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Whose city is it anyway? Contested Citizenship in Karachi

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Abstract

Karachi, a city of migrants in Pakistan, is a socially and politically polarized metropolis. Thus, it is mired with inter-ethnic conflicts. Each group claims their right to the city is superior to others'. Muhajirs claim that they made sacrifices for the creation of Pakistan and make up the majority; hence, they have more rights over the city than others. Sindhis and Balochs see themselves as the Indigenous population, as they founded the port city, while Pashtuns and Punjabis suggest they contributed to the city's economy. These diverging claims result in the contestation over both city and citizenship in the city. This contested citizenship intersects with power politics in Karachi, marked by extreme violence and ethnic hatred. This paper evaluates the nature of contested citizenship against historical developments in Karachi. It argues that the divergent paths of each ethnic group, leading to same city, have created multiple competing claims on the city, resulting in one group cancelling the claims of the others. Ultimately, citizenship itself has become contested.

Keywords: Contested citizenship, Sindhis, Muhajirs, Karachi, Pashtuns, Punjabis

Introduction

Most of the history of citizenship, and hence scholarship on citizenship, has focused on citizens' struggles to expand citizenship based on inclusion, equality, and equal treatment before the law.[1] While citizenship has remained a problematic concept throughout history, developments in international law have helped create an ideal form of citizenship for a society to aspire to, in which every community member stands equal without distinction.[2] However, in practice, citizenship remains deeply problematic. Inequalities based on income, race, gender, and migration status are prevalent everywhere.[3] Both citizens and non-citizens have contested such inequalities through peaceful or insurgent politics and helped reconfigure and broaden the definition of citizenship to include new groups and new rights within it.[4] Yet, the ontology of citizenship is dialogically paradoxically as the claims of inclusion somehow result in the creation of 'others', hence exclusion.[5] This paradox is conspicuous in Karachi, Pakistan, where ethnic groups' claims over the right to the city are replete with ethnic hatred and exclusion of one other. While the state of Pakistan recognizes and gives them all equal social, political, and economic rights, these rights become contested, as different ethnic groups do not recognize each other's belonging to the city and hence argue that their opponent groups should not have any social, political, and economic rights within the city. Often, such contestations become violent and create instability within the city, generating national concerns. These exclusion claims run deep into history and are based on a group's 'year of migration' to the city. Hence, some claims to the right to the city become seen as superior to others, even though all residing in Karachi are formally recognised citizens of the country. Migration and race

[1] Holston 2008a; Isin 1997; Taylor 1989
[2] Džankić and Vink 2022
[3] Holston and Appadurai 1996
[4] Holston 2008b; Holston and Appadurai 1996; Isin 1997, 2000; Taylor 1989; Turner 1990
[5] Isin 2008

scholarship points out that socio-economic status, time of migration, and place of birth play a role in dividing communities even when they belong to same race or community.[6] We see the same happening in Karachi, as most residents belong to same nation and follow the same religion, but do not recognize each other's right to the city. This results in a kind of "spectrum of otherness determining the levels of belonging" to the city.[7] In short, the citizenship status gets reclassified and reconfigured in Karachi.

These contestations are peculiar and curious cases. They are not contestations between citizens and non-citizens, citizens and new migrants (legal or illegal), or citizens and refugees, as is more often the case in Europe, the Americas, or Asia. They happen between legally recognised citizens of the country. Many are economic migrants to the city from various parts of the country. Others migrated from India at the time of Partition and were recognised as legal citizens of the new state of Pakistan. Why do these ethnic groups engage in such exclusionary politics, and how do they conduct these politics? This paper tries to evaluate these questions. The citizenship scholarship shows that cities have remained the arena where citizenship struggles have occurred historically.[8] From this perspective, Karachi has shaped citizenship but has also been shaped by various groups' struggles with citizenship. Scholarly inquiries on Karachi have increased in the last decade, highlighting some citizenship struggles.[9] However, they have not theorised linkages between ethnicity, territory, and citizenship in Karachi. This paper tries to bridge that gap.

The first section of this paper presents an overview of distinct types of contested citizenship covered in the scholarship while also explaining what contested citizenship is for this paper. The following section defines the historical developments in Karachi to set the background in which the contested citizenship emerges in Karachi. While Karachi has several ethnic

[6] Aquino, Kathiravelu, and Mitchell 2022
[7] Aquino et al. 2022
[8] Holston and Appadurai 1996; Isin 1997
[9] Gayer 2014; Inskeep 2011; Khan 2010; Verkaaik 2004

and religious groups, I focus on three groups: Sindhis, Muhajirs and Pashtuns. I theorize these three groups as Indigenous citizens (Sindhis), migrant citizens (Muhajirs), and citizen-migrants (Pashtuns), and explain their positionality in Karachi. These positionalities define the citizenship politics they follow or are attributed with. The following section presents the many ways in which the contested citizenship manifests itself in practice. After sharing different patterns of contested citizenship, the section shares one case study where Karachi became hostage to a political party.

