

Names as Traps: Onomastic Destigmatization Strategies in Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan is a largely Muslim country carved out of British India in 1947. Its majority Muslim population (96.28 per cent) is divided into two major sects Sunni and Shia. The census does not enumerate percentage figures for sects but anecdotal estimates place the Shias as 20 per cent of the population. Other religious minorities are: Christians (1.59 per cent), Hindus (1.85), Sikhs (0.01), Parsis and very small minorities of other religions (0.03).¹ Although there are other divisions: ethnic and linguistic;² class,³ regional (urban and rural), modern and traditional etc, the religious one is the most problematic because names indexed to religion or caste are perceived as traps by their bearers at least in threatening situations. Names pertaining to other divisions, though less threatening, may cause embarrassment or preclude the appropriation of a deiderated identity.

The aim of this article is to describe situations in which names become such liabilities for their bearers as to feel like 'traps' and to study how people and the affected groups respond to such situations. Our focus will be on onomastic destigmatization strategies such as name-changing, modification of names, using names shared with the majority community, and using alternative names in public. The term 'onomastic destigmatization' is borrowed from Moa Bursell⁴ who uses it to describe the adoption of Swedish names by immigrants to avoid discrimination.

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¹ *Census: Population by Religion: Pakistan* (Islamabad: Population Census Organization, Statistics Division, 2004).

² Tariq Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³ Taimur Rahman, *The Class Structure of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴ Moa Bursell, 'Name change and destigmatization among Middle Eastern immigrants in Sweden', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35:3 (2012), pp.471-87.

Review of literature

The idea that names may be perceived by their bearers as liabilities has been described by many scholars coming from different disciplines. Susan Benson, an anthropologist, mentions ‘poisoned’ or ‘injurious names’. These were names of slaves given by their owners which broke their connections with their roots and spoke ‘of a violent disavowal’.⁵ Names have also been called ‘a burden’ and ‘a form of imprisonment’ in the case of migrants with non-Anglo names in Australia.⁶ In these cases one of the onomastic strategies adopted by the bearers of such names is to modify them, change them (as in the case of slaves)⁷ or adopt alternative names for external use as boys of Indian ethnic origin use in South Africa.⁸ The subject of name-changing, not necessarily for the above reasons, is a well-known phenomenon and has been studied by a number of scholars.⁹ Moreover, an overview of sixty such societies compares how names are given, who gives them, whether a ceremony is held when they are given, whether nicknames are used or not, how and why are names changed and so on.¹⁰ This article studies name-changing in relation to the perception of danger, embarrassment or possible obstructions it may cause to one’s life chances among Pakistanis.

⁵ Susan Benson, ‘Injurious Naming: Naming, Disavowal, and Recuperation in Contexts of Slavery and Emancipation’, in G.V. Bruck & B. Bodenhorn (eds.), *The Anthropology of Names and Naming* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.178.

⁶ Bill F. Ndi ‘Names, the Envelope of Destiny in the Grassfields of Cameroon’, in Margaret Kumar, P. Pattanayak and R. Johnson (eds.), *Framing My Name: Extending Educational Boundaries* (Altona, Victoria: Common Ground Publishing, 2010), p.24.

⁷ Susan Benson, *op.cit.*, p.188.

⁸ Thomas Blom Hansen, ‘Where names fall short: names as performances in contemporary Urban South Africa’, in G.V. Bruck & B. Bodenhorn, *op.cit.*, pp.201-24.

⁹ Vivian de Klerk, ‘Changing names in the “New” South Africa: A diachronic survey’, *Names*, 50:3 (2002), pp.201-21; James E. Jacob & Pierre L. Horn, ‘Comment vous appelez-vous?: Why the French change their names’, *Names* 46:1 (1998), pp.3-28; Lu Zhongti & Celia Millward, ‘Chinese given names since the Cultural Revolution’, *Names*, 37:3 (1989), pp.265-80; Agnes C.M. Ragone, ‘Onomastics among Hispanic migrants in south central Pennsylvania’, *Names*, 60:1 (2012), pp.36-45; Mary Louise Nagata, ‘Why Did You Change Your Name? Name Changing Patterns and the Life Course in Early Modern Japan’, *The History of the Family: An International Quarterly*, 4:3 (1999), pp.315-38.

¹⁰ Richard D. Alford, *Naming and Identity: A Cross Cultural Study of Personal Naming Practices* (New Haven, Connecticut: HRAF Press, 1988).

