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Identity Construction Through Language: A Case Study of the Former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Speech at UNGA in 2019

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Keywords: Islamophobia, Religious, Identity Construction, Social Identity Theory

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Abstract

In the light of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the present research has unveiled Khan's religious identity via his speech at the UN General Assembly (UNGA, 2019), the research highlights his role as an advocate of human rights, peace, and justice and analyses how his lexical choices reflect his personate in front of the global Muslim community. The research presents him as a proponent of moral and global values advocating against hostile and intolerant behavior of the global community with Muslims like islamophobia. It also highlights Khan's unified Muslim identity which challenges Western stereotypes of Islam. The study reveals how Khan's linguistic choices frame his religious identity and define his own persona. This research exposes the pivotal role language plays in constructing identity, diplomatic relations, international political negotiations, world affairs, and global attitudes toward Islam.

Keywords:

[Islamophobia](#), [Religious](#), [Identity Construction](#), [Social Identity Theory](#)

Introduction

In various social, cultural, and political contexts, identity which is a complex and dynamic concept changes. Language is one of the most powerful tools through which the identities of individuals are shaped and projected. The communicative style of political leaders constructs their political and religious identities which influence both national and international perceptions about them. Therefore, language serves as a primary channel for

constructing an individual's self-image while aligning him with specific social, political, and religious groups.

The current study unearths Khan's religious identity through the analysis of his speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2019 where he has advocated and promoted the rights of Muslims globally. In his speech, his lexical choices have constructed his persona as a Muslim leader and advocate of the global Muslim community. Apart



from tackling political issues, Khan's discourse depicts him as a moral voice for the oppressed and presents him as a protector of Islam, especially in relation to Islamophobia. His speech functions as both a political and rhetorical effort to focus on crafting and solidifying his identity as a global Muslim leader.

The framework of social identity theory (SIT) postulates that individuals define their identity through their associations with specific groups and their language which contributes to forming, constructing, and adjusting these group identities. SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), asserts that individuals construct their identities through their affiliation with different social groups, religions, ethnicity, and political ideology. Language plays an important role in maintaining distinctions between groups and promoting shared values. Thus, Khan's speech works as a vital instrument for his identity construction, where his language aligns him with Muslims and portrays Islam in positive aspects by opposing Western stereotypes. The analytical framework adopted for the current study reveals how Khan's discourse shapes his identity in addition to the fabrication of the collective identity of Muslims.

This study analyses how Khan's choice of lexicon constructs his religious and political identity. Through his references and allusions to Islamic teachings, history, moral guidance, ethical authority, and moral leadership, the study will explore how Khan constructs a favorable narrative about Islam and his role as a voice for the global Muslim community. Furthermore, the study will also explore how Khan portrays himself as a defender of Muslims dealing with global challenges, particularly in the context of Islamophobia, marginalization, and discrimination of Muslims globally. This research is important because it shows how language can be deployed to shape political and religious identities in the global arena. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory, I have shown how Imran Khan's 2019 UNGA speech utilized the strategic lexical choices that enlivened group continuity and asserted a collective Muslim identity. While the study supports the theory of social identity construction in relational practices via language in international communication, it also speaks to the importance of language in confronting Islamophobia and reasserting narratives regarding Islam.

This study has significance for the works in the fields of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis and it offers practical issues to consider when analyzing political debates and identity politics. In addition, it adds how Muslim leaders particularly from South Asia build their moral authority and challenge Western notions through public speeches. It also serves as a reference point for exploring how identity discussions function at high-level negotiation forums and engage religious and cultural framing.

Research Objectives

- To identify the lexical choices made by the former prime minister Imran Khan in the construction of his identity as a Muslim representative?
- To unearth the linguistic choices of the former prime minister Imran Khan which align him with Muslims around the world?

Research Questions

1. What lexical choices have been made by former prime minister Imran Khan in the construction of his identity as a Muslim representative?
2. How do the linguistic choices of the former prime minister Imran Khan align him with Muslims around the world?

