

‘The Misdeeds and Follies of Morally Bankrupt Elite’? Framing Rioting and Ethnic Violence in Karachi – A Case Study

Yaar Muhammad and Peter Brett

Abstract

This study is based on an analysis of the different arguments utilized in the Pakistani news media in relation to the riots in Karachi after a bomb blast in the Ashura procession on 29 December 2009. From a framing analysis of the related columns and editorials written in The News International for a month after the incident, the article argues that the columnists and editorials articulated opinions and arguments based upon a variety of different interpretations of the causes of ethnic violence. However, there was some consensus around instrumentalist interpretations in the opinion and editorial columns, which emphasized the role of elites and governmental inadequacies in triggering the ethnic mobilization and conflict. The article concludes that any explanation of ethnic violence must combine insights from a variety of perspectives to explain riots. An enhanced understanding of the driving forces behind ethnic violence might lead to richer understandings about how to circumvent or prevent it.

Keywords: Karachi, riots, media, framing, case study

Introduction

The history of analyses of rioting and crowd uprisings, from popular disturbances in Britain and France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and up to and including present day riots, is essentially the history of newspaper reporters' perceptions of the crowd. There is a seminal historical literature on the psychology of the crowd and factors that might trigger riotous behaviour as well as nuanced studies of cities that were especially prone to popular disturbances such as Bristol in the south west of England . These studies all provide examples of the self-conscious language which journalists applied to crowds, preconceptions as to what constituted acceptable or unacceptable gatherings, and an editorial 'line' on groups and individuals who seemed to merit blame for peaceful protest turning to violence. There is always an interesting point at which a 'crowd' becomes a 'mob' in the journalistic language of crowd description.

Karachi – no stranger as a venue for regular displays of protest, dissent, and inter-ethnic violence - is a fascinating laboratory to explore early twenty first century manifestations of contemporary newspaper framing of riotous behaviour in a culturally diverse and divided city in the developing world. The purpose of this article is to offer an in-depth analysis and case study of one newspaper's coverage of one recent episode of ethnic violence in Karachi. A bomb blast in the Ashura procession of 28 December 2009 killed at least 42 people, and over 120 people were injured in the attack. The blast was then followed by riots in Karachi, angry groups of individuals throwing stones at ambulances, setting shops and cars on fire, looting and firing bullets into the air (an estimated 2,500 shops and about 50 vehicles were burnt out in the subsequent arson incidents). The event naturally received a lot of attention in both the Pakistani and the international media.

More specifically, the aim of this limited case study was to investigate how the ethnic violence in Karachi was described, diagnosed and evaluated in one influential Pakistani newspaper, *The News International*. *The News International* has an ABC certified circulation of 140,000 copies and is the second largest English language newspaper in Pakistan publishing from Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi/Islamabad . The study sought answers to the following three research questions. Firstly, in quantitative terms, how often were different framing mechanisms represented in the portrayal of the violence in Karachi? Secondly – and more qualitatively - How did *The News International* frame the riots in Karachi? How did editors, columnists, and feature writers diagnose and evaluate the ethnic violence? And thirdly, how did they prescribe possible future remedies or solutions to this violence?

In order to address these research questions, this article firstly briefly seeks to situate Karachi in its relevant historical, cultural, political, religious, and national context in relation to previous experiences of rioting and ethnic violence. Secondly, the study's methodology is shared and the process of framing outlined and explained. Finally, the study's findings are outlined and discussed. An early finding was that editorial writers and columnists tended to frame the Karachi riots of late December 2009 by relying on number of explanations or stories about ethnic violence which could be summed up as relatively simplistic narrative discourses – for example, the language of ancient hatreds; manipulative leaders; and economic rivalry between different ethnic groups was regularly deployed. These analyses are critiqued. However, *The News International* narratives also differed in many ways. Firstly, they often held contrasting views

regarding the nature of ethnic violence. Secondly, they disagreed about what spurred groups to fight, and in their diagnosis of who was to blame. Thirdly, they differed in their range of suggestions regarding remedies to prevent ethnic violence in the future.