Despite the significance of personal names in understanding the complex issues of identity, power and belief-system, there is perhaps little scholarly work available in the study of personal names in present-day Pakistan. References to Muslim names, however, are found in onomastic studies both by colonial scholars as well as later ones. The tone of the British colonial officer-scholars is condescending and arrogant towards Indians but they have provided valuable information nevertheless. The pioneering study of Punjabi names mentioned above is Richard Temple's *Dissertation on the Proper Names of Punjabis*¹¹ which is based on data gathered in the 'Ambâla District and neighbourhood, where the Hindu element largely predominates'.¹² However, Temple devotes a whole chapter (IV) to Muslim names¹³ which is partly relevant even today for a scholar of Pakistani names. W.F. Sinclair's essay, though not about name-changing, mentions that prestigious titles (or 'caste' names) such as Syed (the best), Khan(chief) and Sheikh (chief, venerable)¹⁴—all proclaiming foreign descent—have actually been appropriated by local Muslim converts because they facilitate claim to the desiderated identity of a status higher than the one they were born in.¹⁵ In addition to that there is Anne Marie Schimmel's study of Muslim names which does not analyse Pakistani Muslim names in any detail nor does it touch upon name-changing being concerned, as a scholar of Arabic, that Pakistanis do not know Arabic and their names are wrongly constructed from the linguistic and Islamic point of view.¹⁶ The only study which is related to the theme of the present inquiry is Theodore Wright's brief article on South Asian name-changing to conceal a problematic identity. But this is highly relevant for us since it gives names of Indian Muslims which are shared with Hindus.¹⁷

¹¹ Richard Temple, *Dissertation on the Proper Names of Punjabis: With Special Reference to the Proper Names of Villagers in the Eastern Panjab* (London: Trubner, 1883).

¹² *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.40-51.

¹⁴ W.F. Sinclair, 'Indian names for English tongues', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 21:1 (1889), pp.159-78.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.171-72.

¹⁶ Anne Marie Schimmel, *Islamic Names* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2005), 1969 edition used.

¹⁷ Theodore P. Wright, 'South-Asian Muslim naming for Identity vs. Name-Changing for Concealing Identity', *Indian Journal of Secularism*, 10:1 (2006), pp.5-10.

Methodology

Samples of names from the four provinces of Pakistan—Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Sindh and Balochistan—are described below. Samples are from the names of the early years of Pakistan (late 1940s and 50s) as well as later years (late 1990s) in order to trace out the change in naming fashions.

Table 1
Abbreviations and Descriptions of Main Samples

1	Badin	Names of voters from one polling station i.e. Badin in Sindh.
2	B'Tan	Names of voters from one polling station i.e. Loralai in Balochistan.
3	Poor-M	Working-class, partly-employed and unemployed men who receive financial aid from the government through the Benazir Income Support Programme from all districts of Pakistan. As they are of different ages ranging from 20 to 60 years.
4	Poor-F	Women of the same sample.
5	Punjab- M (1990s)	Middle and lower-middle class males from the Punjab whose names are in the 2012 matriculation gazette of the Lahore Board of Intermediate and secondary Education (BISE). Their ages being between 15 and 16, they were named in the late 1990s.
6	Punjab-F (1990s)	Girls of the above sample.
7	KP- M (1990s)	Boys of the same ages and classes in the gazette of the Peshawar BISE, 2012.
8	KP-F (1950s)	Girls names in the gazette of Peshawar BISE of the 1960s which means they were names in the late 1940s and 1950s.
9	Sindh- M (1950s)	Men of the middle-class from Sindh named in the early 1950s from the matriculation gazette of BISE Larkana (Sindh). These are fathers of the boys and girls in the samples given below.
10	Sindh-M (1990s)	Boys from the same gazette named in the 1990s and early 2000s.
11	Sindh-F (1990s)	Girls of the same sample.

12	Elite-M (1950s)	Upper-middle and upper-class men from an elite club and an English-medium school in Lahore named in the 1950s.
13	Elite-Fs (1950s)	Women of the same sample.
14	Punjab-M (1950s)	Middle and lower-middle class males from the Punjab whose names were in the matriculation gazettes of the Lahore BISE of the 1950s and 1960s. They were named in the late 1940s and 1950s.
15	Punjab-F (1950s)	Women of the above sample.
16	KP- M (1950s)	Names of males of the above classes in the matriculation gazette of the Peshawar board of 1961. They were named in the 1950s.
17	KP- F (1950s)	Women of the above sample
18	Elite-B	Boys from the upper-middle and upper classes of urban Punjab named in 2000s.
19	Elite- G	Girls of the same sample.

