


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Orating Origins: the Formation of Pakistan in Contemporary Urdu Shi'i Khitabat in Karachi

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Abstract

Urdu-speaking Shi'a *khatibs* (orators) in Karachi regularly speak on the origins of Pakistan, seeking to recuperate Shi'i contributions to the foundation of the nation-state. In this article, I argue that such claims do not resist, subvert, or undermine statist historical narratives. Instead, the claims mimic, in structure and teleology, the very statist historical narratives that they attempt to challenge. I draw upon twenty months of ethnographic fieldwork in Karachi and demonstrate how thoroughly circumscribed such claims are. I read this minority rhetoric as an attempt to appropriate the majoritarian discourse, rather than as an attempt to challenge the dominant historiography of the origins of Pakistan. I turn to the domain of Shi'i *khitabat* (oratory), a ubiquitous and public performance, and identify the important role played by such mass and physical gatherings in the articulation of historical claims. My work emerges from, and contributes back to, scholarship on South Asian Shi'ism, oratory, and the public sphere.

Keywords: Karachi; Shi'a; oratory; platform; history

Introduction

Yeh bohat bara Allah ne is mamlukat pe karam kiya hai ke aik Ahl-i Bayt ka manne wala is mulk ka bani hai . . . Pakistan ka nazariya pesh karne wale 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal. Banane wale Quaid-e A'zam Muhammad 'Ali Jinnah. Tawajjuh! Donon Pakistan ki ihm tarin shakshiyat donon shi'a the.

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Allah has done a huge kindness on this nation-state that a believer of the Ahl-i Bait is the founder of this country The ideology for Pakistan was presented by ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal. The maker [of Pakistan] was Quaid-e A‘zam Muhammad ‘Ali Jinnah. Attention! The two most important personalities of Pakistan were both Shi‘a.

On 25 December 2020, the Twelver Shi‘i orator ‘Ali Raza Rizvi began his *khitabat* (oratory) by acknowledging the importance of the day for his immediate Karachi audience.¹ The date, synonymous with Christmas in many parts of the world, is a statutory holiday in Pakistan, where the government commemorates it as the birth of Muhammad ‘Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), the British Indian and later Pakistani statesman credited with founding the country in 1947. Jinnah, Rizvi noted, was born an Ismaili but had converted publicly to Twelver Shi‘ism around 1913, contemporaneous with other “mass conversions” of the Khoja communities in the Indian subcontinent. Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), Rizvi continued, who had presented the idea of Pakistan, also died a Shi‘a. Rizvi shared with his audience that the evidence for Iqbal’s religious affiliation was a will that Iqbal had left in the trusted company of Lahore’s then most prominent Twelver Shi‘a ‘alim, ‘Allama Hairi, whose great-grandchild Rizvi had met. Rizvi’s fuller invocation of Jinnah and Iqbal, of which this epigraph is a representative excerpt, centered around their religious identities. Rizvi concluded this brief introductory gloss to his oration by observing that while the matter of Jinnah’s Shi‘a leanings had since been accepted by the Pakistani Parliament, today’s gathering was a coming out of Iqbal as Shi‘a. This disclosure, Rizvi cautioned, was made in full awareness of the many “institutions” listening to this oratorical event, and Rizvi was not sure whether he would be able to return to Pakistan after having made a revelation of this magnitude.

In addition to Rizvi’s focus on the historical figures of Jinnah and Iqbal, and his insistence on the specificities of their shared religious proclivities, this vignette contains a plethora of rich themes and concerns that require a careful unpacking. For instance, consider Rizvi’s corroboration for his claims: particular dates and contexts surrounding Jinnah’s conversion, access to Iqbal’s private letters, and a recognition of mass events in the subcontinent all stem from, or aim to create in their very articulation, a demonstrable grasp of modern South Asian history and its trajectories. Similarly, Rizvi’s reflexivity about audiences, whether physically present like the ten thousand Shi‘a men and women that night at Nishtar Park or listening in various other capacities such as digital audiences, audiences from the future, and of course the surveillance agencies whom he names as regular consumers of his content, points to his acceptance of his role as a public and prominent voice that is heard beyond the Urdu Shi‘a milieu in which he orates. Importantly, the very discussion of Jinnah and Iqbal in a “religious” performance raises questions about the category religious itself,

¹ I attended this event in person. There is a virtual recording available on YouTube that readers can access. ‘Ali Raza Rizvi, “Majlis#1| Ayyam e Fatima s.a, Maulana Syed Ali Raza Rizvi | 25 dec 2020,” YouTube Video, 42:43, 27 December 2020 (<https://youtu.be/AAmFv0shEPI> [accessed 13 April 2022]).

and the porousness with which themes and motifs traverse the “religious” and the “secular” domains.²

What I draw out in this article, however, are neither the epistemic aspirations that orators such as Rizvi harbor nor the anxieties that plague the performances of religious minorities in the public sphere.³ I am interested in the logic undergirding the thoroughly ubiquitous claim that Pakistan was envisioned by Iqbal, and that Iqbal’s vision was subsequently executed by Jinnah. The telos informing Rizvi’s claim is not unique: in fact, the claim emerges from a particular understanding of the past, one where the Pakistani state’s history of the country’s origin has been dominant and pervasive.⁴ While Rizvi considers his preoccupations with Jinnah and Iqbal being Shi’a as risky enough to ban his future entry into the country, the logic of his claim is not merely in line with the state’s historical narratives but is thoroughly circumscribed by them. The details of the historical narrative are not important: it is the structure that remains firmly in place.

In this article, I examine how Urdu-speaking Shi’a *khatibs* (orators) in contemporary Karachi lay their own claims to the state-sponsored origin narratives of Pakistan. These Urdu Shi’a claims, I demonstrate through three contemporary examples, do not resist, subvert, or undermine the state’s visions or versions of the country’s past and present: instead, these claims are invested in appropriating, for the Urdu-speaking Shi’a devotees, the state’s ideological constructs, especially the origin stories of Pakistan. My observations draw upon twenty months of ethnographic fieldwork in Karachi, of which Rizvi’s vignette above is but one example. My argument is not that the average Shi’a devotee needs to become a critical historian and go

² Here, I gesture to the now well-established field of Critical Secularism Studies. I particularly have in mind Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) and *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Winnifred Sullivan’s *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Hussein Ali Agrama’s *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012); and Saba Mahmood’s *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

³ On aspiration in Pakistan, Naveeda Khan, *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) remains the definitive text. See also Ammara Maqsood, *The New Pakistani Middle-class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017). For anxieties that accompany public performances by religious minorities, see Jurgen Schaflechner, “Betwixt and Between: Hindu Identity in Pakistan and ‘Wary and Aware’ Public Performances,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2020): 152–68.

