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**The Partitions of Self Mohajir
Women's Sense of Identity and
Nationhood**

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The Partitions of Self

***Mohajir* Women's Sense of Identity and Nationhood**

Rubina Saigol

The following is an extract from an interview with a *Mohajir* woman, RB:

Q. You said your parents came from India?

Ans:- Yes.

Q:- Here it has started that people say so and so is *Mohajir*, that is a Punjabi, that is a Pathan, he is this, he is that what do you think, who are you?

Ans:- Well, we are from Madras so we are Madrasi, yes.

Q:- But now that your children have grown up. They were born here, then what do you want, how should you be known?

Ans:- We should be known as Indian or known as Pakistani. Where a person is born. So I will be known as Pakistani.

Q:- What do you want?

Ans:- I want to be known as Pakistani and I want that whatever rights a Pakistani has I should have too.

Q:- So you think you did not get your rights as a Pakistani?

Ans:- No.

Q:- Why do you think so?

Ans:- I think so because I have suffered more. I have suffered more.

Q:- That's why you came to Pakistan or there was some other reason?

Ans:- No. No, we came from India to Pakistan. But Pakistanis didn't accept us. It has been 50 years since we came here.

Q. Why did you think that Pakistanis did not accept you?

Ans:- It is because everyone thinks that she belongs to India, why should we call her Pakistani. Who knows she might go back but it is not so. We were born here and we will live here. We will not go back to India because our parents died and we do not know anything about that place. What is there, what is not, we have never been there.

Q:- Who thinks that you are from India?

Ans:- People say so. You are not from here, you are from Madras.

Q:- Who says so, *Mohajir* or.....?

Ans:- Indians say so. (She probably means Hindustanis)

Q:- Indians say so?

Ans:- Yes.

Q:- Why do they say so?

Ans:- They say so because we belong to this place and you don't belong to it. You came just to see Pakistan. My father had came here just to see Pakistan.

The above extract from RB's interview vividly illustrates the multiple levels of identity and sense of belonging experienced by RB. She begins by expressing her sense of identity as a Madrasi, a regional identity that connects her to her parents' past and to India. This identity is a negation of the connection with Pakistani nationhood. Later on she asserts that 'we should be known as Indian or known as Pakistani'. This location between two conflicting and inimical identities, reflects another level of her sense of belonging, which now seems to have moved from a regional (Madrasi) to a national plane

(Indian or Pakistani). She soon realizes her apparent confusion and clarifies that belonging should be based on where one is born, thus concluding that she would be known as Pakistani. The basis of belonging now shifts from parental origins in India to her own birth in Pakistan. She then further solidifies her sense of self by averring that she wants to be known as a Pakistani, and makes claims to her rights as a Pakistani citizen. Her claims to rights are buttressed by a reference to her having suffered. This is followed by a sense of rejection by Pakistanis who have not accepted her family, despite the passage of fifty years since they moved to Pakistan.

Upon being asked as to why she and her family are not accepted, she responds by explaining that she is perceived as belonging to India. 'Others' tell her that she is a Madrasi, and thus place her into her regional identity connected with her parental past. They express mistrust in her and her family by fearing that she may return to India, while she staunchly rejects such a possibility. They (unspecified others) affirm that they belong to Pakistan, but she does not, as her father had come to Pakistan only to see it.

RB's dilemma, and her seeming confusion over how to define her self, her sense of belonging and her perception of nationhood, is illustrative of the larger questions of identity, nationhood, state formation and dislocation, that remain unanswered since the partition of India in 1947. She epitomizes the multiple layers of belonging and alienation, as she moves fluidly between regional and national identity, geographical/locational identity and the past and present. Her inability to speak with certainty of her belonging is not indicative of her lack of capacity for articulation. She stands at the crossroads of multiple and layered identities in which she seeks to define her self, her nation, and her place in the world. Her identity seems to be forged not only by her own sense of who she is, but also by what others say. She contests and resists the identity ascribed to her by others and, in the process, tries to consolidate who she is and what she wants to be.

Introduction

This paper explores how women relate to the forging of new identities in a complex negotiation, which involves accommodation, assimilation, rejection, interrogation, resistance and capitulation to the dominant constructions of identity. Women may go through all of these processes or a few of them, depending on a number of factors. They may identify with a particular identity formation, or contest and reject it, as the identity being formed goes through various stages of articulation and elaboration. The specific construct to be discussed here is *Mohajir* identity and sense of nationhood in Karachi, Pakistan. The purpose is to try to understand some of the ways in which ethnic and ethno-national identities come to be created, and the contradictions that may arise from other belongings, primarily those of class, religion and gender.

The word *Mohajir* has interesting connotations that influence the group's sense of belonging as well as suffering. The word has been used to denote a migrant, which suggests a tentative, transient identity based on movement, with no emotional relation to the land to which one migrates, and a sense of loss of the land from which one moved. This connotation of the term suggests a latent or visible longing for what was lost or left behind. In this sense, the term is deployed in the process of a claim to rights based on loss, and the reference point is the past. The word *Mohajir* is also used to denote a refugee, implying a person who escaped death, destruction and violence and seeks shelter, land, food and other necessities from the place to which the escape is made. The mass migration from India at the time of the partition was often referred to as 'the refugee problem'. This term has connotations of suffering and sorrow, apart from loss. The refugee is a figure of pity, and the state is expected to fulfill the needs of a dislocated and

suffering person. Although now, increasingly the Urdu term for refugees is *panah guzeen*, and *mohajir* is used to refer to a migrant, the fact remains that the terms are used interchangeably.¹ The use of the word 'refugee' also enables a claim to rights by an appeal to the suffering, violence and pain endured by people in their attempts to be a part of the new nation. The notions of loss and suffering are both deployed in the construction of *mohajir* identity, as will become clearer later.

Theoretical Explanations of Ethnic Conflict

Before moving on to the specific construction of *Mohajir* identity by group leaders, and its contestation by women, it is important to provide an overview of some theoretical explanations of ethnic conflict provided by sociologists and feminists. The current study explored some of the theoretical formulations advanced with a view to explaining the basis of ethnic conflict and its relationship with the state, civil society and its various social, political and economic institutions. At the end of the paper, I provide a brief review of some of the hypotheses that were upheld by the study, and others which were not supported by the current endeavour. Some of the theoretical constructions mentioned below fall within the grand theory category, and provide broad generalizations and abstractions regarding the genesis and development of ethnic conflict. Others are more specific explanations of the construction of *Mohajir* consciousness and its political articulation in the form of the *Muttahida Qaumi Movement* (MQM).

Hamza Alavi provides a useful comparative analysis of ethnic formations in India and Pakistan.² One of his conclusions is that while in India movements in support of the 'sons of the soil' against outsiders, are usually against other ethnic groups, in Pakistan they are directed at the center. In India, argues Alavi, the Centre is not dominated by a single ethnic group to the detriment of the others. As a result, the movements are more localized. On the other hand, in Pakistan the Centre is perceived to be dominated by one ethnic group, namely the Punjabis who have historically been over represented in the state bureaucracy and armed services. Ethnic group anger comes to be directed against the Centre and the dominant ruling group and the struggle often leads to alliances between the subordinate and less powerful ethnic groups.

