

Discursive Participation and Group Polarization on Facebook: The Curious Case of Pakistan’s Nationalism and Identity

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This article examines how online discussions negotiate radicalism or pluralism in the context of national identities, where nationalism and religiosity often overlap. Grounded in three schools of thoughts (i.e., the Islamist, the pluralist, and the nation-statist), this article employs multimodal discourse analyses on 210 posts to gauge discursive practices in these online spaces. Using Muslim-majority states like Pakistan as a case study, this article finds that the three schools of thought draw on complex, multilayered, and nuanced themes to arbitrate notions of “Pakistaniness,” especially the more conservative or far-right Islamic spheres. As empirical evidence suggests, nationalist expressions emerge through the performance of collective culture, visual symbols, military fetishism, gendered construction of nationhood, and hypernationalism. By exploring the digital practices and discourses in three Facebook communities, this article confirms the presence of the echo chamber phenomenon in Pakistani social media with great potential toward group polarization for more conservative strata of society. Last, we find that a Muslim identity remains the most important marker of being a Pakistani, whereas radicalization has drawn legitimacy from anti-India rhetoric.

Keywords: online communities, discourse, nationalism, polarization, radicalism, Pakistan, echo chamber

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The Internet is deemed as a proactive vector for radicalization and extremist ideologies and, in effect, concretizes preexisting beliefs by way of homophily or group polarization. Sunstein (2001) claims that the Internet has abetted polarization and people predominantly seek viewpoints to which they already subscribe, hence forming an echo chamber of already formed political orientations. On the other hand, the potential of digital media in reinvigorating the practice of citizenship and political participation of hitherto marginalized identities cannot be denied as it gives people the space to voice their opinions due to the interactive nature of social media (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009). It is in this context that one is witnessing the rise of a digital public in Muslim-majority states like Pakistan and social media users are increasingly shaping their own isolated online publics.

This article focuses on the nature of political discourse while examining Facebook communities, using a critical discourse analytical approach to theorize how Pakistanis use social media platforms in their performance of religiosity, nationalism, and identity politics. After outlining three conceptual frameworks, that is, the school of thoughts: Islamist, pluralist, and nation-statist to exemplify the master narrative of leading ideologies in the country, three Facebook communities were identified corresponding to each school of thought. As our methodology, we employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) by adapting Wodak, de Cillia, and Reisigl's (2009) work and drawing on multimodal discourse theory (van Leeuwen & Kress, 2011) on Facebook data. By imagining language and expressions as a social construct and deeming nationalism as a discourse, wherein national identities are discursively constructed, this article investigates discursive practices on Facebook. It examines how an emerging Pakistani digital public is employing new affordances of the platform as they interact, negotiate, and construct narratives or counternarratives on nationalism and radicalism. By investigating digitally mediated discursive practices that are drawn through visuals and texts, intertextuality and interdiscursivity, dichotomy of ingroups and outgroups, and finally through gendered constructions of nationhood, this article explains the nuances and logics behind Pakistani national identities and the state of group polarization in these predetermined ideological Facebook spheres.

The study finds that discourse among Facebook users in the *Islamist* and *nation-statist* framework respectively shows greater group polarization as opposed to the *pluralists*. The former two demonstrate propensity for extremist discourse, an antiminorities stance, self-proclaimed Islamic identity, contempt for "others," pan-Islamism, and ethnonationalist ideas. The article confirms the notion that just as much as Islam is the binding force for Pakistanis, so is anti-Indianism as the default option for national cohesion. Although the study shows a positive side of social media use by pluralists, as they construct a progressive, moderate character of the nation to differentiate themselves from the extremist version of Islam and nation, the way social media have been used by Islamists and nation-statists, in the master narrative to underpin orthodox religiosity and nationalist agendas, far exceeds its positive sides.

A Public Sphere: Rethinking Discursive Practices

In the last decade, researchers have investigated the relationship between political discussions and social networking sites (Ho & McLeod, 2008; Smith & Bressler, 2013). Internet and social media platforms enable users to collaborate, discuss political issues, and generate content because of their interactive nature (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2016). User-generated content has enabled opportunities for user aggregation around common interests, worldviews, and narratives (Del Vicario et al., 2015). Many have

debated the rise of a virtual public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002), which has centrally revolved around the concept of the public sphere (Dahlberg, 2001). But the Habermasian public sphere has long been critiqued for neglecting various *counterpublics* (Fraser, 1990) and its specific focus on rationality as a precondition for deliberative practices of democracy (Papacharissi, 2015). As Papacharissi (2015) has argued, affect plays a far more important role in online conversations, which has led to the rise of affective publics.

These critiques of Habermas expand the concept of public sphere as it can be reimagined as a space with competing publics, and social media provide relatively easier access to this networked public sphere. It is relevant for pluralistic societies with socioeconomic inequalities like Pakistan; the public sphere tends to be dominated both in action and ideas by privileged groups, and through that logic may be supposed monolithic. In the context of the "digital," it may be that equal access is the same for all, but differences in resources make access easier for some than for others (Young, 2000, p. 171). For postcolonial scholars like Partha Chatterjee, the subaltern, and the marginalized communities, belong in the peripheries of any political society and are often ignored by the state and the civil society (Kaviraj & Khilnani, 2001).

