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‘If I speak, they will kill me, to remain silent is to die’: Poetry of Resistance in General Zia’s  
Pakistan (1977-88)

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Abstract

The ethnic and sectarian divisions that were part of General Zia’s (1977-88) political strategies in Pakistan were resisted not only through street protest and political opposition, but also in the realm of culture. In particular, poetry was a vehicle through which to express discontent as well as to mobilize the population. By offering an analysis of a number of poems and the biographies of the political poets who wrote them. This article offers another perspective on the question of resistance in this period of Pakistan’s history. Whilst the outcome of the policy of ethnic division was to divide the struggle against General Zia into a broad anti-Punjab front, this article highlights how it was class division and the securing of elite consent that was the major achievement of the Zia regime. In contrast to previous research, we highlight how resistance came from all groups in Pakistan as reflected in the poetry and literature of the time.

Keywords: Pakistan, General Zia, Punjab, Poetry, resistance

**Introduction**

On whose door shall I knock, carrying the  
corpse of thought  
If I speak they will kill me, to remain silent is  
to die.  
Silently swallowing my tears, I endured the  
ridicule of the world  
Searching for my destination, I walk into the  
dark night, all alone  
Striving, I may not reach the end, but it will  
be closer  
If I speak they will kill me, to remain silent is  
to die.

Sauchaan di miat noon cha key, hun main  
kehrey ghar jawan gah  
Jey baulan te maar dain gey, naan baulan te  
mar jawan gah  
Chup chapetey athroo peetey, mehnai jag dey  
paa ke palai  
Raat henari kalam kalai tureya janaan  
manzal waley  
Pawen sara penda naan sahei kujh na kujh te  
kar jawan gah  
Jey baulan te maar dain gey, naan baulan te  
mar jawan gah

Zahoor Hussain Zahoor<sup>1</sup>

The advent of General Zia's period of military rule, in 1977, signals the demise of a very brief period of postcolonial politics in Pakistan, where the possibility of social and political change through civil processes, glimmered in the public consciousness. In contrast, it is arguable that the institutional changes and social processes instigated by Zia, described as 'evil' in the introduction to the collection, *Resistance Poetry* by H Rahman, are still unfolding in contemporary Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> Our aims in this article are to, firstly provide a sketch of the repressive state machinery that unfolded during Zia's regime. In particular, the ways in which left parties, cultural workers and students were targeted by the hard arm of the state, for torture, extra-judicial killing and imprisonment. Resistance to these processes has been documented in terms of formal political mobilization, but our interest is to look at the role that culture played and particularly poetry in opposing the regime.<sup>3</sup> It is at the level of culture, in terms of women's segregation, suppression of non-Muslim minorities and the promotion of a version of Islam, that perhaps the least research in the Zia period has been carried out, but has perhaps had the longest lasting legacy.<sup>4</sup>

The role of poetry in providing a vehicle to understanding popular sentiment and resentment in South Asia has become increasingly recognized as a corrective to accounts based solely on formal narratives. Though referring to the context of nationalism, Dipesh Chakrabarty's analysis of Tagore's songs asserts the absolute importance of poetry in creating the possibility of the free Indian nation.<sup>5</sup> This perspective is taken up by Ahmed in her analysis of poetry at the heart of the struggle for Bangladesh, where: 'poetry's capacity for oral dissemination and its facility as a vehicle for the performance of collective expression' was essential for supporting the momentum to Bangladeshi independence.<sup>6</sup> Though these accounts take the affective power of poetry as central to a politics of mobilization in the

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<sup>1</sup> Zahoor, H. Z. (1998), *Kaurey Ghut*, Ameer Publishers, Urdu Bazaar, Lahore (1998: 47). All poetry and books referred to in Punjabi and Urdu have been translated by authors.

<sup>2</sup> See Rahman, H. (1995) *Resistance Poetry*, Pakistan Academy of Letters, Islamabad

<sup>3</sup> General Zia's impact on Pakistan in terms of Islamization is mentioned in almost every book on the country, but a detailed analysis of the opposition to the regime remains to be written.

<sup>4</sup> See Rouse, Shahnaz (2011) "Women's movement in Pakistan: State, Class, Gender" in K. Visweswaran (ed.) *Perspectives on Modern South Asia: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, pp. 9-17.

<sup>5</sup> Chakrabarty, Dipesh. (1999) "Nation and Imagination: The Training of the Eye in Bengali Modernity." *Topoi* 18.1: 29-47.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmed, Nazneen (2014) The poetics of nationalism: Cultural resistance and poetry in East Pakistan/Bangladesh, 1952-71, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50.3: 256-268, DOI: 10.1080/17449855.2012.695745 p. 257.

context of nationalism, poets have played an important critical role in postcolonial South Asia. In Pakistan, in particular, where military regimes have quelled formal opposition in the media and civil society, the Urdu poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Habib Jalib, sustained the beacon of hope and resistance, when political figures fell into abeyance.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Faiz, maintains a pan- South Asian following as witnessed by his poetry being recited at the student protests in Jawaralal Nehru University in 2016. This poetic tradition of articulating resistance has retained its political potency in Pakistan for two reasons, firstly the oscillation between military and democratic regimes has mean that poetry plays a role in mocking and mobilising against unpopular regimes. Secondly, the imposition of Urdu as the sole national language meant that even after Bangladesh became separated the question of regional languages was not resolved and literature was implicitly politicized. As Oldenburg notes, once Urdu becomes the official language of the newly formed nation of Pakistan, despite being only spoken by a small minority of the population, it was immediately connected with the cause of unifying the country.<sup>8</sup> This is a reversal of the status of the language in British India, when it was used by organisations like the Progressive Writers Association to provide a searing critique of colonialism.<sup>9</sup> A progressive tradition in Urdu poetry and prose was maintained in postcolonial Pakistan but it lost its critical edge as it became moribund within state patronage.<sup>10</sup> Urdu also remained bound in the hierarchy of languages, maintained and manipulated by the state and at a distance from the masses of the population.<sup>11</sup>

Those languages that have remained outside of the purview of state patronage, such as Punjabi, Hindko and Balauchi for example have remained rooted in expressive cultures that are spontaneous in the Gramscian sense.<sup>12</sup> Though we do not have access to the popular forms of everyday resistance that hereditary musicians and bards performed during periods of

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<sup>7</sup> Asdar Ali, Kamran (2015), *Surkh Salaam*, OUP, Karachi.

<sup>8</sup>Oldenburg, P. (1985). "A place insufficiently imagined": language, belief, and the Pakistan crisis of 1971. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 44.04: 711-733.'

<sup>9</sup> Priyamvada, Gopal (2005), *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation, and the Transition to Independence*, London: Routledge, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> Christina Oesterheld "Urdu Literature in Pakistan: A Site for Alternative Visions and Dissent" in *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 20 (2005): 79-98; see pg 82. The death of Ahmad Faraz in 2008, arguably the last great progressive poet of Urdu in Pakistan, could be seen as the end of the critical tradition.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Nukbah Langah's book on the Sirai movement is titled; *Poetry as Resistance* just to emphasise the way in which language plays a crucial role in subaltern political mobilisation. Langah, Nukbah Taj.( 2012) *Poetry as Resistance: Islam and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Pakistan*. Routledge, London.