Karachi and the broader Pakistani Context

Karachi is the largest and most densely populated city in Pakistan and its population which was around 400,000 in 1947 is approximately 15 million now . Karachi is a city of migrants and has a spectacular ethnic diversity, with representation of each and every ethnic group in Pakistan . At the time of establishment of Pakistan in 1947, most of the migrants settled in the city originated from different parts of India. In recent decades, the city has been further diversified by the arrival of migrants from Iran, a number of Middle Eastern countries, and Central Asian states, not least neighbouring Afghanistan. According to one estimate, the current ethnic composition of Karachi is framed as follows:

the largest segment of Mohajirs, or New Sindhis (six million-plus), is followed by Pathans (three million), Punjabis (two million), Sindhis and Baloch about two million together. Immigrants from other areas include those of Bangladeshi origin (1.6 million), Afghans (300,000), Iranians (100,000), Burmese (100,000), and others.

Pakistan is a state of “contending identities” and Karachi is no exception. The contending ethno-linguistic identities are a major factor underpinning conflict in the city . Though there was little linkage between ethnic identity and affiliation to particular political parties from 1947 to the 1970s, believe that two important events brought significant changes in the politics of Karachi. First was the introduction of a quota system by the government led by the Pakistan People’s Party to address Sindhis’ grievances in 1973. Within this new system, 60% of state jobs and admission in state educational institutions were reserved for rural dwellers and 40% for the urban population. Second was the Sindh legislative Assembly’s language Bill of 1972, which proposed the use of Sindhi language in offices, courts and legislature, and which made the teaching of Sindhi compulsory in schools . These policies alienated the Mohajir community. Moreover, the language riots further widened the gulf between the Mohajir and other communities and culminated into the formation of the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) to safeguard the interest of Mohajirs in Karachi. Thus the 1980s marked the origins of sustained ethnic strife in Karachi and the following years have seen a spiral of increasing violence feeding upon itself in which competing ethnic groups, and arms and drug mafias are involved .

It is not hard to add to the list of de-stabilising factors unsettling Karachi: For example, state dependence on Islam as a binding force within society and politics; the control of the state largely by Punjabi-Mohajir elites right after its creation; the failure of economic growth strategies; the assertion of cultural and nationalist agendas by regional groups such as Sindhis and Mohajirs; and the easy and abundant availability of weapons, . Moreover, argue that the increasing size of the population of Karachi as a result of migration has created severe inter-ethnic problems and a deeply divided society on the basis of language. The demographic changes are gradually disrupting the patterns of living of ethnic groups resulting in the uneven development of settlements causing heightened ethnic conflict . Ethnic activists along with criminal elements contribute to the already fragmented urban space in the city. Furthermore, the trans-nationalisation of the Afghan *jihad* in the 1980s, also added to the propagation of violent

ethnic parties . Now militant wings of the main competing political parties in Karachi, the MQM, PPP and ANP play significant roles in instigating the violence, but the state machinery has largely failed to police and de-weaponize the city effectively and to safeguard life and property of the citizens .

Karachi is the economic heart and hub of Pakistan contributing about 70% of the total revenue and 25% of the GDP of Pakistan . Therefore, peace in Karachi is critical for stability and the economic well-being of the country. However, the persistent ethno-sectarian violence, and recurring and unchecked activities of different ethnic and local mafias, along with chronic energy crises have made the city less viable for business, trade, and industrial activities; and deterred foreign as well as local investors from investing in the city . The situation has assumed such alarming proportions that some businesses have started relocating their administration and production outside of Pakistan .

Against this backdrop of animosity, hatred and violence, Karachi on 28 December 2009 witnessed a fresh wave of ethnic violence. This episode shook the entire nation and left it in mourning at the dawn of a new year.

Methodology

Although a variety of news material is published in a newspaper - such as editorials, columns, photographs, news articles, and opinions - we decided to analyse editorials and columns, because they usually represent the voice of the newspaper. In order to perform this task, frames were extracted from the editorials/ columns from the online version of *The News International*. A frame is “a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” . The primary function of a frame is to diagnose, to evaluate, and to prescribe remedies in relation to a particular problem. Entman further suggests that frames can help to define problems by determining what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, diagnose causes by highlighting the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments by spotting causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies by offering treatments for the problems and also by predicting their likely effects. He argues that:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

The News International is published every day and each edition has at least two editorials. Over a time span from 29 December 2009 to 30 January 2010, around 64 editorials were published. Similarly, since every edition of the newspaper contained approximately 5 columns, almost 160 columns were published. From these we made a selection of all the articles mentioning the terms Karachi and violence. We also included editorials discussing ethnicity and ethnic groups in Karachi. Based on these criteria of selection, we selected 8 editorials and 10 columns on violence in Karachi. Thus, the research design is basically modelled on a case study . Using *NVivo 10*, both types of frame analysis, that is qualitative as well as quantitative, were applied to identify categories and theme frequency with respect to each article selected.