Theorising contested citizenship in Karachi

How can we theorise the exclusionary citizenship politics in Karachi? Citizenship scholarship shows that the concept of citizenship has been used and abused by the state and citizen groups alike to create hierarchical societies.[10] However, historical developments have broadened citizenship's definition to include unrecognised groups and rights.[11] As a result, citizenship's ambit now includes social, political, and economic rights. Nevertheless, many groups were still left out either from the legal definitions or through implementation – for example, women were not allowed to vote, American Africans did not have many citizenship rights, apartheid excluded certain ethnic groups in South Africa, and the social and political rights of sexual minorities were unrecognised in multiple nations. In these cases, social groups have contested such policies and expanded the definition of citizenship.[12] In other cases, there is a difference between legally granted and substantive citizenship, creating social and economic inequalities.[13] Citizens have also contested such regimes of unequal citizenship and improved substantive citizenship. Still, in other cases, new migrants have often found established citizenship

[10] Isin 1997; Taylor 1989

[11] Chan and Tang 2019; Holston and Appadurai 1996; Isin 1997, 2008; Taylor 1989; Turner 1990

[12] Chan and Tang 2019; Holston and Appadurai 1996; Isin 1997, 2008; Taylor 1989; Turner 1990

[13] Holston 2008b; Isin 2008; Taylor 1989; Turner 1990

definitions as barriers to citizenship rights, especially where they follow different cultural practices than the dominant groups in their new country residence.[14] These include Muslims or Hindu migrants in the Americas or Europe not having the right to carry out their religious practices or establish mosques/temples for considerable period. There are also variations in how waves of migrants are treated as citizens, with more recent migrants treated differently to earlier migrants, even when they originate from the same place.[15] In other words, migrants must endure a perpetual struggle to get recognition of their rights. All of these are examples of contested citizenship where different groups have struggled with established citizenship definitions and have produced more inclusion in most cases.

Decolonisation has also produced struggles and contestations of citizenship. As British decided to leave India, they divided India into two countries: India and Pakistan.[16] Creation of Pakistan was based on the popular demand of the Muslim League, a party of Muslims of India, that Muslim majority provinces should become a country for Muslims.[17] Hence, the British divided India into two countries, which created peculiar challenges for citizenship.[18] Scholarship shows that many citizens remained in limbo over their citizenship status in the new countries of India and Pakistan. Many Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs did not want to leave their ancestral homes because borders were demarcated on religious lines, with India for Hindus and Pakistan for Muslims.[19] However, the violence around partition forced many to reconsider their choices, with many temporarily moving across borders. When the violence receded, they wanted to return to their ancestral homes, irrespective of their

[14] Alexander 2011; Ansari and Gould 2019; Džankić and Vink 2022; Isin and Myer Seimiatycki 2002; Razack 2002

[15] Aquino et al. 2022

[16] Ambedkar 1945; Khan 2017; Pandey 2001

[17] Jaffrelot 2015. As space is limited, I am presenting a condensed version of the demand. The discussions for governance and partition of India post British were more nuanced.

[18] Redclift 2013; Roy 2013; Zamindar 2007

[19] Redclift 2013; Roy 2013; Zamindar 2007

religion. However, their citizenship was contested, as many Muslims were not accepted back in India, while Pakistan did not welcome back many Sikhs and Hindus, and asked them to go to a country that aligned with their religion.[20] So, as Zamindar states, many people remained contested citizens in this extended partition. Likewise, when Bangladesh was created as a separate state, breaking away from Pakistan after civil war in 1970s, many people who had left India for Pakistan and were residing in Bangladesh, came to be considered non-citizens, as West Pakistan was now Bangladesh. These contested citizenships took decades to be settled, creating an almost permanent state of statelessness.[21]

These postcolonial contestations were rooted in the colonial project, which created racial and social groups (and native and non-native categories) to justify colonisers' domination and rule over native peoples.[22] This division did not disappear after the colonial rule was over. It instead manifested in different ways. One such manifestation of this postcolonial social segregation is present in Karachi, which the scholarship mentioned above has not yet captured. In most of the above cases, states do not recognize certain groups as members of the society and deny them either full citizenship or certain rights as citizens. Hence, social groups have contested the notions of the state's exclusionary citizenship and have them redefined.