<sup>12</sup> This is a reading of Gramsci which takes seriously the 'spontaneous' account of all people as able to understand their social world, but does not posit the hierarchy that is implicit in the account. Gramsci (1978) *The Prison Notebooks*, p.323.

repressive rule written remnants of poetry are accessible.<sup>13</sup> The literary output of activists as they articulated active political opposition, in the language of the masses, was mostly in oral form, but as this article will show some poetry was published. General Zia polarised Pakistani society on many axes, one of which was that of ethnicity. By promoting the MQM in Sindh and by offering patronage to the Punjabi elite, a cleavage between the two main populous areas of the country was created. This ethnic factionalism is reflected in the opposition to General Zia, where the most poignant and cited literature of resistance emerged in Sindhi and Pushto. Our article aims to include in the gamut of resistance literature those works by Punjabi activist-poets who were subjected to state oppression. This is not to deny the role that the Punjabi elite played in supporting and sustaining the Zia regime, but rather to insert the necessity of a political/class analysis, in which members of the Mazdoor Kissan Party and the National Students Federation (Pakistan), who were based in Punjab and were subjected to imprisonment and torture, also engaged in resistance literature.<sup>14</sup> Crucially it is those who are at the margins of the political power centres of the major cities, outside of the formal literary circles and therefore who are less likely to be co-opted by the state that come to the fore in this analysis.

### **The Repressive Regime**

A group of exiles from Zia's Pakistan, living in Europe, published an Urdu magazine titled *Azadi* from Amsterdam. In 1986, *Azaadi* published a special number in which they assessed nine years of General Zia's rule. The editorial outlines the main objectives of Martial Law:

1. To crush the movement of progressive people especially the left wing leadership.
- 2: To reduce the importance of democratic and popular political parties in national politics.
- 3: To patronise right wing political parties and student organisations to fill the political vacuum among the masses and to use them against left wing and popular forces.
- 4: To promote Islamic ideology and an Islamic system to obtain the above mentioned objectives further providing justification prolonging Martial Law.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Pamment, Claire (2008), 'Mock Courts and the Pakistani Bhand' *Asian Theatre Journal* , 25, 2: 344-62, p. 359.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on the Mazdoor Kissan Party, See Kalra, Virinder S., and Waqas M. Butt. (2013)"'In one hand a pen in the other a gun': Punjabi language radicalism in Punjab, Pakistan." *South Asian History and Culture* ,4.4: 538-553.

<sup>15</sup> *Azaadi*, (1986:4), published in Amsterdam in Urdu. From personal collection. Translated by authors.

Though many commentators would agree that these were the objectives of the Zia regime the editors of *Azaadi* pay specific attention to state intrusion into cultural and literary organisations, as well as intervention in student politics.<sup>16</sup> It is these aspects of civil society that were seen to be behind the power base of the Pakistan People's Party which was coordinating the main opposition to Zia. The small groups of left wing parties were closely monitored and their ideological differences exploited (pro-Soviet versus pro-Mao) to prevent collective action against martial law. According to Sheikh: 'It was the Left that suffered most during this military regime, led by General Zia Ul Haq'.<sup>17</sup> This focus on the left was less to do with their numerical power but as an assertion of the ideological outlook of the regime, in which Islam was wielded with cynical force against the 'anti-Allah Marxists.'<sup>18</sup>

The excesses in the field of human rights, directly organised by the Zia state have been well documented.<sup>19</sup> Arbitrary detention, torture and summative justice were all aspects of the repressive apparatus that came to be used as routine for the maintenance of power. It is perhaps giving too much credence to General Zia to make him solely responsible for Islamization in Pakistan, rather he strengthened the architecture which had been slowly developing from the time of partition.<sup>20</sup> But what is perhaps never considered is the way in which his reforms actually strengthened the hold of summative justice, rather than the rule of *sharia* (Islamic law) over liberal law. The so called *Haddood* ordinances, often cited as the most Islamic elements of Zia's reforms, did not strengthen the *sharia* courts or the *ulema* (religious scholars) but rather enlarged the scope of extra-judicial or patriarchal and prejudicial justice, without recourse to any form of deliberation. This created a situation in Pakistan where customary law was reinforced, in that those given or who take power in given situations can determine outcomes. Rather than creating a situation of *sharia*, which actually had a place since medieval times in commercial disputation, Zia's reforms created conditions of 'mob rule'. Summative justice at the local level reflected the lack of rule of law as a principle by which to challenge the military-feudal at the top of the hierarchy.

The goal of enacting Islamic order was also the justification for suppressing dissent and discouraging demands for democracy. In fact it is the repression of society which is most

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<sup>16</sup> See, Talbot, Ian (1998) *Pakistan a Modern History*, Hurst & company, London. For our perspective on student politics, see Kalra and Butt, (2013: 8).

<sup>17</sup> Sheikh, Zameer, (2014:8) *What Went Wrong*, Welcome Book Port, Karachi.

<sup>18</sup> From personal correspondence with a member of the *Mazdoor Kissan Party*.

<sup>19</sup> See Amnesty International, Pakistan: Report: 'Torture and Death in Police Custody' June 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Op. Cit. Talbot.

important to acknowledge and to explore, rather than raising the status of Zia's 'Islamization' programme into an inevitable teleology in relation to twentieth century Muslim intellectual reformists.<sup>21</sup> These perspectives on the impact of Islam whilst intellectually sophisticated lack any material analysis and propose a level of consistency not present in Zia's political contortions. The multiple twists and turns that the Zia regime engaged in and the contrary nature of the General's own policy statements indicate an obsession with power and its maintenance, rather than the implementation of a coherent philosophy. There is unfortunately a lack of detailed research on particular policy domains and thus overly general claims are made about Zia's influence. This discourse on Islamization is driven by the questions raised in a post-911 comparison with 1980s Afghanistan. However, this is not necessarily the status of Pakistan in Zia's time. Indeed, part of the later resistance to Zia also came from his close allies, the *Jamaat-i-Islami*, who fell out with the regime due to the holding of elections in 1985.<sup>22</sup> If the Islamization project had been successful in the first seven years of Zia's rule, the pressure to democratize and essentially undo the power given to the *ulema* would have been more difficult. Yet Zia was able to quickly dismiss the religious parties as he fundamentally relied on the feudal elite and its industrial wing.<sup>23</sup> For them the difference between authoritarianism and democracy was only a matter of calculations of continuing control and profit. In contrast to the implementation of the Islamization project, Zia was more successful in the breaking of popular and student movements on the left and opposition forces in general.

### **Repression and Resistance**

If any one event comes to symbolise the attack on civil society that the Zia regime unleashed, it is the flogging of three journalists; Nasir Zaidi, Iqbal Ahmed Jaafri and Khavar Naim in 1978, after having been sentenced by a military court in Lahore.<sup>24</sup> This was a clear message to the journalist fraternity that criticism of the new regime would not be tolerated. Some newspapers retaliated by publishing blank pages in their newspapers representing that which had been repressed by the censor.<sup>25</sup> The resistance to the military regime began almost

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21 Both Shaikh, Farzana (2009) *Making Sense of Pakistan*, Columbia University Press, New York and Devji, Faisal (2013) *Muslim Zion*, CUP, Cambridge. give far too much credence to the Islamisation project.