The frequency of occurrence of names and their parts (components) was made by computer search of these large samples. Further information was obtained through unstructured interviews and informants from these communities. These interviews were held all over Pakistan with the exception of Balochistan where militancy precluded visits and interviews. However, Baloch intellectuals and academics were interviewed in the other cities of Pakistan. Questionnaires in Urdu and English were distributed to 400 people but only 372 filled them in mostly when they were in one location as in a classroom. Out of these only 315 were usable for analysis. The respondents were selected through non-random convenience sampling. However, most of them (264), were students to whom questionnaires were given in classrooms where all of them filled them in. The other 108 were ordinary people whom the author met during field work. The sample has less (82) males than females (233) because women change their name on marriage and to conceal their rural origin since using English initials is a strategy not available to them so they are more relevant for our purposes. The whole questionnaire and responses to it are not being given here to save space. Only responses to relevant questions will be used selectively.

Modification and change of names for modernization

With the advent of modernity brought in by the British colonial rulers in India, names also underwent modernization as the desiderated identity was urban and westernized. Like Indian names, Pakistani Muslim names traditionally do not distinguish between first and family names¹⁸ though prestigious titles (Khan, Syed etc.) often function as family names. Thus Ahmed Ali had two components but both could be used as first or family names. His wife could take up the first or the other and even the siblings could take up Ali (exalted) or Ahmed (praised) as last names. One of the changes brought in by modernity is that the concept of family name took hold among urban people. Another one was a certain distancing from the local version of the name. For instance, a local sounding pronunciation could be modified to make it more fashionable. Thus Mohammad (praised) Ali Jinnabhbhoy, Pakistan's founding father, became M. A. Jinnah (substituting the single 'n' for the doubled letter since such sounds do not exist in English). Moreover, in this case, the suffix 'bhoy'—a typical Gujrati ethnic indicator, was also dropped.

But it is not only the elite but even ordinary people who may drop or modify any embarrassing name upon migration from the village to the city. Indeed, there is so much culture shame for some quintessentially rural Punjabi names that a woman working as a maid servant who had once told her employer that her name in the village was Allahditti (Allah=God) Ditti (Pu: given) refused to acknowledge that as her name insisting again and again that her name was Saima (patient; one who fasts). When confronted by her employer in private she said that the village name was not to be told to an outsider (the researcher). Such name-changing out of embarrassment about old-fashioned or rural names has also been reported for India.¹⁹ The old-fashioned rural identity is also indexed with certain rural second names. These are old-fashioned components which were of foreign origin being from the classical languages of the Indian Muslim civilization such as Arabic, Persian and Turkish but later became indigenized and are now taken as typically rural or traditional womens' last names. They are used instead of the names of men in the villages. Taking the data on female names from our sample of people with low income (Poor-W; N= 3, 00, 000) number of names with these rural and old-fashioned components is 51.54 percent. The components are as follows:

¹⁸ Francis Britto, 'Personal Names in Tamil Society', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 28:3 (1986), pp.349-65.

¹⁹ R.R. Melhotra, 'Name Change in Hindi: Some Sociocultural Dimensions', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 21:4 (1979), pp.205-10.

Table 2
Number and Percentage of Rural/Old-Fashioned Female Names

	Poor-F	Punjab-F 1950s	Punjab-F 1990s	KP-F 1950s	KP-F 1990s	Sindh-F 1990s	Elite-F 1950s	Elite-G (P) 2000s	Btan-F	Bade-en-F
	(300,000)	(2,828)	(65,532)	(413)	(17,333)	(614)	(1900)	(608)	9028	4,584
Bibi	1,04,634 (34.88)	112 (3.96)	418 (0.64)	22 (5.33)	2,509 (14.480)	4 (0.65)	NIL	1 0.16	5,984 (66.28)	114 (16.74)
Bano	4,708 (1.57)	71 (2.51)	317 (0.48)	16 (3.87)	400 (2.31)	1 (0.16)	5 (0.26)	1 (0.16)	127 (1.41)	111 (16.30)
Khatoon	24,907 (8.30)	55 (1.84)	20 (0.03)	13 (3.14)	11 (0.06)	3 (0.49)	3 (0.16)	NIL	54 (0.60)	124 (18.21)
Begum	11,100 (3.70)	377 (13.33)	13 (0.02)	86 (20.82)	399 (2.30)	1 (0.16)	9 (0.47)	NIL	78 (0.86)	49 (7.20)
Mai	9,270 (3.09)	02 (0.07)	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	11 (0.12)	08 (1.17)
	154,619 (51.54)	617 (21.82)	768 (1.17)	137 (33.17)	3,319 (19.15)	09 (1.47)	17 (0.89)	02 (0.32)	6,254 (69.27)	406 (8.86)