Findings: Diagnoses and Evaluations of Ethnic Rioting

First, we present quantitative analysis of the different diagnoses/and evaluations of the riots put forward by the journalists. Since every selected article discusses and diagnoses one or more aspect of these riots, it becomes difficult to put them in broader categories on the basis of their diagnoses of the problem. However, we have categorised the articles into six major themes or frames.

It is worth mentioning here that while analysing the issue at hand, journalists rarely used a single frame in an article, and mostly a columnist or editor covered more than one factor in the explanation of the causes of the ethnic violence. Therefore, instead of categorizing frames on the basis of writers, we classified them on the basis of their frequency in the whole data.

Reasons Given for Ethnic Violence	Frequency
Governmental weaknesses	8
Military operation in the north of Pakistan and Pakistan's involvement in the 'War on Terror'	6
Security Forces/Operational factors	5
Ethnic groups	4
Bureaucracy	3
Economic factor	1

Table 1: Frequency of Framed Reasons for Ethnic Violence

The first element in framing analysis is concerned with journalists' diagnoses of causes - identifying the forces creating the problem, whereas the second part deals with how the writers evaluated the actors involved and the incident; and how they analysed the problem identified in terms of diagnoses . Therefore, in this section we present the diagnoses as well as moral assertions made by columnists and editors in their framing of the issue of ethnic violence in Karachi.

Governmental weaknesses and inadequacies. The most dominant overall diagnosis, employed in the explanation of the causes of the ethnic riots in Karachi, suggested that it was result of “the misdeeds and follies of a morally bankrupt elite clinging to chairs over which hang grand titles of president and prime minister” . According to Iqbal , it was the “leadership, which is, nevertheless, unable to command, order, and execute even a simple warrant for the arrest” and “the whole security apparatus of the country is in a state of paralysis, and not a single person in the leadership is willing to take the responsibility” . The critique applied mainly to politicians at a national level but also by implication filtered down to criticism of state and city leadership too.

Highlighting governments' inefficiency, Peshimam , writing nearly four weeks after the incidents, argued that a number of probes launched by the government were just “to quell the shock – as is customary. As expected, nothing has come of these probes, and the investigations have given vague answers at best”, whereas Hassan rhetorically used the metaphor of “besieged government” and considered the governments' promises and prophecies of dire consequences as

laughable. Similarly, another columnist framed “a bleak and alarming picture of the depleting writ of the government” .

Closely linked with the same diagnosis, a few writers framed the incident within the context of contemporary debates and discussions regarding the President Mr. Asif Ali Zardari’s alleged corruption and incompetence for office. As Gillen and Petersen has pointed out, “discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and shapes the possibilities for future discourse” - and journalists are no exception. They are also a product of discourses and further they shape future discourses through viewing issues predominantly through leadership conflict prisms. Echoing the same theme, Mahmood considering it “truly alarming” that the political actors may have been linked to the killings, and that they should be required to defend their actions. One editorial went on to link contemporary investigations in France of financial kickbacks in relation to a submarine deal in the 1990s to alleged corrupt involvement of the president of Pakistan.

It now transpires that events that began in Paris over a decade ago may have influenced happenings in Pakistan, and may indeed continue to do so in the future...It is alleged that Mr. Zardari, then a minister in his late wife’s second government, received a whopping \$4.3 million of these. Failure to pay back what remained of the sums promised, following a change in government in France, may have led to a 2002 ‘suicide bombing’ in Karachi that killed 11 French naval engineers.

To infer from the French news story, that the president of Pakistan was involved in the deadly ethnic riots of Karachi was merely juxtaposition of the two different incidents in order to lend support to the conspiracy theories often circulated in present day Pakistani society in day-to-day social and political spheres.

The columns and editorials evaluated the incident in the light of the quality of political leadership. It was assumed that the riots were the consequence of a series of misdeeds committed by the nation’s rulers, who were therefore culpable for the destruction being done to Pakistan. For example, a few days after the incident, Iqbal argued in his column:

The north was not what it is now prior to the arrival of the US soldiers in Afghanistan. The north has become what it has become through its direct relationship with what is happening in Afghanistan, and through the unwise decisions of those who sided with the Americans when they arrived in our region, arrogantly vowing to send our neighbors back to the Stone Age.