Literature Review

In recent years, Social Identity Theory (SIT) has emerged in the literature for analyzing how political leaders create and negotiate identities through language. SIT argues that people rely on their group memberships to create a sense of self or self-concept, which results in ingroup favoritism and outgroup biasedness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Uysal (2022) expands on SIT in discussing how leaders construct identity-framed narratives aimed at bringing people together through identity, typically by positioning the in-group against a "threat", promoting togetherness. Through the use of identity-framed narratives, Uysal (2022) finds that leaders can create social solidarity and mobilize popular support by inciting collective grievances and claiming moral authority. Likewise, Balinhas (2023) discusses how political leaders and their supporters actively use language to construct alternate realities and social categories as ingroups or outgroups; thereby forming new meanings about

what constitutes "us" and "them". Together, these studies focus on the importance of language in forming social categories and provide rich opportunities to analyze the process by which political identities are constructed through SIT.

Identity and Language

Identity is not a fixed essence but rather a process-based/performative act that emerges through discourse (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Language, as one of the most prominent means of performing and negotiating identities is omnipresent in social contexts (Gee, 2014). Hall (1996) has distinguished that identity is produced in discourses wherein subjectivity is influenced by certain ideological formations that dominate that discourse. However, from the post-structuralist position, it differentiates identity as fluid, multiple, and discursive subject to context and interlocution. Politicians employ discursive practices to shape public perception, consolidate identities, and legitimize authority (van Dijk, 1998). The linguistic construction of collective identity, for example, religious or national identity allows political leaders to facilitate displays of collective (e.g. solidarity) as well as reflection values and historical grievance (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002).

Lexical Choices and Ideological Positioning

The lexical choice is one factor of identity construction. Fairclough argues that lexical choices are not random and that word choices typically reproduce ideologies (1995). In political discourse, emotionally laden or ideologically laden words can mobilize associations with selected groups or moral stances (Wodak, 2009). As political leaders call on specific lexical fields – this could include but is not disallowed to "oppression," "justice," "Islamophobia," or "brotherhood" – those leaders are enacting an ideological positioning and signaling their moral positions. Researchers (e.g., Al-Momani & Badarneh 2010) have observed that in the studies of discourses produced by political leaders who are identified as Muslim, there is a consistent use of terminology associated with pan-Islamism, in an effort to claim a sense of unity on behalf of Muslims around the globe. Khan's lexical choice of "Ummah," "Islam," "justice," and "oppression" in his speech represent a discursive strategy to foreground a

collective Muslim identity and claim legitimacy as a spokesperson on behalf of Muslims.

Muslim Identity in Political Discourse

Muslim identity generally – particularly within post-9/11 international discourse – has been a site of contestation and construction of stereotypes (Said, 1978; Poole, 2002). In order to construct a series of related moral and political agencies, leaders originating from countries with a Muslim majority can be seen to engage in discursive articulations of Islam as a counter-narrative to Islamophobic constructions in discourse. Elnahla (2019) argues that Muslim leaders while occupying global discursive platforms are using those capabilities to reposition Islam in a positive frame, dissociating it from extremism while simultaneously claiming the principles of justice, peace, and equity as foundational principles of Islam.

Imran Khan's address to the UNGA in 2019 included the discursive elements that were consistent with these objectives. His lexical and thematic attention to 'Islam', as a religion of peace to the injustices faced by Muslims around the world (e.g. Kashmir and Palestine) and his accusations of hypocrisy regarding how the West holds Muslims accountable indicates a discursive identity of resistance, advocacy, and leadership on behalf of the Muslim world.

Representation of Muslim Identity in Global Forums

A growing number of studies have examined how Muslim leaders happen to represent their identity in international settings. KhosraviNik (2015), for instance, has researched how Iranian and Turkish leaders negotiate Islamic values with secular and global narratives. Likewise, Eissa (2019) has documented how many speeches at the UN turned out to be performative acts by which leaders have presented grievances and solidarity among states with Muslim populaces. These examples and subsequent studies have suggested that the religious identity does not only simply represent but is constructed in an interactive way like "we Muslims", "must"/"should", "oppression", "injustice", "etc." Khan's speech itself contained many of these aspects like how Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was cited and how Khan framed Islam as a way of social justice.