Women from the large cities, such as Lahore, as expected, have none of the old-fashioned components of names given above nor do they eschew male names as surnames. Sometimes, however, they take the first rather than the family names of their husbands or fathers. In our survey of 315 respondents mentioned above, married women who replied to the question (No. 3 below) whether they took their husband's first name or surname most (14.29 per cent) said they took the first name while a little more than half that number (8.57 per cent) said they took the surname.

Table 3
Extract from Survey on Name-changing

1. Have you ever changed your name?			
	Yes	151	(47.94%)
	No reply	164	(52.06%)
2. Why did you change your name?			
a.	Previous name unlucky/Heavy/Inauspicious	24	(7.62%)

b.	Name too long	01	(0.32%)
c.	Fit in better with majority community	104	(33.02%)
d.	Avoid negative discrimination	03	(0.95%)
e.	I like my new name better	16	(5.08%)
f.	Fit in better with friends	04	(1.27%)
g.	It was fashionable	03	(0.95%)
h.	It was smart	07	(2.22%)
i.	Sounded beautiful	04	(1.27%)
j.	Sounded modern	04	(1.27%)
k.	Any other reason	14	(4.44%)
l.	No reply	131	(41.59%)

3. Did you change your surname after marriage (women only) If yes, did you adopt? FIRST or Surname.

First	45	(14.29%)
Surname	27	(8.57%)
No reply	243	(77.14%)

4. Have you ever adopted a nick name yourself? If yes, tick reasons.

a.	To fit in better with friends	13	(4.13%)
b.	Fashionable	02	(0.63%)
c.	Smart	10	(3.17%)
d.	Beautiful	14	(4.44%)
e.	Modern	03	(0.30%)
f.	To fit in	07	(2.22%)
g.	Avoid discrimination	02	(0.63%)
h.	Like new name better	24	(7.62%)
i.	Any other reasons	26	(8.25%)
j.	No reply	214	(67.94%)

Naming and self-naming for integration

The necessity to adopt an integrative persona through the names of the powerful majority community is shown by several minority communities. For instance, during the 1940s and 50s, 'some 50,000 Americans filed petitions with state courts each year seeking permission to change their family names; 80 per cent of them were Jews.²⁰ Indeed, for many early immigrants, part of entering the United States was the

²⁰ Charles Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and their Lives Today* (News York: Summit Books, 1985).

‘Anglicization’ of their names usually forced upon them by clerical error and insensitiveness to the foreigners’ feelings.²¹ Among others, the Poles also changed or simplified their names when they immigrated to North America.²² And, of course, immigrants of nearly all communities use western-sounding nicknames to adjust better in western societies.

Likewise, the Pakistani diaspora in western countries is caught between two conflicting imperatives: the desire to integrate in the host society and the desire to maintain their ‘authentic’ identity. Recently the latter is being emphasized and reduced to Islam excluding language, music, literature, sartorial repertoire, festivities and other aspects. Names or alternative names, however, are still governed by the imperative of integration at least in schools and workplaces. Thus Pakistanis adopt ‘neutral’—ambiguously both western and Pakistani—names in western countries. For instance, a friend of the author, Tariq Ahsan, settled in Canada has a daughter whom the parents wanted to name Qurratul ‘Ain (Light of the eye). However, when he consulted English-speaking Canadians he found that they could hardly pronounce the name finding it too unwieldy. This phenomenon of a powerful community not being sensitive to the pronunciation or the onomastic norms and values of a less powerful one is well known to researchers as Lehsite²³ notes. In this case the name would also be difficult to write and would certainly mark the child out as an outsider. So they chose the name Shehrezad (P: she whose realm is free; daughter of the city)—of the Arabian Nights fame—and use its abbreviation (Sherry) in everyday life.²⁴ Similar stories are shared by other immigrants. Richard Johnson, an Anglo-Indian immigrant to Australia, having seen children with different names bullied in schools names his son as follows:

I voted for a name that was easy to pronounce and spell. We also wanted our choice to be meaningful. My wife and I shared excellent memories of a Catholic nun in our days at school—Sister Kevin. So, our son was called Kevin.