Pakistan’s involvement in the ‘war on terror’. Yet another frame, highlighting demotic discourse often heard from ordinary men in the streets of Pakistan, from the people sitting on opposition benches of the parliament, and also from the people affiliated with right wing parties of Pakistan, linked the riots and the attacks on the Ashura procession to the military operation in the north of Pakistan, which was being conducted against the Taliban as part of America’s ‘War on Terror’. Doubting Pakistan’s ability to fight the Taliban, one editor pointed out:

There must be some question as to whether the Taliban and their allies have indeed been overcome. Certainly, they seem able to strike at will, where and when they choose. They have retained their ability to do so despite drone attacks, bombing raids, army action in villages and the public opinion against them.

Similarly, one editor went further to argue that Pakistan should find a path that would take it back to the possibility of a more peaceful existence. The evaluation was made that, the Taliban seemed able to strike at will, where and when they choose, and since they had retained their ability to do so despite drone attacks, bombing raids, army action in villages and the public opinion against them, Pakistan's should negotiate with them in order to avoid these kinds of incidents in the future . Appeasement was in the air.

The emphasis on militancy was another recurring theme in many of the columns and editorials. One moral judgment suggested that the:

'jihad' in Kashmir and the emergence of groups backed by the establishment have returned back in a somewhat different form, with 'jihadi' militants seen as allies in the past having turned into foes .

Breach of security/operational inadequacy. The third most favoured diagnosis in the explanation of the causes of the riots highlighted it as a "breach of security" and asserted that, "foolproof" security exists only as a fantasy" . Sehgal saw it as "failure in law enforcement at the highest levels of leadership" on the basis of the facts of "the time gap between the explosion and remedial reaction" and "the enormity of the security task covering the entire route" of Ashura procession. Iqbal framed this theme thus:

Why thousands of security men in their uniform cannot find the culprits? Why do we have institutions like the police and the intelligence agencies and the army and its long payroll if they cannot stop this unending series of blasts?

However, here, it is interesting to note the emergence of two different and opposing evaluations regarding the police and law enforcement agencies. One discourse promoted a highly unfavourable image of the Karachi police which highlighted its corrupt ways of handling any issues and criticized it on the ground that it used almost every law and measure taken by the government to its advantage . On the other hand, quite favourable evaluation was also seen, which highlighted limited resources and the police's inability to deal with the law and order situation of deadly ethnic riots as something to do with their inadequate training and poor technical ability and political appointees .

The inevitability of conflict between different interest groups. Another diagnosis, though not frequent, emerged that ethnic groups are simply another sort of interest group and they were competing with each other for economic and political goods and that ethnic violence was a product of this struggle. This approach is "instrumental" as it asserts that people organize as an ethnic group when it seems the most practical way to get what they want .This is evident in a feature article by Sehgal, who represented the riots as "collateral damage in the battle for turf in Karachi raging between the PPP and the MQM" . Moreover, it was highlighted as part of an ethnic war between Lyari, the oldest settlement in Karachi and populated largely by ethnic Sindhis and Balochs; and Urdu-speaking neighbourhoods such as Liaquatabad and Nazimabad. This account suggested that Lyari, a locality that is politically vibrant and well-knit socially and

often a ground for drug-related gang wars, had an abiding support for the Pakistan People's Party.

A related diagnosis was based on the primordialist assumptions of ethnic violence, suggesting that targeted killings were not going to stop, no matter the forces deployed to stop it, until those doing the killing decided to stop it. Similarly, another editorial added that

Karachi is a powder keg of ethnic and religious tensions like no other city in the country. It is a city bursting at the seams with people all living tightly packed into a hugely stressful urban environment where the slightest spark can start a fire that jumps from place to place at lightning speed – as it did last Monday. .

The metaphor may be lazy and clichéd – and lack satisfactory explanatory detail – but it has the merit of identifying significant pre-conditions and locational, religious and geographical divisions within the city.