Alavi explains role of the state and authoritarian rulers in engendering feelings of ethnic deprivation, and argues that absence of class politics creates space for the articulation of economic issues as ethnic politics. According to Alavi, after the creation of Pakistan, the concocted two-nation theory had fulfilled its purpose and so-called Muslim nationalism, which had shallow roots to begin with, declined. After partition, there was a realignment of identities and the Punjabi Salariat became the standard bearer of Pakistani identity. In response, Sindh, Bengal, the Frontier Province and Balochistan defined themselves in ethnic and linguistic terms. The state played a role in the restructuring of Sindh where most migrants were settled after the departure of urban Hindus. With over 50% of urban Sindh having become non-Sindhi, Sindhi identity came to be defined as rural Sindhi. The issue became explosive with the introduction of the quota system during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's time. In order to empower rural Sindhis, Bhutto introduced urban/rural quotas for jobs in the highly regarded civil bureaucracy, and also for admission to colleges. This measure threatened the economic interests of the urban *Mohajir* community, which had until then dominated the civil bureaucracy. With increasing numbers of Punjabis joining the

1 For example, Akbar Zaidi in his paper 'Sindhi vs Mohajir: Contradiction, Conflict, Compromise', translates *mohajir* as refugee rather than migrant. See Zaidi, S. Akbar (ed)(1992). *Regional Imbalances and the National Question in Pakistan*. Lahore: Vanguard. p. 336.

2 Hamza Alavi. 'Politics of Ethnicity in India and Pakistan', in Alavi, Hamza and John Harris (eds) (1989). *Sociology of "Developing Societies"*. Macmillan.

civil services, and their domination in the armed services, the urban Urdu-speaking migrants felt that their share of state power would be lessened with a consequent decrease in economic, political and social benefits. The increasing numbers of Punjabi and Pathan settlers further aggravated the ethnic conflict, which erupted in the form of *Mohajir*-Pathan riots in 1986.

For the purposes of this paper, the most important aspect of Alavi's analysis is his problematization of ethnic identity as an already existing social fact. Alavi discounts the notion that ethnic formation is 'a manifestation of primordial sentiments, a culturally predetermined social fact that exists *sui generis*'.³ Alavi rightly points out that radical realignments take place as new ethnic identities emerge and develop. In his words, 'the ethnic *community* therefore is not simply a politically mobilized condition of a pre-existing set of people, described as an *ethnic category*. The delineation of the "category" is itself contingent on the emergence of the "community". Our experience shows that both the ethnic category and the ethnic community are simultaneously constituted in a single movement'.⁴ Alavi continues to argue that the idea that ethnicity is an already constituted primordial social fact, serves an important political function by suggesting that 'boundaries of the ethnic community are deeply embedded, unquestionable and sacrosanct'.⁵ As ethnic reconfiguration takes place, the notion of sacred, inviolable and immutable boundaries that cannot be transcended by class or other identities, becomes hardened and plays a role in the crystallization of the identity. The interviews of *Mohajir*

Women, for the current study, amply demonstrate the process of the emergence of identity within the context of conflict, and that ethnic identities are not pre-existing, already constructed social 'facts'.

Inayatullah, in his paper 'The Process of Development of Ethnicity and Ethnonationalism: A Theoretical Analysis', provides an essentially state-centric theory of ethnicity. While the paper represents a number of abstract generalizations about ethnicity and ethnonationalism, it refers to several aspects of the development of ethnic consciousness from a stage-development perspective. According to Inayatullah, while ethnicity is a threat to the nation-state, the state also manufactures ethnic consciousness as a tool in the game of power. Inayatullah distinguishes between two types of ethnicity, one open, outward-directed, inclusive and empathic, and the other closed, narcissistic, aggressive and insecure. Most forms of ethnic consciousness would seem to belie this dichotomy as the characteristics of each Type seem to constitute almost all ethnic articulations. Inayatullah also dichotomizes the state as either authoritarian, repressive and closed, or democratic, plural and able to deal with multiplicity. According to him, the latter form of the state is more able to deal with ethnic conflict through accommodation and negotiation. However, most states are also mixtures, as elements of authoritarianism seem to underlie a large number of seemingly democratic states, and dictatorial states occasionally express democratic attributes. However, Inayatullah's theory of ethnicity is useful in understanding how ethnic consciousness emerges and goes through various stages from initial consciousness to a full blown demand for provincial autonomy, and finally even secession. It is also a useful framework for understanding how ethnic articulation is impacted by intrastate and inter-state relations. Inayatullah seems to be sensitive to the economic, ideological, political and social factors that influence that course that ethnic conflict will take. Uneven development, the domination of the military-bureaucratic elite, and a feeble commitment to democracy and pluralism, are held responsible for fuelling ethnic and separatist sentiments. Additionally, Inayatullah points out the international and global, as well as local, factors that determine the outcome of ethnic conflict.

3 Hamza Alavi, p. 223.

4 Hamza Alavi, p. 224.

5 Hamza Alavi, p. 225.

For our present purposes, certain aspects of Inayatullah's comprehensive analysis are more relevant. First, his notion that ethnicity is not a static identity but can grow as well as decline, is important. The current study did reveal that ethnicity can rise and decline and that it undergoes transformative processes. Secondly, an important contribution by Inayatullah is his contention that ethnic groups are not internally homogenous and that the consciousness of identity is not evenly distributed among all members. Ethnic groups are differentiated along class, caste and religious axes. Furthermore, ethnic solidarity varies inversely with other loyalties, particularly those of class and religion. While Inayatullah does not specifically mention differentiation along the lines of gender, the current study found that gender consciousness interrogates and fragments ethnic uniformity at many levels. The level of commitment to ethno-nationalism can be dependent upon the distance between the center (the movement leaders) and those on the periphery. Third, Inayatullah rightly observes that there is often a conflict between national and ethnic identity, and that there are multiple levels at which identity functions. Fourth, ethnicities feed mutually on each other as one group's feelings affect those of another in the bid for political power and access. Fifth, and this is an important insight for our current purposes, a shared sense of persecution and deprivation serves to bind the group together. The perception of loss of privilege and a perceived sense of subjugation are strongly implicated in the articulation of identity as a means of attaining political power and privilege. Unless the state mediates perceived inequality, ethnic feelings can receive a big impetus from the sense of persecution. Sixth, the group's need for the rectification of grievances is accompanied by a strong sense of group superiority over others. The claim to cultural superiority, coupled with the invocation of group sacrifice for the nation, forges a powerful instrument in the bid for state power. Electoral politics then plays a role and numbers/voters, come to be mobilized in the group's claim to state control and access. Our interviews with *Mohajir* women lend support to most of these claims made by Inayatullah.