But according to Fuchs (2014), society and social media face antagonism between networked protest communication that creates political spheres (both online and offline) and "the particularistic corporate or state control of social media that limits, feudalizes, and colonizes these public spheres" (p. 89). Challenging classical liberalism's major assumptions with these antagonisms, he further elaborates that contemporary social media do not fully form a public sphere, as they are controlled by corporations and the state (perhaps more relevant in Pakistan's case), which occupy and thereby destroy the public sphere potentials afforded by social media technologies (Fuchs, 2014). In the context of narratives and political actions, media logics have become so prevalent that both state and society are drawn into recursive media as sites and networks of symbolic production (Udupa & McDowell, 2017).

A Longing for Identity

The question of Pakistan's national identity has been a complicated one since its inception in 1947. This is largely because of identities of exclusion, where particular concern is given to the extent to which conceptions are likely to "exclude" those characterized by "difference" in terms of their national or ethnic origins (Bond, 2006). In its desire to create a unified Islamic nation, religion was the nucleus around which the idea of Pakistan had grown. While many claim that it was "won" in the name of religious nationalism (Ahmed, 2008), others contend that it was intended as a progressive and democratic state (Karim, 2010).

Without calling Pakistan a secular state, the country's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and his modernist colleagues believed that Pakistan would advance its people's socioeconomic conditions and that people of all faiths and practices would continue to live as equal citizens. Jinnah's oft-quoted speech, addressed to the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947, explicitly stated that religion, caste, or creed would have "nothing to do with the business of the state" (Hoodbhoy, 2007, p. 3003). To that end, the religious-secular debate in Pakistan is as old as the history of the country.

Current realities are in stark contrast with the intentions of Pakistan's yesteryears, as radical blocs now associate state sovereignty with God and the Shar'ia. The Islamic state debate has also left the state

polarized between orthodox and secular factions leading to internal dualism—the ethno-Islamic and the ethnonational (Binder, 1961). Hussain (1976) explicates that historically within the ethno-Islamic framework, the national identity of a Pakistani citizen oscillated between religion and state, meaning that if an individual was a Muslim first and Pakistani second, he surpassed national boundaries and took kindly to pan-Islamism and if he was a Pakistani first and Muslim second, the foundation of his identity was ethnicized as Punjabi, Baluchi, Sindhi, Pathan, or Muhajir (examples of a few major ethnic groups in Pakistan). Insofar, within the ethnonational framework, the internal dualism fluctuated between ethnicity and nationality.

From the mid-1970s onward, as class struggles and regional conflicts proliferated in light of Islamization² under the government of fundamentalist dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan saw a shift from a Jinnah-ist to a more jihadist (Islamic fundamentalist) ideology, leaving most of its citizens who believed in coexistence hoping to revert to the original “Pakistani dream.” Decades later, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks by the Islamist terrorist group al-Qaeda against the United States, most Pakistanis digressed from Islamic nationalism in attempts to reimagine the country as a “moderate and tolerant Islamic state” (Kalim & Janjua, 2018, p. 72). It is worth mentioning here that Pakistan has never exhibited a monolithic national identity, and this self-identity has always remained fragmented (Qaiser, 2015). Subsequently, its national identity is severely “exclusive” in nature as it does not include all the permanent citizens of Pakistan as equal citizens of the state, with categories of lesser citizens, women of all factions, non-Muslims, and deviant religious sects subjected to legal, constitutional, social, political, and economic disadvantages. In the same vein, the pluralist vision of Pakistan and factions that adhere to a secularist Pakistan constantly resist the hegemonic dominance of ethnic nationalist Pakistan in the form of protests, activism, resistance, and social movements (Jaffrelot & Rais, 1998). At the root of Pakistan’s national identity crisis has been the unresolved debate on how to square the state’s self-proclaimed Islamic identity with the obligations of a modern nation-state (Jalal, 2014). As such, pluralism and democracy continue to struggle for a place in this so-called Muslim homeland.

Intertwining Nationalism and Religion

There is notable scholarship (Hall, 1996; Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Wodak et al., 2009) on the politics of national identities, with scholars underlining a multitude of factors such as religion, culture, race, ethnicity, language, and territories in the construction of national identities (Kalim & Janjua, 2018). National discourse is deemed relational, dependent on the formation of “self” and the “other” (Van Dijk, 1998), meaning that nationalist discourse is categorized by discourses of sameness and difference (Wodak, 2017). Members of these “imagined communities” exclude those who do not fall under their criteria of nationhood, for example religion, ethnicity, common culture, history, caste, or sect (Anderson, 1983).

The complex interplay of religion and politics in Pakistan’s history has perpetuated decades of authoritarianism and state-sponsored nationalism. Thus, the assembling and uniting cry of an Islamic nation

² Sharization or Islamization has a long history in Pakistan since its foundation, but it became the primary policy, or “centerpiece,” of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq’s government from 1977 to 1988. Zia has also been called “the person most responsible for turning Pakistan into a global center for political Islamic terrorism.” More information can be found at Deutsche Welle: <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistans-islamization-before-and-after-dictator-zia-ul-haq/a-19480315>

worked only for a short time, given the complexities of ethnic nationalities, multiple linguistic groups, contrasting doctrinal beliefs of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, and discriminated minorities like Ahmadi Muslims, Christians, and Hindus (Sabir, 2011). As ideologies of order in South Asia, nationalism and religion mimic each other's functions as they are lodged with grand implications, define values and purposes, protect interests, evangelize, command loyalty, and, most important, shape identities (Rehman, 2018).