However, in Karachi, we can notice a contestation that may not neatly fit these typical definitions of contested citizenship. Citizenship is not challenged in Karachi to expand it, but to restrict it. Its redefinition is aimed at excluding some citizen groups. It is not merely a contestation between migrants and local/indigenous groups. It is also a struggle between various migrant groups, whereby one migrant group thinks they are superior to other migrant groups. Another difference is that often-contested citizenship claims are made upon the state. In this case, these

[20] Redclift 2013; Roy 2013; Zamindar 2007
[21] Redclift 2013; Zamindar 2007
[22] Sharma 2020

groups move in and out of the state apparatus, using such access to state power to exclude other groups. These efforts are not often legal but centred around using formal and informal forces to exclude other groups. This exclusion is based on the different claims on the city by different ethnic groups. These politics intersect with the use of violence by ethnic groups against each other.

Hence, these politics are violent exclusionary citizenship politics. I call this exclusionary because one group thinks that other do not belong to Karachi and should leave the city. For example, Sindhis raise the claim that Muhajirs do not belong to the city and should leave. Likewise, Muhajirs think Pashtuns should leave the city as they are not locals, while Pashtuns believe they have helped build the city and they should not leave. Sometimes, Sindhis also think Pashtuns do not belong to Karachi and should go to back to the province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa or, in the case of Pashtun refugees, to Afghanistan. Hence, each group is trying to cancel the citizenship of the other, even though the state of Pakistan recognises them all, except the refugees, as citizens of Karachi. This conception differs from militant citizenship or insurgent citizenship politics, where scholars have theorised using some violent activities to expand citizenship as militant or insurgent.[23] The violent politics in Karachi are focused on exclusion rather than inclusion. They are narrow, where some groups use force to retain the city for themselves. These exclusionary politics are theorised here as contested citizenship.

Overview of the main ethnic groups in Karachi

Karachi is a multi-ethnic metropolis with a population of sixteen million, reflecting almost all of Pakistan's social diversity within the city. As an economic hub, it contributes around 25% to Pakistan's GDP and 60% to tax collections.[24] The social configuration of Karachi has changed over the years. At the time of Partition in 1947, Karachi's population comprised

[23] Holston 2008b
[24] Gayer 2014

of Sindhis (both Hindus and Muslims), Balochs, and Parsis.[25] However, Partition brought a massive influx of Muslim migrants from northern India (now known as Muhajirs, the Urdu word for migrants). The economic attraction to the city and geopolitical conditions, such as the Afghan war, saw subsequent migration waves to the city. The rapid population growth made Karachi an 'instant city', since, in a matter of just 20 years, from 1941 to 1961[26], it recorded a population increase of over 400%, growing from 400,000 to 2,044,044 – a situation found in very few other cities.[27] As a result, migrants dominate Karachi's population, with Muhajirs constituting the majority, representing around 70% in the 1950s, over 50% in the 1970s, and over 42% as per the 2018 census. Pashtuns and Punjabis are the other significant ethnic groups in Karachi, whereas Sindhis and Balochs have become ethnic minorities.[28]

These ethnic groups all have certain historical statuses and contexts, shaping who they are and their claims regarding their citizenship status in Karachi. Hence, it is essential to explain these historical backgrounds.

The Muhajirs – the migrant-citizens

The Muhajirs came from India's northern parts. They came to Pakistan following the partition of British into the states of India and Pakistan. The partition resulted in significant violence between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, and many Muslims were forced to leave India for Pakistan. I call these people 'migrant-citizens' because most of them did not live in Karachi before the partition. They came to Karachi because of violence. As such, they make distinct claims about Karachi because they sacrificed their ancestral homes in India and came to be part of Pakistan. They also constituted the majority of the leadership of the Muslim League,

[25] Gayer 2014; Hasan 1999
[26] Inskeep 2011
[27] Gayer 2007, 2014
[28] Gazdar and Mallah 2013

the party which led the movement to create Pakistan. Many Mujahirs believe their leadership gave Muslims their new country, so they should have superior claims to citizenship over others.

The word 'Muhajir' in Urdu means a migrant, and initially, it was used because these people migrated from India to Pakistan.[29] Muhajirs took pride in this as they thought they had sacrificed their homes for the new country. Muhajir also has a religious connotation, as it is associated with Prophet Muhammed, who had migrated from Makkah to Madina and came to be called a Muhajir. Hence, Muhajirs and the local population initially used the word positively.[30] However, this was soon to change.

