
Political Turmoil in a Megacity: The Role of Karachi for the Stability of Pakistan and South Asia

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Political parties are a major part of representative democracy which is the main political system worldwide today. In a society where direct modes of democracy are not manageable any more – and that is the majority of modern democracies- political parties are a means of uniting and organizing people who share certain ideas about how society should progress. In South Asia where democracy as a political system was introduced from outside during colonial rule only few political ideologies have developed. Instead, we find political parties here are mostly based on ethnicity. The following article will analyze the Muttahida Qaumi Movement and the role it plays in Karachi.

Karachi is the largest city, the main seaport and the economic centre of Pakistan, as well as the capital of the province of Sindh. It is situated in the South of Pakistan on the shore of the Arabian Sea and holds the two main sea ports of Pakistan Port Karachi and Port Bin Qasim. This makes it the commercial hub of and gateway to Pakistan. The city handles 95% of Pakistan's foreign trade, contributes 30% to Pakistan's manufacturing sector, and almost 90% of the head offices of the banks, financial institutions and

multinational companies operate from Karachi. The country's largest stock exchange is Karachi-based, making it the financial and commercial center of the country as well. Karachi contributes 20% of the national GDP, adds 45% of the national value added, retains 40% of the national employment in large-scale manufacturing, holds 50% of bank deposits and contributes 25% of national revenues and 40% of provincial revenues.¹ Its population which is estimated between 18 and 21million people makes it a major resource for the educated and uneducated labor market in the country.

Politically also, Karachi is a major player in Pakistan. It is the capital of Sindh province and the former capital of Pakistan. Especially its attraction as a main provider of employment in Pakistan makes it attractive to large numbers of people from all over the country to come to Karachi in search for employment, business opportunities and survival for their families. That is why Karachi is sometimes called a 'small Pakistan' because people from all over the country including a large community from other South Asian countries and regions have come and settled here. This fact and the fast urban growth, missing urban planning and weak administrative management have lead to political turmoil in the city that has historical, power-related and ideological roots. Today Karachi has become a place where security and thus living quality has deteriorated and millions of people are in danger of being robbed, abducted, killed or fall into the hands of extortionists. Fast and unplanned urban growth has created extensive slums around and inside Karachi where there are no water pipelines, no sewage system no garbage collection which has led to considerable health hazards for the population. This paper is undertaking the task to trace the roots of some, especially the political problems of the city which have contributed to instability, security and law and order problems not only in Karachi but in the whole of Pakistan and which are one of the reasons why many other problems like local administration, health standards and others are difficult or impossible to solve.

History of Karachi

Karachi was reputedly founded as "Kolachi" by Baloch tribes from Balochistan and Makran, who established a small fishing community in the area. The name until today survives in the name 'Mai Kolachi' designating a connecting road and area close to the port of Karachi. When people from this area started trading across the sea with Muscat and the Persian Gulf in the late 18th century, Karachi gained in importance; a small fort was constructed for its protection with a few cannons imported from Muscat. The fort had two main gateways: one facing the sea, known as Khara Dar (Brackish Gate) and the other facing the adjoining Lyari River, known as the Meetha Dar (Sweet Gate). The location of these gates corresponds to the present-day city localities of Khaaradar and Meethadar respectively.² In 1795, the village became a domain of the Balochi Talpur rulers of Sindh. A small factory was opened by the British in September 1799, but was closed down within a year because of trouble with the Talpurs. After sending a couple of exploratory missions to the area, the British East India Company conquered the town on February 3, 1839. Kolachi was later incorporated into the British Indian Empire together with the rest of what is today the province of Sindh after it was conquered by Charles Napier in 1843 and was added to the jurisdiction of the Bombay Presidency. This move was resented already at that time because now Sindh became the hinterland of the metropolis of Bombay.

The modern city of Karachi is mainly a British creation. The East India Company created a cantonment for their troops around which the city developed. In 1843 Charles Napier started constructing a Governor House on the plot where the current governor House is situated. In 1939 the old building was replaced by the current one. In 1864 a telegraph connection to London and Europe was established and in 1878 Karachi was connected to other places in British-India by a railway line. In 1924 the first airfield was opened. The British cantonment and shopping areas of

Karachi were provided with beautiful buildings and roads. In 1865 Frere Hall was constructed and in 1890 Empress Market was built. British Karachi had a sewage system and water pipelines and a tramway. By 1899 Karachi had become the largest port of the East and attracted immigrants from all over South Asia, China and Arabia.³ At the beginning of the 20th century it had over a hundred thousand inhabitants with multiple ethnic backgrounds.