Rajni Kothari also provides a comprehensive, all-encompassing framework within which ethnic struggles can be understood.⁶ In a scathing critique of modernity and modernization, as introduced by the universalization of the secular, technocratic and managerial state, Kothari sees ethnicity as a centralizing as well as decentralizing force. Kothari holds the universal capitalist, consumerist and technological domination responsible for the articulation of group and community identities. With the centralized nation-state creating a universal culture based on market values and technocratic managerialism, local communities find their values and practices endangered by an all-encroaching state. The individualism, atomization, alienation and fragmentation that he finds in the modern market dominated ethos, are countered by an appeal to culture, to the indigenous and authentic as expressed in the local and the small collective. For him, ethnicity is a rebuttal of globalization and the technocratic capitalist central state along with its homogenizing nationalism. The standardization and commodification of culture is resisted by appeals to the uniqueness and specificity of indigenous cultures.

Kothari asserts that in plural societies identities have always existed. This is a rather static view of identity, not supported by the current study, which finds that identity is perpetually constructed in discourse and is an open-ended process. Kothari also makes a distinction between negative and positive articulations of identity, with the former connoting exclusion, paranoia and violence, and the latter referring to collective forms of shared experience and lives. However, Kothari rightly finds that the kinds of development and modernization agendas pursued by the modern state, with its universal secular and nationalist ethos, tend to induce inequality and consequent feelings of deprivation. State intervention, for Kothari, can accelerate social breakdown. The resulting loss of faith in the state because of its failure to

6 Rajni Kothari 'Ethnicity', in David, Kumar and Santisilan Kadirgamar (eds) (1989). Ethnicity: Identity Conflict, Crisis. ARENA.

provide security, leads to security being sought in local hoodlums and street toughs. Citizens tend to withdraw from the state and reject its authority when the state appears to be less neutral than its rhetoric.

Socio-economic issues are reformulated as communal, caste and ethnic issues and political parties come to articulate communalist or ethnic agendas instead of social and economic ones. This leads to a steady discrediting of politics and increasing distance and alienation of citizens from the centralized state, along with an enhanced tendency to seek security and needs within the immediate group. Ethnicity, for Kothari, is induced by the processes of modernity while also being a reaction to it. Modern technologies of terror and information are not only used by the central state to diminish ethnic consciousness, they are also used by the ethnic group leaders to enhance narrower loyalties. With the receding of politics in the old sense, democracy gives way to technocracy, and a managerial consciousness rooted in control and subjugation emerges.

Kothari's observations are extremely relevant to the concerns of this paper. The *Mohajir* movement initially did arise articulating a socio-economic agenda, which was reformulated in ethnic terms. The alienation and estrangement from the centralized state was found abundantly in the women interviewed for the study. There was an almost universal rejection of the police and the role of the security agencies in the conflict. The loss of faith the central state to deliver basic needs and security, was clearly evident in the voices of the women. However, the ethnic movement made claims to what is considered modern, for example the right to jobs in the bureaucracy and college admissions. Hence, while recourse to ethnic identity may signify a turn toward something local or indigenous, it is participation in the modern centralized state that was sought by the MQM, in spite of alienation from the state and loss of faith in its capacity to grant rights. This is why the importance of electoral politics was underscored by the leaders of the movement. In this case, the ethnic identity formation was a turn *toward* modernity, although the *method* employed certainly had seeds of a pre-modern consciousness.

The three theorists discussed above provide us with general, comparative and broad theoretical underpinnings of ethnic consciousness and ethno-national formations. Next I will discuss some theorists who specifically explored the development of *Mohajir* identity in Pakistan. Akbar Zaidi argues that the Pakistani state, that is, the military-bureaucratic apparatus and the security agencies played a role in the formation of the MQM and *Mohajir* identity.⁷ In agreement with Inyatullah's arguments, Zaidi also contends that democratic functioning and pluralism would be able to accommodate difference and prevent it from becoming division. Zaidi's observations that pertain more directly to the arguments presented here are that the *Mohajirs* had a strong sense of cultural superiority vis a vis the rural and 'backward' Sindhis, and this perception was an affront to Sindhis who reveled in their own sense of an 'ancient culture'. According to Zaidi, threat perception by the *Mohajir* community led to the crystallization of identity around the issues of jobs and admissions quotas. *Mohajir* identity was challenged not only by rural Sindhis but also by development in the Punjab, which led to increasing numbers of Punjabis being inducted into the government. The perception of threat led the *Mohajirs* to argue that they had sacrificed a great deal for the creation of Pakistan. Thus the combination of a sense of persecution, coupled with delusions of grandeur in giving sacrifice, led the community to make claims to political rights. The identity, argues Zaidi, was invented in opposition to the ethnic others, that is, Sindhis, Punjabis and Pathans.

Akmal Hussain refers to Hamza Alavi's theory of the overdeveloped post-colonial state to argue that the crisis of state legitimacy, which resulted from the state's inability to ensure citizens' security and basic

7 Akbar Zaidi. 'Sindhi vs Mohajir: Contradiction, Conflict and Compromise', in Zaidi, Akbar S. (ed) (1992). *Regional Imbalances and the National Question in Pakistan*. Lahore: Vanguard.

rights, led to the fragmentation of civil society along ethnic, caste and biradari lines.⁸ Security was sought in ethnic identity due to the failure of the state to ensure protection. The crisis of the state engendered a crisis of civil society which became fractured along vertical and horizontal lines. Hussain argues that security was sought in the most proximate identity, which evoked immense emotional charge rooted in primordial loyalties. The latter claim was not borne out in the current study, which found that identities are not 'primordial social facts' but are forever in the making, therefore always incomplete, incoherent and contradictory.

For Irfan Hussain again the villain is the centralizing and unresponsive modern state, which fails to provide basic rights to citizens.⁹ Irrelevance of the state and the attitude of the law-enforcing authorities, are held for letting the conflict escalate. Irfan Hussain's argument is that issues of class, when not dealt with in terms of class politics, are distorted as ethnic or sub-nationalist issues. However, Irfan Hussain points out that almost every activist of the MQM refers to sacrifices made by his father and his father's father to build Pakistan, as the basis of the claim to rights and special status. He notes the element of cultural superiority and the invocation of sacrifice by the community to stake a claim to state power.

Farida Shaheed's analysis of the Pathan-Mohajir conflicts sheds further light on the role of the state in exacerbating ethnic conflict.¹⁰ Shaheed argues that ethnic conflicts cannot be understood without an analysis of the general milieu surrounding the conflicts. According to her, the unbalanced policies of the state intensified feelings of deprivation which led to the Pathan-Mohajir conflicts of 1986. The role of law-enforcing agencies was extremely destructive and led to more genocide than the ethnic difference itself. Since the state offered nothing either in terms of socio-economic rights or protection, the latter was sought in the ethnic community. Political affiliation was thus displaced by community loyalties. Community leaders had a greater hold over the people than the distant central state, hence national institutions were unable to replace local and immediate ones. Direct contact of the citizens with the state was lessened as national institutions tended to interact with the local and traditional community leaders. Hence, benefits were perceived as accruing from the efforts of the immediate ethnic leaders, while the state became associated with only law and order, taxes, bureaucratic rules and repression. This led to a decrease in state credibility along with enhanced credibility of sub-national and ethnic collectives. The state came increasingly to be perceived as a coercive institution that distributes benefits unevenly and exacerbates social inequalities. *Mohajir* trust was singularly shaken when urban/rural job quotas were introduced in Sindh, as the *Mohajirs* had placed their confidence in the national bureaucracy, which they previously dominated. The state's inability to evolve an accountable and participatory democracy, led to its failure in the process of integration.