As per Shafqat (2009), a Pakistani sociologist, three schools of thoughts (i.e., the Islamist, the pluralist, and the nation-statist) exist in Pakistan. According to this conceptual framework that defines national identity in Pakistan, Islamists perceive Islam as the sole binding force for nationalism in the country. Proponents of this school employ Islam to suppress ethnic and cultural pluralism by promoting centralization and authoritarianism. Interestingly, Islamist parties have never been able to garner significant support in elections.

In contrast, the pluralists see Pakistan as a multilingual and multicultural entity where diverse ethnic groups peacefully coexist. This group testifies to the pluralist character of Pakistan, contending "that it is not Islamization, but greater decentralization and enhanced provincial autonomy which promotes national integration and strengthens the Pakistani national identity" (Shafqat, 2009, p. 24).

The last school of thought, the nation-statist, discerns antagonism toward India as a fitting foundation of self-identity and nation-building while relying more on anti-Indian nationalism as opposed to national integration. The logic behind this claim is that ethnic divergence is so formidable that, internally, hardly anything binds it together whereas externally driven anti-India nationalism is the singular binding force. Shafqat has argued that this school of thought is one-dimensional and overemphasizes the role of this perceived enemy in formalizing the Pakistani national identity. It can also be argued that since citizens, especially the younger generation, have access to alternate media and digital platforms, the dynamics of championing and outlining nationhood are now domestic and international and not merely anti-Indian (Shafqat, 2009).

For the scope of this article, we find Shafqat's (2009) characterization of Pakistani society relevant as it makes similar distinctions in delineating the digital public. Although it is difficult to summarize such frameworks simplistically because of the complex nature of nationalist identities, this model aims to explore the nature of discourses in this study because of the instrumentalization of religion, which has fashioned contradictory, conflictual, and competitive factions—both offline and online. This perspective helps in understanding discursive continuities and estrangements about religiosity in Pakistani society. According to Young (2004), online environments tend to reproduce offline religious practices, and, on the other hand, online discursive practices generally follow the same established structures as their offline equivalents (Jacobs, 2007). Against this backdrop, online publics embody exclusivist ideological overtones and have conflicting visions about the role of religion in Pakistani society in terms of seeking reconciliation, accommodation, or power sharing. To that end, we focus on three public Facebook communities, with each community matching the criteria of one of three schools of thought.

An Emerging Digital Public

In Pakistan, with a population close to 225 million, Internet usage accounts for 76 million users whereas Internet penetration (mobile and fixed) is just over 36% (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, 2019). Eighty-seven percent of the population lives where wireless mobile telecommunications technology is present, 70% of Pakistanis with wireless mobile technology have access to 3G, and 30% have access to 4G (Syed, 2013). As of January 2019, the total number of active social media users was recorded at 37 million and active social media users as a percentage of the population was at 18 (Global Digital Report, 2020). The number of social media users in Pakistan increased by 2.4 million (+7.0%) between April 2019 and January 2020. Social media penetration in Pakistan stood at 17% in January 2020, with Facebook being the most popular social networking platform.

The country's emerging digital media landscape forms an important new ground for the staging of political, religious, and capitalist modernity. Unlike the state-centric productions of Pakistani identity, largely dominated by electronic media and private news channels, social media—with a fair share of censorship—have witnessed conflicted media publics with a wide variety of interests, emotions, logics, practices such as journalistic identities, nationalistic sentiments, social codes of interaction, news dissemination, and development discourses (Banaji, 2010).

The discourse that we see on display gives a window into a Pakistan that is in tandem with the one that many of the citizens experience as opposed to the one we see performed and produced on more official or mainstream media. These public or private spaces, that is, Facebook groups or pages/communities, are constructed for debate, deliberation, commentary, support, outlet, sharing, expressing, and having daily discussions on a multitude of niche topics. During periods of momentous political occasions, activity is often increased. Similarly, they have managed to carve out spaces with lax rules, minimal moderation and Facebook's clandestine settings, which allow these groups to operate without public scrutiny (Livingstone, 2019). This brings us back to the cyberbalkanization debate, as reiterated by Sunstein (2001), that when the Internet is segregated into smaller groups with similar interests, they end up demonstrating a narrow approach to outsiders or those with contradictory views. At the same time, aggregation of favored information within these public or private communities reinforces selective exposure and group polarization (Quattrociocchi, Scala, & Sunstein, 2019).

Methods

The article employs CDA as a method to analyze discourse in relation to its social context (Fairclough, 2003; Given, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). CDA is a theoretical approach to study the role of language in society, originating within linguistics, but has found vast application across communications and the social sciences by situating linguistic investigations within social analysis (Given, 2008). In CDA, discourse is assumed to be a central vehicle in the construction of social reality. Its interdisciplinarity has attracted engagement from other disciplines, including sociology, cultural studies, political economy, and media studies.