Other migrant communities, such as the gypsies, the Iranians and the Spanish also change their names. The gypsies, notably, adopt American

²¹ Scott Baird, ‘Anglicizing ethnic surnames’, *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, 54:2 (2006), pp.173-92.

²² Robert Klymasz, ‘The Canadianization of Slavic surnames’, *Names*, 1&2 (1963), pp.81-253.

²³ Ilse Lehist, ‘The attitudes of bilinguals towards their personal names’, *American Speech*, 50:1&2 (1975), pp.30-5.

²⁴ 10 September 2012. Telephonic interview of a personal friend settled in Ottawa, Canada.

names to ‘remain invisible, concealed, and untraceable’.²⁵ The Iranians, to integrate in American society and to avoid embarrassment²⁶ and the Hispanics ‘adapt their onomastic choices only when they see a necessity for it.’²⁷

The same trend can be observed among the workers of the call centres of Pakistan, as mentioned earlier, who take up Westernized nicknames to sound American or British.²⁸ In their case, however, it is not a case of despising the indigenous identity and attempting to escape it in elite circles but an attempt to earn their living through concealment of an identity which may cost them their jobs considering that there may be bias against their names as reported in some studies.²⁹

When names are deadly traps: the religious identity

Names may put their bearers in real danger as they are linked to a certain religious identity. In pre-Partition India Hindu names in Muslim-dominated areas and Muslim ones in Hindu or Sikh ones could be death traps. One of the anecdotes about the communal riots of 1947 when British India was partitioned into Muslims majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India is as follows:

A man asked another his name. Upon being told he killed him.

Though not given in the literature on the riots it could well be true. In the Punjab alone between 500,000 to 800,000 people—Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs—were killed.³⁰ Indeed, as an informant told Ishtiaq Ahmed, the author of the book being cited, ‘East Punjab had become totally unsafe

²⁵ Carol Silverman, ‘Strategies of ethnic adaptation: the case of gypsies in the United States’, in Stephen Stern and John Allan, *Creative Ethnicity, Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life* (Utah: Utah State University Press, 1991).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.112-36.

²⁷ Agnes C.M. Ragone, *op.cit.*, p.44.

²⁸ Tariq Rahman, ‘Commodification of language in the call centers of Pakistan’, *Language in Society*, 38:2 (2009), pp.233-58; Kiran Mirchandani, ‘Practices of global capital: gaps, cracks and ironies in transnational call centers in India’, *Global Networks*, 4 (2004), pp.355-73.

²⁹ Marianne Bertrand, & Sendhil Mullainathan, ‘Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination’, *The American Economic Review*, 94:4 (2004), pp.991-1013.

³⁰ Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab: Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.xxv.

for anyone with a Muslim name. It was similar for us with Hindu names to leave West Punjab in 1947'.³¹

Under these circumstances people took up what are often called 'neutral names' i.e names which are ambiguous enough to pass as a member of two antagonistic religious community. During these days—the late 1940s—the well-known novelist of Pakistani origin, Zulfikar Ghose (b. 1935), changed his family name of Ghaus which immediately identified him as a Muslim. Zulfikar (sword), however, remained as it was. This is how Ghose explains his change of name.

Ghose is a common Hindu name familiar to anyone who has been to Calcutta, while we are Muslims. But the India before independence was a time of communal hatred; we found it convenient to be known as *Ghausa* among Hindu communities and *Khawaja* among Muslims... And I prefer it. It is half Muslim, half Hindu, half Pakistani, half Indian.³²

Nor was this the only time that it happened. We are told that 'In the 1992 communal riots in Bombay victims' names were picked out from apartment and voters lists'.³³

In Pakistan, though populated by a majority of Muslims, it is sect (Sunni, Shia etc) which came to be indexed with names. Although the Shias and the Sunnis share most Islamic components of their names the Shias are perceived by the Sunnis to be marked by some components relating to the names of the twelve Imams (leaders) believed by the majority of Shias called twelvers (*athana asharis*) as the rightful spiritual leaders of Muslims are given below.³⁴ However, according to a scholar of Shia Islam all the so-called distinctive Shia components given below are actually shared by the Sunnis in Pakistan besides the names Ali, Hassan and Hussain which are among the most common male names in Pakistan.³⁵

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.42.