The aspects of Shaheed's analysis that are most pertinent to our present purposes, include her understanding that the *Mohajirs* were an internally heterogeneous group composed of various ethnicities. Since they represented a mixed ethnicity, they had no hinterland with which to identify, no one code of conduct within which to operate, and no single social entity to incorporate them. According to Shaheed, the notion of 'nationhood' had not undergone the evolutionary process that is required to weld people into a sense of oneness. The only common reference point was the colonizer and the diverse and varied

8 Akmal Hussain, 'The Karachi Riots of December 1986: The Crisis of State and Civil Society in Pakistan', in Veena Das' (ed) (1990). Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

9 Irfan Hussain. 'The Karachi Cauldron', in Mian, Zia and Iftikhar Ahmad. (eds) (1998). Making Enemies: Creating Conflict: Crises of State and Society. Lahore: Mashal.

10 See Farida Shaheed's paper 'The Pathan-Muhajir Conflicts, 1985-6: A National Perspective', in Das, Veena (ed) (1990), Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

communities were not knit into a sense of nationhood. The latter insight was amply demonstrated in the interviews of *Mohajir* women, for whom nationhood seems to have varied and multiple meanings and their identifications are with all kinds and levels of collectives, and not just with the nation defined as 'Pakistani nation'. Identifications with a sub-national entity, such as Madrasi, and supra-national pan-Islamic identity, were found in many of the women respondents of the current study.

All the theorists discussed above have pointed out the role of the state in creating, intensifying and/or mediating ethnic conflict. The failure of the state is held as being mainly responsible for the level of violence witnessed during ethnic outbreaks. Most of the theories on ethnicity have been excessively state-centric. Nevertheless, some theorists have pointed out the role of social factors, such as the persecution complex accompanied by the invocation of sacrifice and suffering as the basis of the claims to special rights. Nearly all of them point out the process of differentiation based on feelings of cultural superiority of the self in relation to an inferior Other, or Others, against whom identity is constructed. The multiple and conflicted nature of identity has also been pointed out by some writers, especially Inayatullah. Some of the theorists mentioned above, have referred to the fact that identities are not monolithic and that the groups are not internally homogenous.

However, while religious, sectarian or caste differences have been pointed out, gender as a differentiating category has not been mentioned. What about *Mohajir* women? Did they participate equally in the process of identity-formation and 'national' construction or were they irrelevant? While ethnic constructions were challenged by alternative identities including religious, caste, national or sectarian identities, were they also challenged on the basis of gender? Did women fracture the neat fabric of ethnic nationalism, did they penetrate it at any point? Such questions have not been dealt with by the writers discussed above. The missing dimension of gender renders the theories at best incomplete, at worst insipid.

I now turn to three writers who explicitly explored the women's role in the MQM movement and looked at the impact of the violence and conflict specifically on women. The gender dimension adds new richness to ethnic discourse, and pierces it at crucial points of its inception. The three women analysts whose work is briefly discussed here include Sheen Farrukh, Khawar Mumtaz and Nafisa Shah. In her work on women and ethnic identity, Sheen Farrukh argues that the MQM never addressed the specific issues of women and subsumed them within the larger political struggle.¹¹ However, she claims that the Party used for its vested interests, women's feelings of fear and insecurity due to widespread violence. Additionally, sexist and familial metaphors and language were invoked to integrate women into the movement. For example, the notions of mother, wife, daughter and sister were frequently employed to create the kind of loyalty and emotional investment that is usually reserved for families. The fear of rape at the hands of unscrupulous Sindhi men was also conjured up as a device to enhance women's emotional investment in the MQM movement. Women's religious and sentimental attachments proved useful in political action when women were asked to march in the face of law-enforcing agencies with copies of Qura'an in their hands. Women were also incorporated by the use of 'feminine' symbols in the form of bangles and *dopattas* (head scarves) with the MQM Party colours of green, white and red.

However, the movement was able to mobilize women in large numbers and in February 1989, 7500 women workers were enlisted in one day. The mass mobilization did not lead to the empowerment of women. Rather, as Farrukh argues, the women were manipulated into becoming the mouthpieces of

11 Sheen Farrukh. 'Women and Ethnic Identity: A Case Study of MQM (Mohajir Qaumi Movement)' in Khan, Nighat S., Rubina Saigol and Afiya S. Zia (eds). (1994). Locating the Self: Reflections on Women and Multiple Identity. Lahore: ASR.

male leaders. They were given subservient and subordinate roles in the movement as members of committees, couriers and local mobilizers. Very few women were given Party tickets to fight election, nor were they given any other more responsible position within the mainly masculinist party. In Farrukh's view, the MQM became a personality cult of the leader Altaf Hussain who came to be virtually worshipped by Party members. Sheen Farrukh's observations were borne out in the interviews of Party activists who were initially enamoured of the leaders and later thoroughly disillusioned with the movement.

Khawar Mumtaz in a comparative analysis of the rural Sindhiani Tehreek and the MQM Women's Wing, analysis the gender dimension in Sindh's ethnic conflict.¹² Apart from analyzing the role of the state, economy and social factors in engendering and escalating the conflict, Mumtaz looks at some of the internal dynamics of the women's wing of the MQM. Like Farrukh, Mumtaz also finds that women activists of the MQM were given secondary roles in the movement and that most of them, like women of other parties, were relatives of the male activists. However, she points out that some women had joined in spite of family opposition and the MQM was able to draw out the largest number of women in urban Sindh. Mumtaz directs our attention to the regulation and discipline of the female body that was characteristic of women activists. Their mode of dress, attitude and behaviour were under scrutiny and they were expected to express austerity in their habits. Even the marriages and personal lives of women activists, were regulated by the Party leadership. The men made all the important decisions regarding the party and the movement, and women were mostly followers who obeyed orders. Women's Wings were created by the Party for galvanizing women for the 'cause', and subsequently given direction by men. Mumtaz argues that the closed and highly secretive structure of the Party made it hard to penetrate inside and gain access to women. Consequently, the links between the women of the MQM and the women's movement remained tenuous.

However, Mumtaz acknowledges that ethnic and nationalist movements mobilize more women than do purely women's movements. Ethnic consciousness seems to override gender awareness since the latter at times disconnects women's issues from the issues of the larger collective on which women depend for security and livelihood. Mumtaz makes some observations about the way in which social movements, with their focus on regulation, discipline and morality, in fact fail to emancipate women or even intensify control over them. The latter observation was supported by the interviews of the activists. Additionally, the overwhelmingly masculine structure of the language and ideology of the movement, a premise implied in Khawar Mumtaz's analysis, was also upheld during the course of the current study.