The migration of Muhajirs to Pakistan was associated with their strong belief in the idea of Pakistan as a separate homeland for Muslims – a state for an imagined Muslim nation.[31] They also constituted the majority of the leadership in the Muslim League. The country's foundational concept was based on religious ideology: that Pakistan will be a Muslim state where all Muslims will enjoy equal rights, compared to British India, where Muslims feared third-class citizenship status (with British and Hindus being first and second classes respectively).[32] Muhajirs came to Pakistan with an intense sense of belonging to the country and with a sense of Muslim religious identity, with the idea of one Muslim nation at the centre of that identity.[33] They believed local Muslims in the new country would follow this ideology. Since they were in the leadership, they started imposing this one-nation ideology in the new country. Part of this policy was the imposition of Urdu, the native language of many Muhajirs, as an official language of the state as that would unify the entire nation as its lingua franca. Sindhis, Bengalis, and other ethnic groups resisted this, preferring that all their native languages be given the status of official

[29] Gayer 2014
[30] Gayer 2014; Verkaaik 2004
[31] Gayer 2014; Khan 2005; Verkaaik 2004
[32] Jaffrelot 2015
[33] Gayer 2014; Verkaaik 2004

languages of the state.[34] Their demands were also rooted in the Pakistan resolution, which imagined a federal country where the provinces would have autonomy. However, Muhajirs considered this to be parochial thinking and something that would go against the ideology of creating Pakistan as a Muslim nation, as it would divide Muslims into ethnic groups.[35] As Muhajirs were in leadership, had left their homes in India for Pakistan, and considered themselves better educated than most locals, they came to have a sense of privilege and wanted to pursue the one-state policy. Therefore, they thought that the imposition of one language would help them achieve this one-nation goal.

But reality soon hit them hard, as the local populations saw themselves along ethnic lines. They wanted their ethnicities to be recognised and the promise of the federal country to be followed in letter and spirit. This ultimately created problems for Muhajirs, explained later in this section.

Sindhis – the indigenous-citizens

On the other hand, Sindhis were the local population that has lived in Sindh province and its capital Karachi for centuries, long before Pakistan and even the homogeneous conception of India.[36] They draw their roots from the five-thousand-year-old Indus Valley civilisation, with the province's UNESCO World Heritage site, Mohen jo Daro, also located here. Hence, they consider themselves to be the indigenous people of Sindh (and therefore Karachi). Therefore, I am also theorising them as 'indigenous citizens'. But this does not mean that everyone who calls themselves Sindhi is actually Sindhi. Many Balochs and Seraikis living in Sindh for centuries now call themselves Sindhis, even though they may have come to Sindh from elsewhere.[37] Sindhis have accepted them, but

[34] Talbot 2009
[35] Talbot 2009; Verkaaik 2004
[36] Khan 2005
[37] Ansari 2015

most do not accept Muhajirs as Sindhis. That is despite many generations of Muhajirs being born in Sindh and, as a result, consider themselves Sindhis, even if they support Muttahida Quomi Movement (MQM), the party that represents Muhajirs. I call this duality of Sindhis. I must also disclose here that I am a Sindhi myself.

Although the Sindh Provincial Assembly was the first to move a resolution to support the creation of Pakistan, the Sindhi leadership did not appreciate the unifying policies of the new state.[38] They came to see problems with the nation-building policy of the new state as it denied them the right to promote their Sindhi language.[39] They also did not accept the conversion of Karachi into the state capital, as it took essential resources away from the province.[40] Hence, Sindhis living in Karachi and elsewhere started to resent state policies. Since Muhajirs were pro-state policies, the resentment converted into a feeling of hatred in the political and social relationships between many Muhajirs and Sindhis.

Pashtuns – the citizen-migrants

Pashtuns have lived in Karachi since colonial times, but their emergence as a robust social group in Karachi occurred during the dictatorship of General Ayub Khan. General Khan took political control of Pakistan in the 1960s and ruled as its chief executive.[41] Khan was Pashtun himself but lacked a constituency in Karachi, being a military dictator. In a bid to create his ethnic support base in Karachi, he helped Pashtuns from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (then North West Frontier Post) to migrate to Karachi and establish transport and real estate businesses.[42] As a result, Pashtuns came to dominate these fields. In the wake of the Afghan war, many allegedly also began drug cartels, providing capital for transport and

[38] Gayer 2014; Khan 2005
[39] Khan 2005; Rahman 1996
[40] Khan 2005
[41] Gayer 2014; Talbot 2009
[42] Gayer 2014; Khan 2005; Verkaaik 2004

real estate activities, although they were not the only ones to do so.[43] Soon, Pashtuns encountered problems with the city's Muhajir population, who saw Pashtuns as threatening their livelihoods and politics.[44]

I call Pashtuns 'citizen-migrants' because most came to Karachi after Partition. However, they were already citizens of Pakistan. So, unlike Muhajirs, they did not migrate to Karachi to become citizens in the new country. They were already citizens and migrated to Karachi for political and economic reasons, so they remain part of the majority group and operate many businesses. They also brought a popular tea café culture to Karachi, which has snowballed into other cities.