The demand for the separation of Sindh from Bombay province and the creation of a Sindh province was a long-standing demand of ethnic Sindhis and Balochis. It was supported by the Muslim League (founded in 1906) after the Lucknow Pact concluded with the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1916 proved to be inapplicable. In 1918 a branch of the Muslim League was established in Karachi by Ghulam Muhammad Bughri from where the political fight for a separate Sindh province was coordinated. After many years of sustained political effort Sindh was separated from Bombay province in 1936 and Karachi became the capital of the newly created Sindh province. The so-called Pakistan resolution of 1940 was presented by a Sindhi activist and revolutionary G. M. Syed in the Sindh Assembly. Only nine years later, on the 14th August 1947 British- India was partitioned and Pakistan was founded of which Karachi became the first capital.

Karachi - the Capital of Pakistan (1947-1960ies) ethnic composition and political situation

The partition of British India under the two-nation theory and the creation of Pakistan as a homeland for Indian Muslims resulted in a massive exchange of population between the newly independent India and Pakistan. An estimated 7 million Muslims from all over India moved to Pakistan while an equal number of Hindus left their former homes and migrated to India. This exchange of population was accompanied by vast amount of atrocities and killings on both sides that cost the lives of several millions of refugees; it is one of the darkest chapters of Indo-

Pakistan history. Those Muslim refugees from India who made it to Pakistan settled mostly in Karachi and the urban towns of Sindh. Most of the refugees were educated from the Indian civil service, teachers, people from the professions and business people. They left their homes and parts of their families behind and came to Pakistan not only in the search of jobs in the newly made state and administration but also in search of a dream: a new nation and national state. They were Urdu speaking apart from their local languages and their arrival changed the numerical, social and ethnic situation in Karachi and Sindh basically.

At the time of partition Karachi had slightly less than half a million inhabitants. At the time of the foundation of Pakistan in 1947 Sindhis and Sindhi speaking Baloch formed about 62% of the population of Karachi while Urdu speaking were only about 6%. However, by 1951 the population of Karachi had increased to 1.14 million due to the influx of refugees and the ethnic mix had changed dramatically. Now 50% of the population was Urdu speaking and the Sindhi speaking had been reduced to about 8%.⁴ During the nineteen fifties migration from India continued and during the first ten years of Pakistan's existence with Karachi as its capital the proportion of Sindhis was further reduced while the percentage of Urdu speaking had grown to 58% of the city's population. This created naturally much aversion and even hatred among Sindhis against the newcomers whom they perceived as intruders into their province taking away their job and business opportunities and resenting their affinity to education, their entrepreneurship and carrier-oriented behavior in jobs as well as some cultural specifics.

Ethnic prejudice has a long history in the subcontinent. It was promoted if not created by the British who spread certain ideas about 'warrior races' inhabiting Pakistan and contrasting them against the rest of the population. Their introduction of census accounts which neatly divided the population into religious, ethnic and language-based categories may also have played a role in this

development. In any case, from historical sources we know that for instance Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was considering Bengalis cowards who ' at the sight of a table knife would crawl under their chair'⁵ while he considered Rajputs and Pathans as brave thus demonstrating how deep this understanding had been incorporated into the political consciousness of the late nineteenth century. And we know that until today such ethnic divisions and prejudices related to them are present in our society. The upheaval of partition and its aftermath has been building upon these prejudices and since then created new ones.

The province of Sindh and its largest city Karachi suffered from this phenomenon most. While the Punjabis from Indian Punjab who settled in Pakistani Punjab were absorbed into the population of the province and no difference is visible today the non-Punjabi migrants from India who settled in Karachi and the other cities of Sindh in search for jobs, business opportunities and a new homeland created a stir in Sindhi society. Partition had affected Sindh badly: with the majority of the Hindu business class who had been the backbone of Sindh economy left for India a vacuum had been created that could not be easily and quickly filled with Sindhi Muslims who are traditionally connected to the agricultural sector of economy and artisans. It was the newly arrived people from India who filled much of the vacuum in business and administration. The newcomers were generally better educated than the Sindhis and more enterprising given their need and pressure to start a new life in an unknown surrounding after having left their old lives and existences behind. Besides, the Indian refugees were Urdu speaking and culturally quite different from the local population. They had come with a certain idea about Pakistan and Urdu as its national language which they thought didn't require them to learn Sindhi or adjust to local culture. They understood themselves as the prototypes of the new Pakistan nation which all other inhabitants of Pakistan had to emulate.