³² Zulfikar Ghose, *Confessions of a Native-Alien* (London: Routledge, 1965).

³³ Theodore P. Wright, *op.cit.*, p.8.

³⁴ Syed Hussain Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000 repr.); Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

³⁵ 16 September 2013. Telephone interview with Professor Syed Hussain Jafri, a scholar of Shia Islam and former Director, Pakistan Study Centre, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan.

Table 4
Names of the Shia Imams and Components Associated with Them

S #.	Name	Meaning	Period	Component of Name
1	Ali ibn-e-Abi Talib	Exalted one. <i>Ibne-e</i> =son of	600-661 CE.	
2	Hassan ibn-e-Ali	Handsome	626-670	Hassani
3	Hussain ibn-e-Ali	Handsome	626-680	Hussaini
4	Ali ibn-e-Hussain (Imam Zainul Abideen)	Ornament of worshippers	658/9-712	
5	Muhammad ibn-e-Ali (Imam al-Baqir)	The revealer (of knowledge)	677-732	
6	Jafar ibne-Muhammad (Imam Jafar as Sadiq)	Honest	702-765	Jafari
7	Musa ibn-e-Jafar (Imam Jafar al- Kazmi)	Calm	744-799	Kazimi
8	Ali ibn-e-Musa (Imam al-Raza)	The Pleasing One	765-817	Rizvi
9	Muhammad ibn-e-Ali (Imam al-Taqi)	The God-fearing	810-835	
10	Ali ibne-e Muhammad (Imam al-Naqi)	The pure	827-868	Naqvi
11.	Hasan ibn-e-Ali (Imam al-Askari)	Citizen of a garrison	846-874	Askari
12.	Muhammad ibn-e-Hasan (Imam al-Mehdi)	The guide; the proof	868-unknown	

Components on identity cards of people, perceived to be distinctively Shia, has resulted in their being singled out by name for sectarian killings. One such incident was reported from Kohistan in the north of Pakistan in July 2012. Reportedly a bus was stopped on its way from Rawalpindi to Gilgit and the passengers were asked their names. Those who had Shia components in their names mentioned above – although, as mentioned above, some of these components such as Ali, Hasan and Hussain are shared by Sunnis also—were off-loaded and killed in cold blood. The danger such names pose is poignantly mentioned in the following passage by a Sunni Baluch journalist part of whose name was Hussain. He says:

I should not be simply murdered for my parents' short-sightedness for not foreseeing that 30 years later this name could get their child killed.³⁶

Pakistani society has become more Islamized since the Islamization policies of General Zia ul Haq (1977-1988).³⁷ One consequence of this increased religiosity in society has been greater awareness of sectarian differences which have led to continual Shia-Sunni conflict for two decades.³⁸ Some militant anti-Shia radicals have even taken up the names of Muawiya and Yazid, both maligned by Shias and avoided even by the Sunni community till the advent of Zia ul Haq. The Shias have not responded onomastically to the existential threat their names pose for them as yet since children still carry components perceived to be distinctively Shia in their names. However, the author was told how worried they were that people had started adopting such Shia-baiting names as Muawiya and even Yazid.³⁹ However, the Shias have the doctrine of permissible concealment of identity under imminent persecution called *Taqiyya* which was used by them in Gujarat and other parts of India⁴⁰ and which might be deployed now.

Table 5
Frequency of Occurrence of the Radical Islamic Components

	Poor-M N=500, 000	Elite-M 1950s 3, 649	KP-M 1950s 63, 013	KP-M 1990s 42, 692	Punjab-M 1950s 22, 464	Punjab-M 1990s 65, 331
Muawiya	16	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	7
Yazid	13	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

The destigmatization strategies of religious minorities

Religious minorities are increasingly being subjected to persecution or, at least, negative discrimination in Pakistan.⁴¹ Thus it is only to be expected that they would adopt name-changing as a destigmatization

³⁶ Sajid Hussain, 'From Quetta to Turbat', *The News*, 14 January, 2013.

