégé. The graves and the Mosque of the Date Palm Tree formed an appropriate setting for all sorts of discussions. Moreover, most of these conversations were supervised by Mazhar Sahib, who felt himself old and respectable enough to cut short anyone he thought was talking nonsense. Not that he was successful; it only resulted in more and hotter discussions. Aqeel was also often present during these meetings, translating and explaining concepts I did not understand, and together he and Mazhar Sahib often led the conversation and brought up new topics. Although I never participated in the social life of the area, I did at times manage to be in a situation where my presence became nearly irrelevant. With a break of two months in spring I continued research in and around this little park until August 1997.