Head-on collision of three groups

As the Muhajirs believed in one nation, they remained supporters of the Muslim League, the party that led the struggle to create Pakistan.[45] But when General Ayub seized power as a military dictator, he called for elections, ultimately contesting Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Muhammed Ali Jinnah. All Muhajirs came to support Fatima Jinnah, so Ayub saw Muhajirs as a threat to his power.[46] As a result, he adopted various policies which curtailed the Muhajirs' power, including supporting Pashtuns to migrate in droves to Karachi and helping them establish businesses.[47] Hence, Muhajirs saw Pashtuns as a threat and clashed with them several times.[48] The tensions reached a tipping point when, in 1980s, a bus driver ran over a school student, Bushra Bibi, who happened to be a Muhajir. The incident resulted in bloody, violent clashes between Pashtuns and Muhajirs who believed that driver was a Pashtun. The incident resulted in killing thousands in the city.[49]

[43] Gayer 2014
[44] Shaheed 1990
[45] Gayer 2014; Khan 2005; Verkaaik 2004
[46] Gayer 2014
[47] Gayer 2014
[48] Shaheed 1990
[49] Gayer 2014; Verkaaik 2004

In 1960s, General Ayub shifted Pakistan's capital from Karachi to Islamabad. As Muhajirs occupied a large share of civil service jobs, they saw this move as potentially reducing their job share (although, in practice, they did not lose many jobs).[50] Later, in the 1970s, the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a Sindhi Prime Minister, introduced two further measures that intensified conflicts between Sindhis and Muhajirs. First, Bhutto enacted civil service quotas to address Sindhis' underrepresentation in government jobs, and second, he legislated the Sindhi language as mandatory for employment and education in Sindh province.[51] Muhajirs perceived these two moves as further undermining their socio-economic security in the new state.[52] The language act, in particular, drew violence between Sindhis and Muhajirs in Karachi and Hyderabad. Muhajirs opposed both these moves and vowed to have them changed.

As different population groups clashed, the conflicts transformed the country's ideology-based politics into ethnicity-based politics. From the partition to the 1970s, Karachi's Muhajir population had mainly supported the Pakistan Muslim League and the religious-political Jamat-e-Islami (JI).[53] They considered ethnic politics parochial and believed in promoting cohesion through Islamic teachings and the idea of an Islamic state, which has, after all, been the basis for the creation of the new country.[54] Some Sindhis and Balochs also supported the Muslim League, while others turned their votes towards the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which had been founded by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in the late 1960s and espoused a more socialist narrative of equality. Some Muhajirs also supported PPP as they believed in the socialist narrative.[55] Pashtuns' vote shifted over time, changing from religious parties such as JI in the 1970s-

[50] Gayer 2014; Verkaaik 2004
[51] Gayer 2014; Hasan 1999; Verkaaik 2004
[52] Gayer 2014
[53] Gayer 2014; Nasr 1994; Verkaaik 2004
[54] Khan 2005; Siddiqui 2022
[55] Siddiqui 2022b

1990s to the Pashtun-led Awami National Party since the late 1990s.[56] On the other hand, Muhajirs came to realise that JI and PPP did not represent their issues. They saw that ethnicity had more currency in Pakistani politics, as it had helped Bangladesh gain independence and assisted other ethnic groups gain a more significant share in power and state jobs.[57] With this realisation, Muhajirs started projecting themselves as an ethnic group even though they came from various parts of British India.[58] Later, they formed the Muhajir Quami Movement (MQM, then renamed the Muttahida Quami Movement) as a party representing Muhajirs. Violence by other groups against Muhajirs helped mobilise the broader Muhajir community behind reimaging Muhajirs as an ethnic group.[59] MQM faced a violent backslash and realised it should invest in developing its violent capacities. Hence, it sent its workers for training with Mujahideen in Afghanistan and bought bulk weapons.[60] With that, they pursued an agenda for Muhajir's rights in Karachi. Much of their narrative was based on excluding other ethnic groups from Karachi or establishing Muhajir domination over the rest.

Contested Citizenship in Practice

So far, I have theorised the contested citizenship in Karachi and explained the historical background that has established these exclusionary citizenship practices. I now want to define the various patterns through which contested citizenship is manifested in Karachi. Based on empirical evidence, I have identified five ways: ethnic hatred, territorialisation, admissions to education institutions, erasure of indigenous villages, and blocking of internally displaced persons. It should be noted that these are not mutually exclusive categories and are

[56] Siddiqui 2022
[57] Gayer 2014; Verkaaik 2004
[58] Verkaaik 2004
[59] Gayer 2014; Verkaaik 2004
[60] Khan 2010

interwoven with each other. Furthermore, I also unpack a case in which the entire city of Karachi became hostage to one resident group.

Ethnic hatred

As scholarship shows, space takes racial and ethnic race colour in how it is regulated and through claims that various social groups make about it.[61] In Karachi, contestation over space evolves in a similar manner. However, the focus in Karachi is more on ethnicization of space, which leads to ethnicity-based hatred among different groups. This does not occur through legal means, but more through residents' social interactions and perceptions, such as the association of crimes with certain identities.