To make sense of online practices and group identities on Facebook by investigating nationalism and religion, we employ CDA by adapting Wodak et al.'s (2009) matrix in their study of discursive construction of national identity in Austria:

1. national sentiment: passion, emotional attachment to country
2. collective history: myths, triumphs, defeats
3. collective culture: symbols, language, literature, music
4. shared destiny: future goals, aspirations
5. gendered constructions of nationhood

This article also draws on multimodal discourse theory (van Leeuwen & Kress, 2011) on Facebook data. Multimodal discourse analysis refers to the analysis of various and different semiotic modes in discourse, and the aim is to "integrate the representational, interactive, and textual meanings achieved by various elements" (Bo, 2018, p. 132) in analyzing how these elements work together to form complete discourse. We apply multimodal discourse analysis of text and images from the perspectives of context of culture, context of situation, and meaning of image.

Social and political issues are assembled and echoed in discourse. Likewise, power dynamics and social relations are negotiated and performed through discourse. Hence, Facebook posts are considered performative acts of citizenship with nuanced motivations, aspirations, ideologies, narratives, and counternarratives. Our analytic sample exemplifies that ideologies are constructed and reflected in the use of discourse to strengthen group identities. As such, discourses create individual and collective consciousness, and in turn consciousness gives stimulus to peoples' actions by way of repetition of ideas and solidifying knowledge through reflecting, shaping, and enabling social realities (Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2011; Jäger & Maier, 2009).

Data Collection

Three Facebook communities were selected because of their relevance within the framework of national identities, as they unpack nationalism within a select group of people and, most important, public access. After a preliminary investigation using a keyword search through Facebook, three communities were identified, with each group/page situating within one of the three schools of thought, that is, Islamists, pluralists, and nation-statists. Because we were ethically bound to seek informed consent from social media users if we decided to collect data from private groups, some closed groups that better fit the criteria for analysis had to be dismissed. Owing to these limitations, in this study, we selected three communities, and one of the groups (the pluralists) in comparison with the other two, had reduced frequency of posts but was deemed relevant because of the available public content and rich opportunity for multimodal analysis. These groups were selected on the following criteria: engaged audiences, participation patterns, high frequency of comments and shares on individual posts, political topics under discussion, group dynamics, and popularity within Pakistanis residing in the country.

After the group selection, a multimodal data collection was conducted, in the form of texts and visual images, to capture the content posted in these Facebook communities. A corpus of 210 Facebook

posts (text and images) from Pakistani social media users was constructed, with 70 posts from each community. Only the first 70 Facebook (within the said time frame) were saved, organized, and numbered: FB 1–FB 70; FB 71–140; FB 141–210. The article also weighs in on Facebook posts in terms of digital practices to emphasize the use of pictures, videos, memes, illustrations, and other modes for the meaning-making process within like-minded groups.

Table 1. Details of Three Facebook Communities.

Facebook Page or Group Name	School of Thought	Public or Private	Members	Posts Collected	Data Collection Time Frame
Stop Killing Muslims in Kashmir (Stop Killing Muslims in Kashmir, 2020).	Nation-statist	Public Page	39,278	70	1 Month
Voice of Pakistan (Voice of Pakistan, 2020).	Islamist	Public Group	52,738	70	1 Month
Aik—Better Together (Aik Better Together, 2020).	Pluralist	Public Page	35,529	70	5 Months (because of decreased frequency of posts)

Findings

We find that nuanced nationalist expressions have emerged through the performance of collective culture and symbols by way of rich media content, increased engagement of posts, and comments in Islamist and nation-statist groups. In Islamist spheres, religion remains at the epicenter of discursive participation along with allegiance to the military, constructing that the Pakistani army is the protector of Islam. These communities have attempted to educate their respective groups, engage (likes, shares, and comments), and criticized external groups/organizations, to reinforce groupthink and discourage participation from outside. Simultaneously, counternarratives in pluralist communities offer an alternative public space to extremist and radical elements, apparent in discursive practices that abjure Islamization to promote national integration and strengthening national identity through collective culture negotiated via creative industries. From a gendered perspective, users draw on feminist philosophies to empower women, making pluralists highly exclusive in nature on the ground of gender in comparison with Islamists and nation-statists.

We also observe that Pakistani nationalism has drawn legitimacy from anti-India rhetoric. This interplay of official nationalisms embedded in the nation-statist school of thought and emotionally charged popular narratives of animosity has negotiated antagonism toward India to lay the foundation of nation-building. Considering deliberation, discourses indicate that the tendency toward radical attitudes continues among Islamist and nation-statist participants. We can conclude that the findings illustrate a shift toward more conservative positions at the group level because of participation seen in comments on posts.

Islamist Community: Voice of Pakistan*Waving the Flag*

Instances of using national symbols, such as the flag, in the visual discourse are linked to banal nationalism (Billig, 1995). Through these actions of allegiance and membership, online communities like Voice of Pakistan remind themselves and others, constantly, that we are part of a united "nation." By doing so, they articulate that we belong to it and it belongs to us. Along the same lines, Billig (1995) argues that "banal nationalism can be mobilized and turned into frenzied nationalism" (p. 5).

Figure 1 shows a soldier kissing the national flag atop a mountain to symbolize collective history of triumphs and a textual message prompting users to show their undying support and love for the army to express patriotism to the nation. Figure 2 relies on subtle imagery of the flag in juxtaposition to the army praying in harsh conditions to portray perseverance to country and religion. Visuals are shared to address the noble cause of the army, as imagined by the group. Through these expressions, they try to represent the nation's strength and forbearance at the borders and subscribe to an ideology that oscillates between being a Pakistani and a Muslim. Islam became synonymous with notions of national sentiment and expressing emotional attachment to the country by using the army as a prop to build its national status.