⁴ By statist historical paradigm, I refer to histories of Pakistan that overemphasize big men like Iqbal and Jinnah, exclude political parties other than the Congress and the Muslim League, posit the Hindus and Muslims as monolithic and irreconcilable demographics, and take the partition of British India in 1947 as inevitable. For a fuller elaboration of this statist historical paradigm, see K. K. Aziz, *The Murder of History: A Critique of History Textbooks Used in Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2012 [1993]); Rubina Saigol, “Knowledge and the Production of Identity: Educational Discourse in Pakistan,” PhD dissertation, University of Rochester, 1995 (<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fknowledge-production-identity-educational%2Fdocview%2F304222148%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D14771> [accessed 12 April 2022]); and Ali Usman Qasmi, “A Master Narrative for the History of Pakistan: Tracing the Origins of an Ideological Agenda,” *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 4 (2019): 1066–105. Readers are also invited to peruse the Nazaria-i-Pakistan Trust website here: <https://www.nazariapak.info/#/>

around identifying and deconstructing state narratives; my argument is that the logic and the structure of claims around the origins of Pakistan shared in these orations is thoroughly statist in nature. Arguments such as those of the religious identity of Jinnah and Iqbal, from the epigraph to this article, appear to men like Rizvi who orate these histories as well as to the audiences who listen to such orations, as a challenge to standard historical narratives in the country. Beyond the demographic of Shi'a devotees, scholars too have occasionally read the Urdu-speaking Twelver Shi'a rhetoric in contemporary Pakistan in contradistinction to that of the state.⁵ However, such readings, whether lay or scholarly, look past the grand and bellicose statist forms and contents that are easily observable in the public rhetoric of the group. Two of the examples I cite in my argument are from public, visible, and audible orations, and I detail their specific contexts below. The third example draws on interviews with multiple orators in Karachi and intertwines these conversations with a rich Urdu Shi'i textual archive in which similar origins claims are presented. Before I turn to my data, I briefly recap the existing scholarship on Shi'ism in Pakistan and speak to the necessity of addressing oratory as a prime platform through which the logic, structure, and teleology of statist rhetoric are reproduced and reamplified.

Studying the Pakistani Shi'a

The existing scholarship on Shi'ism in Pakistan can be divided into three broad categories. These include a study of political institutions and actors, the study of religious performances, and the study of objects.⁶ Below, I briefly review the political and the religious approaches, largely due to their relevance to this article and due to the prolific body of work that they constitute among works on Pakistani Shi'a.

The study of political Shi'ism has been an outsized presence eclipsing other facets of Shi'i practice and experience. For instance, consider the oeuvre of work produced by the late French scholar Mariam Abou Zahab, where she details the rise of a Shi'i political consciousness in Pakistan in the 1970s and the 1980s. Her work—whether on the city Jhang as a particular case study or Pakistan writ large—foregrounds intertradition competition between the Sunni and the Shi'a where religious identity looms large.⁷ Though Abou Zahab notes the contextual embeddedness of these

⁵ While I engage and repudiate this literature more pointedly later in this article, two works serve as examples of this kind of scholarly approach. Abbas Zaidi, "The Shias of Pakistan: Mapping an Altruistic Genocide," in *Faith-Based Violence and Deobandi Militancy*, eds. Jawad Syed, Edwina Pio, Tahir Kamran, and Abbas Zaidi (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 273–311; and V. G. Julie Rajan, *Al Qaeda's Global Crisis: The Islamic State, Takfir, and the Genocide of Muslims* (London: Routledge, 2015), 230–86.

⁶ On religious objects, I particularly recommend Tryna Lyons, "Some Historic *Ta'ziyas* of Multan," in *People of the Prophet's House: Artistic and Ritual Expressions of Shi'i Islam*, ed. Fahmida Suleman, (London: Azimuth Editions, 2015), 221–31; Ghulam Abbas, *Taziyas of Chiniot* (Lahore: Tarikh Publications, 2007) and "Visual Challenges Faced by Islam in South Asia in the Modern Era," *Al-Adwa* 48, no. 32 (2017): 1–12; Michel Boivin, "Representations and Symbols in Muharram and Other Rituals: Fragments of Shiite Worlds from Bombay to Karachi," in *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, eds. Alessandro Monsutti, Farian Sabahi, and Silvia Naef (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007), 149–72, and *Artefacts of Devotion: A Sufi Repertoire of the Qalandariyya in Sehwan Sharif, Sindh, Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Karen Ruffle, *Everyday Shi'ism in South Asia* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021).

⁷ Mariam Abou Zahab, "The Sunni-Shia Conflict in Jhang (Pakistan)," in *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict*, eds. Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (London: Routledge, 2007),

conflicts, and her work is attentive to the role that class, caste, and belonging play in the social conflicts she writes about, the overarching emphasis in her writing remains on the primacy of religious identity and its political motivations, unfolding, and afterlives.⁸ Similarly, consider also Laurance Louër's chapter on Shi'ism in Pakistan, where a generalized Shi'a identity, from prepartition British India to the turn of the millennium in Pakistan, is invoked to explain the "theater of sectarian violence" that animates the nation-state.⁹ Andreas Rieck and Simon Fuchs both offer, in different ways, a longer and more complex political history of Pakistani Shi'ism.¹⁰ Their works ground Pakistani Shi'a in their local contexts, and are nuanced in their readings of the myriad, rather than a monolithic, reception of events such as the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran and its impacts on the Shi'a communities in Pakistan.

From within the scholarship on political Shi'ism in Pakistan, there are three scholars whose work I have found productive to think with for this article. Mashal Saif has detailed, in her recent monograph as well as in an earlier article, the ambiguities that inhere within Pakistani Shi'i scholar-leaders, with her interlocutors straddling a broad range of political commitments and ambitions.¹¹ The multiplicity of aspirations thus belies an easy categorization of a given position as Shi'a, reminding us to carefully excavate the contexts of the data that we handle. Noor Zaidi's work on Bibi Pak Daman is similarly productive for further engagement: Zaidi argues that the shrine in Lahore is "a physical space onto which competing ideologies about religion and the state are mapped and conflicts over meaning are played out."¹² Zaidi's recognition of the rival claims embedded in the narratives various interlocutors tell about the shrine emphasizes the diversity of voices present in any claims to national belonging. Simon Fuchs, too, attends to the intratradition diversity among the Twelver Shi'a in Pakistan, tracking the normative debates between the two groups he terms the "traditionalists" and the "reformists."¹³ What I argue in this specific article is, in some ways, the complete obverse of Saif's, Zaidi's, and Fuchs's close attention to plurality— I insist on the singular dominance of the statist historical narrative around the origins of Pakistan. However, my argument here should not detract from what I consider a timely blueprint that works by Saif, Zaidi, and Fuchs have provided for future scholarship on Pakistani Shi'ism.

135–48, and "The Politicization of the Shia Community in Pakistan in the 1970s and the 1980s," in *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, eds. Alessandro Monsutti, Farian Sabahi, and Silvia Naef (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007), 41–52.

⁸ About Zahab, "The Sunni-Shia Conflict in Jhang (Pakistan)," 145.

⁹ Lawrence Louër, *Sunnis and Shi'a: A Political History*, translated by Ethan Rundell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 135.

¹⁰ Andreas Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan: An Assertive and Beleaguered Minority* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2016) and Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land: Shi'ism between Pakistan and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

¹¹ Mashal Saif, *The 'Ulama' in Contemporary Pakistan: Contesting and Cultivating an Islamic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). See especially chapters 4 and 5. See also her earlier article "Notes from the Margins: Shi'a Political Theology in Contemporary Pakistan," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2014): 65–97.