For example, Muhajirs and Sindhis tend to see Pashtuns in Karachi as backward tribal people engaged in criminal activities such as drug dealing, terrorism, and other crimes. Some also equate Pashtuns with the Taliban, or at least consider them to be Taliban sympathisers. However, Pashtuns are hardworking people and provide all sorts of labour to many industries and sectors in Karachi.[62] They also form a significant part of the transport sector in Karachi and throughout the rest of the country.[63]

Many Sindhis dislike Muhajirs because they support MQM, a party often involved in violence in the city. Because of this, Sindhis stereotype Muhajirs as criminals and conniving people. Whenever tensions erupt between Sindhis and Muhajirs, some Sindhis also derogatively refer to Muhajirs as refugees and taunt them to return to India.[64]

On the other hand, Muhajirs maintain their privileged position in Karachi. They still cultivate a sense of themselves as people who sacrificed their lives, livelihoods, and homes to create a new country where Muslims could live freely.[65] Muhajirs' sense of pride and privilege is also grounded

[61] Razack 2002
[62] Gayer 2014; Khan 2005
[63] Siddiqui 2022a
[64] Faiz 2021
[65] Gayer 2014; Khan 2005

in the perception that Muhajirs are better educated, hence more civilised and better qualified to run the government and get jobs in Karachi.[66] As a result, they often brand Sindhis and Pashtuns as parochial, as most Sindhis and Pashtuns come from the country's rural or tribal parts or from areas where education is less available or not as good as in Karachi.

This tit-for-tat ethnic hatred takes away much historical context and goes against reality, as most of the groups trace their roots back to old civilisations and rich cultural histories. Sindhis are descendants of the Indus Valley civilisation, with a rich history of arts and literature full of philosophy and wisdom.[67] Likewise, Pashtuns come from a region full of Gandhara civilisation remains, including a centuries-old university founded by the Buddha. In response to the overlooking of this historical heritage, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan – often referred to as 'the Pashtun Gandhi' – once said, "I have been a Muslim for 1400 years, Pakistani for only 30 years, but a Pashtun for thousands of years."[68] Sindhi leader Jam Saqi repeated the same sentiment when he said, "I have been a Muslim for 1400 years, Pakistani for only 30 years, but a Sindhi for five thousand years" during a military trial. Likewise, Muhajirs have contributed much to the art and literature of their regions in India.[69] Their contributions to Urdu poetry and music are immense and well-documented. They have also contributed immensely to Karachi as have other groups.

Despite these long histories, the unfortunate situation in Karachi leads to ethnic hatred against each other, which makes citizenship contested.

Territorialisation

Territorialisation has a two-fold manifestation in Karachi. The first is the Muhajirs' demand to convert Karachi into a province that belongs to

[66] Gayer 2014
[67] Faiz 2021; Khan 2005
[68] Khan 2005
[69] Gayer 2014

Muhajirs. This argument parallels the reality that most ethnicities in Pakistan have their 'own' regions: Sindhis have Sindh, Punjabis have Punjab, Pashtuns have Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochs have Balochistan. In response, some Muhajirs demand that, since they imagine themselves as an ethnicity, Karachi should be made a province for Muhajirs.[70] In doing so, they ignore the historical facts that Sindhis, Balochs, and Pashtuns have already lived in the regions for centuries. Many of these provinces existed before the British unified them as India; some were independent states on their own.[71]

These Muhajir demands are deeply controversial for Sindhis, who have seen Karachi as the historical capital of Sindh province, an important economic hub that houses many state resources as the provincial capital.[72] If Karachi becomes a province of its own, Sindhis will lose an essential part of their identity, as well as many resources. Yes, some Muhajirs have repeatedly used demand of a separate province as a political tactic, and even when they are not actively pursuing these demands, they refer to Karachi as an independent entity without any connection to Sindh province. They often talk about Karachi as a separate city and refer to the rest of Sindh as 'interior Sindh', as if Karachi is outside Sindh province. Overall, the situation places Karachi as an ethnicity-based territory, with Muhajirs and Sindhis defining their identities through the city.

The second form of territorialisation happens through turf wars in Karachi, which have roots in the state's failure to provide certain services to people.[73] Massive and rapid population growth in Karachi has created enormous demands on the government to provide social services such as housing, water, and sanitation.[74] However, the state has not been able to fulfil these needs, and, as a result, land mafias have facilitated informal settlements for Karachi's residents. However, such localities face

[70] Gayer 2014; Talbot 2009; Verkaaik 2004
[71] Khan 2017
[72] Khan 2005
[73] Yusuf 2012
[74] Hasan 1999

existentialist crises, as most were created without formal governmental approval.[75] Political parties and governments saw an opportunity to win the loyalty of residents of informal settlements: acting in concert with these mafias, they would help give governmental approval to these settlements if residents supported them.[76] To show their seriousness, parties used their access to the government to provide essential services like roads, electricity, and water to these settlements.[77] This patronage by political parties helped win residents' support; they would often mark these territories as their own turf and spread their party network within them. They would also charge residents and businesses extortion money, bringing massive economic benefits and helping parties to run their offices, electoral campaigns, and violent cadres.[78]