Inefficient bureaucracy. Yet another diagnosis put forward was the irresponsibility of the city's bureaucratic agencies and a lack of communication and information sharing between different agencies. The evaluation emphasising this diagnosis assumes that this tragedy could have been avoided if there had been better preparation and coordination among the members of city administration. A linked criticism was that even after the incident nobody was there to accept the responsibility for the incident. For instance, Peshimam evaluated this grave situation:

Not a single high authority – not a single one – has taken any sort of responsibility – meaningful or token – in the aftermath of the huge security breakdown, or even in the face of stalled investigations. There has been no rebuke, no questions asked or answered. It is just business as usual. Nothing major happened, as usual.

further articulated the deep political polarization of bureaucracy and police and the absence of neutrality of the entire system of government. He was of the view that the police, indeed all other departments in the city, had undergone a transformation over the previous twenty years, because whenever an opportunity had presented itself, political parties had stuffed their supporters into the bureaucracy and police. Thus, the 'administrative' or poor organization and liaison argument quickly linked back to the politicians ultimately being to blame.

Economic factors. Only one diagnosis highlighted in the editors/columnists analysis of the riots foregrounded economic factors. A columnist urged the governments to undertake honest expenditure of development funds to meet long festering demands of the public for more openness and transparency. The universal poverty experienced by most ethnic groups across most parts of Karachi largely went unexplored by journalists as having a causal relationship to the riots.

It is worth noting the omissions in these framing explanations in *The News International* and some contrasts with initial reporting in parts of the Western media. For example, in the UK *The Guardian* (28 December) foregrounded the suicide bomber angle – the headline was ‘Suicide bomb targets Shia Muslims in Karachi’. The article also emphasised inter-Islamic tensions – not something referenced in *The News International* coverage:

The suicide bomber evaded heightened security during the traditionally tense month of Muharram when Shias mourn the death in a 7th-century battle of Mohammed's grandson Ali which led to their split with mainstream Islam. Scores of lesser incidents of violence between Shias and Sunni Muslims have been reported in the run-up to Ashura, the holiest day of Muharram, which the Karachi march was marking.

Moreover, *The Guardian* drew attention to an additional external linking frame of Kashmiri militant groups - “Warnings of possible attacks had increased overnight after a suicide bombing yesterday killed eight and wounded 80 in Muzaffarabad, the capital of the Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir”. For the *New York Times* the events in Karachi, “highlighted the multiple security challenges confronting the embattled Islamabad government, from violent vendettas by Taliban militants to sectarian violence against minority Shiites” (27 December 2009) – thereby combining elements of the four most prevalent explanations in *The News International* in one sentence. The top line of reportage in the *New York Times* was to link the rioting in Karachi to “fears that extremist groups already waging a multi-front war against the government were now trying to foment sectarian violence against the country’s minority Shiite Muslims” (29 December).

Remedies Proposed in ‘The News International’ to Avoid Similar Problems in the Future

The previous dimension of the framing analysis related to proposed explanations for the rioting in Karachi. This section focuses upon the different kinds of suggested remedies that were proposed in *The News International* editorials and columns. Firstly, we tabulate the frequency of occurrence of remedies:

Suggested Remedies	Frequency
Selection of morally sound and politically sagacious rulers	3
Disengagement from the War on Terror	3
Role of liberal and progressive citizens in Karachi	2
Stopping politicization of the bureaucracy	2

Search for lowest common-denominator political consensus	1
Stepping back from the land craze by different ethnic groups	1
Adoption of a coherent, cogent and organic counter-terrorism strategy	1
Borrow some liberal, progressive solutions from other related international contexts that have worked	1
Honest expenditure of development funds	1
Expulsion of illegal immigrants from Karachi	1

Table 2: Frequency of Suggested Remedies

Rhetorically the most common and prevalent remedy suggested by editors and columnists was the establishment of “functional political institutions”, and the selection of “morally sound and politically sagacious rulers” .

Yet, another remedy, quite emphatically and boldly echoing the sentiments of the general public suggested that the key element underpinning the Karachi riots lay in the complexities of militancy resulting from Pakistan’s engagement in the affairs of the US-led interminable war on terror and if the country disengaged from it, it would find a solution to the chaos, confusion, and terror in the land. Furthermore, Pakistan should mend fences with the men in the mountains to heal their wounds resulted in the military operation against the Taliban.