This situation was not taken kindly by the Sindhi population who felt increasingly overpowered and strangers in their own country. But there was more trouble in the making. The first decade of Pakistan was a time of intense struggles for power in the newly created state. The first generation of Indian refugees who took over like Jinnah, Liaqat Ali Khan and representatives of the Bengali majority population like Khwaja Nazimuddin and Muhammad Ali Bogra came under strong attack from the Punjabi political elite and the Pathans serving in the Pakistani Army. This power struggle found its expression in the shifting of the capital from Karachi to Rawalpindi and then Islamabad in Punjab and in a policy of denouncing the newcomers from India as 'Indian' and thus untrustworthy to serve in the army. With the foundation of the PPP and after the break-up of Pakistan in the seventies an new policy of promoting Sindhi language in Sindh and of introducing quotas for Sindhis in administration and universities the situation of the newcomers became more difficult. Their feeling of being rejected as a group by Sindhis created a group feeling between them who otherwise had nothing much in common culturally hailing from very different areas and cultures in India.

Karachi since the 1980ies

According to the census of 1981 the Sindhi population consisted of 6.29% and the Urdu speaking 54.34%.⁶ By 1998 census the numbers had changed to 7.22% for Sindhis and 48.52% for Urdu speakers. In addition, the number of Pashtuns living in Karachi who in 1981 had been 8.71% had grown to 11.42%.⁷ Until today the situation has reached a point where the Urdu speaking are only 43% of the Karachi population while the percentage of Pashtuns has risen to 15%⁸ and no end to this development is so far visible. The reason for the rise in Pashtun population is of course the war in Afghanistan against Russian occupation first, then the outfall of civil war in Afghanistan and now the consequences of the US war there which has resulted in the continuing influx of Afghan refugees into Karachi in search of

security, jobs and a new home. Lately the Afghans have been joined by their brothers from the tribal areas in Pakistan where months-long military operations result in creating new, indigenous refugees whom we call IDPs. This continuing fall in the population ratio in Karachi during the years since the 1980ies with no end in sight in combination with the growth of ethnic politics in Pakistani political parties has created a stir among the Urdu speakings.

As a result of this the Urdu speaking who did not represent initially a homogeneous group either culturally or politically were forced into a new ethnic identity under the name of 'muhajir' (refugee) and a new political party under the name of Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) was created out of a students' movement in 1984. Growing availability of arms in Karachi where the arms consignment from the West arrived for further transport into Afghanistan led to a deterioration of security in Karachi supported also by the unplanned growth of the city which made it difficult to control its vast areas of kachi abadis and other unregulated settlements. The ideology of jihad promoted during the eighties as an incentive to fight against Russian occupation of Afghanistan contributed to the growth of Islamic militancy in word and deed in Karachi and the whole of Pakistan.

Such a situation makes it understandable that Karachi has become a hotbed of political parties with ethnic agendas and a militant edge as well. Sindhi and Balochi nationalists, ANP and MQM are the main representatives. Political issues are mixed with ethnic problems and this is creating the explosive situation which we find in Karachi. Even political parties with originally an all-Pakistani agenda like PPP and PML (N) are increasingly falling back upon their ethnic origins and are found playing the ethnic 'Sindhi' or 'Punjabi' card. Almost all political parties in Karachi have an armed wing that is standing by to come into action when required⁹. This is true for the MQM but it is true also for PPP and other parties. We have seen this on 12th May 2007 when riots

broke out on the day when the Chief Justice was visiting Karachi and city roads were blocked, cars burned and hundreds of people were injured, killed and arrested, most of them political workers of different parties. Opposition parties PPP and ANP's members fought then with MQM who were siding with the Musharraf regime. Criminal gangs have been used for political purposes by some of the political parties. The uncontrolled availability of arms and ammunition has also sponsored the development of criminal gangs trading drugs, arms and busying themselves in extortions of the business community in a way that is upsetting the economic prosperity and peace of Karachi. A recent operation of rangers in Karachi's Lyari against mainly Baloch gangs connected to the PPP¹⁰ which had been launched because of daily killings of MQM and Pashtun party workers in the city has remained inconclusive and only on 16th May six MQM activists were killed within 24 hours¹¹.