Pakistani Political Discourse and Islam

In Pakistani political discourse, Islam has always been implicated. Since its independence (1947), it has been typical for Pakistani leaders to use Islam (terminology or references) in order to justify their political positions (Zia, 2009). Imran Khan's rhetorical approach is distinctive in blending populist nationalism with Islamic moral values both as a basis for supporting and lacking a critique of Islam among the domestic and diaspora Muslim audience (Ahmed, 2020). His vision of "Naya Pakistan", has been constructed around its ties to justice, morality, and Islamic revivalism (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). At the international level, like UNGA, this kind of rhetoric highlights global Muslim solidarity. It serves the dual purpose of furthering foreign policy aims and contributing to Khan's public persona as a defender of Muslim causes in the international arena. In these moments, language becomes a mechanism for producing identity that straddles both religious and political lines.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative case study design with a single, bounded case: Imran Khan's speech at the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019. Case studies are appropriate to investigate identity construction as a situated phenomenon within a specific socio-political context and rhetorical situation (Yin, 2014). By analyzing a particular speech of significant public interest, the study is able to investigate the role of language in identity presentation and desirable group alignment. The qualitative methodology allows for the interpretation of the meaning, intention, and social significance found in the text. It is not the intent of the study to analyze numerical data; it is to explore the strategies employed to construct a sense of shared identity with the Muslim world. Data includes the official transcript of Imran Khan's UNGA speech, which can be found on the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations and several international media outlets. This part of the speech was chosen for its substantive emphasis on Islamic values, Muslim solidarity, and the geopolitical factors that have affected the Muslim world, such as the situation in Kashmir and the implications of the rising impact of Islamophobia in Western societies. There were no

additional datasets employed to investigate such as interviews or surveys, and we have focused on the text. The transcript was engaged through close reading and manual coding with careful attention to themes, and lexical and rhetorical features.

A thematic analysis has been conducted to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret the patterns within Khan's speech. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method for analyzing textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which emphasizes its flexibility for exploring meanings across datasets. This study has been specifically analyzed through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to examine how group identities, in-group/out-group distinctions, and social categorizations are constructed and communicated in the speech."

Theoretical Framework

The current research has adopted Social Identity Theory (1979) as a theoretical framework that describes a state where individuals derive a part of their self-concept through their social group memberships. SIT (1979) provides a mechanism to understand how political leaders construct their in-group and out-group identities using language. In the present study, in-groups may refer to Muslim leaders and out-groups may refer to Western powers or in this case oppressors.

Group Categorization

Tajfel (1982) describes categorization as the way in which individuals define the self, as well as others through group membership. Khan's membership identifiers such as "we Muslims," "our prophet," and "the Muslim world" illustrate to construct of a collective group identity. Khan draws upon group and cultural identifiers that categorize him and his audience as members of the same cultural and religious community, through repeated references to group membership identifiers.

Social Comparison

The social identity is also influenced by comparison with "out-groups." In this case, Khan compares moral superiority and the peaceful nature of Islam with the hypocritical and aggressive nature of Western powers. The "us vs them" narrative is consistent with the SIT principle that groups sustain and develop identity through positive and social

comparison (Turner et al., 1987). Khan positions Muslims as the victims of injustice and Islamophobia, whereas the out-group is constructed as the perpetrator of that injustice.

Identity Negotiation

Imran Khan's speech also fulfills identity negotiation proposed by scholars of SIT such as Hogg and Abrams (1988) and concerns the individual adopting and/or reaffirming an identity in line with contextual interplay. Khan negotiated his identity as both a national leader (the Prime Minister of Pakistan) and also as a transnational representative of the global Muslim ummah. Khan mediated his identity as the Prime Minister of Pakistan and as a voice of the Muslim ummah around the world who are concerned about the sanctity of the Prophet (PBUH) and perceptions of Islam. Consequently, SIT is not only relevant but necessary in explaining how Imran Khan constructs solidarity, distinguishes opponents, and negotiates multiple identities within a single speech. The current research has drawn on SIT as a theoretical guide for interpreting linguistic choices functioning to build group cohesion and provide moral legitimacy.