Last in negotiating collective culture and national symbols, Figure 3 shows how users rely heavily on symbolism and extremist content vis-à-vis Islamist and nation-statist ideology to depict a savior or a jihadi through war against India by descending on an Indian flag to attribute heroism. The text "Ghazwa-e-Hind" appears on the image to elaborate Ghazwat-ul-Hind as an Islamic separatist jihadi organization and al-Qaeda cell that is active in the Indian union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The group derives its name from the Islamic prophecy of Ghazwa-e-Hind, the ultimate conquest of India (Roy, 2019). Delivering prowar messages from the perspective of such organizations fosters a hypernationalism and radicalized ideology of nationalism and reiterates that a profound sense of national pride is required for war.

These messages are consciously or unconsciously constructed but are reinforced by text producers and commenters through intertextuality and interdiscursivity, part and parcel of the national ideology in which they live. This validates our notion that using digital communities to divulge ideological messages has provided a new set of tools for multimodal forms of persuasion (Pettersson & Sakki, 2017) in the context of radical Islamist rhetoric. In other words, we claim that banal nationalism is not very banal after all—and it is the very foundation on which more nationalisms are built.



Figure 1. Metaphors of swearing an oath to the nation (Source: Voice of Pakistan, 2020).



Figure 2. Pakistani army praying with a hoisted flag and upright arms (Source: Voice of Pakistan, 2020).



Figure 3. Symbolizing radical imagery (Source: Voice of Pakistan, 2020).

Intersecting Militarism and Army Fetishism

Within our analytic sample, the emotional appeal of militarism is enhanced and promoted through visuals and texts. Core values such as strength, security, pride, sacrifice, and freedom are set forth as fundamental characteristics of the Pakistani army, and by association its citizens. The idea of the army as a brave and heroic institution plays a central role when framing “nation” in the Islamist framework.

Military capabilities represent competition for security, and nations like Pakistan, which appear to be concerned about the size and effectiveness of their military organizations in relation to their neighbors (Posen, 1993), often practice militarism—online or offline. Figure 4 shows that the army is capable of aggression in the face of threat, treason, or hostile attacks. The text in Figure 4, translating to “If you are a traitor to Pakistan, you are deserving of nothing but death,” is representative of the radicalistic ideology and hateful jihadist discourse and acts as a vehicle to empower the ingroup and marginalize outgroups (Voice of Pakistan, 2020).



Figure 4. War rhetoric for greater emotive power (Source: Voice of Pakistan, 2020).

Using elements identified in the tropes or rhetorical devices, text producers have used a combination of images, videos, and texts to draw or build on existing stories that arouse fondness of the military. These gendered constructions of nationhood are often negotiated by supporting the troops or supporting our brothers, fathers, and sons. This offers an interesting insight into the language by citizens, where the nation is always female—mother, motherland, soil—and backing the military is always masculine, akin to supporting brothers, fathers, and sons. These groups have also taken the liberty of romanticizing army personnel as national heroes and saviors to attain their collective hopes and aspirations.

Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are apparent through sharing quotes from Western literature to construct the army to unmatched strength by taking meaning out of its original context and intent. Such dissemination of discourses of national pride, unity, and solidarity are important components of nationalism. The trope of suffering is widespread in Pakistani nationalist discourse, and Anderson (1983) maintains that this so-called sense of community, or fraternity, allows for millions to willingly die for their imagined community.

Pluralist Community: Aik—Better Together*The "Softer" Side of Pakistan?*

The pluralist self-image is still based on hopes of shared destiny in Pakistan as a modern and progressive nation, inhabited by "secular" individuals taking responsibility for the common future. Literature, music, sports, theater, arts, Sufism, poetry, and history as crucial cultural dimensions of the public sphere are of great importance to these groups. Habermas (1989) has talked about the development of a literary public sphere within private institutes of families where debates on art and literature come into being on the grounds of inclusivity, but paradoxically, entry was guaranteed by one's social, economic, and educational status (Chakravarty, 2017). In an online milieu, barriers to entry are somewhat reduced, albeit digital divide and literacy still impact deliberative participation to a greater extent in the Pakistani context. However, subscription to a pluralist school of thought, as opposed to other dominant ones, is also largely dependent on higher education status, socioeconomic factors, and liberal political ideologies.

Pakistani users have made references (visually and through text) to 14th-century Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldun, a social scientist and historian who is often described as the pioneer of the modern disciplines of historiography, sociology, economics, and demography (Schmidt, 1978). By doing so, they show great support and yearning for Khaldun's philosophy of history and the neoliberal model for transformation toward political and economic liberty. In Figure 5, users refer to a Muslim intellectual as a source of inspiration while unknowingly showing a first hint of the existence of a strong common component in our following observation that pan-Arabism and political Islam are linked as an inverse correlation.