The creation of *muhajirs* as a new ethnicity is thus one of the core issues at the bottom of ethnic conflict in Karachi. The political limitations of making the party a *muhajir* target group was recognized by the MQM in 1997 when the party changed its name into Muttahida Qaumi Movement and tried to widen its scope towards all ethnic groups living in Karachi and Pakistan. A successful implementation of this idea would be the only way to make MQM a really national party relevant in all provinces of Pakistan. This has proven to be extremely difficult until now and the success has been limited accordingly. The reasons for this are two-fold: one is that the MQM with its insistence upon Altaf Hussain as their Quaid and the strong role which *muhajirs* play in the party together with the scant success of a cultural merger of *muhajirs* into Sindhi culture and language could not overcome the '*muhajir*' label. Secondly, the rival political parties and the public opinion both continued to perceive and name the MQM '*muhajir*' regardless of those efforts and bad feelings even hatred against them is common. Thus until today this is the situation though by now representatives of all ethnicities have been co-opted into the

ruling committee of the MQM and inroads have been made into areas like Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

One of the central players in the Karachi political scene and a political arch rival of MQM is the PPP. Though being originally a Sindh party founded by one of the largest landowning families of Sindh, the Bhuttos, the party had from the beginning a national agenda and no special 'soft corner' even for its own home constituency Larkana as can be seen from the neglected and underdeveloped status of the district. Things changed when in the October 2002 elections both PPP and PML(N) were routed and almost reduced to seats in their home provinces Punjab and Sindh respectively. That was the time when they were increasingly falling back on their ethnic origins for political survival and started playing the 'ethnic card' as a matter of policy. In Karachi, as a matter of fact, the PPP which is mainly a party with rural support has never had a strong or defining influence. Karachi traditionally has been under the political influence of urban political parties like Jamaat-i-Islami first and MQM later. PPP influence is limited to Sindh-Balochs dominated areas in Karachi like Lyari, Chakiwara, Pan Mandi, Jubilee, Landhi, Korangi, Malir, Malir Extension and Goths. Ever since the 1970ies, those areas have been a stronghold of PPP with its originally socialist sounding political manifesto. Hanging of Z. A. Bhutto made him a *shahid* in the eyes of the people of those areas and especially Lyari. Lyari was the place where Benazir's first rally took place when she came back from exile in 1986, in Lyari her marriage took place in 1987 and her son Bilawal is supposed to contest elections from this same constituency. But in-between many things have changed and Lyari especially has become a den of mainly Baloch drug gangs, of land mafia and of weapon dealers with the help and protection of PPP or of some prominent PPP members like Zulfiqar Mirza who created so-called 'aman-committees', armed gangs who were used for target killing MQM workers apart from allowing them to fight against their criminal rivals in the area. Different spells of violence have been upsetting the peace of Karachi during the rule

of PPP since 2009, the worst may be during August-September 2011 when 2500 MQM workers are estimated to have been killed and tortured to death while the videos of the tortures came up for sale in the Karachi markets. MQM has its own armed gangs of course and hundreds of PPP and ANP workers as well as police personal became victims of the killing spree as well. Nevertheless, the violence which was mainly directed against MQM brought the political coalition between the two major parties of Karachi and in the Sindh parliament repeatedly to the verge of break-up. Since 2009 about six times MQM tried to leave the unholy alliance with their arch rivals PPP mainly because of the violence against their party members and supporters on behalf of the armed wings of PPP as well as of political non compliance of PPP with the demands of MQM – the re-instatement of the local governments in Karachi and Sindh. It was the pressure of the end of the PPP election period and the forthcoming elections which made PPP and MQM agree finally on a deal that gave MQM the Sindh People's Local Government Act (SPLGA) and in return made MQM promise PPP support in the election campaign and seat adjustments according to which MQM has to sacrifice 11 seats (four seats in the National Assembly and seven seats in the Provincial Assembly).¹² For this agreement PPP has been alienating some of their other coalition partners in Sindh such as the ANP and the Sindh and Baloch nationalists who, however, have no strong vote bank in Karachi.

Another problem endangering the peace in Karachi is the growing number of Pashtuns in the city who are coming mainly from war-ridden areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, who have been uprooted and who lost their properties and homes. They mainly occupy the western part of Karachi from Afghan Camp to Sohrah Goth to Mangopir to Banaras and other areas including Saeedabad, Qaidabad, Keamari, Baldia Town and others.¹³ As has been mentioned before, the percentage of Pashtuns living in Karachi is estimated at 17 to 22 percent and is growing due to ongoing migration and to their very high birth rate. By now Karachi hosts

the largest urban Pashtun population that surpasses the number of Pashtuns in Peshawar, Quetta and Kandahar. The first wave of Pashtun migrants have settled here by now; they were hardworking, ready to take the low-wage jobs that the locals did not want and by now have acquired reasonable wealth. This was because of a lack of economic opportunities in their own province. The Pashtun contributed significantly to the economy of Karachi through labour, petty jobs and small trade. Since 2001 and the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, the earthquake 2005 and army operations in Fata since 2007 poor, uneducated Pashtuns have arrived who have been unsettled, have lost their homes and businesses and who have meager chance for jobs and survival here. In addition, the newcomers are tribals with a tribal cultural background who are unable to adjust to the urban culture prevalent in Karachi. This has led to their cultural alienation and this in combination with poverty and miserable living conditions has resulted in growing criminal activities made worse by the easy availability of weapons.