Data Analysis

Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits how individuals and groups shape their identities by affiliation with specific social groups like religion, nationality, or ethnicity. Social Identity Theory (SIT) is structured around the following principles:

- Group categorization: Classifying oneself as part of a particular community.
- Social comparison: Highlighting distinctions between groups, often to underscore inequalities, highlighting injustices or aligned values.
- Identity negotiation: Constructing and projecting one's self-image for the outside world, often shaped by societal and external standards.

In his speech, Imran Khan draws on these principles to construct a religious and political identity firmly based on Islam directly addressing Western misconceptions and the worsening challenge of Islamophobia. The following themes have been extracted from the data.

Islamophobia as Collective Struggle for Muslims

Khan frames Islamophobia as more than a political issue but as an emotional and religious wound felt by Muslims worldwide reinforcing a transnational Muslim identity. This coincides with the way social categorization occurs in SIT - individuals identify as part of a group based on shared experience and vulnerability. The given extract from the selected data presents Khan's stance on Islamophobia.

"There are 1.3 billion Muslims in the world... Islamophobia has grown since 9/11 and it is alarming. It is creating divisions." The quantitative language ("1.3 billion Muslims") and the global scale of the issue ("throughout all continents") turn an issue of one national-level problem into a worldwide issue. The lexical choice of "alarming," "divisions," and "marginalizing" highlights threat and urgency. Repeating "Islamophobia" in various guises provides a thread through the discourse that defines the aspects of what constitutes an Islamic identity alongside systemic oppression and discrimination. In this case, the theme of collective victimhood illustrates how Khan attempts to emotionally pull Muslims together within a sense of shared oppression in order to collectively form a coherent global in-group.

The Misrepresentation of Islam in Western Discourse

One significant part of Khan's speech deals with the issue of framing Islam in the West. Khan disagrees with phrases such as "radical Islam" and Western interpretations of suicide bombings, arguing that Islam has suffered unjust stigma.

"What is radical Islam? There is only ONE Islam and that is the Islam of Prophet (PBUH)." This issue works in a paradigm of semantic negation (e.g., that there is no such thing as radical Islam) as it affirms a sense of Muslim identity by rejecting the identity the West imposes. It also taps into social comparison, part of the process of SIT whereby the Muslim in-group is defined as more ethical than the ignorant and judgmental Western out-group. Khan also draws attention to the arbitrary nature of violence being framed according to religious identities:

"No one blamed religion when [Tamil Tigers or Kamikaze bombers] carried out suicide attacks... because no religion teaches violence." This scales up the double standards in worldwide stories and examines the more extreme side of the binary of "us vs them" between Muslims and the West. It demonstrates how identity development involves resisting discursive othering.

Reverence for the Prophet (PBUH) as the Core of Muslim Identity

A recurring and emotionally charged - theme is the sanctity of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which Khan is able to extend to embody a core of Muslim identity. He elaborates on this theme to highlight the affective connection Muslims share with their Prophet (PBUH), which also serves to create a unified ummah and distinguishes Muslim affective sensitivities from that of the West.

"Our Prophet (PBUH) lives in our hearts, and when he is maligned, it hurts us." This sentence is a clear construction of a shared and affective sensibility of Muslim identity. The effective language that he uses ("lives in our heart", "it hurts us") creates group cohesion through emotional attachment to their prophet (PBUH). In SIT, shared emotions tie identity and group cohesion together. Khan draws comparisons of this respect with Western secularism: "In their eyes, Islam was an intolerant religion... In Western society, the Holocaust is treated with sensitivity... That's the same respect we ask for." This comparison presents ideological work because it operates to humanize Muslim emotion by appealing to Western morals (sensitivity to the Holocaust) in hopes of reciprocity while also trying to defend the boundedness of the group.