Besides economic gains, parties also use their turf for political outcomes. They treat these areas as their private fiefdoms and expect the residents to vote for them. Parties ensure this by regularly surveilling residents through violent gangs. When parties sense that residents may not vote for them, they resort to intimidating voters, killing opponents, and capturing polling stations.[79] If supporters of opposition parties live in these neighbourhoods, major parties can even force them to leave these areas, as shifting even just a few hundred votes could swing electoral results for or against a party.[80]

While many political parties use these tactics in Karachi, none have absolute control. However, MQM has outdone others, successfully winning the majority of elections and vote share from the city.[81] It has also secured power-sharing in successive governments and consolidated territorial control and violent capacities using its consecutive participation in

[75] Budhani et al. n.d.; Gazdar and Mallah 2013
[76] Gayer 2014; Siddiqui 2022; Yusuf 2012
[77] Gazdar and Mallah 2013
[78] Siddiqui 2022; Yusuf 2012
[79] Siddiqui 2022
[80] Yusuf 2012
[81] Gayer 2014

governments. As a result, Karachi citizens began to fear MQM, effectively enabling MQM to wield the power of shutting down the entire city through a single call for protest.

Erasing villages to remove indigenous populations

While we categorise Karachi as a metropolis and urban area, it also houses old villages which maintain a traditional outlook. These villages are home to populations, who have lived them for hundreds of years. Part of these contested citizenship struggles have led to efforts to remove these old populations. At face value, the dislocation of villages was based on the pretext of pursuing development in Karachi. In fact, the initiatives were politically motivated and mainly undertaken when MQM, the Muhajir-led party, was in power between 2002 and 2008. During this period, Parvez Musharaf ruled the country, and MQM was his close ally. Musharraf gave MQM almost free reign in Karachi in return for their absolute loyalty and supporting his government coalition government. With such authority, MQM tried to use their power to erase some of the old villages and made several plans to do so. However, Musharraf had installed a Sindhi as a Chief Minister in Sindh province, and MQM needed his approval to remove these villages. The Chief Minister would not approve such plans: as Sindhis occupied most of these villages, he saw these plans as erasing Sindhis from Karachi. Hence, he blocked these moves by MQM. "I was misinformed and was briefed that they are removing encroachments. I was never told that they are demolishing centuries-old villages," the Chief Minister had said after visiting a site where MQM's Mayor in Karachi had ordered bulldozing.[82]

[82] Ansari 2007

Education

Karachi's university campuses were where spates of violence and ethnic conflict started back in the 1970s.[83] Since the beginning, ethnically-aligned political groups have maintained student wings within public universities in the city. Using them, they have regulated university spaces in several ways, including through controlling university admissions, allotment of hostel rooms, and student body activities. Muhajirs' efforts to form a political party accelerated after the party's eventual founder, Altaf Hussain, was denied admission to Karachi University.[84] Other founders have also shared stories of not being admitted to Karachi's universities because they were Muhajirs. While MQM's initial struggles included forming a party that helped them gain admission to Karachi's universities, as the party gained both formal and informal power, it reversed the trend. Through access to power and violence, MQM took control of the spaces of Karachi University. It placed party loyalists to secure key management positions within Karachi University, and through this, it has influenced the university's admission policy. A vital feature of this policy is denying admission to Sindhis, with policy requirements used as an excuse. Karachi University follows a quota scheme in its admissions whereby it gives first preference to residents of Karachi. To prove residence in Karachi, people have to secure a domicile document which is only given if you can prove long term resident in Karachi. Next, there are reservations for people not living in Karachi.[85] Then, there is a merit-based quota for outstanding students. However, Muhajir officials at Karachi University often use ethnicity data from the admission forms to deny admission to Sindhi students.[86] When MQM was in-charge of government, it denied many Sindhis admission in Karachi's institutions as they could not show local

[83] Gayer 2014
[84] Gayer 2014; Verkaaik 2004
[85] Ahmed 2012; Ghori 2016
[86] Ahmed 2012; Ghori 2016

residence.[87]The move is related to Muhajirs' efforts to retain their dominance of Karachi, as more Sindhis coming to Karachi could mean that Muhajirs' will lose their hold of the city. By refusing admission to Sindhis, they think that Sindhis will go to other cities in search of education.