Pashtun migration to Karachi apart from the cultural perspective has a political dimension as well: it is perceived as a threat by the other ethnicities living in Karachi, first of all by the *muhajirs*. As a result, Pashtuns are among those who are increasingly victims of target killings and murder especially by MQM. Dozens of shops and restaurants that belonged to Pashtuns are set on fire, muhajir-Pashtun violence is on the rise. Hospitals, schools and roads are now segregated on ethnic grounds and people are reluctant to go to the neighborhood where rival ethnic groups live¹⁴ Though they are all 'Pashtuns' they are not a homogeneous ethnicity at all and their tribal and local affiliations are quite strong. Most Afghans and many Pashtuns from the Pakistani tribal areas have not been politically active in their former localities and are not engaged with any political party until now. While the ANP has been trying to make itself the spokes man for all Pashtuns in Karachi the real influence of this party which has a secular agenda and urban outlook is quite limited.

Besides, ANP is known for its contribution in the war on terrorism siding with the Pakistan Army and the US which is not supported by most Pashtuns; that is why they do not feel themselves being represented by ANP. This fact has found its expression in the limited number of seats of ANP in the provincial parliament and during the Musharraf period in the parliament. But that also means that though Pashtuns are the second largest ethnicity in Karachi they have been politically underrepresented so far. This fact though seems to be changing right now. While the politization of the Pashtun population was quite marginal in the past, there are recently new trends visible which show that the miserable living conditions of the Pashtuns, the non-availability of water, electricity, education and health care for them and the deteriorating security situation make them politically more active. Not surprisingly, therefore, it is not the ANP that is gathering support and influence among the Pashtuns. We have recent reports that it is the *Tehrik-e Taleban Pakistan* (TTP) which is making inroads into Pashtun settlements in Karachi and is threatening the ANP to close down their offices and get lost. According to reports it was the complaints of Pashtuns living in Karachi against ANP for its involvement in murders and extortions which drew the attention of Hakimullah Masood towards the situation in Karachi. He directed TTP members living in Karachi to take action against ANP which resulted in a violent drive against ANP and the closing of ANP offices. Since then security is reported to have improved and the amount of '*bhatta*' that is collected by the TTP from the businesses for protection is much less than that which ANP used to collect. Even more recently, the former PPP-Sherpao is gearing up to make its influence felt in Karachi and Sindh. For that the party has acquired the new name of 'Qaumi Watan Party' and is trying to get foothold among the Pashtuns in Karachi.¹⁵ – an enterprise the success of which will have to be seen. As the Pashtun community of Karachi is not only growing in numbers, but also increasingly taking to politics with different political parties vying for their favours, an intensification of fighting is to be expected keeping in

mind the high amount of weapons that are present in all of the parties. Though attempts have been made to avoid more violence recognizing the fact that political problems cannot be solved by militant means political overtures by ANP towards MQM have so far not resulted in success.

In a latest development the new influence of TTP based on the support from the culturally tribal population makes itself felt in Karachi as an anti-MQM force. MQM, a basically secular urban party, has been knowingly or unknowingly antagonizing TTP lately by organizing a huge protest rally condemning the *taleban* attack on Malala Yusufzai in Swat in October and by starting a campaign for a referendum among Pakistanis as to 'what Pakistan do we want: Qaid's Pakistan or *taleban* Pakistan'. Both initiatives have explicitly antagonized the *taleban* and TTP. As a result TTP on 2nd November 2012 called the media and read out a statement, saying that TTP has now decided not to show any more leniencies towards the MQM and expressed their resolve to rid Karachi of the MQM which has been suppressing Karachiites through violence and extortion.¹⁶ This is a dangerous development that might result in a new war between the two major ethnic communities of Karachi that will upset the fragile security situation of the city. It is also showing that the law enforcing agencies of Karachi were unable or unwilling to prevent the spread of *taleban* influence in Karachi. Under the influence of this new constellation new political coalitions and alignments could also be expected to come up in a changing ethno-political landscape in Karachi. Thus though MQM, PPP and ANP are close enemies in the daily street fighting and target killing that is going on in the city, in the face of the *taleban* threat these basically secular parties may find the resolve to overcome their political controversies and unite against the *talebanization* of Karachi. Thus, we have been hearing Shahi Syed, the head of ANP in Karachi saying that "MQM is not worse than *taleban*. If we can talk to the *taleban*, we should be able to hold a dialogue with the MQM as well"¹⁷ Gul Faraz Khattak, a Pashtun member of the Rabita

Committee of MQM said in an interview that not all Pashtuns support ANP and that MQM was interested in talks with ANP if ethnic violence could be ended this way.¹⁸ If this was true it could be a step in the right direction.