<sup>22</sup> Op. Cit. Talbot.

<sup>23</sup> See Lieven, Anatol (2011) *Pakistan: A Hard Country*, Public Affairs, New York for an analysis of this perspective, which is only problematic for its association of the military with stability.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Dawn*, Karachi, 15, May, 1978 in (Ahmed, 2009:175) Ahmed, Tauseef (2009) '*Fauji Aamreerat aur Pakistani sahafat*', *Sehmaahi Tareekh*, Special edition, No. 39, ed. Mubarak Ali, *History of Martial Law in Pakistan*, Thap Publications, Lahore (Urdu).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

immediately at the local level but did not take the shape of major protest until the 1979-80 with Shia agitation against the *Zakat* and *Usher* ordinances. These regulations made it incumbent upon every Muslim Pakistani to give their religious donations to the state rather than to individuals or religious institutions. A large militant protest against the legislation, in Islamabad in July 1980, led to a modification of the ordinances, but also demonstrated the flexibility of the regime when faced with protest.<sup>26</sup> Nadeem Paracha astutely notes that it was the tinkering with the traditional religious structures in Sindh and Punjab that led to large scale protests against General Zia in the early 1980s.<sup>27</sup> For our purposes this actually indicates how divisions were exacerbated and then exploited by Zia. As part of the religious establishment sided with the regime while other parts mobilized against it and this is also a similar pattern for the formal political parties. Even though the initial suppression of the regime had meant the Pakistan People's Party was put in disarray, by 1981 they had regrouped and were the backbone of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), a multi-group organisation with a single point agenda, neatly summed in its title. This was also the year that saw the birth of the Women's Action Forum which was in response to the increasing use of summative punishments against women in cases of personal law.<sup>28</sup> From 1980 onwards, Amnesty International levelled charges of torture, imprisonment and human rights abuse against the Pakistani state. It is the cases of summative justice which are most pertinent, for example a woman, Lal Mai was lashed in front of a crowd in front of 5000 men in Liaquatpur, having been accused of adultery.<sup>29</sup> Women and minorities, thus became the main targets for an Islamically justified, but in practice, traditional use of coercive power. The social cleavages along the lines of gender, ethnicity, *biraderi* and religion became instruments by which Zia maintained power, funded by the USA through the Afghanistan conflict and with the support of the feudal and business elite.

There is no doubt that the MRD was led by the PPP and that it found its rural base in Sindh and this plays a large part in the disquiet felt amongst activists about the role of Punjab in the agitation. In the summer of 1983, after months of successful agitation, Zia combined repression with political acumen. As Kennedy notes, though with a focus on Sindh: 'Most of the thousands arrested as a consequence of the MRD disturbances were members of the PPP

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<sup>26</sup> Abbas, Azmat, (2002) *Sectarianism: The Players and the Game*, South Asia Partnership, Lahore.

<sup>27</sup> Riots between 22 February and 19 March 1983 claimed twelve lives. As insightful commentator and analysis Nadeem Paracha notes that 50,000 disciples of the Makhdom of Hala successfully blocked the national highway in 1983.

<sup>28</sup> See Rouse, Shahnaz (2011) *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> *Al-Mushir*, 26, no.1 (1984), p. 17.



(72%), the Sindh Awami Tehrik (13%), and the Jiye Sindh Mahaz (10%)'.<sup>30</sup> This does not account for activists from the left that were also arrested, such as from the Qaumi Mahaz-e-Azadi (a left wing political party led by Miraj Mohammed Khan, ex Minister and leader of NSF during his student life) the Mazdoor Kissan Party and various left wing students organisations including, the Pakistan Students Federation, the National Students Organisation and the National Students Federation. This focus on Sindh, needs to be tempered by the extent to which Zia was able to use the elite and ultra-nationalist forces, once martial law was lifted in 1985. For example, it was a Sindhi who was chosen to be the first Prime Minister and many Sindhis were co-opted into the parliament. Even radical Sindhi nationalist GM Syed supported Zia, in the naïve hope that his policies would break up Pakistan!<sup>31</sup> It is the lack of a similar uprising in Punjab that is often the reason for considering the opposition there to be quiescent to the Zia regime. Analytically, it is more appropriate to consider that the Punjabi landed and business elite were incorporated before those in Sindh and the resistance in Sindh, was quelled through ethnic co-option and division. The rise of the Mohajir (Muttahida) Qaumi Movement is the case in point, as it involved the creation of a new ethnicity out of a disparate group of migrants from all parts of British India to Karachi. It was sponsored by Zia and emerged as a potent political force in the 1980s as a way of controlling Sindhi nationalism.<sup>32</sup>

The 1985 parliament is also an example of ethnic compromise at the expense of the *ulema* (who were opposed to the formation of a parliament) and a renewal of military power as Ayesha Siddiqa pithily states: 'The coercive capacity of the military worked very well on these parliamentarians, who had major personal stakes which they could not afford to compromise for the sake of democracy'.<sup>33</sup> Landed and business classes were able to seamlessly transfer between military rule and democracy. The Prime Minister of Pakistan at the time of writing this article (2015), Nawaz Sharif, came into politics in 1985 under Zia's patronage.<sup>34</sup> There is much credence to the view that Zia tinkered with the social order rather than creating wholesale Islamization<sup>35</sup>, but this implies a relatively benign account of what was a harsh and cruel regime. Rather, it make sense to consider Zia's rule as a series of measures that were designed to maintain power internally and in relation to American

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<sup>30</sup> Kennedy, Charles H. (1991)'The Politics of Ethnicity in Sindh,' *Asian Survey*, 31. 10: 938-955, p. 947.

<sup>31</sup> See Talbot, (1998: 444).

<sup>32</sup> See Waseem, M. (1996). Ethnic conflict in Pakistan: the case of MQM. *The Pakistan Development Review*, 617-629.

<sup>33</sup> Siddiqa, Ayesha (2007) *Military Inc*, Pluto Press, London (2007: 87).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 88, 94,156.

<sup>35</sup> Lieven, 2011.

interest. The issue of women is an apt point. The *Haddood* ordinance as they relate to women's bodies are misogynistic and reflect one of the central pillars of Zia's Islamization programme. However, as Talbot notes, Zia also created a National Council on Population planning, had a female cabinet secretary, as well as a Women's division and reserved seats for women in provincial and assembly elections. To deal with traditional female constriction, in terms of inheritance, shaming and marriage to the Quran, a Crimes Ordinance was passed.<sup>36</sup> These paper exercises did not result in any change in women's lives, rather the *Haddood* ordinances, as have been well documented, continue to result in repression. However, the reforms did appear to an American audience as illustrating their influence over Pakistan in relationship to issues such as 'women's rights'.<sup>37</sup> These manoeuvres illustrate that Zia's main concern was the maintenance of power so compromises in policy formulation were necessary and inevitable in achieving this goal.