Another way of showing national identity is through historical references (Smith, 1998). A sense of national identity is often communicated through cultural icons of music—national or regional. Despite the general perception that music, art, or literature runs counter to the dominant political-religious ideologies, Pakistani pluralists have used these groups to develop digital collectives that create self-confidence, promote diversity at home, and improve Pakistan's image abroad. For example, one post, FB 129, tries to create a collective identity by framing cultural history and remembering the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, musical maestro and primarily a singer of Qawwali, a form of Sufi Islamic devotional music, for his international fame in the 1980s to late 1990s. Another post, FB 85, a memorial post for a Hindu folk and Sufi music artist, constructs Pakistan in addressing and confronting its problematic past/present discourses and treatment of minorities. By using possessive pronouns like "our," users rebuild a sense of belonging and national status through its creative, cultural, and heritage industries.

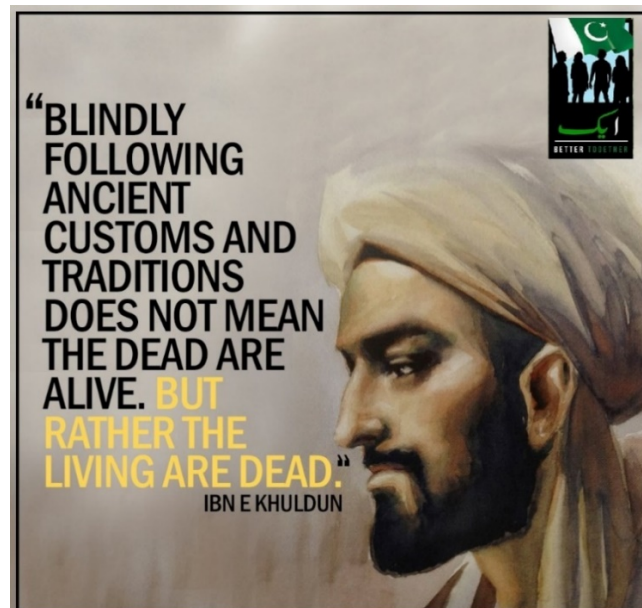


Figure 5. Ibn E Khuldun (Source: Aik Better Together, 2020).

Within the context of literature and poetry, our analytic samples exemplify that Pakistanis celebrate literary icons to create meaning. We also find evidence of evoking emotions through the cultural memory of national icons that represent hopes of a glorified past. The discursive practices of these counternarratives to the dominant discourse are legitimized in the sense that this group was more inclined toward change and civil debate than group participants in extreme environments.

Gendered Constructions of Nationhood

In examining the association between gender performances and stereotypes in the online public sphere, pluralist communities contradict stereotypical conceptions of gender. To that end, multimodal stance-taking is made possible through images, photographs, and videos (Barton & Lee, 2013). Discursive construction of Pakistani national identity is employed using pronouns like “we,” “our,” and “other.” There are references to past or present injustices and acknowledgment of women’s narratives, with the help of photographs, posts, videos, icons, national symbols, hyperlinks, curated content, and news articles.

Within the data, we find many references to women and minorities breaking stereotypes in the country. A commonplace narrative in nationalist discourse reveals the country’s men in the public space, fighting for freedom and making history, to define clearly demarcated gendered roles. In other samples, we see the Pakistani soldiers as fighters and emblems of freedom, whereas women are denoted in their biological or reproductive roles as mothers, sisters, or daughters.

Women's access to public spaces and their participation in these arenas remain inadequate because of patriarchal societal norms, harassment, violence, lack of education, and other imminent factors. Pluralist discursive practices encourage more women to claim their space: public or private, physical or ideological, online or offline. Let's consider textual samples like FB 77, "These Pakistanis (women) made us immensely proud of their achievements on a national as well as global level!" and FB 117, "We need to recall Jinnah's vision of a pluralistic and inclusive Pakistan. We must engage diverse communities and discuss quality and pluralism in Pakistan for all of its citizens, especially women." These posts demonstrate how users amplify the nation through gendered dimensions and historical contexts and construct national identity through the use of "we," "us," and "our."

Micronarratives of empowerment and citizenship emerging from within Pakistan's transgender movements are also echoed in the discourse. Using key concepts of remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) and narrativity (Ryan, 2004) from media design, narratives conveyed on social media like Facebook can be defined as micronarratives as they are composed of autonomous multimodal fragments spread across the digital narrative space (Venditti, Piredda, & Mattana, 2017). We find these references in the data to highlight women's roles in the country's history as (i) pioneers in the workplace, (ii) activists in the women's rights movements, and (iii) cultural or political leaders. Symbols and discourse of maternalism to reinforce women's role as mothers of the nation is entirely absent and nonexistent in the pluralistic corpus.

Nation-Statist Community—Stop Killing Muslims in Kashmir

Hypernationalism and Anti-Indianism

According to Jaffrelot (2002) and Racine (2010), Pakistan's nationalism is primarily anti-Indian, stating that "this is the essence of the country's identity" (Jaffrelot, 2002, p. 38). Despite common and shared history within the subcontinent, it continues to be defined by anti-Indianism, with little to no tangible identity of its own. To this end, two partitions and four full-fledged wars in the last 70 years have failed in letting Pakistan separate itself from India (Shahid, 2017). Nation-statist ideology is also heavily reliant on an "us" versus "them" paradigm, and this theme is recurring within our findings. For instance, FB 141 makes references to the ultimate battle against India and uses graphic imagery with Pakistan's national flag splattered across the Indian map in hopes of conquering and "ending India" from the world map.