Islamic Justice and Historical Glories

Another significant theme developed in the speech refers to moral and social justice ideals within Muslim historical narratives. The most important examples are those connected to the historical narrative of the Prophet (PBUH) and His Caliphate. Reference to these narratives serves as ideological anchors to Muslim identity connected to a glorious and just past.

"The Prophet (PBUH) created the state of Medina which was a welfare state... The state

announced all humans were equal; whatever the color of their skin."

"The 4th caliph of Medina lost a court case against a Jewish citizen. No one was above the law." These are not just historical stories but are discursive resources for identity. They challenge the stigma of Muslims being intolerant or oppressors by constructing Islam as a modern, fair, and egalitarian religion. This theme constructs Muslim identity as moral, just, and inclusive, thus reclaiming the dispersive space taken by Islamophobic narratives. It also lends validity to Khan's own role as a spokesperson because his message is situated within sacred Islamic value systems.

Leadership Failure within the Muslim World

Interestingly, Khan is self-reflective about the failures of Muslim leadership which generates a theme of accountability within the group. "Unfortunately, the Muslim leaders were unable to explain... We failed as the Muslim world." This theme demonstrates an understanding of internal factors limiting the group and it is quite unusual in political identity construction. It operates as identity negotiation—Khan does not merely idolize the Muslim group while trying to gain inclusion but he has structured himself and the group as a disappointment in terms of leadership while communicating that there is a needed correction or reawakening underway.

Emotional and Ethical Appeals for Recognition

The final prominent theme is Khan's engagement with commonality and empathy through emotional analogies and moral reasons. He asks the collective audience for understanding and respect: "So that's the same respect we ask for; do not hurt our sentiments by maligning our Holy Prophet (PBUH). That is all we ask." This theme is premised on ethical reciprocity—a discursive shift that places the obligation of recognition on the audience in the West. It constructs the Muslim identity as peace-making and respectful opposed to Western indifference or incitement. There is no ambiguity in Khan's rhetorical project: to humanize the Muslim encounter, to establish moral capital, and to anticipate transcultural empathy.

Table 1

SIT Process	Theme
Social Categorization	Islamophobia as a global Muslim struggle
Social Comparison	Misrepresentation of Islam; Moral Contrast with the West
Identity Negotiation	Khan's role as a reformist and emotional mediator

Khan constructs an identity that is complex: One based on collective trauma and emotional solidarity (Islamophobia, reverence for the prophet) another based on historical justice and moral high ground, one action focused on misapprehensions by the West, and another oriented to noble recognition in the public sphere. Each theme emphasizes similar rhetorical strategies: inclusive pronouns, religious intertextuality, emotional appeal, and historical comparisons. Together, these themes create a strong identity narrative that frames Imran Khan as not only the Prime Minister of Pakistan but a legitimate voice of the Islamic ummah globally.

Findings and Discussion

Imran Khan's 2019 UNGA speech develops his identity as an individual and as a representative of the global Muslim Ummah by invoking shared experiences, values, and struggles. Within the speech, he draws attention towards Islamophobia as ubiquitous and as a loud problem affecting Muslims universally by starting with "There are 1.3 billion Muslims in the world...Islamophobia has been on the rise since 9/11 and it is alarming. ...It is not just Islamophobia it is creating divisions." It situates Muslims as belonging to a large and unified group, one that equally suffers from discrimination and injustice. Social Identity Theory suggests that a focus on shared adversity presents a positive opportunity for group solidarity when members feel threatened by external parties (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Khan's description of Islamophobia as a lost challenge bonds with Abbas' (2019) example of how collective victimization is linked to grouping which increases the willingness of participants to participate and mobilize their identity claims. Khan begins by confronting existing notions - prevalent in the West - about Islam in general and continues by explaining the illusion of "radical Islam" in giving prominence to the consideration of Islam in particular. His comment, "There is only ONE Islam and that is the Islam of Prophet (PBUH)," does not only denounce the problematic label of radical