### **Dissent and Dissonance**

Literature in general and poetry particularly, with its ability to convey multiple meanings became a vehicle for expression of dissent against the Zia regime. As repression grew more pernicious, thus the voices of poets became more important. Faiz Ahmad Faiz, perhaps the poet laureate of the progressive movement in postcolonial South Asia went into exile to Beirut. Habib Jalib's staunch anti-Zia poetry landed him in jail for long periods during military rule. Ironically, though both from Punjab, neither wrote extensively in Punjabi. The rationale for this was two fold. Firstly, the national language of Pakistan being Urdu, it was considered the most widely available common language with which to address an audience. Secondly, a particular perspective deriving from a specific legacy of the Indian communist party, was the need to speak and educate in the most advanced language of the time. In that sense Urdu was (and still remains in West Pakistan) more technically developed and the preferred language of the middle class. However, as we have argued elsewhere this approach to language ignores the essential class dimension linked to those who speak and promote Urdu and on the left comes out of an elitist socialist vision.<sup>38</sup> Thus while Jalib and Faiz are extremely important in the struggle against Zia, it is appropriate to recognize all the languages of the poets that resisted the authoritarian regime.

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<sup>36</sup> Talbot. (1998:140-143).

<sup>37</sup> Op.cit.

<sup>38</sup> Kalra and Butt (2013).

In the context of the ethnic strife that General Zia exploited, it is not surprising that progressive writers such as Ahmad Salim neglected the resistance literature in Punjabi that emerged in the Zia period.<sup>39</sup> Whilst acknowledging that Sindhi provided a vehicle against political suppression in the context of the MRD<sup>40</sup>, Salim lyrically, states: ‘Punjabi literature, during previous periods of Martial Law does not give any news about these incidents or their outcomes in the social and political decline of the country. Collectively the waters of literature were calm, it is a great surprise that not even a pebble disturbed this situation’.<sup>41</sup> In some senses, these words echo the sentiments of well known writer, Fehmida Riaz, who in her pioneering book *Pakistan: Literature and Society*, published in 1986, articulates the need for a focus on regional languages, but indicates that Punjabi has not been able to articulate resistance against Zia.<sup>42</sup> Fehmida Riaz, herself, as editor of the Urdu magazine *Awaaz* went into exile in the mid-1980s after being charged with sedition, only returning to Pakistan in 1988 after Zia’s death. Whilst wanting to articulate a coalition of regional languages, Riaz is actually mostly interested in Sindhi in relation to Punjabi, with one articulating resistance and the other oppression. This simply dichotomy is only punctuated by the need for a renewal of an Urdu literature of resistance, which will come from the partition migrants (*mohajairs*).<sup>43</sup> Though this was a relatively naïve outlook in respect to the politics that are subsequently developed by the MQM, it reflects the ways in which the writing on resistance literature also falls into the traps of ethnic strife. Though Salim and Riaz are offering a progressive perspective which takes as its starting point resistance to the repressive regime they inadvertently promote precisely the type of ethnic conflict that Zia’s policies were generating. Our intention is not to question the fact that the Punjabi literary elite, writing in Urdu, did not acquiesce to martial law and that this is reflection of its class position, as primarily urban and

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<sup>39</sup> The list of well known Punjabi poets who spoke out against General Zia and who suffered as a result consists of: Munno Bhai, Ahmed Salim, Sain Akhtar, Abbas Athar, Akhtar Sheikh, Rashid Hussan Rana, Mushtaq Soofi, Mazhar Trimzee, Zubair Rana, Sara Shagufta, Ashiq Buzdar, Aziz Shahid, Irshad Taunsee, Ishoo Lal, Rifat Abbas, Sarma Sehbay, Gulzar Raza Chaudhry, Nasreen Anjum Bhatti, Yusaf Hasan, Ali Arshad Meer, Mian Salim Jahangir. In addition, there were prose writers and columnists who also wrote against martial law: Asif Khan, Shafqat Tanveer Mirza, Ilyas Ghuman, Ahmad Salim, Jamil Ahmed Pal, Iqbal Salah-u-din, Salim Khan Ghami, Kanwal Mushtaq, Maqsood Saqib, Parveen Malik, Ehsan Waggah, Dr, Anwar Ahmed, Fakhar Zaman, Afzal Tauseef, Faruk Nadeem, Azra Waqar, Farquanda Lodhi, Mansha Yaad, Ahmed Daud.

<sup>40</sup> Talbot (1998) mentions the following Sindhi poets, who were part of the anti-Zia resistance: Rehmatullah Manjothi, Naseer Mirza, Tariq Alam and Adal Soomro, Atiya Dawood.

<sup>41</sup> Salim, Ahmad, ‘Punjabi Adab, ik Sawaaliya Nishan’, *Research Forum*, Issue No. 3, Research Forum Publications, Karachi. (Urdu) (July 1985: 114 ) Translated from the Urdu by the authors.

<sup>42</sup> Salim’s view is, to some extent, well illustrated in Safir Rammah’s review of Punjabi poetry in postcolonial Pakistan in which the Zia period is not mentioned at all. Rammah, Safir. (2006) "West Punjabi Poetry: From Ustad Daman to Najm Hosain Syed." *Journal of Punjab Studies* 13.1&2: 215-228.

<sup>43</sup> Yaqin, Amina (2009) ‘A Reading of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Jamil Jalibi, and Fahmida Riaz’ in Kelly Pemberton & Michael Nijhawan (eds.) *Shared Idioms, Sacred Symbols, and the Articulation of Identities in South Asia*, pp.115-43.

upper middle class. Our contention is that resistance against General Zia was not to be found in these formal literary circles. As it was this particular urban class, that was most susceptible to being incorporated into the authoritarian regime, regardless of sectarian or ethnic boundaries. Where this approach by the state was not as successful was in the control of those who were not subject to state patronage and those who actively resisted. Ahmad Salim also acknowledges that this is the case when it comes to poetry, citing writers such as Mushtaq Soofi, Nasreen Anjum Bhatti and Sara Shagufta. Even when it comes to prose he mentions Fakhar Zaman's novel *Bandhiwaan* and Afzal Ahsan Randhawa's novel *Suraj Grehan* published in 1985.<sup>44</sup> Salim's overall negative assessment may be due to the relatively minor impact of these writers and their publications, but perhaps also due to his focus on the major cities of Lahore and Faisalabad, whereas our research indicates that in the smaller cities and towns of Punjab, a different story of literary resistance emerges.<sup>45</sup> Sahiwal and Pak Pattan, during the Zia period, offer a vibrant culture of resistance poetry, closely related to anti-martial law activism. Crucially, the class of these activists and their engagement in Punjabi moves our attention away from those who were compromised and incorporated into the martial law regime.