The Sindh Local Government Act 2012 and the perceived threat of a division of Sindh

Apart from those issues mentioned previously that affect the whole of Pakistan the situation in Karachi is also volatile because of specifically local Sindh and Karachi issues which are mostly tied to the MQM. As we have discussed earlier, the inner and outside pressure that made *muhajirs* into a new ethnicity was also creating the question about where they would have a homeland. The migrants from India came mostly from the urban areas of India and were urban in their lifestyle and mindset. They settled, therefore, in the cities of Sindh and the rest of Pakistan. Living in Sindh for the third generation they regard this as their actual 'homeland' apart from their attachment to Pakistan as such. Since 1992 there is the story about 'Jinnahpur' around, an alleged plan of the MQM to create a homeland for themselves by dividing Karachi and Hyderabad from Sindh and carving out a province for themselves which was used as the basis for the military operation named 'clean up'. Despite the denials of MQM all along the story never died until August 2009 when two senior former military officers of the Pakistan Army admitted that the story and the maps allegedly found in MQM's headquarter was fake and made up in order to have a reason for the military action against the party. But even today there are many who do believe that this still might have been the real intention of MQM. This belief got new life from one of the latest developments in Karachi and around MQM.

Since April 2012 news about an organization has come up which is called *Muhajir Sooba Tehrik* (movement for a *Muhajir* province) and which has staged a couple of smaller rallies in Karachi demanding the creation of a separate province for the

muhajirs comprising of Karachi and Hyderabad and having a *muhajir* CM; a separate province where they would not be discriminated against and could live in security. The participants of those rallies, mostly women of different age groups, asked the leader of MQM Altaf Hussain to agree to this demand and they asked the Pakistan Army, poets and writers to support this demand. After the Jinnahpur idea had been proven fake this is a surprising development and a relapse from a national position into ethnic thinking by parts of the *muhajirs* again. But it seems that this demand has to be understood as a result of the fears and security concerns in the wake of the ongoing violence in Karachi against *muhajirs*. The fact that especially women whose husbands and sons have been the victims of this daily violence in the city are behind this demand speak for this interpretation. Though Altaf Hussain and the party leadership has never accepted this demand for the MQM this has renewed old fears of especially Sindhis about sinister aims of their arch enemies. Though politics in Pakistan and Sindh during the last several years have generally taken an ethnic face this development among some circles of the MQM diminishes whatever creditability MQM has reached among other ethnicities during the last twenty years after its name change from '*muhajir*' into '*muttahida*'.

Another chapter has been added to this story in October this year when as a result of political negotiations between PPP and MQM which have lasted for almost four years, a new local government law was created and pushed through the provincial Assembly by the name of Sindh People Local Government Act (SPLGA). Local government in Karachi and in the urban centres of Sindh is expected to be in the hands of MQM who, on the one hand, have shown that they can deliver under the previous law but on the other hand, are eager to use this law in order to strengthen their local political hold in urban Sindh. Even before the details of this legislation were known to the public the fact that it was to be applied only to Karachi and several other urban centers of Sindh where MQM has a stake aroused a wave of strong protest mainly

from Sindhi nationalist parties, but also from within PPP and some other opponents of the MQM that this was a step towards the division of Sindh and the creation of a *muhajir suba*. This kind of discussion is going to sharpen existing political rivalries that are mostly fought out with weapons between the contenders. That is why there is a daily headcount published in the newspapers of those who have been killed during the past 24 hours and there is no way the government or its law enforcing agencies could possibly tackle this problem. The situation in Karachi is at red alert and the economic and political outfall of this is going to affect the whole of Pakistan, our Indian neighbors and the region at large.

Pakistan, Nationalism and the Muhajir mindset

Ethnicity and ethnic divide thus seems to be one of the major reasons for political turmoil in Karachi and Pakistan. New ethnicities are created and are demanding a homeland of their own. *Muhajirs* are the most vivid example in Karachi, but there are *Seraikis* and *Hazaras* in other parts of Pakistan coming up with the same idea. One of the major reasons why ethnicity has acquired political importance in Karachi and Pakistan at large and has, therefore, a role in the ongoing ethnic violence can be traced back right to the beginnings of Pakistan's existence and to the confusions about the Two-Nation-Theory based on religious communities, its handling in Pakistan and ideas about how a Pakistani nation could be defined.