An empirical study of the impact of ethnic violence upon women's lives, was carried out by Nafisa Shah.¹³ Shah recorded interviews of women directly affected by the violence in Karachi. Many women had been the direct victims of law-enforcing agencies as well as non-state elements. Many more had suffered the loss of parents, husbands, sisters, brother and children. Shah found that for women the drop in income after the death of a relative was the single most worrying aspect, since it meant that the women had to go out and seek employment. Sixty-four percent of the women had suffered the death of a close relative which meant severe emotional distress and economic loss. Several of the women were in a crisis since their loved ones were in jail. They had to look after the

12 Khawar Mumtaz. 'The Gender Dimension in Sindh's Ethnic Conflict', in Rupesinghe, Kumar and Khawar Mumtaz (eds) (1996), *Internal Conflicts in South Asia*. Sage Publications.

13 Nafisa Shah. *Blood, Tears and Lives to Live: Women in the Crossfire*. March 1998. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Lahore.

family in the absence of these relatives as well as provide succour and economic support to distraught families. Over 90% said that there was more than one case against their incarcerated relative. Almost all of them verified that they had to bribe the police at every stage during the remand. For about 88% of the women, the relative who had been killed or taken captive was the source of livelihood for the family. The absence of a breadwinner, an uncertain future for the family, the absence of any security or support had led many women to suffer from various medical complaints. An overwhelming 62% of the women blamed the government for the conflict and for their sorrows. Most of them held the police responsible for the torture, disappearance and murder of their kin.

Most women were found to be still hurting from the scars of the violence unleashed upon them and their families, and none of the political parties had helped them after the loss of a relative. No women believed that her son was guilty and if he was killed for the 'cause', he was declared a martyr who had given up his life honourably. They took pride in being mothers of martyrs and felt that this bestowed a special status on them within the community. Many women were displaced from their homes because of the constant need to hide from the opposing group or the police and the police took massive bribes in return for so-called protection. Most women were found to be seriously depressed and their work burdens had doubled.

Nafisa Shah's empirical study provides a great deal of information on the effects of the conflict and, specifically, the impact upon women. Her findings on the negative role of the state and absence of the provision of security by the police in particular, were corroborated in the current study, as woman after woman repeated tales of police torture, bribery, callousness and inhumanity. Significantly, however, the current study supports Shah's finding that the meanings of martyrdom and sacrifice for a cause had been altered by the women, who defined their sons as martyrs, and themselves as proud mothers of martyrs.

The analysis of the gender dimension in ethnic conflict, provided by the three women writers mentioned, has enriched the discourse on ethnic conflict by turning scholarly attention away from purely state-centric and political analyses of the conflict to cultural, social and interpersonal levels. The inclusion of women's perspectives alters the larger picture in ways that purely political analyses cannot grasp. While Sheen Farrukh and Khawar Mumtaz's analyses focus on the MQM and the gender dynamics of the movement, Nafisa Shah records the testimony of women who were victims of the conflict. However, Shah focuses almost entirely on the dynamics and issues of victimhood, and the impact of the violence triggered by the conflict. This is the point from which the current endeavour departs.

An attempt has been made in this paper to use the methodology of testimony, but go beyond mere victimhood, to women's conceptions of identity, self, nation and belonging. The purpose of this paper is to explore the myriad ways in which *Mohajir* women construct their world, and within it, their own location. The questions for this paper were: how do *Mohajir* women understand nation – as *Mohajir*, as Pakistani, as Muslim, or still other? What are the levels of identity that they articulate, from sub-national, regional, local all the way to national and global? How do they resolve the conflicts that spring from the multiple locations of identity and self in a contradictory and conflicted world? What are the points at which they fracture the assumed homogeneity of *Mohajir* identity? What are the other sources, for example religion, class, caste, nation or gender, which challenge the sense of self as *Mohajir*? At what points, if any, does the ethnic identity take precedence over other belongings, and how do they deal with resulting conflict? These and related questions have been addressed in the pages that follow.

Role of the State and the Monolithic Constructions of Identity

The claim to ethnic unity, which may ultimately translate into a sense of nationhood, typically relies on the process of homogenization. Diverse and multiple belonging, comes to be welded by the leaders and ideologues into a sense of the unity, oneness and internal coherence of a group. An 'imagined community' of plural, diverse, and even contradictory, groups is created by erasing and denying the internal dissensions, differences and incoherence of the group being mobilized for specific political aims. In the case of the *Mohajirs*, the only common threads that bind them together into a unified entity are migration from India at the time of, or after, the partition, and the Urdu language. There is no reference to a common region or land from which they migrated. They are, in reality, multi-ethnic and represent different parts of India.¹⁴ However, at specific points in time, political mobilization necessitates the claim to oneness and unity, thus giving impetus to the emergence of ethnic consciousness.¹⁵ For the *Mohajirs*, politicized ethnic consciousness emerged in the decade of the 1980s, although as Akbar Zaidi points out, seeds of a separate consciousness did exist prior to that.¹⁶

The role of the state in enabling ethnic identities to assert themselves in a divisive way, has been commented upon by various writers.¹⁷ One manner, in which ethnic consciousness emerges and is solidified, is the method that the state uses to categorise and classify its populations.¹⁸ The questions that are asked in Census forms, often have fixed, immutable and exclusive categories of identity such as Punjabi, Sindhi or Pathan. Mixture of identities can only be indicated by the vague category 'Other'. This kind of positioning and fixing by the state, can be rejected or appropriated by a particular group, depending on the kind of political mobilization required. One *Mohajir* woman, KS, explained the process of filling government forms in the following words:

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- 14 See Farida Shaheed's paper 'The Pathan-Muhajir Conflicts, 1985-6: A National Perspective' for the fact that the *Mohajirs* are multi-ethnic and do not have a common origin. Shaheed writes that 'The Muhajirs were culturally distinct from the Sindhis and, though composed of various ethnic groups, gravitated towards the Urdu-speaking culture of central India'. In Das, Veena, (ed) (1990). *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 199.
 - 15 See Inayatullah for a theoretical analysis of the various stages through which ethnic consciousness passes as it finally articulates a full blown political demand for autonomy or secession. Dr. Inayatullah. 'The Process of Development of Ethnicity and Ethnonationalism: A Theoretical Analysis', in *Pakistan Perspectives*. Vol. 5, No. 2, July-December, 2000.
 - 16 Zaidi points out that 'Although Muhajir identity per se has only become crystallized after the official launching of the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) in 1986 and by the violent events following that, there have always been the seeds of an exclusivity of identity in this community'. Akbar Zaidi, p. 339. It may be mentioned here that such 'seeds' can be produced in discourse, as the propensity toward ethnic articulation potentially exists in any collectivity that, with time, comes to imagine itself a community.
 - 17 See for example Akbar Zaidi, Farida Shaheed, and Inayatullah (cited above) as each of them provides some explanation of the development of ethnic distinctions in relation to the state, especially as regards the form of the state, whether plural, democratic and accommodative, or exclusive, authoritarian and homogenizing. One realizes though that no state is purely either/or, as avowedly democratic and plural states have authoritarian and non-accommodative tendencies, and highly authoritarian states may accept plurality despite the contradiction. As regards the role of the state, also see Akmal Hussain's paper 'The Karachi Riots of December 1986: Crisis of State and Civil Society in Pakistan', in Das, Veena (ed), *Mirrors of Violence*, pp. 185-193.
 - 18 For an understanding of how the state's classificatory systems tend to create rigid and bounded identities, see Sri Lankan Feminist, Neloufer de Mel's 'The "Half-Truths" of Classification: The Wooden Dolls and the Census'. Published by the Asian Film Center, 2001. This is her introduction to the film based on a short story by Karoor Nilakantha Pillai. As de Mel writes, 'The rigid boundaries required by the Census fail to capture the complex nuances of these lives as well as those who live in the liminalities of hybrid ethnic, religious, caste and sexual identities', p. 4.