### **Activist Poiesis**

Our argument that the Zia regime was most interested in targeting those activists, who were least invested in the political structure, regardless of ethnicity is well illustrated when considering writers and poets. Zahoor Hussain Zahoor was a well known supporter of the PPP who would recite at rallies and gatherings, indeed, it is his poem that titles and opens this article. In 1979 he was arrested and tried by a Military court on the charge of reciting a Punjabi poem, '*Balle Balle,*' (yippee, yippee), in a public gathering in Okara. He was sentenced to three months imprisonment. At the same rally, Rao Sikander a PPP leader and retired General Tika Khan, a critic of the regime, also spoke. Rao Sikander was also jailed, but only for four days and this discrepancy went on to be incorporated in one of Zahoor's poems (see *In Prison*). This is not to deny that the leadership of the PPP was not subject to repression under Zia's rule, but that this was mitigated by their elite status, whereas this was

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<sup>44</sup> Ahmad Salim's comments are somewhat ironic, given that he is one of the Punjabi writers who was very active against the Zia regime. It maybe that his comments are meant to taunt the writing community into action from their passive support of martial law.

<sup>45</sup> Though the role of street theatre as a tool to resist the restrictions of the Zia regime has been somewhat documented ( see Afzal-Khan, 1997, 2001), there has been little analysis of Punjabi literature in this period and what there has been is negative. Even though groups such as Lok Rehas in the 1980s was also closely intertwined in Lahore with activists previously involved in the language movement of the 1980s.

not the case for these activist poets. Indeed, it is responding to the repressive conditions of the time, that motivates and generates the poetry that we are interested in. It is the silencing of these oppositional voices both through the courts and through control of publishing that is most noticeable in the Punjab context. Punjabi activists such as Iqbal Qaiser was jailed in 1983 pending investigation on the charge of anti-national sentiment, the evidence for which was reciting a poem he had penned about Bhagat Singh. Even when not jailed, writers such as Abid Ameer could not find publishers for their poems, indeed his collected poems ‘*Mochi Gate*’ from the period remained unpublished.<sup>46</sup> Even the poems from the time of the 1857 rebellion, that took place at Gogera and documented by AD Ijaz, was banned from publication during Zia’s period. It is clear that the space for public debate and gatherings, of which *mushaira* (poetry recitals) were a popular aspect became a target for state agencies. The general suppression of the Zia period is found in specific form in relation to poets and writers. The rationale for this is neatly summarised by Dr Mubarak Ali: ‘They realised that they would lose the struggle against the state and its institutions, but in spite of this fact, the movements of resistance continued to oppose suppression and to sustain the hopes of the people that change was possible. In this way, their defeat was their victory.’<sup>47</sup> A point also made in poetic form by Zahoor in the poem that opens this article.

There is no doubt that General Zia’s policies of ethnic, ‘divide and rule’ meant that the Punjabi literary class had greater access to the resources of the military state, but availability does not prove culpability. Perhaps, Ustad Daman’s case illustrates this point well. In his biography, as told by Tanveer Zahoor, Ustad Daman was invited to the wedding of Choudhry Zahoor Elahi’s son.<sup>48</sup> Elahi, himself was a leading member of the Punjabi feudal class and as such had also invited General Zia to the wedding. Ustad Daman and Zia were kept apart, as by this time Daman’s anti-martial law poem was very popular:

*Mere mulk de do khuda,*

*La-e-allah te martial law*

*Ik rehnda ai arshaan ute,*

*Dooja rehande farshaan ute*

*Uhada naan ei Allah mia,*

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<sup>46</sup> From personal correspondence.

<sup>47</sup> Ali, Mubarak (2012), *Tareekh Kai nay Zaaviey*, (Urdu) Fiction House, Lahore (2012: 31).

<sup>48</sup> Zahoor, Tanveer (2009), Ustad Daman, *Hayaatee Shairee te Vichaar*, 2009, Sachal, Lahore (Punjabi) p. 33. Translated by authors.

*Ehda naan ei general Zia*

My country has two Gods,

*La Ilah* and Martial Law

One lives in the sky,

the other on the floor

The first one's name is Allah Mia,

This other is General Zia

*Wah wah be wah general Zia*

*Kaun khenda tenoon aithoon ja*

*Sadey des ich moajaan ei maujaan*

*Jidher wekhoo faujaan ei faujaan*

*Lakhaan bandey qaedi ho ke*

*Adhah dendey mulk gawaa*

*Wah wah be wah general zia*

*Kaun khenda tenoon aithoon ja*

*Wah Wah General Zia*

Who says to you go from here

In our country, it is all fun and barmy

Wherever you look, the army, the army

Hundreds and thousands jailed

Half the country derailed

*Wah Wah General Zia*

Who can say, go, go!

Daman<sup>49</sup>

According to Tanveer Zahoor, General Zia knew about the poem and when he found out that Ustad Daman was in the wedding, he told Zahoor Elahi that he wished to meet the poet. During that meeting General Zia requested Ustad Daman to recite the poem about his rule, Daman flatly refused, with the excuse that a wedding ceremony was not an appropriate place for such poetry and that he would be happy to recite it at a public rally. More significantly, Daman has also said to have retorted: ‘ General Sahib, I’m not a radio that you can just push a button and listen to, just like one minute you push and listen to Radio Lahore or you push

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<sup>49</sup> Daman Ustad (1993) *Daman Dey Mooti* , Feroz Sons Lahore (Punjabi) , p. 88-89.

another button and listen to Radio Jalandhar'.<sup>50</sup> This defiance in the face of intimate power, is also found in the account of Daman's last week of life. The Governor of Punjab of that time, General Ghulam Jilani Khan visited Daman in Services Hospital in Lahore and inquired about his health. He refused to talk to the governor and rejected offers of special treatment or to take the money that the Governor offered him. Daman's own stature as a poet and humbleness in living, meant that he was able to resist incorporation.

Punjabi literary activists in this era were particularly targeted for being anti-national, due to the association of the language with Sikhs and therefore India.<sup>51</sup> Najam Hussain Syed, probably the most prolific and certainly the most respected modern Punjabi literary figure, was removed from his position as head of the Punjabi Department at Punjab University. As Rahman describes: "Najam's secular and leftist reputation made the department suspect in the eyes of his ideological opponents".<sup>52</sup> In his place, a new breed of right wing Punjabi college teachers, often members of the *Jamat-i-Islami* came to occupy positions as lecturers. This further emphasised the close connection between Zia and the Punjabi urban middle class. As part of the strategy of sponsoring sectarian division and due to the control of the *Jamaat* at Punjab University, the 1980s witnessed a purge of leftist professors. Indeed, the Oriental College in Lahore, where Punjabi is still taught, was dominated by right wing forces. Their main attempt was to place the language into the service of the divisions being fostered by General Zia. Research into the multiplicity of spoken Punjabi and an ideology that it was not capable of being used as the language of governance and trade worked well to place it as a relic of a past time. Tied into the reform of religious institutions, language reform meant an assertion of Urdu, as part of a regulation of popular practices. As a process, Zia's reforms have had a huge impact on contemporary West Punjab, where the urban middle class (now a sizeable portion of the country) have abandoned Punjabi, Siraiki, and Potohari in favour of Urdu.

Those based in Lahore had access to various groups of people who could support him and literary figures such as Najam Syed came from a class background which afforded some protection. In contrast in the rural towns of Sahiwal and Pakpattan, the impact of Zia's repression whilst targeted at civil society and educational institutions had greater effect. For example, the vibrant political atmosphere centred on Government College Sahiwal in the

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<sup>50</sup> Op cit. Zahoor, (2009: 34) This refers to the fact that Zia was himself from Jalandhar.