The demand for Pakistan that was negotiated by M. A. Jinnah in the wake of the negotiations about British withdrawal from the subcontinent had received support mainly from the Muslim minority provinces of British-India and was a reaction to the fear of those 'minority'-Muslims that they will be unable to get their political interests secured in a majority-dominated political system that was going to prevail in independent India after the British had left. The Muslims from the minority provinces with their

'minority complex' were the ones who dominated the Muslims League; Jinnah himself and Liaqat Ali Khan being the most prominent among them. After the creation of Pakistan they left their homes, businesses and landholdings behind and migrated to Pakistan wishing to mould this new country into their new home. While leaving behind parts of their families and properties they also left behind much of their ethnic affiliation. Urdu was or became their new language and Pakistan their identity. They felt that now they are the real Pakistanis and expected all other Pakistanis who did not have to leave their homes and lands for Pakistan to do the same: leave their ethnicity and culture aside and accept Urdu and Islam as the new exclusive identity markers. During the first two decades of Pakistan's existence and even later ethnic identity was discouraged by the Pakistani state first through the one-unit set-up that united the whole of West-Pakistan overriding the underlying ethnicities in order to balance East-Pakistan with its population majority and relative ethnic unity. Any demands of Bengalis or others to accept their ethnic and cultural identities alongside the Pakistani one and their ethnic languages alongside with Urdu was considered as treason and as a challenge to Pakistani identity; the idea was you are either a Bengali or a Pakistani. But that didn't work. Local languages like Bengali, but also Sindhi and Pashto, have a long history rooted in the region, have produced rich literature and many ideas and turned out to be important factors of identity to the inhabitants of Pakistani. That became clear when in 1971 East-Pakistan broke away insisting that their ethnic and cultural identity was as important as or more important than the Pakistani one. The creation of Bangladesh was a blow to the Pakistani-only definition of identity and as such a blow to *muhajir* mindset. But also in West-Pakistan ethnicity reached the surface of politics. Balochistan in the 1970ies with its claim for Baloch identity and autonomy if not independence and Pashtunistan demands came next followed by Bhutto's introduction of Sindhi as the language of teaching and of ethnicity for job quotas and reserves seats in educational institutions for Sindhis which again hit the *muhajirs* and made them

feeling wronged. The inability of sidelining ethnic and cultural identities in the regions comprising Pakistan thus put pressure upon the refugees from India to form an ethnic identity of their own – that of *muhajirs*, an imagined community speaking Urdu and identifying as ‘Pakistanis only’. This identification was as much driven by the *muhajirs* themselves who felt increasingly cornered and needed this new ethnic community for their protection and solidarity. But it was also created from the outside, from the perceptions of the local Sindhis especially who would put the label ‘*muhajir*’ on the migrants from India who today have become ‘refugees’ without a actual homeland apart from Pakistan in general in the third generation.

Thus, in a way the idea of ‘Pakistan only’, the refusal to accept and integrate regional ethnic and cultural identities into the idea of a Pakistani nation and the limitation of this nation to Urdu and Islam as identity markers have created cultural resistance against this narrow definition and are at the bottom of our today’s confusion about the Pakistani nation. The second identity marker ‘Islam’ again has created a more trouble than good because there are many forms of Islam practiced in the territory of Pakistan. Which Islam would be made the ‘official’ one? While in the history of the Islamic community there has always been a discussion about what would be the ‘right’ understanding of Islam, most of the time this was an academic discussion which would not prevent different understandings from being practiced. But the idea of Islam as an essential identify marker for the Pakistani nation and a unifying force would make our leaders put up a unified model of Islam and they chose the *Deobandi* version of it which was represented by the urban politicized *ulema*. The *Deobandi* interpretation of Islam, an outcome of 19th century revivalist efforts to go back to the roots of the Book and the teaching of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) was a rather literal interpretation of Islam for those who did have some education and were able to read the Qur’an themselves. The idea that Muslim culture and Islam in India were declining because of *bidat*