Undoubtedly, Kashmir remains a highly politicized subject in both countries, especially in terms of the ideologization of related debates. For most Pakistanis, Kashmir remains the unfinished agenda of the partition and remains at the root of its national identity crisis. By extension of this logic, India is perceived as the occupier of a territory that lawfully belongs to Pakistan (Yasmeen, 2002). Our findings show that users have engaged in strong negative framing of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to draw attention to the lockdown in Kashmir using illustrations, as seen in Figures 6 and 7.



Figure 6. Depiction of lockdown and "caged" Kashmiris at the hand of the Indian PM (Source: Stop Killing Muslims in Kashmir, 2020).

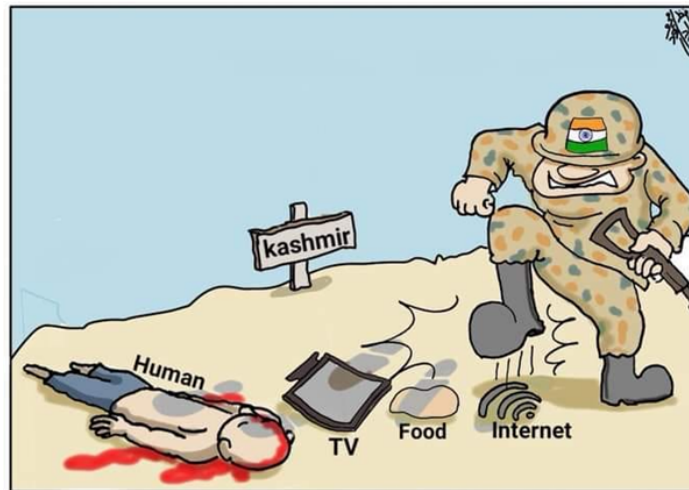


Figure 7. Metaphor for India (Source: Stop Killing Muslims in Kashmir, 2020).

National sentiment with Kashmir, and by proxy to Pakistan, is expressed through emotionally charged phrases or terms—be it deliberate or nondeliberate. For example, in our collected data, Kashmiris are referred to as tortured, oppressed, innocent, fighters, victims, homeless, dehumanized, besieged, and survivors. Similarly, incidents in Kashmir have been vocalized in equally dominating terms like criminalized torture, militancy, power abuse, Islamophobia, genocide, bleeding Kashmir, existential battle, tragedy,

graveyard, and cold-blooded murder. Likewise, discourse of difference, by contrast, emphasizes the strongest differences to India. This group has also combined visual and discursive methods to put forth images that are gory and triggering in nature, for example visuals of lynching, dying infants, dead bodies, houses on fire, and looting. These images and videos amplify political arguments outside the context of cognitive linguistic discourse, often with radicalized and powerful emotional consequences. Analogies and proverbs have also been used to intensify the idea of the dangerous outgroup and are frequently employed in the negative representations of others.

In this study, the idea of Pakistan is also symbolized by mythical notions, religious nationalism, rituals, and celebrating the "virtues" of being a Muslim. Islam unites Pakistanis in a mysterious sense of solidarity and oneness. Kramer (1997) affirms that "all nationalist creeds therefore praise the individual's willingness to make sacrifices for a higher cause and to affirm the nation in rituals of collective belief" (p. 533). Adherence to nation as a public affirmation of religious beliefs allows for this digital public to become active participants in national, political, religious, and military struggles. Cultural practices, symbols, and religion as elements of difference are salient themes in the discourse on integration against India.

Group members use religious symbols like the Islamic text, Quran, to perform normal affirmations of faith in the daily lives of its believers. Respect for the written text of the Quran is an important element of religious faith for Muslims and burning or desecrating sacred scriptures or symbols is considered blasphemous and hurtful. Using intertextuality and interdiscursivity, Figure 8 shows an image of a Quran believed to remain undamaged in a fire that burned houses in the vicinity. Through the text, Pakistanis express multilayered emotions: evoking religious sentiment, celebrating the "survival" of the Islamic scripture and by proxy of their faith, venting against the Indian army for aggression, and appealing to all Muslims.

The singularity of Islam as a political ideology and as a sociopolitical movement is linked with its ideological claims, myths, and collective history. We deduce that this presumed national unity and religiosity are perceived in tandem with cultural trauma, which Sztompka (2004) also contends as having a healing power and can lead to the revival of nationhood. In doing so, the allusion to Islamic narrative elevates the status of Pakistanis.



Figure 8. Using sacred texts as symbols (Stop Killing Muslims in Kashmir, 2020).

Language and keywords analysis revealed an overall tendency for the social media users to construct these strategies through classifications between “us” and “others.” Specifically important are “Us” (Pakistanis/Kashmiris) and nonimportant “Others” (Indians), versus good “Us” (Pakistanis) and evil “Others” (Indians). Strategies of historicizing the nation have inundated discourse by theorizing a past nation built on memories of common suffering and sacrifice to reinforce discursive construction of a common Pakistani identity that includes Kashmiris. Last, the surprising lack of counterdiscourse, that is, pro-India sentiments, in our Facebook data suggests that it is so commonplace to construct a nation on anti-Indianism that this has become a naturalized polarization for citizens.