I realised the problems Urdu speaking boys and girls were facing in the universities and then even in jobs. ...Urdu speaking people were unable to enter the armed forces. The reason was the form that had to be filled. Pakistan was created in 1947 and if the form was filled in 86 then that person was surely born in Karachi. The next question was where his father was born. There were many whose fathers were also born in Karachi. Then where was the grandfather born. These questions should be taken notice of that a person was limited to a particular section and those who were not born here had certainly migrated from India, so that was how a community was being recognised. If somebody's grandfather were born somewhere in India and he then migrated here, that would put him in another category. I then realised for the first time that we might get another form where it would be required to fill where the grandfather's father was born and then we would never be able to get away from this title of being a migrant. So instead of treating it as an insult, it was better to make it an identification that even if we had migrated from there we hold certain status that we too are a community and we live here.

So I felt it very strongly that they should have their own identity and if the term *Mohajir* has been thrust upon us then we should be proud of it instead feeling a sense of deprivation or inferiority

KS, a political activist and well-educated woman, provides this articulate explanation of how the state, in its official classifications, imposed a migrant identity on people. Since descent in patriarchal states is traced from the father and forefathers, the government form was designed to fix Pakistani citizenship identity on the basis of the origin of the father and his fathers. Urdu-speaking people were placed by the state in a fixed and rigid category of migrant, that is, one who does not belong to the land is not, therefore, indigenous. This category immediately differentiated the Urdu-speaking settlers in Karachi and Hyderabad from Sindhis, who are considered the original inhabitants of Sindh. This kind of classification later also led to the ideas of the old (read original/authentic) Sindhis and new Sindhis. A sense of difference and separation was thus instilled in the consciousness of Urdu-speaking people by government categorization based on place of birth. A child born in post-partition Pakistan to migrant parents, was also defined as a migrant –an identity that denotes a transitory phase, impermanence and a sense of being in limbo. Such an identity is potentially explosive as one is set into a state of competition with the 'authentic' and 'original' 'sons of the soil'.

This identity, frozen by the state's need to classify and divide, was appropriated by the *Mohajirs*, when they realized that 'that was how a community was being recognized'. KS describes eloquently her realization that escaping the title, which the state was bent upon imposing on them, was impossible. As she says, instead of treating it as an insult, it was better to identify with it. She makes a claim to rights and recognition by arguing that even if they had migrated from somewhere, they still had a certain status. The sense of a united community with certain rights is evident from the words, 'we too are a community and we live here'. It seems that the earliest seeds of an 'imagined community', united by the bonds of language and 'shared suffering', were sowed by the state's procedures of differentiation. The *Mohajirs*, in KS' perception, appropriated and internalized this ascribed identity, and turned it into the basis of political mobilization. An identity thrust upon them became, in her words, a source of pride rather than engendering feelings of inferiority and deprivation. This is an example of a complex and conflicted negotiation with the Other, in which

identity is constructed by first being resisted and rejected, and then finally giving way to accommodation, assimilation and the proud affirmation of *Mohajir* identity.

Role of Electoral Systems in the Consolidation of Identity

While the state's classificatory systems, and the division of the population in the national census, tend to give rise to ethnic consciousness, the electoral systems of democracy also tend to reinforce and solidify identities. The realization that state benefits can be obtained by forming vote banks based on ethnic grouping, leads to the formation of political parties that articulate the group's political agenda. A number of political parties have been formed based on ethnic and regional identity, for example, the Baluchistan National Party, Awami National Party, and the Jiye Sindh Mahaz. Ethnically-based parties can develop to the point of ethno-nationalism, where the demand for maximum provincial autonomy or even secession can be made.¹⁹ For example, the Awami League, a political party representing the interests of East Pakistan in the federation, ultimately led to the independence of East Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh. The Pakistani state's inability to accommodate the demands of its eastern wing within a democratic and plural framework, enabled the politics of ethnicity to take concrete shape. Ethnic politics can, therefore, be the precursor of state disintegration as well as state-formation. Women activists of MQM seemed to realize the importance of electoral politics and managed to mobilize a large number of women voters. Describing the methods used by women activists of the MQM, KS says

In these corner meetings we would for instance get 20, 25 women from the houses from the neighbourhoods and brief them that it was time that our young generation aims for the Assemblies. They were neither going to get admissions in the universities nor find jobs unless certain legislations are introduced and for that it was important to reach the Assemblies which meant that votes were essential. I highlighted the importance of votes and never before had another political party received as many women's votes as the M.Q.M. did.

In a multiple and plural society, democratic experiments ensure that vote banks and the formation of identities go hand in hand, each process reinforcing the other.²⁰ In majoritarian forms of democracy, minority vote banks tend to be concentrated, and are considered essential for political power and the protection of minority rights. The MQM was able to create, and subsequently draw upon, women's sense of being *Mohajirs* very successfully, and the largest ever number of women were mobilized.²¹

Prior to the articulation of identity for political mobilization, a latent sense of self has to be brought to the level of consciousness. While some vague sense of a commonality may have existed among the Urdu-speaking populations of Karachi and Hyderabad, the conscious sense of being a homogenous, unified and monolithic whole had to be created. The leaders and ideologues of the Mohajir Qaumi Mahaz (MQM) achieved this task successfully by using a number of devices, which

19 See Inayatullah for how the stage comes when ethnic politics becomes ethno-nationalism and leads to the demand for provincial autonomy and/or secession. Dr. Inayatullah, p. 13.

20 The fact that electoral politics, and the need for constituencies, play an important role in the articulation of ethnic identity, is highlighted by Rajni Kothari in his paper 'Ethnicity', in Kumar David and Kadirgamar, Santasilan (eds) (1989), *Ethnicity: Identity, Conflict, Crisis*, pp. 38-39.

21 See Khawar Mumtaz for an idea of the large number of women who were mobilized for MQM rallies. 'The Gender Dimension in Sindh's Ethnic Conflict', in Rupasinghe, Kumar and Khawar Mumtaz (eds) (1996). *Internal Conflicts in South Asia*. Sage. pp. 156-158.

appear in the rhetoric through which *Mohajir* women narrate their sense of identity and nationhood. Some of the most visible devices appear to be, 1) the promotion of a sense of victimhood, coupled with feelings of persecution, deprivation and injustice, 2) the inculcation of a belief in sacrifice and loss for the land and the new country, 3) a heightened sense of loyalty based on the use of familial terminology, suggesting that all *Mohajirs* constitute a family and are tied to one another by blood bonds, 4) one of the most well-known devices of politicized ethnicity, that is, the construction of the self and other as opposites, and the unwavering belief in the cultural superiority of one's own group, are present in the narratives of the women interviewed, 5) like other forms of national and sub-national identities, there is a great propensity to create heroes and to worship these larger than life figures as saviours of the '*Mohajir nation*'. These elements of the construction of *Mohajir* identity, need to be explored separately. Unlike other forms of ethnic or national identities, there is seldom any reference to a great and glorious past, which has been lost and must be revived. The *Mohajirs*, occasionally referred to as a *Mohajir nation*, construct themselves in opposition, not only to the Centre and State (vertically), but also in a horizontal relation to Punjabis, Pathans and Sindhis. Their many Others, provide them with a rich source of their own construction as the absence of all that Others represent, and the presence of all that Others lack.