Another remedy suggested that the liberal and progressive elements in Karachi had to do something in order to get rid of the riots in the city and for that they only had to come together and make their presence felt . Echoing that same sentiment, Salahuddin further noted that ordinary people had to restore their faith in the system and feel that they possessed a stake in it. They should be conscious of the role they were required to play in the campaign against terrorists and religious extremists.

Other columnists suggested that political parties and religious groups had to take a clear and concrete decision that they would not sanction murder, not condone it and not support or harbour those that commit it and they should publicly condemn the butchery . Similarly, pointing to the two rival groups in Karachi , the PPP and MQM, Sehgal suggested that “they have to get their act together and take a step back from the land craze driving their political ambitions in the battle for Karachi” .

In order to eradicate or minimize the incidence of deadly ethnic riots, a further suggested remedy appealed for the betterment of governance by stopping the politicization of bureaucracy

and administration. Political masters had to discontinue the practice of bending the state structure to their will. And in this regard, civil servants had to change their attitude of performing diligently today under this or that political government and of unintentionally spoiling himself or herself with partisan colours .

Supporting the same remedy, one editorial's suggestion went further by pointing out the practicalities of the issue, and potential opportunities to learn from international success stories elsewhere:

Indonesia is seen as a nation that has fought off militancy. We must learn how they have achieved this... rehabilitation centers have been set up for former militants... free education and quality health care have helped stave off extremism... The government must devise policies that can have a positive impact both now and in the future.

Zaidi , discussing another aspect of the same remedy, advocated the adoption of an organic, coherent and cogent counter-terrorism strategy at national level.

In response, another editorial, asserted that any future counter-terrorism strategy should not become a means to harass or target specific groups (Rehman Malik, the interior minister had initially dubbed the Karachi riots as primarily the work of illegal immigrants and announced that his government would clamp down upon future illegal immigrants in the city).

Discussion/Conclusion

The detailed analysis of the various frames put forward by the columnists and editors of *The News International* indicates some suggestive findings relating to the ethnic violence in Karachi in December 2009 in terms of its causes and suggested remedies. An enhanced understanding of the driving forces behind ethnic violence, as communicated in influential media outlets, might lead to improved understanding about how to circumvent or prevent comparable events in the future and more nuanced journalistic understanding and analysis of riots in Pakistan. Any explanation of ethnic violence must combine insights from a variety of perspectives to explain riots. An enhanced understanding of the driving forces behind ethnic violence might lead to richer understandings about how to circumvent or prevent it.

Incorporating elements of ideological criticism into these findings and analysis reveals that the values, norms, and goals of columnists and editors of *The News International* were (unsurprisingly) influenced largely by the dominant ideology of an instrumental approach to understanding ethnicity and ethnic riots in Karachi. Frequently, the riots were framed within assumptions that a morally bankrupt leadership was directly responsible for what happened: leaders of ethnic communities incited conflict in order to cling themselves to power. While this explanation captures part of the truth, it has its limitations and agendas. It is a simple reading of a complex phenomenon. It seems that resentment regarding the inefficiency of the government of the Pakistan People's Party over the management of various problems faced by the Pakistani people dominated the most prevalent explanations of the ethnic violence in Karachi in December 2009. Considering that the newsmakers as well as news consumers were (and are) suffering significant price hikes and inflation, daily many hours of electricity load shedding, and extreme shortage of daily food commodities, it is not difficult to comprehend why journalists linked the

causes of ethnic riots to inefficient government. The anti-incumbency argument and blame for those in charge is always a popular tool for healthily anti-authoritarian journalists. Moreover, If we accept these explanations, “the correct prescription is to insist on leadership change” . However, it seems problematic to assume that a change of government would control ethnic violence as “widespread group myths” would still “exist on both sides that explicitly justify hostility toward, or the need to dominate, the ethnic adversary” . Moreover, it is noted in other studies of ethnic conflicts that, “hostility and violence bubbled up from below rather than being provoked by top-down manipulation” .