¹² Noor Zaidi, "'A Blessing on Our People': Bibi Pak Daman, Sacred Geography, and the Construction of the Nationalized Sacred," *The Muslim World* (2014): 306–35.

¹³ Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, *Pure Muslim Land*, see especially chapter 2.

Within the study of political Shi'ism, the omission of orators such as Rizvi is notable. This is despite the recognition by different scholars that it is khatibs (also referred to as *zakirs* in this scholarship) who are far more numerous, if not outright significant, than the 'ulama' when it comes to shaping Shi'i practice and opinions. Commenting almost in passing on these orators, Abou Zahab notes that "these skilled performers, famed as much, if not more, for their personality and eloquence as for their learning, have always been more important than the *mujtahids* (jurists) to the religious education of the community."¹⁴ Here, Abou Zahab identifies the centrality of these orators to the Shi'a community at large: I would only add that these orators serve as educators in the broader sense, beyond the "religious" with which Abou Zahab draws a line around the expertise of these men.¹⁵ Indeed, the epigraph to this article is one example of how a nonreligious theme was seamlessly integrated in a religious performance. An anecdote from Fuchs's *In a Pure Muslim Land* succinctly captures the impressive crowd-pulling abilities of these orators, where Ibn-i Hasan Jarchavi, a mid-twentieth-century Urdu-speaking Shi'a orator was "credited with having gathered around forty thousand people in Multan" for a protest against the destruction of Jannat al-Baqi' cemetery in 1926, thousands of miles away from Medina.¹⁶ Orators such as Rizvi, with whom I started this article, regularly pulled crowds that, at their largest, exceeded well over a hundred thousand devotees, for nights on end in Muharram. The regularity with which orators address their audiences, as well as the star power that some of the orators wield, makes their rhetoric worthy of a critical analysis by scholars of Islam in Pakistan.¹⁷

On the other end of the spectrum, in contradistinction to an emphasis on political Shi'ism, scholars have studied the wide variety of Shi'i religious practice in Pakistan. The central ethnographic work in this vein is that of Vernon Schubel, who detailed the Muharram performances in early 1980s Karachi.¹⁸ Roughly two decades later, Amy Bard's dissertation and a handful of book chapters drew out the performance of the Urdu *marsiya*, within the confines of a majlis, Shi'i gatherings to commemorate their dead, and miracle-narratives, across formal and informal contexts.¹⁹ There have also

¹⁴ Abou Zahab, "The Politicization of the Shia Community in Pakistan in the 1970s and the 1980s," 44.

¹⁵ See my article "Husain's University: Urdu Shi'i *khiṭābat* in Contemporary Karachi," forthcoming with *Asian Ethnology* in 2024.

¹⁶ Fuchs, *Pure Muslim Land*, 48.

¹⁷ The primary medium of oratorical engagement is the Shi'a majlis, a gathering to commemorate the deceased. The majlis is a ubiquitous performance in Karachi, and there are tens of majalis (pl. of majlis) happening on any given day in the city (with some exceptions, such as 'Id and the birthdays of Muhammad and the Imams). During Muharram and Safar, when Shi'a mourn for the Karbala martyrs, the daily number of majalis can go into thousands.

¹⁸ Vernon James Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Amy Carol Bard, "Desolate Victory: Shi'i Women and the Marsiyah texts of Lucknow" PhD diss., Columbia University, New York, 2002 (<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fdesolate-victory-sh%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D14771> [accessed 4 March 2022]). See also Bard's "No Power of Speech Remains": Tears and Transformation in South Asian Majlis Poetry," in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, eds. Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 145–65, and "Hearing mo'jizat in South Asian Shi'ism,"

been more isolated case studies of Shi'i practice, of which Mary Hegland's work on the Shi'a women in Peshawar, Karen Ruffle's vignettes about women's *matam* (self-flagellation) in Karachi, and Sara Rizvi Jafree's conversations with Shi'a women scholars are some examples.²⁰ This scholarship has employed diverse heuristics for their data: to wit, Hegland, Ruffle, and Jafree are grounded in anthropology, religious studies, and social work, respectively, with these approaches influencing how the scholars approach their data. As such, though all comment on the importance of orators in Pakistani Shi'i lives, no one work devoted to the study of oratory, whether that of the public sphere or that of the domestic private sphere, exists in secondary scholarship: indeed, even the Urdu sources themselves only speak piecemeal to this central ritual performance.²¹

Attention to orators also helps redress the privileged place that the 'ulama', "the traditionally educated Muslim scholars," have occupied in Islamic studies scholarship as the guardians of the Islamic religious tradition.²² The attention to this class of men has varied over time. In the South Asian context, Peter Hardy captured the 'ulama' as part of a larger "underworld" in colonial India, frozen in time and therefore out of place in the contemporary world.²³ Barbara Metcalf, pushing against Hardy's theorization, charted the birth and growth of the Deobandi 'ulama', demonstrating the malleability of the actors that many conceptualize as rigid and inflexible.²⁴ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, in addition to his excellent *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, also draws out the relevance of the 'ulama', especially in their continuous prominence in the Muslim public spheres from Pakistan to Egypt.²⁵ Attention to the 'ulama', however, comes at the expense of dismissing a plethora of epistemic rivals, of

in *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, eds. Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 137–66.

²⁰ For Mary Elaine Hegland, see "The Power Paradox in Muslim Women's Majales: North-West Pakistani Mourning Rituals as Sites of Contestation over Religious Politics, Ethnicity, and Gender," *Signs* 23, no. 2 (1998): 391–428; "Shi'a Women's Rituals in Northwest Pakistan: The Shortcomings and Significance of Resistance," *Anthropological Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2003): 411–42; "Flagellation and Fundamentalism: (Trans)forming Meaning, Identity, and Gender through Pakistani Women's Rituals of Mourning," *American Ethnologist* 25, no. 2 (1998): 240–66; Karen Ruffle, "Wounds of Devotion: Reconceiving *Matam* in Shi'i Islam" *History of Religions* 55, no. 2 (2015): 172–95; and Sara Rizvi Jafree, "Informal Congregational Social Workers and Promotion of Social Welfare in Sermons: A Study of Shia Women Religious Scholars of Pakistan" *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work* 39, no. 2 (2020): 156–73.

²¹ See Iritiza 'Abbas, 'Allama Talib Jauhari: *Hayat aur Khidmat* (Karachi: Jawahir Foundation, 2020) and *Chahardah Sad Salah Yadgar-i Murtazavi (1957–2007): Golden Jubili ke Hawale se* (Karachi: Idara Jashn-i Yadgar-i Murtazavi, 2007); Taha Turabi ed., *Turabiyat* (Karachi: 'Allama Rashid Turabi Memorial Centre, 2009); Amir Hussain Chaman ed., *Minbar ka Dusra Nam* (Karachi: Print Media Publications, 1975); Haider Zaidi Hashimpuri, *Auj-i Zamir* (Karachi: Markaz-i 'Ulum-i Islamiyya, 2014); Shahid Naqvi, 'Azadari: *Tihzibi, Adabi, aur Saqafati Manzar Name Mein* (Lahore: Izhar Sons, 2002); Dr. 'Abbas Raza Nayyar Jalalpuri ed., *Khutut Banam-i Zamir* (Karachi: Muhsina Memorial Foundation, 2015); Zamir Akhtar Naqvi, *Urdu Marsiya Pakistan Mein* (Karachi: Sayyid and Sayyid, 1982); Syed Imran Zafar, *Karachi ki 'Azadari*, vol. 1 (Karachi: Zahra Academy, 2022); 'Aqeel 'Abbas Jafri, *Karachi ki 'Azadari: Ibtida'i Nuqush 1950 tak* (Karachi: Virsa Publications, 2023).

²² Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1.

²³ Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 169.

²⁴ Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²⁵ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chapter 5.

which the orators are one example, that animate the very efforts of the ‘ulama’ to maintain, demonstrate, and cement their presence in Muslim imagination and practice. The khatibs I reference below occupy a middling ground between the ‘ulama’ and the devotees: a small minority of khatibs is certainly formally trained in Islamic madrasas and seminaries, and most khatibs have some experience of attending, but not necessarily completing, curriculums either in Pakistani madrasas or in Iranian or Iraqi seminaries.

“The Shi’a . . . material and foundational to the creation of Pakistan”

The Gregorian date of 14 August 2021, overlapped with the Islamic calendar date of Muharram 5, 1443. On this day, as on the four days before and on the four days after, my morning fieldwork consisted of attending the series of *majalis* (pl. of *majlis*) that the orator Shahenshah Naqvi was addressing in Soldier Bazaar, Karachi. The venue is formally called Mehfil-i Shah-yi Shahidan, but colloquially known and referred to by the Shi’a devotees in the city as ‘Ali Muttaqi House. The ‘Ali Muttaqi House majlis has, over the years, cultivated a particular reputation of attracting an intellectually elite cadre of Urdu-speaking Shi’a orators, including, but not limited to, Ayatollah ‘Ali Naqi Naqvi, or Naqqan mian; Ayatollah ‘Aqil al-Gharavi; Dr. Kalb-i Sadiq; and Rashid Turabi, to name some of the stellar orators that have climbed the ornate minbar in this gathering place. The audience, too, consists of individuals with significant recognizability in the city, if not the country writ large. To wit, in the course of my fieldwork in 2019 and 2021, I witnessed ‘Ali Zaidi, then the Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs; Shehla Raza, Speaker of the Provincial Assembly; Farooq Sattar, a political leader and former mayor of Karachi; Maqbool Baqar, then a justice of the Supreme Court and, at the time of the writing of this article, the caretaker Chief Minister of Sindh; and many other politicians, bureaucrats, and literati regularly attend the early morning majlis at ‘Ali Muttaqi House. I highlight these details to reinforce the seriousness of these gatherings and to drive home the importance of attending to the contexts in which particular claims are offered, including the one that I now examine.

Upon ascending the minbar and having recited the formal Arabic *khutba* that marks the beginning of oratory, Shahenshah Naqvi unfolded a small piece of paper and said, “The Shi’a personalities whose roles were material and foundational to the creation of Pakistan” (*tashkil-i Pakistan mein jin Shi’a shakhsiyat ka asasi aur buniyadi kirdar raha*). Naqvi then proceeded, for around three and a half minutes, to read a list of sixty-three names and thus render his initially ambiguous “Shi’a personalities” graspable and concrete. The list included individuals whose names are easily recognizable to lay audiences such as His Highness Sir Agha Khan the III, the Maharaja as well as the Raja of Mahmudabad, Syed Ameer ‘Ali, and Muhammad ‘Ali Jinnah, and other names that historians of modern South Asia might be more interested in, which is to say, names that belie an easy identification at first hearing. Naqvi read the list in a fairly monotonous tone, his voice low and grave, and upon completion of the list, he requested the audience to join him in reciting a *fatiha*, an Islamic blessing of the deceased through the recitation of the first few qur’anic verses, for the souls of these historical figures.

As Naqvi read through this list, it was not just his voice and his demeanor that captured the audience’s attention. Indeed, on the ornate minbar that Naqvi was

seated on, was affixed a small Pakistani flag, one that was visible to three different audiences: First, the devotees inside the physical confines of the ‘Ali Muttaqi house, in the courtyard where Naqvi was orating; second, the devotees that filled up the streets surrounding the venue, where a live video broadcast of the oration accompanied the loudspeakers that are more ubiquitous in such gatherings; and third, the digital audiences, whether those listening to Naqvi’s oration later that night when it would be uploaded onto YouTube and played on different television stations, or those listening to Naqvi’s oration at any other later point in time, for a whole variety of reasons.

The discursive framing of the list, “The Shi’a personalities whose roles,” worked hand-in-hand with the material framing of the speech-event, the easy visibility of a Pakistani flag that had been absent from all past events, and the ideological framing of the event, that it was 14 August, the day celebrated as Independence Day in postpartition Pakistan. This triangulation of discourse, materials, and ideological structures lends itself to thinking about the performance of factuality that Naqvi undertook here. The otherwise ubiquitous act of reading from a paper, reciting a list in a neutral and distant tone, and simply presenting the data, rather than commenting upon it, all were in service of what might be read easily, but mistakenly, as nonchalant objectivity, rising above and beyond pettier intertradition differences. Much later, in the oration, Naqvi did offer some glosses on the list he had presented, but it is significant that he chose the beginning of the ritual performance, when the audience is waiting for him to begin his oration, to recite these names.

Naqvi’s list of names, framed by him as Shi’i personalities pivotal to the creation of Pakistan, is not, however, a marginalized group offering an alternative history, or an inclusion of excluded voices into an inhospitable archive. The list was merely a regurgitation of the state’s version of the history of Pakistan, one where Pakistan is the inevitable unfolding of clearly linked historical causes and effects, with the teleology simple, identifiable, and unwavering. Let me illustrate with two quick examples from Naqvi’s list. Both Syed Ameer ‘Ali and the Maharaja of Mahmudabad are no strangers to historians of modern South Asia. Though differing in regions, professions, and legacy, ‘Ali and the Maharaja have been well-attended to in secondary scholarship in English and Urdu alike. Their credentials and achievements, however, are not at stake: it is the slippage of the tongue with which they are folded, here by Naqvi but generally in statist history broadly, under a “Pakistan” movement, despite having lived and died well before any ideas, however embryonic, of a separate nation-state for the Muslims were floated in public or private discussions.

A more complex inclusion in Naqvi’s list is that of Agha Khan the III. Beyond naming the Agha Khan in his list, Naqvi also commented later in his oration that the “Muslim League” was founded by an Ismaili, in the “1800 something.” Naqvi’s discussion of the Agha Khan centered on the latter’s religious identity, one which Naqvi recognized as Shi’a, at least in this rhetorical performance, and one that Naqvi further noted was indispensable to the history of Muslim belonging in South Asia. Again, the empirical inaccuracy around the dates of the founding of the All-India Muslim League is not what should jump to mind when listening to the claim Naqvi makes; what should capture our attention is the linear logic that links the creation of Pakistan to the founding of the Muslim League, a logic that omits, if not outright

denies, the presence of significant differences both around religious identity, and around alternative conceptions of Pakistan, voiced in British India.²⁶ The identification of Agha Khan with the birth of the “Muslim League” is a narrative that state history in Pakistan promotes: arguably, it is Agha Khan’s advocacy in the League of Nations in the 1930s that comes closest, rather than his involvement with the origins of the Muslim League, to his participation in the movement for an independent nation-state.