Feelings of Persecution and the Construction of Ethnic Identity

The sense of victimhood, suffering and persecution seems to be fundamental to the *Mohajir* imagination of being a community with common concerns. A number of *Mohajir* women interviewed, expressed feelings of the persecution of their community by the state as well as by other ethnic groups, in particular the Pathans and the Punjabis. The massive spilling of young *Mohajir* blood is seen by the community as evidence of being a persecuted and discriminated group, which has the right to have its grievances redressed. The perception of the loss of *Mohajir* lives, becomes an unspoken justification for taking up arms and engaging in the killing of members of other communities. While it is true that a large number of young *Mohajir* males were killed by the police and by other communities, the MQM itself engaged in the murder and torture of many people. The discovery of the MQM's torture cells revealed the gory extent of the its murders, and led many people to define the party as fascist because of its highly organized, regimented, disciplined, loyal and committed cadres, along with a tight chain of command.²² Nevertheless, *Mohajir* women tend to feel that only *Mohajir* boys were killed and those of other communities were safe. This sense of oppression is created and encouraged by the MQM leadership, and serves to bind the group's members to each other in angry solidarity. For example, TK says

That is how the rift became wider and there were continuous murders of *Muhajirs*, no one ever heard that a Pathan or a Sindhi was ever killed.

Then they made two ethnic groups fight with each other such as Sindhis with *Muhajirs* and Pathans with *Muhajirs*. In both cases, the *Muhajirs* are the ones who have been involved. The *Muhajir* is blamed and the Urdu-speaking people will be killed. So if you analyze history you will see that out of those who have been killed the majority are *Muhajirs*. That is how they made two ethnic groups fight with one another and this hatred can be removed if we try. If we try peace can be established in Karachi.

22 For the discovery of torture cells of MQM in June 1992, see Khawar Mumtaz, p. 152.

Similar feelings of *Mohajir* victimization are echoed by FB who says

Mostly the children of *Muhajirs* were killed, to this day no Punjabi, Sindhi, or Pathan's son has been killed. What harm have the *Muhajirs* done that they are being treated like this.? *Muhajirs* have only one fault - that they can speak Urdu. That is why they are killed. You must have seen in the newspapers that all young children were killed.

The simultaneous assertion of one's own oppression, and the denial of the victimhood of the Other(s), is a construction of the Self/Other dichotomy, which underlies ethno-nationalist passions. It is a covert justification of one's own violence, while simultaneously making claims to separate nationhood/belonging, and providing a basis of access to state resources. In other words, it is the claim that since the community has been treated unjustly and victimized, it should receive benefits. It is said that pre-nationalist and nationalist movements tend to remember and recall their wounds frequently. The recurrent remembering of traumas to the community, helps cement the diverse entity into a unified and integrated whole. This kind of memory-making also serves to enhance feelings of alienation against others, which can then be mobilized for political ends. A recognition that the blood of all communities was spilled, does not enable the pre-nationalist cause to make exclusive claims, and forge strong internal links. Exclusive suffering thus has to be claimed, for the community to believe itself to be singled out for persecution, and in need of justice and the redressal of wrongs.

The Invocation of Martyrdom and Sacrifice in Identity Creation

Claims of persecution are less credible without the invocation of martyrdom and sacrifice. The assertions of being a wronged community on the way to imagining itself a nation, need to be bolstered by conjuring up heroes, martyrs and sacrifices. Unlike more established nationalist constructions, the *Mohajir* community does not hark back to a golden past and ancient heroes. It relies much more on current, living heroes and defines its murdered youth as martyrs. Motherhood is glorified with reference to the mothers of martyrs, as in most nationalist formations. The term martyr is divested of its religious significance, and transferred to the secular arena through the claim that the MQM boys who were killed, were martyred by the state or the other communities. FN describes the plight of *Mohajir* mothers in the following words

Women talk about themselves in a way that it strikes our hearts. An old lady comes for her son and grandson. Another comes for her three sons who have been martyred

The construction of glorified motherhood, able to sacrifice sons to the movement, is reproduced in the words of FZ who says

That I am the mother of a martyr is a thing to be happy about not to get angry about.

In a redefinition of martyrdom, dying for the nation (sub-nationality), and at the hands of the state, come to be included in the term which had so far been reserved for dying in the name of Allah. For example, AR says the following to express her sense of martyrdom and nationhood:

Q: Do you think your son is a martyr?

A: Yes certainly he is a martyr. He has sacrificed for the nation. He died at the hands of the police.

Q: How can you say that he was killed at the hands of the police?

A: Because we buried him after five days and the body was still bleeding.

Q: It was bleeding even after five days.

A: Yes this is a sign of martyrdom.

In a subversive narrative, AR not only redefines martyrdom, but also the idea of the nation. In her view, *Mohajirs* already constitute a nation. One of the ways in which pre-nationalisms consolidate themselves, seems to be the assertion that the nation already exists. While the notion of what it means to be a *Mohajir* nation is being defined and elaborated through discourse, and through violence, for some members of the community, the nation already exists. This is an oblique, though perhaps unconscious, denial of the larger sense of Pakistani nationhood. On the other hand, it could also be a deliberate interrogation and interruption of what, in official discourse, constitutes Pakistani nation. AR feels that the bleeding body of her son signifies martyrdom. This 'sign' not only reassures her that her son has died in a just cause, it also demonstrates that the story of nations is written, rather drenched, in blood.²³ At some future date, 'martyrs' like AR's son would most likely be conjured up as the heroes of the nation who sacrificed their lives for the land. While AR redefines martyrdom as dying at the hands of the police/state, AZ provides yet another basis of martyrdom. As she says

We will call them martyrs because they are killed without any sin. That is why they are called martyrs.

Martyrdom thus has multiple meanings in the *Mohajir* world. It can refer to death for the ethnic cause, death at the hands of the police/state, or being killed without any sin. Innocence is here the basis of martyrdom. Most women believe that their sons were innocent, were not involved in the conflict, and the state punished them without justice. In such constructions, one's own innocence, and the Others' guilt, are established with equal vehemence. The kind of thinking in which the self equals moral/innocent, and the Other equals immoral/guilty, forms the moral and ethical underpinning of emerging ethno-nationalism. The mothers eulogized their sons, provided various reasons for martyrdom, and condemned the police, and other social groups, for the atrocities committed upon their sons.