<sup>51</sup> Kammi, Syed (1988) *Punjabi Zabaan Naheen Marey gee*, Punjabi Esperanto Academy, Jhelum has a whole chapter devoted to the issue of how Punjabi is seen as the language of Sikhs. pp. 93-122.

<sup>52</sup> Rahman, Tariq (1998) *Language and Politics in Pakistan*. Oxford University press Karachi(1998: 204).

early to mid seventies was in for a rude shock with the introduction of martial law. This took a number of forms: Firstly, the College was closed for the best part of a year while the military established itself. Alongside this, venues such as Café De Rose, where students, intellectuals and professors would gather for more informal and political/literary discussions closed, as the bans on public gatherings took force. Indeed, it was these spaces that also became the hunting ground for state agencies looking to clamp down on left wing and anti-martial law activists. Students were arrested and professors posted to remote areas as a way of disrupting political activism. We offer two case studies to illustrate this general scenario, one of a student, Qaswar Butt and the other of two professors at the College, Ghulam Rasool Azad and Abid Ameer, to illustrate the various contours of state suppression.

Qaswar Butt was the General Secretary of the Government College Sahiwal's Student Union, on the platform of the National Students Federation, a body that was locally promoting Punjabi and at the national level, a left wing challenger to the *Jamiaat*. Qaswar Butt was also a well known Punjabi poet, having won the College award for best poet in 1976.<sup>53</sup> He had barely turned 15 years old when he was arrested by the military regime and was imprisoned in Sahiwal central jail. This was only the first time of many that he would spend time in jail due to his political activities and ideological commitments. As a political prisoner he was able to keep his comrades and friends aware of the conditions in the jail. Indeed, the local media was able to follow the activities of political prisoners. To curb this communication, Qaswar was sent to Jhelum Jail, which was at that time an eight hour journey from Sahiwal, to ensure he was kept away from his fellow comrades. An example of his poetry is given here:

*Bhulai rahi wanger thal wich, mareen na  
Balo rait de ja khur julh pey sonween na  
Aes saffer vich pather banan penda ai  
Roween na bai wekheen biba roween na  
Ai yaraan di yaad noon zinda rakhan gey  
Kand tey sukhey laho dey tubkey dohween na  
Takri dey wich tulna ee tey soochan noon  
Sach dey khoo noon gearan dey lai joween na  
Qaswar jey toon jeena ai, tey yaad rakheen  
Naan hoowan da pakh kareen toon hoween na*

Like a drifter in the desert, don't die

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<sup>53</sup> Sadiqui, Raza Alhaq, (1976) Report on Government College Sahiwal, Annual Awards, *Imroz*, Lahore. (Urdu) (Siddiqui 1976).



In the hot sands of the storm, don't sleep  
On this route be firm as a rock,  
don't cry,  
dear don't cry  
We will keep the memories of friends alive  
Don't wash the specks of blood from your  
back  
If you are going to sell out  
Don't trade the waters of truth  
Qaswar, if you want to be truly alive, then  
remember  
Put aside the self and become the collective  
Qaswar Butt<sup>54</sup>

As freedom of expression was subject to state suppression, some writers did not speak openly against Military rule. In response to the banning of direct criticism, many writers turned to symbolism as a way of expressing their discontent with the regime. Qaswar's poetry is an example of this turn in Punjabi poetry. During this period, symbolic poetry and prose become popular among the writers as well as among readers. The method, as stated by, writer and activist Amin Mughul was: 'One story is being told in another one. The writer writes on the hope that what he is saying will be understood by the reader. Writer and readers are both part of this conspiracy, the coded message of one person is translated by the other in his own language. If this takes place, both are engaged in the same activity of deception'.<sup>55</sup> It is the combination of activist and writer which is an essential part of the politics of this era. Amin Mughal was arrested multiple times, as a political activist of the Awami National Party, ultimately leaving for exile to London in 1984. On 5th March 1978, the editor of the *Daily Musawat*, a paper associated with the PPP, SGM Badur Uddin, along with the paper's printer and renowned poet Zaheer Kashmiri were given jail sentences of a year.<sup>56</sup> Any publication or

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<sup>54</sup> Butt, Qaswar (Jun 1989) *Suraj Mukhi* edited by Kanwal Mushtaq (Punjabi) volume 1 Lahore. 1989: 23.

<sup>55</sup> Mughal, Amin (1979) *Pakistani Adab kai nai rujhanaat*, Vol. 8, issue No. 7-8, *Ahtesaab*, ed. Abdullah Malik, Lahore (Urdu) (Moghul, 1978: 354). A similar form is described by Abu Lughod in the context of Bedouin women, where: 'Poetry cloaks statements in the veils of formula, convention, and tradition, thus suiting it to the task of carrying messages about the self that contravene the official cultural ideals.'

<sup>56</sup> Daily Dawn, Karachi, 12 March, 1978.

writer associated with progressive politics was subject to incarceration and military judgement.

To some extent, whether the form was symbolic or one of direct confrontation, it led to targeting by agencies of the state. An example of a more direct critique of the regime can be found in the writings of the previously mentioned Zahoor Hussain Zahoor from Pakpattan. In the jail cell, he found inspiration and penned this poem:

**In Prison Aseeri wich**

*Mootey mootey jander band  
Shameen saarey ander band  
Jaan talee tey dher leendey naeen  
Zaher peaaaley bher leendey naeen  
Maut aa jawey mar leendey naeen  
Lahoo de taari ter laeendey naeen  
Lageean waley kar leendey naeen  
Akhiaan wich samunder band  
Shameen saarey ander band*

Fat, fat padlocks shut,  
Evening time, prisoners shut,  
Fearing not for life,  
Ready to drink a cup of poison,  
Embracing death,  
Swimming in rivers of blood  
With these convictions,  
the ocean of emotions, held by the eyes  
All locked up behind the bars

*Sooiaan phar monh seeti jandey  
Kaliaan da lahoo peety jandey  
Paani pak pleeti jandey  
Puthehaan sidiaan neeti jandey  
deen dey naan te keety jandey*

*Masjid wich mander band*  
*Shameen saarey ander band*

Mouths sealed with sewing needles,  
youthfulness drained of blood,  
pure water polluted,  
prayers turned upside down,  
In the name of religion,  
In the mosque unbelievers hidden,  
All locked up

*Gehnti wajdi kunjiaan parhda*  
*Kagaz da eik sheer aa warda*  
*Majboori da seena sarda*  
*Banda degda dehnda tarda*  
*Ulta law ees cheria ghar da*  
*Bander baher qalander band*  
*Shameen saarey ander band*

Jail bell rings the keys grabbed,  
the paper lion comes,  
helplessness burns the chest,  
The man falls and breaks,  
injustice rules this bird cage,  
monkeys outside, *faqir* inside  
All behind bars  
*Eenjh insaaf de pagri laahi*  
*Pariah shaher naan milli gawahi*  
*Paai betheri haal dohai*  
*Adhi raateen qaeed sunai*  
*Yaar zahoor wi dahkey shahi*  
*Boori jeewain chookander band/ chaar din*  
*rao sakander band*  
*shameen saarey ander band*