Similarly, in the brief gloss that Naqvi provided on his understanding (*meri danist*) of the “Pakistan Movement,” he shared what, in his reading, were the two basic tenets that undergirded the movement. These two topics (*unwan*) chosen by the leaders (*qa’idin*) were “A knowledge in Muslims of their rights” (*musalmanon mein un ke huquq ka shu’ur*) and “A knowledge of the unity and accord of the Ummat” (*ittifaq aur ittihad-i ummat ka shu’ur*). While the second of these aims lacks a locative term analogous to “in Muslims” from the first aim, presumably the knowledge is being raised in the same target demographic. Here, too, Naqvi’s narrative dovetails heavily with the state rhetoric around Muslims as an oppressed minority in British India, steeped in the darkness of tradition, and lagging behind other nations in the development of a national consciousness. In such a view, the distinctions of class, caste, language, and geography are subservient to an overarching, monolithic category Muslim that transcends all these other identity markers. The leaders, first the men from Naqvi’s list and then, presumably, the state that followed, also become leaders and guides of a people that know no better, that lack a knowledge of their own rights as well as the rights of, and their responsibilities to, their fellow Muslims. Naqvi’s point in invoking these foundational aspirations was to harken to a past that Pakistanis today, and not just the Shi’a, had diverged from, and were thus in need of a reminder.

In both the list and the brief gloss on the Pakistan movement, and in the affixing of the flag to the minbar, and of the unspoken recognition of 14 August, we find how Naqvi, a prominent Shi’i orator who has, in other places, claimed that “the Shi’a got Imran Khan elected” and that “Pakistan was envisioned by a Sunni and executed by a Shi’a,” merely articulates a history of Pakistan that is thoroughly statist in nature. This in itself is not surprising: Naqvi is, after all, a product of his time and place, and his attempts at wrangling space for the Shi’a in historical imaginations of the country remain confined under the structural premises of state historiography. What is important is to note that though, on the surface, Naqvi’s claims look novel and appear to argue for a revisiting of the past by attending to religious identities, a deeper look at the form and content of the oration lays bare the state historiography mechanics and logics that structure Naqvi’s very narrative itself.

“Iqbal and Jinnah were both Shi’a”

Let me return to the opening vignette for this article. Before I had arrived at Nishtar Park for the first majlis out of a series of five that ‘Ali Raza Rizvi was addressing at the tail end of December 2020, I had certainly wondered if he would remark on the importance of the date, with 25 December being both Jinnah’s birthday as well as

²⁶ See the impressive essays compiled in Megan Robb and ‘Ali Usman Qasmi’s edited volume, *Muslims against the Muslim League: Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Christmas. Rizvi was up to the task: in addition to his comments on Iqbal and Jinnah, both of which I summarized in my opening vignette, Rizvi also proceeded to talk about Mariam and 'Isa, the Qur'anic figures he rendered completely equal to the Biblical Mary and Jesus. The discussions of Mariam, in particular, were noteworthy because of Mariam's comparison with Fatima, Muhammad's daughter, in whose memory the five-day majlis series had been organized. These comparisons have long existed in Shi'i texts and practices, with Mariam often serving as a foil against which Fatima is imagined and aggrandized.

This large-scale commemoration of Ayyam-i Fatimiyya, or the Days of Fatima, in Karachi, in 2020, was an entirely novel affair. Middle-aged devotees, for example, could not recall this event, with such pomp and fare, in their childhood or teenage memories. I met many different individuals who each claimed to have played some part in making the event what it was today: these contributions ranged from arranging for Rizvi to orate, to shifting the venue to Nishtar Park, and to organizing *sabils*, stalls through which foods and beverages are distributed to devotees and participants of a gathering or procession. Though I did not get a chance to interview 'Ali Raza Rizvi himself, he too has put forward in other public orations, his claim to being the founder of these Ayyam-i Fatimiyya gatherings, having hosted the first one in the United Kingdom just before the turn of the millennium. I bring up the newness of this ostensibly old performance to underscore the ease with which devotees adapt old contents to new forms of practice, as well as the smoothness with which new practices incorporate old forms and contents in their performance.

Rizvi's discussion of Iqbal and Jinnah lasted for around five or so minutes that evening. Rizvi noted that names, in and of themselves, were influential: what can be said of Jinnah who has both Muhammad and 'Ali in his name? Iqbal and Jinnah, Rizvi observed, were born into non-Shi'a families but both became Shi'a at a later point in their lives. Jinnah, Rizvi detailed first, acquired a "life membership of the *imambargah* in Bombay, and then in Karachi" (life membership *li Shi'a imambargah ki Bamba' mein aur phir Karachi mein*) and announced, "I am a Twelver Shi'a from today, a believer of Twelve Imams" (*Mein aj se Shi'a Isna' ashari hun, barah imamon ka manne wala*). Iqbal, Rizvi continued, had become a Shi'a after listening to the orations of 'Allama Hairi (*Sayyid 'Ali Hairi ki hi taqiriron se, majalis sunne ke ba'd*). A major public evidence, Rizvi suggested, was Iqbal's poetry before and after his conversion. The criticism in Iqbal's pre-Shi'a poetry, Rizvi clarified, was of the mulla, and not the 'ulama'.²⁷ After becoming a Shi'a, however, Iqbal penned religious poetry and wrote in praise of the Prophet's family, even after many people started commenting that Iqbal was on the verge of going over to the other side (*Bohat se log kehne lage ke lagta hai yeh us taraf chale ja' in ge*). Rizvi then repeated his claim that Iqbal, the ideologue of Pakistan (*nazariyya paish karne wale*), and Jinnah, the maker of Pakistan (*banane wale*) were both Shi'a, and, for this reason at the very least, there ought to be a prohibition against the spilling of Shi'a blood in the country.

The positing of Iqbal as the ideologue of Pakistan is completely consistent with the origins narrative that the statist historians have espoused in Pakistan. In this version, Iqbal is the poet-philosopher of the immediate nation-state as well as the broader

²⁷ The fifth chapter of Naveeda Khan's *Muslim Becoming* can help shed light on the signifier "mulla" as evoked by Rizvi in my observation.

Muslim civilization writ large. Iqbal is referred to as having diagnosed the ills that befell the Muslim nation, such as a reliance on blind customs, an epistemic inertia, a fetishization of the past rather than active attempts in the present, and so forth. Of course, the modernist rhetoric that Iqbal espouses is consistent with the criteria Francis Robinson identified in the Islamic reform movements in South Asia; these include renewed attempts at making revelation meaningful in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the inward movements (toward entities such as “will” or “spirit”), new modes and methods of rationalizing texts, and the reenchanting of the present by critiquing the disenchantment heralded in by secularisation.²⁸ Indeed, we can witness how Robinson’s markers of modernity are evident in the brief exposition that Rizvi offers for Iqbal himself.