Islamism but actively participates in creating a properly defined Muslim identity demarcated in the most inclusive and authentic manner. Renunciation of the label of "radical Islam" is congruous with the hyper-stereotypical consideration convenience provided by those who study Muslims and Islam. Carr and Haynes (2015) have noted that the majority of low obtaining stereotypes result in Muslims being flattened to a singular, monolithic portrayal rather than accurate, distinct, and nuanced representations. Khan's instance of the "only/real" aspect of Islam attempts to reclaim positive representations of the faith and remove associations with violence and extremism. Thus, Khan is attempting to alter how Muslims are viewed both externally and internally.

Khan's rhetoric relies on emotionally charged appeals based on the respect that Muslims have for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). By stating that "Our Prophet (PBUH) lives in our heart, and when He is insulted, we feel the pain," he is expressing a collective affective bond that reaffirms group identity by identifying talks of respect for shared beliefs and sensitivities. Huntington (1996) argues that religious identities are often tied to the emotional and spiritual experiences of faith that help to maintain solidarity within groups facing oppression. Khan's call for respect is designed to invoke empathy and at least some degree of moral understanding, especially when making reference to other religious communities, i.e., respect in Western societies toward the Holocaust. He also touches on the historical legacy of Islam by recounting the creation of the welfare state of Medina and by emphasizing principles of justice, equality, and the safeguarding of minorities. By saying that "the 4th caliph of Medina lost his court case against a Jewish citizen," and even that "all humans are equal," he is directly challenging narratives that show Islam as intolerant and suppressive towards minorities. Wodak (2015) points out that minority groups frequently use historical memories or idealized pasts to rebuild a positive collective identity as resistance

against deficit representations. Khan's references to the ethical roots of early Islam support his proponents of Muslim identities that are fundamentally premised on fairness and inclusivity.

Khan interestingly states that Muslim leaders failed to deal with Islamophobia when he said that "we failed as the Muslim world to explain there is no radical Islam." With this, it is clear that there is still something of an identity negotiation taking place in which Khan situates himself as a critic and reformer for the Muslim world. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) have made a valid case for this kind of self-reflection for Muslim leaders because it shows the audience that there are internal difficulties being dealt with while reestablishing universal values. The reflexive position of Khan's speech also contributes to establishing both a leader's identity in confronting the blight of external prejudice and the blight of internal resentment.

One significant effort of the speech is to delineate clear boundaries between "us" (Muslims) and "them" (the West), particularly in Khan's critique of the ignorance of the West about Islam that contributes to Islamophobia. Khan stated that Western societies do not understand Muslim religious sensitivities resulting in repeated offenses such as publishing books disparaging the Prophet (PBUH). Khan's act of boundary construction is an example of what Tajfel (1981) refers to in terms of out-group and in-group identity. The delineation and definition of the out-group serve to unite the identity of the in-group. However, Khan's discourse also emphasizes the need for mutual respect and understanding, attempting to re-direct the antagonistic/sensitive nature of the discourse. The examples that Khan provided of his own life experience as a former international cricketer and spending life in the West add authenticity and credibility to his perspective. This element of Khan's speech also humanizes him and brings together cultural differences, strengthening his stance as a spokesperson for all Muslims around the world. Fairclough (2003) illustrates how personal stories in political speeches often contribute to the political ethos and allow for identification between the speaker and the audience. In alluding to his multicultural experiences Khan appeals to the world both locally and globally emphasizing the multiplicity of his identity.

Nonetheless, there are limitations associated with the study because it only analyzes one speech in an international forum and hence does not cover how Khan has constructed his identity in different contexts or more generally in different media forums. There do not exist many similar examples, since political speeches are likely exclusively constructed for specific audiences and in distinct, formal exchanges so socio-linguistics will appropriate different selections of language depending on a range of reasons too. Moreover, Future research in examining Khan's discourse including as many of his national speeches and domestic interviews as possible would provide greater depth into his identity construction.