The turban of justice pulled off,  
 a full city with not one witness,  
 protests and noise to no effect,  
 in the middle of the night sentenced.  
 Zahoor my friend, no justice,  
 Sack like a full of Beetroots / For Four days  
 Roa Sikander Jailed<sup>57</sup>  
 Evening comes, all locked up  
 Zahoor Hussain Zahoor<sup>58</sup>

Zahoor was a poet in the vein of Ustad Daman, relishing the stage at political rallies with simple messages of resistance and hope. Here the style of Zahoor was not in the vein of Faiz Ahmed Faiz where radical thought and progressive ideas were one level of interpretation.<sup>59</sup> Rather, there is a direct confrontation with what the poet views as social hypocrisy. This is more akin to the style of Bulleh Shah, the eighteenth century poet, who brings together contradictions and then negates them.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, it is these medieval poets such as Shah Hussain and Bulleh Shah who become the motifs behind which political poetry was hidden. Even though activists were in and out of jail, Qaswar Butt and his comrades founded the Sahiwal Academy in the mid-1980s to carry out cultural activities as a way of voicing their criticism. The annual Shah Hussain *Mela* was one of the main functions organised by the Academy. In 1985, eight years after martial law, the usual chant in honour of the poet saint Shah Hussain: *Madho Laal, Madho Laal*, was modified to *Poore ho ge atth saal, Madho Laal, Madho Laal*, (eight years have passed, Madho Laal, Madho Laal) which refers to the broken promises of a return to democracy which marked Zia's rule.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> This was the recited version, where Rao Sikander is mentioned, whereas in the written form, the slightly odd phrase about beetroots is added!

<sup>58</sup> Op. Cit. Zahoor, (1998: 133-135).

<sup>59</sup> Victor Kiernan, (1971), *Poems by Faiz*, London.

<sup>60</sup> Mir, Anita, (2012) 'Sense Experience: A Reading of the Verse of the Punjabi Sufi, Bulleh Shah' . *Religious Studies and Theology*31.1: 55-74.

<sup>61</sup> In 1977, Zia promised elections within 90 days of taking over. Eight years later things had not changed.

Resistance poetry in Southern Punjab and specifically in Sahiwal draws upon a historicity in which the present is collapsible into any particular moment from the past.<sup>62</sup> From medieval poets previously cited to couplets or *dohlas* performed as part of the oral tradition that retell the heroic tale of Ahmad Khan Kharral in his battle against the British in 1857, the contemporary poet draws on a wide range of sources.<sup>63</sup> Recited at political gatherings, religious fairs and weddings, the oral tradition offers a literary sensibility closely related to the rhythms and tempo of rural life. In that sense the writings of the poets that we reproduce here are only a snapshot of the extent and multiplicity of the individual poem, given its multiple forms in multiple performances and further only a fraction of that produced, as much of it remains ephemeral. Furthermore, when it comes to political poetry, those poets who were jailed or silenced by the regime were not written or recorded. The traditional bards: *mirasis*, *ras-dharis*, *dom* and others, consistently provide social commentary that is of the moment. It is in the everyday spaces of public gathering, such as weddings and fairs, that the political critique of the marginal is most voiced. As Pamment notes with respect to the practices of the *bhand* (performing duo), during the 2008 anti-military movement: '[the *bhand*] while increasingly banished from the realms of the political glitterati, continues to provide a model to those who know they must speak back from a position of weakness, offering a marginalized and yet alternative voice of political critique'.<sup>64</sup> These are not necessarily in the form of a direct criticism as the multiplicity of jokes about Zia bear witness to.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps more significantly, it is not possible to find an archive of this cultural output as the ubiquity of recording technology was not present. The poetry in this article, therefore reflects those who were in some established positions, in colleges or with access to printing facilities. In some senses there are the organic intellectual who in their closeness to the poetic tradition, suppression at the hand of the state and political awareness were able to reflect the broader conditions of the people.

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<sup>62</sup> A wonderful example of this is given in the theatre play, *Sammi di Vaar*, by Najam Hussain Syed. Set in a Punjabi village around 1920: On being told by a fugitive that he is part of the Ghadar movement, Dhuni tells him that: 'We are part of the rebellion of the River Ravi, that tells the tales of Ahmad Khan Kharral in its flow'.

<sup>63</sup> These were gathered and preserved in detail by AD Ijaz in the book *Kaal Bulaindee*.

<sup>64</sup> Pamment, Claire (2008:359).

<sup>65</sup> General Zia also spawned many jokes, which are mostly too obscene to print, but have been collected by Dr Tariq Mehmood, who offers this as an example: General Chisti was walking past a graveyard when he heard a voice, 'General Chishti, get me a horse.' Immediately, the loyal servant, ran to General Zia and told him what had happened. Zia slapped Chisti across the face and said, 'The dead don't talk you daft donkey.' The next day as general Chisti was walking past the same grave yard, the same voice said angrily: 'General Chishti, where is my horse.' The brave general ran to Gen. Zia and told him what happened. Zia let out a mouthful of *doabi* poetry[swearing in a Jalandhar style] and said: 'Right you imbecile, I will come with you, to show you the dead don't speak.' When the two generals got to the grave yard, the voice was infuriated and shouted, 'General Chishti, I told you to bring me a horse, not an Ass!'

Once the Zia regime had banned student unions in 1984, the next level of resistance to be tackled was that of the teachers. Rather than sacking teachers, which would have meant confrontation with the unions, two strategies were adopted. The first was the take over of teachers' associations by the *Jamaat-i-Islami*, a right wing religious party supporting the regime. The second strategy was to post 'troublesome' teachers to remote areas. Professor Ghulam Rasool Azad, one of the key protagonists of anti-martial law activism at Sahiwal College was the main target of the state agencies. He was posted to district Attock, a distance of 500km, but even there he maintained his role as an activist. A couplet from his poetry sums up his approach to politics:

*Janjaan dey naal turna saanoon raas naheen*

*Saadey moondey saada janazey dohndey rahey*

We don't march with the wedding processions

The likes of us sought the death march

Another Professor of Sahiwal College, but this time of English, who suffered from maltreatment was Abid Ameer. Writing in his native Saraiki, Ameer's writings against General Zia were written in a direct and confrontational manner, as Mahmood Awan comments: 'Ameer has artistically used literary directness and conversational style to shape up his thoughts and construct his poems. It is resisto-political poetry of its own kind, so different from his other contemporaries'.<sup>66</sup> Ameer was arrested, while at home and the events of the police climbing into his sleeping household, scaring his wife and young family. Indeed, in his poem 'The fearful night (A story of 1979)' he relates the nights events and the long term psychological impact it had. After serving time in Sahiwal Jail he was transferred from Sahiwal College to Narah Kanjorh, a twenty two hour journey from his home, with no direct train, bus or road connection. As he relates: 'The single building college lacked basic amenities and there were more snakes than students in the grounds'.<sup>67</sup> Ameer is, in many ways an unsung poet of the 1980s and here we offer a selection of some short poems that relate to the politics of the era:

Aadam Khood

*Aadam khood wi bandey hoondan*

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<sup>66</sup> Awan Mahmood (2014) "A symbol of freedom" *The News on Sunday*, March 30, 2014.