Briefly, note the role that rationality, broadly defined as an ability to evaluate multiple claims and to reassess one’s initial position in light of new information, plays in Rizvi’s oration of Iqbal. Iqbal, to think back to Rizvi’s vignette, had become Shi’a after listening to a Twelver Shi’a orator. The implication here is twofold. On the one hand, the orator, as well as oratory, are imagined as committed to reason and logic, to articulating their ideas in the public sphere in a register that is accessible, meaningful, and forceful. On the other hand, the listener, of which Iqbal is the ideal type, must in turn be normatively committed to pursuing truth, receptive to new arguments, and be able to either defend their claims or to concede to stronger ones. The “sense of personal responsibility and the centrality of action on earth” are evident in the depiction of Iqbal’s conduct: Iqbal actively chose to seek out the right path, here that of the Ahl-i Bayt, rather than remain mired in the darkness of the tradition of his birth.²⁹ As Rizvi narrated for his audience, Iqbal, when faced with questions later, did not back down or shy away from his devotion: he doubled down on his love for the Prophet’s family and embraced it in his personal life and his private life.

Similarly, the depictions of Jinnah in this narrative are framed, first and foremost, in terms of enchanted signifiers, the very names of Muhammad and ‘Ali themselves. The idea that names are powerful is a long-standing Muslim doctrine, beginning with Allah and continuing all the way to Muhammad, whose name, to this day, demands a talismanic “peace be upon him” after each invocation. The insertion of this power of names into the historical figure of Muhammad ‘Ali Jinnah thus renders the Quaid a quasi-divine actor, one whose actions were perhaps orchestrated not at his sole behest but at the wishes and commands of his creator. Here, it would be apropos to revisit Stanley Wolpert’s famous quote about Jinnah— “Few individuals significantly alter the course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Mohammad Ali Jinnah did all three” – and suggest, in line with Rizvi, that perhaps Jinnah’s achievements benefitted, if not directly arose, from the power of his very name.³⁰

Consistent with my previous vignette of Naqvi’s oration, Rizvi’s oration is only superficially laying a claim to, or marking out, difference. Though Rizvi sees his contents as potentially disruptive, even as it is not quite clear what exactly he is

²⁸ Francis Robinson, “Islamic Reform and Modernities in South Asia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no. 2/3 (2008): 259–81.

²⁹ Robinson, “Islamic Reform and Modernities,” 265.

³⁰ Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1984), vii.

disrupting, and sufficient grounds for a refusal for future entry into the country, the logic, structure, and teleology of his narrative is completely consistent with that of statist history. The reduction of the plurality of ideas, visions, events, and trajectories that culminated with the partition of British India in 1947 are here reduced to a singular, monolithic ascription to Iqbal and Jinnah, respectively. There is no denying that Rizvi focuses on the religious identities of these two men: however, as I have demonstrated above, the claims Rizvi advances do not delineate Iqbal or Jinnah as peculiarly Shi'a, but as simply modernist. Of course, for the crowd of devotees listening to Rizvi, these distinctions between Shi'a and modernist do not matter; what matters is Rizvi's affectively persuasive argument, peppered with myriad evidence, and one that corroborates the overarching statist historical narrative that the devotees, too, have internalized in their young and adult lives in Pakistan.

Assessing orations

In the two examples I have shared above, we see how orators seamlessly integrate statist historical narratives into their oratory. In both instances, orators privileged these historical discussions by inserting them into the opening part of their oratory. The enthusiastic responses of the crowds, too, evince an appreciation by the audience of the orators' choices of acknowledging the importance of the days on which these orations happened to be taking place. In this section, I draw together my examples to tease out three analytical engagements salient to my argument. These include oratory as a site of national belonging where Shi'i orators and audiences emphasize, in equal parts, what makes them similar to the imagined nation; oratory as "atmospheric citizenship," where the inculcation of origin stories is central to how different groups integrate themselves into the broader body politic; and oratory, ultimately, as an archive where we see the majoritarian aspirations of a minority group—aspirations that are consistent with, rather than an inversion of, existing majority rhetoric in the nation-state.

The limited attention that has been paid to oratory in Pakistan has approached the genre as hermetically sealed and restricted largely to "religious" or "political" topics.³¹ This methodological orientation allows for an easy instrumentalization of oratory in service of broader explanations around mobilization, religious parochialism, and epistemic inertia. My examples do not lend themselves to easy categorization of oratorical content into "religious" or "political": instead, both vignettes demonstrate the intertwining of themes that complicate, if not outright render impossible, scholarly attempts at distilling particular signifiers as either "religious" or "political" in nature. Repeatedly, in the course of my fieldwork, I observed examples that were similar to the aforementioned evocations of Iqbal and Jinnah, or the unidirectional understandings of the Pakistan movement. For example, a recurring topic in the orations in Karachi, Pakistan's largest urban center, was the critique and ridicule of rural oratorical sensibilities, both of the speakers and the listeners. Similarly, in many other orations, literacy became an operative category through which orators and their audiences typologized other orators and audiences,

³¹ Sam Robinson, "The Ancient and Modern Power of Islamic Sermons in Contemporary Pakistan," *Journal for the Royal Asiatic Society* 27, no. 3 (2017): 461–75.

across intra- and inter-tradition lines. The discursive and performative contents about urban/rural or literate/illiterate are not just Shi'a in nature and scope, but familiar tropes evoked by people in Karachi regardless of religious, ethnic, and caste backgrounds. While ostensibly about difference, a closer reading of these vignettes, in the vein I have pursued above, renders clear the overlaps, rather than differences, that orators inadvertently identify. As such, even as Shi'a orators and their audiences purport to be different from their Sunni counterparts, by insisting that Iqbal was a Shi'a as one example, it is their similarities with other groups around them that stand out in the logic, structure, and teleology of the histories espoused in Shi'i khitabat.

The structural similarity in the oratorical content lends itself well to thinking about oratory as one medium where "atmospheric citizenship" is performed by the devotees. Patrick Eisenlohr argues, in the case of present-day Mumbai, that sonic atmospheres, such as processions, are central to a constitution of cultural citizenship.³² By attending to atmospheres, scholars can identify the "felt dimensions of such citizenship... highlighting its somatic dimensions that often evade discursive rendering."³³ Eisenlohr's argument is that inclusion into the body of the nation is not merely at the level of signifiers or discourse, but is felt, literally, by the bodies of the citizens who constitute public gatherings. This is where my emphasis on physical oratorical events is important: the historical vignettes that both Rizvi and Naqvi offered were not simply information that was received and filed away by the devotees. In both cases, as in the many other instances of such oration, audiences responded vehemently and positively with vocal appreciation, coupled with a waving of their hands in an approving gesture, and the physical movements of their bodies as they looked around and made intimate eye contact with other devotees present. It is in these moments where oratorical events become a physical modality in and through which the nation is not merely imagined, it is enacted. The iterative aspect of oratory thus renders the genre a productive venue to observe and feel how the nation is made alive.