(innovations in belief and religious practice) and shirk (worshipping other than God) having crept into it resulted in a drive since the 18th c. Shah Waliullah to streamline Islamic belief and practice by forbidding and outlawing popular practices and understandings. Because of its purpose of cleansing non-Islamic elements *Deobandi* Islam is quite intolerant of any deviations. The idea as propagated by Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi (1786-1831), a disciple of Shah Waliullah's son Shah Abdul Aziz brought the *Deobandi* type of Islam into *Pashtun* territory where it survived but could not flourish under traditional tribal set-up¹⁹ until this set-up was destroyed in the wake of the Afghan warfare since the 1980ies. The streamlining effort of *Deobandi* Islam was supported by the newly created Pakistani state when it adopted this version as the 'official' one and introduced it into the curricula, public debate and media. It promoted a culture of religious intolerance not only against non-Muslims but also against certain sects and practices of Muslims like *Shias*, *Ahmadiyas*, different *sufi* practices, shrine and saint worship and others; intolerance that in the face of declining law and order, the militarization of society and the uncontrolled influx of people and weapons into Karachi has brought us to where we are right now.

Practical steps towards stabilizing the Karachi situation

Changing the mind sets of Pakistani people, changing the curriculum or opening a debate on the exclusive *deobandi* interpretation of Islam is a long-term project. It may take rather decades than years to show any results. But people are dying now and the security situation has to be addressed now before the total collapse of the state. Therefore, what can be done right now?

There are always voices that are calling for the army to step in and take over responsibility for law and order in Karachi. We heard such demand in summer 2011 when the large killing of MQM was going on and we are hearing it again these days. But this is neither in the interest of the government nor in that of the

Pakistan army. The government would have to admit its failure to bring law and order to Pakistan's largest city and that just a couple of months before the expiry of their term and the next elections. And the army is busy in so many places including their actions in Fata and Balochistan and taking over a city like Karachi would be a responsibility they would like to avoid saying also it was the civilian government who created the mess let them sort it out.

Next comes the idea to give sweeping powers to the rangers and the police. The rangers have been in Karachi for more than two decades now and their performance in the past has not been always up to the mark. We remember them being unable to check entrance of armed youth to the Karachi university campus where they are in charge of security for the last many years. There have also been reports of rangers standing by while attacks on the muharram procession in Karachi in 2009 was going on. Therefore, sweeping powers to rangers is not going to be a solution. The actual force that is responsible for law and order in Karachi is the Sindh police. But we all know that there is not enough police force available, often police is used for VIP duties instead of service of the people of Karachi. The service structure of the police is inadequate and police men are underpaid and overstressed. In addition, the police force which should be a neutral law enforcing agency has been increasingly politicized by political appointments. In November this year senators were demanding a mass transfer of police force from Karachi because of their political affiliations in the city²⁰. Given this situation, depolitization of the police forces, a reform of the service structure and pay raise might give new motivation to the police in Sindh. The question if it should be under the local government or the provincial government is less intriguing when the police is not taking sides politically.

As we have been saying before, ethnicity and ethnic identities and strains between ethnic groups are going to stay in near future at least. In order to smoothen those tensions the Supreme Court

of Pakistan, an institution that has proven to be aware of the ground realities in other cases also, has observed in its recommendations to avoid political polarization in Karachi that "boundaries of administrative units like police stations... ought to be altered so that members of different (ethnic) communities may live together in peace".²¹ What the SC meant was that boundaries of police stations and of constituencies should be redrawn on the basis of administrative utility only and not succumb to notions of an area belonging to this or that party or ethnic group.

Another demand that has been raised in this regard by different political parties and individuals is the dewatering of Karachi or of Pakistan for that matter. While this is clearly not an easy task to fulfill, it takes a political decision to begin with by all the political stakeholders in Karachi to support such a move and in the first place to dissolve the own armed units of the different parties. Another step would have to be, to stop the influx of weapons into Karachi.

There is a growing number of militants and armed religious groups including *taleban* present in Karachi that is disturbing the peace of the city increasingly. While this fact is connected to the larger situation in Pakistan still there should be measures taken beyond the already mentioned dewatering. Karachi is a port city and an economic hub of Pakistan and South Asia, a place that needs to be open to all regardless of their political, religious or ethnic affiliations and ideas. One new idea could be to devise a 'charter of Karachi' that makes Karachi a special area and lays down certain rules to be observed by those who temporarily or for a longer time want to enter the city or settle down. When you enter a market place business, that means sellers, buyers, producers and consumers should respect the openness of that place as a precondition for its functioning. We could define Karachi as such a place a port city with trade and commerce as the main destination open to all with special status to promote economic activity. For that infrastructure has to be provided and

special rules like tax relaxation or others but in order for people to avail of this special opportunity certain rules are to be observed like no weapons are allowed and a strong local government directly from the local people could take care of governance.

It is quite clear that restoring law and order in Karachi is not easy and it will take time. But given its importance for the whole of Pakistan and the South Asian region as such the effort has to be made.

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