<sup>67</sup> In personal correspondence.

*Ya hoondan akhbaar*

*Ya hoondan qanoon*

*Ya hoondan khauf*

*Ya hoondan eh .....*

*Dasso*

*Dasso*

*Kia hoondan eh ?*

*Jewain akho*

*Jewain akhoo*

*Tusaan saadey maalek hoo*

### **Cannibals**

Cannibals are also human

Or are they the newspapers

Or are they the law

Or fear itself

Or are they .....

Tell me,

Tell me

What are they?

Whatever you say,

Whatever you say

You are our masters

Abid Ameer<sup>68</sup>

### **Geerjhaan**

*Keeho jahi eh wasti hai*

*dhol dhamakey*

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<sup>68</sup> Ameer, Abid (2000), *Tal Vatnee: Saraiki Poems*, Rut Lekha, Lahore.

*jaghrey jaheerey*  
*mantaan mano*  
*chaaroo deeghaan*  
*hath wich rakhool*  
*toop da gola*  
*Pairaan haithaan paiye*  
*Bahwain bazi khedo sidhee*  
*Bahwain khedo puthee*  
*Hun taan jewain*  
*Hikoo kujh eh*  
*Utee dekhoo*  
*Chaar choferoon ghirjhaan*  
*Kheri maut bahnwaali ehnaan*  
*Sadey ander ditte*  
*Keinwain sakhoon wilhard giaan*  
*Chaar chofairoon ghirjhaan*

### **Vultures**

What is this town like  
*Dhol* playing merriment  
Arguing neighbours  
Prayers for favours  
Food all day  
But keep in the hand  
A cannon's ball  
Foot loose  
Play the game straight  
or play it bent  
No difference,  
All is the same  
Look up  
A sky of vultures  
What death have they seen Inside us



they now haunt us  
Everywhere vultures  
A sky of vultures

Though ignored by the literary elite, the poetry of the teachers and activists lived on in the politics and the minds of the activists that were inspired by words that matched the material hardships they were facing at the hands of the military regime. The poet we wish to conclude our article on was greatly influenced by the Punjabi movement in Sahiwal reading his first poem in 1976 at Government College. Coming from a peasant background, Talib Jatoh went on to publish three books of poems and still has a following in the region. Though not jailed himself he would smuggle the poetry of Zahoor Hussain Zahoor and Qaswar Butt out of Sahiwal jail and when Ghulam Rasool Azad and Abid Ameer were forced to leave Sahiwal due to state orders, Jatoh penned the following poem:

*Kar gey saare haani chup*

*Beli chup boolani chup*

*Rogee saara wehraa hai*

*Banda chup swaani chup*

*Kithoon churey da chhunkaara*

*Chaati chup madhani chup*

*Gunjal bhariaan tandaan nain*

*Pai eh saari taani chup*

*Hadh hoy majboori di*

*Akheaan da eh paani chup*

*Saadey pichey pai gai hai*

*Kithoon aye marjaani chup*

*Hauli hauli waat gai hai*

*Talib sauch namaani chup*

They've made all my peers quiet  
Friends quite, acquaintances quiet  
The yard is sick  
Man is quiet, wife is quiet  
No longer the jangle of bangles  
Mortar is quiet, pestle is quiet  
An entangled bundle of threads  
the spinning wheel is quiet  
It's the limit of suppression  
Eyes brimmed with tears, quiet  
Chasing us endlessly  
Where is this curse, quiet  
Slowly, slowly dissolving all  
Humble thoughts of yours, Jatoi, quiet  
Jatoi<sup>69</sup>

### Conclusion

While perhaps overused and discredited as a conceptual category due to its elitist overtones, nonetheless the appellation 'organic intellectual,' as developed by Gramsci to refer to those individuals who acted as the link between the masses and civil society does hold relevance when considering the poet activists of rural towns like Sahiwal and Pakpattan.<sup>70</sup> Their poetry articulated the concerns of those opposed to the Zia regime in the language of the masses, but in a form which translated spontaneous resistance to an articulate opposition. This particular role for poetry becomes intensified in the context of postcolonial Pakistan where language is so closely related to power. While Urdu played a role in continuing the legacy of progressive

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<sup>69</sup> Jatoi, Talib, (2000) *Channan dee Had Beetee (Nazmaan)*, Al Barkat Publishers, Multan.

<sup>70</sup> Gramsci, (1978:334).

literature, it was never a language of the majority of the population and certainly not that of peasants. Where revolutionary parties such as the Mazdoor Kissan Party took up the question of regional language as part of their praxis, they were brutally repressed.<sup>71</sup>

One of the reasons for Urdu's dominance in cultural politics in Pakistan is the urban centred nature of literary endeavour. The main urban centres of Punjab were and still remain more closely connected with state power and this is reflected in the form and shape of political resistance. It is in the small towns and villages of Punjab that popular forms of protest are still connected to traditional modes of expression. Whilst the poets we have considered here were all from educated backgrounds, they were still connected to the rural population and this is reflected in their form and language of communication. It is for this reason that the poetry of resistance that was produced against General Zia in the Punjab is all the more significant. As it is still the case that the regional languages of resistance in contemporary Pakistan fail to make any impact on the organising of progressive parties. It is for this reason that our excavation of the Zia period is of direct relevance to those who wish to mobilize and articulate a politics of resistance in West Punjab.

General Zia's policies have, especially in contemporary academic literature been overtly focused on the issue of Islamization. Though this is of immense importance to understand the post-911 situation in Pakistan, it was only one strategy of the many used by the General to maintain power through the 1980s. By promoting the Muhajir Qaumi Movement in Sindh and by offering patronage to the Punjabi elite, ethnic factionalism was a preferred strategy. The integration of the Punjabi elite within the state structures was the main reason that the most poignant and cited literature of resistance emerged in Sindhi and Pushto.<sup>72</sup> It was the ruling classes across all provinces and in the mainstream political parties who were subject to incorporation into the state machinery, regardless of ethnicity. Indeed, it is the feudal, bourgeoisie and emergent trader/industrial class, represented by Junejo, Yousaf Raza Gillani and Nawaz Sharif, who support Zia in the post-1985 elections and who have continued to dominate Pakistani politics. All sections in the elite, regardless of ethnicity, with perhaps the exceptions of the Balauchis and those in the Federally Administrated Territorial Areas

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<sup>71</sup> See Kalra and Butt.

<sup>72</sup> See, Rahman, H.

participated in the Zia regime.<sup>73</sup> One aspect of Zia's legacy in relation to these divisions was the way in which attention to class and elite formations has been neglected, by academic and political commentators, with an emphasis on ethnicity and religion. This is most clearly reflected in much of contemporary literature on Pakistan where the intersections between language, class and locality are sorely neglected. A cultural politics of resistance emerges in the Pakistani context when attention is paid to localities and those actors who articulate and express resistance through poetry.

#### Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical approval: This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors. No financial benefit arises from the research.

All Copyright for the poetry has been gained from the poets (where living) and from family members where not.

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<sup>73</sup> There is also no doubt that Baluchistan and FATA have been subjected to outright subjugation since the formation of the state of Pakistan.