My argument has also been that both vignettes demonstrate how oratory serves as a vehicle where minority rhetoric articulates an aspiration to appropriate majoritarian discourses. In making this argument, I am pushing against long-standing depictions, whether emic or etic, that paint the Pakistani Shi'a with a broad brushstroke, labeling them as "largely defenseless."³⁴ At other times, such scholarship renders the Shi'a, writ broadly, as coterminous with the Ahmadi and the Hazara in terms of institutional and systematic persecution, and thus collapses important and significant distinctions of class, caste, language, and geography all in service of some uniform and broad Shi'i identity.³⁵ The location of my ethnographic examples – large, public events open to all and sundry – invites a reconsideration of the place that the Urdu-speaking Shi'a occupy in Karachi, and encourages scholars to turn to self-representations, such as the ones I have discussed above. I have not taken the claims I

³² Patrick Eisenlohr, "Atmospheric Citizenship: Sonic Movement and Public Religion in Shi'i Mumbai," *Public Culture* 33, no. 3 (2021): 371–92.

³³ *Ibid.*, 373.

³⁴ Abbas Zaidi, "The Shias of Pakistan: Mapping an Altruistic Genocide," in *Faith-Based Violence and Deobandi militancy*, eds. Jawad Syed, Edwina Pio, Tahir Kamran, and Abbas Zaidi (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 288.

³⁵ V. G. Julie Rajan, *Al Qaeda's Global Crisis: The Islamic State, Takfir, and the Genocide of Muslims* (London: Routledge, 2015), 230–86.

examined at face value, but rather interrogated and embedded them within a broader struggle for hegemony, one in which the minority is as invested and as willing to internalize and imbibe the logic and structure of majoritarian discourse.

Rashid Turabi remembered

Let me highlight one last example to hammer home my argument. During the course of my fieldwork in Karachi, the specter of Rashid Turabi (1908–1973) loomed large. Turabi, arguably the single most influential Urdu Shi'i orator in contemporary South Asia, was remembered by my interlocutors, as well as in the many texts and writings on his life, not just for his oratory, but for what he had contributed to the early growth and eventual stability of the nascent nation-state.

On 11 January 2022, I interviewed an orator who I will call "Muhammad."

After I had finished introducing myself and my dissertation project, Muhammad suggested that we begin with Rashid Turabi. Turabi, Muhammad noted, had been in Hyderabad, Deccan, on the eve of partition and was specifically invited to Karachi by Jinnah and the Raja of Mahmudabad. The reason for this invitation was simple: both men desired for Turabi to translate 'Ali's letter to Malik Ashtar so that the letter could serve as the basis for the soon-to-be drawn-up constitution for the country. Turabi was not quite willing to make such a journey, but was eventually persuaded by being gifted an *ashra*, a series of ten majalis where Turabi could orate on any topic of his choosing, that was organized just for him to address in Karachi in 1947–1948.

Two days later, I interviewed another orator whom I will call "Hasan," perhaps the most senior orator in the city today. Shortly into our conversation, Hasan appreciated the foresight (*wasih nazar*) of the Raja of Mahmudabad, who convinced and got the approval from Jinnah, in 1947, to invite Turabi to Karachi to translate 'Ali's aforementioned letter. To this day, Hasan shared with pride, that the translation of the letter is given to officers who reach the level of colonel or higher in the Pakistan Army. Hasan's discussion of Turabi was full of specific details concomitant to Turabi's first visit to Karachi, such as the hotel Turabi stayed in, the places where Turabi orated, and the topics Turabi discussed in his orations.

Whereas the earlier ethnographic examples from Naqvi and Rizvi had focused on the public figures well-known in Pakistan, whether Sayyid Amir 'Ali, the Maharaja of Mahmudabad, the Agha Khan, Iqbal, or Jinnah, my conversations with Shi'a orators consistently highlighted Rashid Turabi's activities in and around the partition of 1947. The two conversations I have shared above are united in their insistence of why Turabi was invited: this is because the incipient nation-state could find no better paradigm to guide its constitutional aspiration than a letter attributed to a seventh-century figure from Arabia. Of course, the stories recounted by both Muhammad and Hasan raise more questions than answers. If the letter was not yet translated, how were Jinnah and the Raja so sure that its contents would live up to their expectations? To invite a translator from Hyderabad, Deccan, also suggests that Jinnah and the Raja did not have faith in the many other prolific 'ulama' of the time who had already made the move to Karachi, including some renowned Shi'a translators, such as A. H. Rizvi. Yet, to ask these questions is to miss the affective work that such narratives do. Turabi is important in these narratives because he provides a richer texture to the histories

Shi'a tell, but what really anchors these narratives is the linkage of Jinnah's constitutional aspiration with 'Ali's letter to his commander.

Both interviews above memorialized Turabi's involvement with the Pakistan movement and were consistent with how Turabi is remembered in Shi'i texts produced in Pakistan. The *Tazkirah 'ulama'-yi Imamiyyah Pakistan*, a leading biographical dictionary of Shi'i 'ulama' in Pakistan up until the mid-1980s, depicts Turabi as having a keen interest in politics (*siyasat se khas shughaf tha*) and as having participated in the Pakistan movement alongside Muhammad 'Ali Jinnah.³⁶ Historian Reza Kazimi heralds Turabi himself as a constitutional wizard who, through his speeches and writings, solved the problems of "*siyasat-i mudun aur dastur sazi*" (civics and constitutional design).³⁷ Turabi is also credited with pioneering the use of the 9 Muharram majlis in Nishtar Park as a *markazi* (central) platform from which to articulate *qaumi masa'il* (national issues), a practice that continues to this day.³⁸ Shahenshah Naqvi, for example, regularly reminds his audiences on 9 Muharram that it was Rashid Turabi who pioneered the use of the majlis as a platform for articulating Shi'i concerns around civil, political, and national issues to the government.³⁹

Public oratory in Pakistan

My attention to Shi'a male orators builds upon a wider history of the importance of oratory in Pakistan, beyond a ritual performance peculiar to the Shi'a, with two notable examples from just before and after the partition of British India in 1947, driving home how oratory has been central to political events in the region. Farhat Haq, in her *Sharia and the State*, notes how 'Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari's orations during the *Rangila Rasul* events in the 1920s found their way into a biography of 'Ismuddin, the protagonist at the heart of the affair in prepartition Lahore.⁴⁰ Similarly, Agha Shorish Kashmiri, a well-known Urdu editor and journalist in the 1960s and 1970s, central to Jama'at-i Islami's opposition to Islamic socialism, both of the Maulana Bhashani and the Z. A. Bhutto kind, and at the forefront of multiple anti-Ahmadi agitations, authored one of the definitive treatises on public speaking, his *Fann-i Khitabat*.⁴¹ Also relevant within the genealogy of oratory in Pakistan is Kausar Niazi (1934–1994), a politician belonging to the Pakistan People's Party who became famous as "Maulana Kausar Niazi" in part because of his prowess in public speaking, and the author of *Andaz-i bayan*, an Urdu history-cum-treatise on public speaking in the subcontinent as well as on the Muslim tradition broadly.⁴² Lastly, contemporary Shi'a orators proudly commemorate the role played by Muhammad Ismail Deobandi

³⁶ Naqvi, *Tazkirah 'ulama'-yi Imamiyyah Pakistan* (Islamabad: Imamia Dar al-Tabligh, 1982), 104.