To consider that this incident of ethnic violence in Karachi was primordial in nature – and traceable back to events in the distant past is also problematic. Ethnicity, according to primordial theory, is “a natural trait rooted in the individual’s birth into an ancestral gene pool or shared cultural network, [and] centres on the origin and durability of ethnic identity” . However, this view is invalidated by recent scholarship , since it lacks explanatory power and provides a naturalistic and static view of ethnicity . Ethnic groups are not necessarily "primordial" at all and are not discrete, fixed and unchanging, or necessarily persisting units . Additionally, ethnic identities overlap with other social identities and are malleable; people assume different identities in different situations . Therefore, “the ethnic hatred is not "ancient" but modern and is renewed in each generation by mythologies that are typically modern revisions of older stories with quite different messages” . Moreover, it is “a dangerously misleading interpretation in itself, and is also a way of cynically distancing events for political purposes” . There are few traces of this complexity in *The News International* and few Pakistani journalists incorporated it in their explanations of ethnic conflict. Yet, as a thesis it still possessed the potential to have a serious impact on the policy makers because they might conclude that since ethnic violence was underpinned by ancient hatred, little could be achieved in ameliorating relationships.

A third theme, which emerged in these findings, is the existence of international dimensions of ethnic violence in Karachi in the causal interpretations of various journalists. Quite in line with explanation of causes of ethnic violence, journalists linked global politics to the micro-politics of streets and neighbourhood, influenced by the PPP, ANP and MQM, by incorporating macro events and processes related to the ‘War on Terror’ in Afghanistan and Pakistan’s military’s involvement in the north and the alliance with America. Thinking on these lines, editors and columnists of *The News International*, suggested that a clear remedy was disengagement from the War on Terror. However, in this explanation, there seemed to be a lack of regard to the specific contextual tensions around this particular event. In contrast, the editorial and feature article explanations in *The News International* largely resorted to simplistic frames, which eschewed contextual complexity and nuance.

Clearly, this small-scale study has its limitations. The qualitative analysis was largely based on a handful of editorials and columns. Therefore, assumptions about how the whole collective of journalists of *The News International* viewed the ethnic violence in Karachi is restricted. Similarly, the editorials and columns analysed represented a small portion of the numerous articles that were written by these writers during the periods of study not to mention the writing beyond the periods of study. However, even with these limitations in mind, the rhetorical frames extracted from the text of these columnists and editors in these analyses

provide suggestive insights, and indicate the use of rather fixed and inflexible frames of reference.

Journalistic analysis of the riots and linked events was shaped to fit existing assumptions and lenses of vision. In general riots have both general causes and particular causes at the same time. Weaknesses of political leadership, ethnic and religious tensions, and urban divisions make riots possible, but they do not make them certain. An overwhelming focus upon the profound, underlying causes of the Karachi riots of December 2009 diverts attention from the question why this particular riot at this particular time. The detailed official investigations into the causes of seminal riots in the Western world tended to show that they are multi-causal but triggered by specific events and that these specific events were worth detailed examination.

Moreover, the journalistic analyses are characterized by confidence and a degree of certainty. When all of the international, political, and ethnic factors have been considered, something must still be considered as unknown. In the study of riots, attention should be directed to the uncertain influence of the human factor. What made individuals act in the way that they did in Karachi in late December 2009 is as much as a psychological problem as it is a focus for socio-political analysis. To what extent, for example, did a minority of active participants enjoy the sympathy of a passive majority and hence pull them along with the tide? Journalists might still benefit from their analyses of riots and mass crowd behaviour being cognizant of the work of Gustave Le Bon on 'The Mind of Crowds' published more than a century ago. His psycho-social investigation descended to street level and was an attempt to empathise with individuals faced with pressures and choices in circumstances of riot. Le Bon noted that "the crowd is always dominated by considerations of which it is unconscious" and added that "in crowds it is stupidity and not mother-wit that is accumulated". Furthermore,

The notion of impossibility disappears for the individual in a crowd. An isolated individual knows well enough that alone he cannot set fire to a palace or loot a shop, and should he be tempted to do so, he will easily resist the temptation. Making part of a crowd, he is conscious of the power given him by number, and it is sufficient to suggest to him ideas of murder or pillage for him to yield immediately to temptation.

It would be good for hard-pressed journalists, working against publication deadlines to be more alert to the complex psychological pathology of crowds – their impulsiveness, irritability, and suggestibility.

About the Authors

Yaar Muhammad is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania. In his PhD project, he is doing a comprehensive examination of the national curriculum policy for citizenship education in Pakistan. He worked as a secondary school teacher for ten years.

Dr. Peter Brett is a Lecturer in Education at the University of Tasmania. His History Ph.D. focused upon early nineteenth century popular politics in England. He worked as a teacher educator at the University of Cumbria in the north of England from 1993 to 2008.