³⁷ Amir Mir, *The Fluttering Flag of Jihad* (Lahore: Mashal Books, 2008).

³⁸ Khaled Ahmed, *Sectarian War: Pakistan's Sunni-Shia Violence and its Links to the Middle East* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁹ Syed Hussain Jafri, *op.cit.*

⁴⁰ Theodore P. Wright, *op.cit.*, p.6.

⁴¹ Ahmad Salim, *Equal Citizens?* (Islamabad: Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 2006); Tariq Rahman, 'Pakistan's policies and practices towards the religious minorities', *South Asian History and Culture*, 3:2 (2012), pp.302-15.

strategy. Rana Irfan, a professional woman from a Christian family, told the author in an interview that their family always had Muslim, Christian and even Hindu names—the last because Sir Chohotu Ram (1881-1945), a pre-partition political figure, was a relative. Her own family has neutral names—Rana (handsome), Reena (H-U: gem), Naveed (good news), Faheem (wise), Amir (full, inhabited)—her own son is called Gibran and daughters Anam (vine branch) and Shayan (P: suitable). These names are shared by Muslims and Christians. However, since middle-class families come from clans such as the Gills (Kashmiris) or Bhattis (Rajputs), they retain these names from the past and have not adopted them recently.⁴²

Sarfraz Anwar, a Christian social worker, who was interviewed on the telephone on 06 May 2012, said that there were two contradictory trends in the Christian community. First, the name Masih (the Messiah; Jesus Christ) had decreased. However, this was understandable since it was associated with the sweeper community and, therefore, was shunned by upwardly mobile Christians. And secondly, ‘neutral naming’ had increased. In his own case, his name Kenneth Naveed Anwar (brightest), was changed to only Naveed Anwar which is shared with Muslims ‘to facilitate schooling’.⁴³

Confirmation of some of these trends comes from a sample of 4423 names of educated, middle-class people from the Christian community obtained from a college in Lahore between the ages of 21 and 59 compared with a sample of 282 children from the same community between the ages of 4 to 19. The results are as follows:

Table 6
Components of Shared Names between Christians and Muslims in Pakistan

Description of name	Between 21-59 N = 4423	Between 4-19 N = 282
All components of name shared with Muslims	1977 (44.70 %)	120 (42.55 %)
With at least one component shared with Muslims	1385 (31.31 %)	148 (52.48 %)
Names with Masih	244 (5.52 %)	01 (0.35 %)
All components Christian	817 (18.47 %)	13 (4.61 %)

⁴² 20 March 2012. Interview with Rana Irfan, Personal Manager in the City School Head Office, Lahore.

⁴³ 6 March 2012. Telephone interview with Kenneth Naveed Anwar, Rawalpindi.

In short, the use of Masih has decreased among the educated, middle-class in the younger generation though, of course, the working classes and the rural areas still retain this Christian identity marker. Moreover, most Christians now use nominal components shared with Muslims. Indeed, those who use purely Christian names (i.e no component is shared with Muslims) have decreased from 18.47 to 4.61 per cent. Those using at least one Muslim name, which can be used at certain places or with Muslim companions, were 76. 01 per cent in the older generation but have now increased to 95.03 per cent (figures obtained by adding the first and second rows). Interviews bear this out in poignant details.

For instance, two janitors working in the Quaid-i-Azam University at Islamabad were more open about the discrimination they faced when they revealed their real names Tahir Masih (clean) and Shamoon Masih (Obedient; Simeon). For instance, they were stopped by the police and interrogated. That is why, even without any formal change of names in their identity cards, both use the surname ‘Nazeer’.⁴⁴

As for Pakistani Hindus, they are mostly residents of Sindh, and reconizable by their distinctively Hindu names (Hari Ram, Ashok Kumar, Pooja Devi etc). According to Harbaksh Makijani, an academic from this community, Hindu children receive their names after a ceremony in which the Brahmin priest calculates the horoscope (*kundli*) of the child. This name is traditional so the names which people use and write down in documents are informal names. These are called ‘calling names’. He did mention, however, that there was discrimination against Hindus so people sometimes used names shared with Muslims. Such kind of names were observed in the data from the districts of Sindh where the Hindus form clusters. For instance, in my data from Sindh comprising 360 names of Hindu women (Sindh-F), there were at least ten names shared with their Muslim neighbours. Among these Meena (S: Fish; also means love in Persian and Pashto) (10 names) was a favourite, followed by Raj Bai (H-U: ruling lady) (6) and Meeran (T: doe) (5). The name Beena (P: season of flowers) (3) is also a shared one as are Veena (S: lute), Seemi (P: silver), Anita (S: graceful), Soni (Pu: beautiful), Heer and the more modern-sounding Neha (H-U: beauty, loving) (Badin-F). In the data for students of matriculation from the Larkana (Sindh-M and F 1990s) the religion is mostly given in the case of Hindus and sometimes also for Muslims. Thus a name which could be shared by both Muslims and Hindus such as Reeha (P: released) would be marked as Reeha