³⁷ Reza Kazimi, "'Allamah Rashid Turabi ki a'yini jidd-o-jahd," *Qaumi Zaban* (2020), 23.

³⁸ For a depiction of Turabi as a representative leader, see 'Aqil Turabi's preface to vol. 4 of *Majalis-i Turabi*, edited by Zamir Akhtar Naqvi (Karachi: Markaz-i 'Ulum-i Islamiyya, 1993).

³⁹ Shahenshah Naqvi regularly makes this claim in the days leading up to the 9 Muharram majlis, and I recorded this in my fieldnotes for 2019 and 2021.

⁴⁰ Farhat Haq, *Sharia and the State: Blasphemy Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 29.

⁴¹ For Kashmiri's anti-Ahmadi agitation, see Sadia Saeed, *Politics of Desecularization: Law and the Minority Question in Pakistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 115–16. For his opposition to Islamic socialism of various kinds, see Humeira Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists: Jama'at-e-Islami and Jama'at-ud-Da'wa in Urban Pakistan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 83–84.

⁴² Kausar Niazi, *Andaz-i Bayan* (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1975).

(1901–1976), an orator who converted to the Twelver Shi‘i tradition and who, in the stories recounted from the Shi‘a pulpits today, single-handedly convinced the Parliament of Pakistan, including the then president Z. A. Bhutto in the audience, to declare the Ahmadis as kafir via the constitutional amendment of 1973.⁴³ The examples of Bukhari, Kashmiri, Niazi, and Deobandi illustrate the role that oratory has played in the Pakistani milieu and imagination alike, beyond the confines of a circumscribed religious performance.

These instances, concurrent with the Rizvi epigraph with which I began this article, foreground what Bernard Bate noted, in the context of early twentieth-century South India, as the intertwining of “the press and the platform.”⁴⁴ Here, platform refers to the stage from which the Tamil orators that Bate studied addressed their audiences: in the Pakistani context, both the minbar, a set of stairs used as a pulpit, from which the Shi‘a orators speak to the devotees gathered in front of them, or the more generic “stage,” set up in a whole array of public gatherings, from political rallies, to concerts, to weddings, from which different speakers make themselves visible and audible, transpose onto Bate’s invocation of the platform. By coconstituting the platform and the press, Bate harkens to the centrality that print capitalism has enjoyed in the scholarship on the construction of “large-scale modern social imaginaries such as the public sphere, the people, or the modern nation-state.”⁴⁵ Bate notes that the press and the platform are “utterly different modes of communicative production that operate through very different political economic modalities and social processes.”⁴⁶ While the press – the novel, the newspaper, the pamphlets – relied on reading ability, access to printed materials, and technologies of production, the platform – of which political oratory is one example – “spread in South Asia (and far more broadly) largely through motivations of the heart, in appeals to the imagination, in promises of salvation and of the reconciliation of God and man and the reconciliation of man and man in the universalization of the concept of natural or human rights.”⁴⁷ Orators set up shop at street corners, parks, beaches, thoroughfares, and spoke to whoever would listen to them. In contrast to an emphasis on the rational and deliberative debates that marked Jurgen Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere in modern Europe, orators participated in an economy of affect, speaking in what William Connolly called, in a different context, “the visceral register of intersubjectivity.”⁴⁸ While Bate’s attention to oratory is in service of the interpellation performed by an elite political class of “people utterly unlike

⁴³ Nasir Abbas, “Qadiyanioun ko Kafir kis ne Dilwaya ?,” YouTube Video, 19:04, 7 September 2020 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEy_4xmVlnQ [accessed 12 April 2023]); Asif Raza Alvi, “Assembly me kis tarha Munazra jeeta | Allama Asif Raza Alvi 2022,” YouTube Video, 13:45, 7 September 2022 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8w-gHziRdw> [accessed 12 April 2023]).

⁴⁴ Bernard Bate, *Protestant Textuality and the Tamil Modern: Political Oratory and the Social Imaginary in South Asia*, posthumously edited by E. Annamalai, F. Cody, M. Jayanth, and Constantine V. Nakassis (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁴⁸ William Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11. For the European bourgeois public sphere, see Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

themselves,” I take a different route in this article.⁴⁹ I insist that in the Urdu Shi‘i orations, people who orate are exactly like – in their understanding of history – the people they orate for, and that taken together in this particular regard, the speakers and the audiences, both Urdu-speaking Shi‘a, are exactly like the group that scholars so often try to distinguish them from, the Sunnis writ large.

My attention to oratory also complements the recent encouraging trend in scholarship on Pakistan to center the role of affect in the construction of belonging to the nation-state. Nosheen Ali and Shenila Khoja-Moolji have both turned, in different contexts, to the conceptual apparatuses of feeling and attachment with which to understand the imbrications of statehood, sovereignty, and belonging. Ali details how religious identities are interspersed with national identity, or lack thereof, in Gilgit Baltistan.⁵⁰ Khoja-Moolji reads the cultural texts and public performances of sovereignty by the state as well as by rival claimants such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan.⁵¹ Elsewhere, Maria Rashid has unpacked the relationship between sentiment and sacrifice in the Pakistan Army, and Omar Kasmani has identified the public architecture of intimacy evident in the shrines at Sehwan.⁵² These studies have been rich, precise, and productive: my article is a small contribution to this ongoing conversation. My recourse to the orations I attended – large public events in Karachi, though primarily dominated by Urdu-speaking Shi‘a – during my fieldwork helps bridge between microscopic ethnographic work with interlocutors and with broad analysis of state institutions. In particular, my physical presence among crowds helps think about the concrete ways in which belonging to the nation-state, albeit of the statist historical narrative kind, is orated, felt, and celebrated.

Conclusion

In this article, I presented three examples in which the Urdu-speaking Shi‘a of Karachi imagine and discourse on the origins of Pakistan. Though each of the examples foregrounds a particularly Shi‘i reading of the figures involved with the partition of British India in 1947, I have argued that the claims presented in each instance are instructive for the similarities they demonstrate with the statist historical narratives of Pakistan. Though differing superficially in terms of detail, the claims are completely consistent with the logic, structure, and teleology of the stories that the Pakistani state promotes about the origins of the country. Viewed in this light, the minority rhetoric of the Shi‘a should not be romanticized as a resisting, subverting, or undermining hegemonic discourse, but as a productive inquiry into the majoritarian aspirations that minority groups harbor.

⁴⁹ Bate, 6.

⁵⁰ Nosheen Ali, *Delusional States: Feeling Rule and Development in Pakistan’s Northern Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁵¹ Shenila Khoja-Moolji, *Sovereign Attachments: Masculinity, Muslimness, and Affective Politics in Pakistan* (California: University of California Press, 2022).

⁵² Maria Rashid, *Dying to Serve: Militarism, Affect, and the Politics of Sacrifice in the Pakistan Army* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020); and Omar Kasmani, *Queer Companions: Religion, Public Intimacy, and Sainly Affects in Pakistan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).

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