Blocking internally-displaced persons

Pakistan has faced several natural and human-made disasters over the past two decades. These included the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the 2009 security operations against Taliban in Swat and related areas, and the 2010 and 2022 floods. These emergencies displaced thousands of people, many of whom wanted to go to Karachi, as they had relatives who could provide shelter or because they could find economic opportunities to rebuild their lives.[88] But both Sindhis and Muhajirs tried to block the migration of internally displaced persons to Karachi.[89] While Sindhis supported flood-affected people in the rest of the province of Sindh to come to Karachi if they wanted, they disapproved of people from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or Punjab migrating to the city. Sindhis' opposition to migrants from outside Sindh lies in their fear that more migrants would deepen Sindhis' minority status in Karachi. Likewise, Muhajirs were afraid of losing their majority status if Karachi's Pashtun or Punjabi population grew further.[90]

Case study: Lawyers' Movement and the 12 May 2007 Incident

The lawyers' movement highlights another way in which citizenship rights became contested in the streets of Karachi. It also shows another side of this right to the city and the exclusion of other citizens' right to the city. Other citizens of the country – including some influential political and social leaders, such as Imran Khan and former Chief Justice of the

[87] Faiz 2021
[88] Ashfaq 2019
[89] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2014
[90] The Nation 2009

Supreme Court of Pakistan, Chaudhary Iftikhar – were blocked from entering Karachi.[91] This case study is chosen because it demonstrates that the various elements of contested citizenship converge around each other. It also shows how the various ethnic groups living in the city came to fight with each other. Pashtuns, Balochs, and Sindhis supported the lawyers' movement, while Muhajirs led MQM wanted to block the Chief Justice's entry to Karachi.

In the heydays of his power, General Parvez Musharaf deposed Chaudhary Iftikhar, then Chief Justice, and several other Supreme Court judges when the judges denied assenting Musharaf's emergency proclamation. The deposition sparked a lawyers' movement for the restoration of judges and the independence of the judiciary. The movement received widespread mass support, and Iftikhar came to spearhead the campaign. Many opposition political parties also supported the lawyers' movement. As the movement grew, its leadership organised long marches and protests in cities across the country. Showing support in Karachi often remains a critical litmus test for proving the validity of leaders' and movements' political and social popularity.[92] So, the campaign chose to perform a show of power in Karachi on 12 May 2007. Imran Khan, Iftikhar, and several other prominent leaders spoke out to encourage people to support the rally in Karachi and stated they would attend and speak at the rally.

At this time, MQM, the Muhajir-led party, was running affairs in the city through the Mayor of Karachi (an MQM politician), and had a substantial share Ministries in the provincial administration. Musharaf did not want Chaudhary to succeed in Karachi, and he entrusted MQM to do whatever it could to ensure the movement's rally in Karachi failed[93]. MQM vowed to block the entry of Iftikhar, Khan, and other critical leaders into Karachi.

[91] Abb Takk News 2019
[92] Gayer 2014
[93] Abb Takk News 2019, Gayer 2014

As MQM and Musharraf had influence over the leadership of Karachi airport, they used their contacts to stop these leaders upon arrival. Some MQM activists also clashed with other parties' activists, who were going in their thousands to the airport to receive the deposed judges and other leaders.[94] This sparked violence between MQM and these groups. As Musharraf had liberalised the media in Pakistan, news channels began covering this big day and reporting that MQM activists were inflicting violence on other parties. MQM tried to block this coverage, and many although channels complied, one channel, Aaj News, did not comply and openly showed MQM's highhandedness in Karachi. MQM activists allegedly attacked Aaj News' office and injured their staff[95].

With the city on fire and the movement's leadership stuck inside Karachi airport, the rally could not proceed. But 50 people died, and many hundreds were injured in the clashes[96]. The city also experienced unprecedented rates of vandalism[97].

While this case might seem extreme, it showcases how citizens and popular leadership were blocked from entering Karachi. It shows how the right to the city and violent monopoly over it can be used to exclude and stop even a popular and influential social movement that had made Musharraf's survival hard. MQM later apologised for the 12 May carnage in Karachi, even though it had previously denied its involvement in the incidents[98].

Conclusion

The case of contested citizenship in Karachi shows that formal citizenship does not guarantee people of Karachi a sense of security and equality. As the empirical evidence provided in this article indicates,

[94] Abb Takk News 2019
[95] Ibid.
[96] Dawn.Com 2018
[97] Ibid
[98] Express Tribune 2022

Karachi has become a place where a diverse population resides, and everyone thinks they have a right to the city. Still, many deny other ethnic groups the same right to live in the city. As a result, groups repeatedly call on others to leave Karachi. This situation has led to violence, making Karachi a hotspot of daily violence, even earning the reputation of being the bloodiest city in Pakistan. While violence has receded in recent years, it remains one of the most dangerous places of Pakistan to live. Part of this problem lies in these ethnic tensions and contestations over who are the city's residents. These are grounded in historical inequalities, which if addressed may help bring lasting positive change to the city.

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