⁴⁴ 8 May 2012. Interview with Tahir and Shamoon Masih, janitors in Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad.

Bhojwani Hindu in the case of a Hindu girl. There are a few examples of shared names besides the favourite Reeha. These are: Hina (henna), Kiran (H-U: ray) and Kanwal (H-U: lotus) but, as mentioned before, in all cases the word Hindu is attached in the matriculation gazettes. The potential danger for Hindus using Muslim names is brought out by a report by the International Dalit Solidarity Network. The report is about the caste, class and religious discrimination against lower caste (Dalit) Hindu community in Sindh and lower Punjab. A woman of this community called Alya (exalted) Oad got a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) degree and went to Karachi where she found a job. Here, when her colleagues found out that she was not a Muslim, they turned against her. The treatment meted out to her is summed up as follow:

‘You are cheating people with your name. Why have you got a name as a Muslim girl? You are a low caste Hindu, and we didn’t know that’, said a senior colleague. Then it got worse: ‘You are so beautiful because your mother slept with a Muslim man’, read a note on her desk. Oad wrote her resignation on the reverse and left the office.⁴⁵

As Harbaksh Makijani revealed, he and his cohort were embarrassed by their Hindu names in their youth.⁴⁶ Yet, as the experience of Alya Oad above testifies, Pakistani society seems to have become more intolerant since then as the quest for not being onomastically marked can lead a person from the Hindu community of Pakistan in serious trouble nowadays.

Conclusion

To sum up, there are situations in which some Pakistanis perceive their names to be a liability, a burden or even traps. If they carry rural or old-fashioned names indexed in the public mind with a peripheral, non-modern identity they find such names a source of embarrassment. If they are migrants abroad, they find their names an impediment to their integration in the host country. In both cases the names may be modified or changed. Sometimes, however the immigrant response is to adopt nicknames on the pattern of the majority community exclusively for use

⁴⁵ Report by International Dalit Solidarity Organization, June 2000. <http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/Factsheet.Pakistan.pdf>. Retrieved on 24 March 2013.

⁴⁶ 20 June 2013. Interview of a Hindu academic, Harbaksh Makijani, from University of Sindh, Jamshoro at Bara Gali Campus, University of Peshawar.

outside home. Other small communities, such as westernized Pakistanis, also take up the names or nicknames of the desiderated identities they relate to. In the most serious case of one's name indexing a problematic religious identity a name may be concealed. As for non-Muslim minorities in Pakistan the Christians are noted for using names shared with the Muslim majority while the Hindus, though to a much lesser extent, sometimes use such names. It should be added that this kind of naming strategy is practiced by all communities who lack power in a certain situation. The intention of the weaker community is not to deceive the stronger one but to be as safe as possible under the circumstances. Indeed, in a world without discrimination, without danger, without malice there would be no need for such strategies except for fitting in better or for expressing solidarity with one's companions and friends. But Pakistan is surely not that kind of world yet.

Notes

1. The major sects in the Muslim world are Sunnis and Shias. The Shia or *Shi'ān-i-Ālī* (partisans of Ali) are those who believe that Ali bin Abi Talib, cousin of Prophet Muhammad and his son-in-law, as husband of his daughter Fatima, was deprived of his rightful position as the first caliph by the first three caliphs (spiritual and worldly rulers) revered by the Sunnis. Muawiyah appointed his son Yazid as the caliph and killed Ali's son, Hussain, in the Battle of Karbala 10 Oct 680.
2. For brevity names from Arabic are given without any letter for abbreviation. Other abbreviations are: H-U= Hindi and Urdu; P= Persian; Pu= Punjabi; S= Sanskrit; T= Turkish).