Conceptualizing Gender and Nation

Various scholars (Ray, 1994) agree that women do not necessarily fit the descriptors of Anderson’s (1983) imagined community because of the “language of fraternity and comradeship” (Pratt, 1991, p. 582) to present the essence of a modern nation-statist. Yet women have always shared their roles in the active imagination, in which they became symbolic representations of the nation.

Women as mothers or symbolic representations of suffering represent the purity and victimhood of the nation. In the nation-statist group, they are depicted as modest, pious, and dutiful—a stark contrast with pluralism, where women are theorized as breaking stereotypes in both public and private spaces, essential for the nation’s survival. In the former group, even though women have an emblematic status in the production of nationalism and self-identity, they are objectified in patriarchal societies and seen by men as the “other” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 47).

Discursive practices within our findings attest to the fact that there is close association among collective territory, collective identity, and womanhood. The message is both multilayered and ambiguous: Kashmir as a mother itself and Kashmiris' biological mothers. In the analytic sample, the use of textual and visual representation of mother serves twofold purposes. First, the symbol of mother metaphorically embodies homelands as mother/woman, that is, Pakistani nation and Kashmiri territory as a mother speculates the country with an assortment of emotions including love, care, and belongingness. Second, it intimates the pain of Kashmiri mothers for victims (men as sons, brothers, fathers, husbands) in the conflict.

The fact that Kashmir and Pakistan have been constructed as a "family" points toward a patriarchal hierarchy that assigns gendered roles from its group's members. Embedded in Islamist and nation-statist, the stance on women is conceptualized through their difference from men and assembled in their primary vocations as wives and mothers. Overall, gender relations appear significantly in discourse of nations and are deeply rooted in "constructed myths" of women's role as producers of the nation, as sources of culture and values, or as auxiliaries in support of men.

Conclusions

Muslim identity remains the most crucial indication and quintessence of "Pakistani-ness." This article confirms that there is underlying tension between national interests and ideological religious goals. Within nation-statist, Pakistani nationalism has drawn legitimacy from anti-India rhetoric. This confirms our notion that just as much as Islam is the binding force for Pakistanis, so is anti-Indianism as the default option for national cohesion (Varshney, 1991).

Pluralists continue to construct a progressive, moderate "good Muslim" character of the nation to differentiate themselves from the extremist versions of Islam and nation (Kalim & Janjua, 2018). Notably, there is also an absence of group polarization within this group, which could be attributed to increased political tolerance as a result of enhanced awareness for different viewpoints. Our assumption is that Pakistan's nonconservative factions are aware of opposing perspectives since Islamists and nation-statists disproportionately dominate platforms like Facebook and Twitter. These deliberative minipublics paint a different picture from that of Sunstein's polarization claims, and in some instances of nationalist discourse, groups depolarize as opposed to being polarized.

The nation-building processes also echo other agendas based on masculine nationalism and banal nationalism. The appeal to mobilize "using" Islam is also a byproduct of Muslim nationalism and political consciousness. Our findings show that Islamists and nation-statists consider themselves as the guardians of faith. The admixture of religion and politics has been used as an instrument to advance ideologically homogeneous worldviews and militant tendencies. It is not Islam or religion that is the issue in this context, but it is the age-old exploitation of religion by state bureaucracies to advance national interests that remains at the heart of the Pakistani problem.

We find that discourse with like-minded people in the Islamist and nation-statist framework shows greater group polarization compared with the pluralists. For the former two, political discussions with

"others" fail to integrate diverse viewpoints or attain the overarching goal of deliberative democracy. Sunstein (2009) characterizes polarization as "members of a deliberating group usually end up at a more extreme position in the same general direction as their inclinations before deliberation began" (p. 3). This is increasingly true for the Islamist and nation-statist conceptual frameworks in our analysis. In instances when confronted with evidence to the contrary, they not only dismissed the information to harden their stances further but also engaged in active trolling and name-calling of various individuals or clusters within their groups. Divergent viewpoints and participants have been vilified as antination, anti-Muslim, and essentially anti-Pakistan. To that end, we found that homophily and confirmation have not necessarily made these online spaces impenetrable chambers but have widened the gaps among diverse groups through hate speech and extremist contents.

This study contributes to the research field on religion in online contexts by analyzing discourse on Facebook and finding emergent communicative patterns that reimagine notions of nationalism and online practices. We have filled a gap by outlining structures and processes that enable resistive online practices in digital cultures that are already prone to strong nationalism. This nuanced reflection on the nationalist rhetoric and ideals of national identity in online publics is central to the understanding of where the so-called Islamic republic is heading while generating new social and moral dilemmas. Otherness is at the heart of the dynamics of identity. Last, it also reveals that the participatory affordances of select online environments like Facebook groups contribute to the everyday reproduction and performativity. It confirms the function of Facebook as an arena for political conversations; however, this should be interpreted with caution. Our analysis within three ideological spaces testifies to the diffused logics of Pakistani nationalism online. By paying attention to users who embrace different visions of religious belonging, we have presented mundane reproductions of nationalism online and the crescendos of more overt articulations of digital nationalism. However, this study has limitations, as we have restricted the analysis to Facebook, and points to areas for future research. Much can be gained by studying social networks in relation to nationalism and identity formation in their precise religious and historical contexts and by paying close attention to group narratives.

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