Imran Khan's 2019 UNGA speech has used language as a way of constructing collectively, a Muslim identity that is associated with the plight of Muslims today against Islamophobia, spiritual devotion, historical justice, and moral assertion. Having noted the shortcomings of the internal Muslim community against ignorance, Khan positions himself as the one representing and reinvigorating the Muslim ummah. Khan's discourse demonstrates the ways language is used as an essential tool in constructing identity in the face of global political and social challenges facing Muslims. The findings, in this research, align with the international academic literature on political identity constructions indicating the significance of language in understanding how we are able to negotiate complex social realities.

Conclusion

Imran Khan's speech in the United Nations General Assembly (2019) is an example of the use of political discourse to construct, negotiate, and affirm social identity, in this case, a collective Muslim identity. Using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the present study has demonstrated that Khan's lexical and rhetorical construction does not only identify him as the leader of a Muslim-majority state but as an arbitrator of Muslims across the globe. Khan's persistent references to shared historical victimization, Islamophobia, collective respect for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the Islamic values of justice and equality are mechanisms for producing a collective in-group identity that transcends national borders.

This type of critique has internalized and denoted a desire to reform and unify the Muslim world from within, adding a reflexive dimension to the identity under construction. This positioning is consistent with the argument by Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) that political leaders' identity work often identifies and addresses external threats while also representing themselves as addressing internal fragmentation. An additional important dimension of Khan's identity construction involves personal experience. By invoking his familiarity with Western societies through his profession, he lends credibility to his arguments, as well as repositioning himself as a person who connects the two sides in a pathway for actionable activity. This allows for Fairclough's (2003) assertion that politicians' emotional appeals with personal stories, do not only humanize an associative relational proximity with heterogeneous audiences but also build their ethos and endorse an increasing sense of authenticity.

In the transitory space of Khan's discourse, he has offered a collective memory of marginalization since September 11, 2001. He has provoked a common set of emotions to meet with increasing offenses to sacred Islamic symbols and provides an alternative Islamic-based narrative located on Islamic values and historical contexts of justice. As powerful as this is to denote a reconstituted identity of Islam on the world stage, Khan is also creating a Muslim transnational identity rich in unified identity, dignity, and moral high ground. Carr and Haynes (2015) have highlighted that recovering discursive space is vital for individuals in underrepresented and overtly stereotyped communities of culture, and Khan uses the speech to also stake some claim to discursive space.

Khan has constructed a moral and emotional appeal with references to Islam's ethical traditions, including the welfare state of Medina and the

justified treatment of minorities. These references have simultaneously challenged existing stereotypes about Islam while also functioning to reconstitute Muslim identity as one that is guided by compassion, tolerance, social justice and virtues sometimes neglected in global discourse (Wodak, 2015). Equally important is Khan's unequivocal rejection of terms such as "radical Islam" reclaims interpretive authority regarding Islamic identity while his critique of the West's inability to grasp Muslim sensitivities works to create an inter-group boundary erasing existing identities promoting in-group solidarity by demonstrating contrast to the other (Tajfel, 1981). Importantly, Khan does not simply leverage the Western world for the above; Khan also makes Muslim leaders culpable for their failure to de-legitimize Islamophobic discourse and represent the tenets of Islam in a better way.

The speech by Imran Khan serves as an example of how moral and religious convictions could provide a blueprint for a specific form of political discourse; making it a political endeavor and an authentic assertion of identity in a global forum. Because this study has only focused on one particular speech, there is limited scope for advancing more generalizable claims about how Imran Khan engages and fashions his identity through his actions in a particular context or place. This study has only explored one dimension of identity fashioning and articulating the religious identity leaving unexamined the other dimensions of political stigmas like national identity. It appears to rely on a qualitative approach without an analysis that utilizes a quantitative (for example, using corpus-based methods) or statistical identification. Also, this study has not examined the reception of Khan's speech for different audiences including Western audiences and non-Muslim groupings.

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