The pride in being the mother of a martyr, helps to overcome the grief of losing a child. The cause provides succour and fortitude by redefining the murder of MQM boys as martyrdom, thus giving a new meaning to the act of dying. Redefined martyrdom has been used by a number of *Mohajir* women, possibly as a way of dealing with the loss of sons. The paradise promised in the next world, and the justice in this one, enable women to justify an otherwise painful event. The leaders of the movement benefit from such constructions of death, as they make it easier to engage young men in the ferocious ethnic conflict. However, anguished mothers gain some comfort from the respect bestowed upon the mothers of martyrs by the community. As MB expresses it

23 Suvir Kaul aptly comments that borders are so often confirmed by the spilling of blood. Ethnic divisions are also reinforced by engaging in the differentiating ritual of bloodletting. Suvir Kaul, 'Introduction' to *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*. Edited by Suvir Kaul. (2001). New Delhi: Permanent Black. p. 1.

I am A's mother. Now I am getting respect. After his death people envy me. I have gained respect after his death.

The sense of suffering and deprivation, resides not only in the loss of life and blood, it also has material referents. There seems to be a strong feeling among the community members, that the *Mohajirs* have been deprived of their rights, especially in terms of jobs and college admissions. The *Mohajirs* felt threatened by the rural/urban quota in jobs and college admissions, as they believed that their previously dominant status in the state bureaucracy would be undermined. The fear of unemployment and economic loss as a result of the quota system, and the diminishing numbers of Urdu-speaking people in government jobs, led to a sense of economic insecurity among the *Mohajirs*. This insecurity, and the visible unemployment as a consequence of the state's inability to generate employment for youth, created fears which the leaders managed to harness to the cause. The imminent lessening of status, especially with the Punjabis increasingly filling government jobs, helped incite sentiments of anger at other ethnic groups as well as the state. The decisive victory of the MQM in the urban centers of Sindh in the local elections of 1987, and subsequently in the national elections, led to ethnic consciousness becoming more rigid. The articulation of *Mohajir* identity reinforced electoral victories, which, in turn, further strengthened the sense of a common identity. Electoral processes and the formation of identity became mutually reinforcing. The sense of deprivation and material suffering is narrated by a number of women. For example, ZBQ says

A. There are no jobs for the Hindustanis; they are born to be crushed. First they suffered in India and now in Pakistan. This is no life.

Q. Do you think other groups (ethnicities) have jobs?

A. Yes, they get jobs and nobody kills them. Only the Hindustanis are being killed.

Sentiments of being economically oppressed, are also expressed by KS who says

Urdu speaking community are downtrodden and are being victimised. Even with education they are not gaining anything.

Another respondent, TK echoes the same feelings when she says

They have done this to *Muhajirs* mostly and you can see in most jobs there are Punjabis and Pathans. If we go to them and ask them for jobs, they are not ready to accept *Muhajirs*. It seems that all the vacancies are in Karachi but there is the highest level of unemployment here also. People from the Punjab and the Frontier come to get jobs in Karachi and they are acceptable but I don't understand why the Urdu-speaking people of Karachi are not acceptable for jobs. They have the experience and the degree but even then this is the case. I don't know why.

TK attributes the lack of jobs to the Pathans and Punjabis who come from other provinces and get employment, but the *Mohajirs* do not. The sense of persecution and suffering is explained in terms of an implied competition with the Other, and the state's responsibility in generating employment is obscured. The feeling that not only are outsiders killing the *Mohajirs*, in collusion with the state, they are also wrenching the source of livelihood, enables the community to feel justifiably oppressed and downtrodden. Material struggles and class issues are thus articulated in ethnic terms, and come to be mobilized by ethnic parties in the absence of class-based political mobilization. The rage of the community members is steered towards other, often equally downtrodden or oppressed, people belonging to other communities,

rather than towards the state and those who rule it. This process helps the community to become more tightly-knit, and its tendency to rally behind its leaders is usually enhanced. The articulation of *Mohajir* nationalism, not unlike most forms of nationalist construction, undercuts class politics. The movement at one point made a demand for a separate province, and asked that the *Mohajirs* be recognized as a fifth nationality. However, the ethnic struggle did not reach the level of secession, which usually leads to state disintegration and the formation of a new state.

The *Mohajir* ethnic movement relies on other forms of claims to sacrifice. A recurring theme in the narratives of *Mohajir* women is that the migrants gave sacrifices to create Pakistan and lost a great deal in moving from their original homeland. This argument becomes the basis of the claim to rights. While sacrifices during the partition of India were made by all the communities, here again exclusivity is claimed as the basis of rights and privileges. For example, FN says

Res: We don't have any identity Sindhi claims Sindh to be theirs. Balochi claims Balochistan to be theirs, Pathans claim Sarhad to be theirs. What is ours?

Int: For Urdu speaking, means for you, there is no place?

Res: Obviously. You have seen the statement of Sindhis, according to them they have given refuge to Urdu speakers.

Int: What is the opinion of Urdu speakers about themselves?

Res: Urdu speakers are of the view that all sacrifices have been given by them.

FN's claim is that *Mohajirs* feel that *all* sacrifices have been given by them. She complains that all other ethnic groups in Pakistan have their own territory, but *Mohajirs* do not. For them there is no place and, as FN says, the Sindhis claim that they only gave refuge to the *Mohajirs*. In FN's case, her ethnic identity is defined in terms of a refugee population, and she seems to feel the pinch of the term 'refugee' with all its connotations of pity, sorrow and charity. This interview suggests that while the *Mohajirs* made sacrifices, the land was appropriated by all Others, and the *Mohajirs* remained a transitory people, on the move from one place to another. Others gave them only temporary shelter out of pity for their plight. The notion of receiving charity from another ethnic group or the state, has given way to the idea of rights as citizens in the political articulation of identity. It can be said that with time, the *Mohajirs* moved from being 'refugees' to being full citizens of the state. With that move, the connotation of the word '*Mohajir*' changed from 'refugee' to 'migrant'. Nonetheless, the word 'migrant' also suggests that the person is not an authentic 'son of the soil', not original and, therefore, should not have full rights. Authenticity is a claim upon which nationalisms tend to rely, but for the *Mohajir* community, the claim to citizenship rights lies in the notion of sacrifice for the new homeland. The problem of authenticity arose within the *Mohajir* movement when it split into two factions, with the new faction calling itself *Haqiqi* (the real, authentic ones) in an attempt to de-legitimize Altaf Hussain's faction. The claim to authenticity has political implications, and seems to be an instrument in the road to power.

Since sacrifice and loss are the basis of the *Mohajir* claim (instead of the idea of belonging to the soil), sacrifice, loss and consequent suffering, are invoked in the narratives of several women. For example, AM says

As our mother said she left everything and came to Pakistan because it was made for Muslims. But we have forgotten why Pakistan has been built and why we have come.

AM expresses a sense of loss at the time of coming to Pakistan, and feels that the real purpose of the creation of the country has been forgotten. There is a sense of betrayal, which appears in other narratives also, but AM belongs to a religious party and feels that the ideal of religion has been forgotten. By an

appeal to Muslim identity, she tries to erase the ethnic differences on which the new *Mohajir* identity is premised. MB, who feels strongly about being a *Mohajir*, also refers to the sense of having suffered and sacrificed in the process of the formation of the Pakistani nation and state. She says

I am proud of being a *Mohajir*. We are *Mohajirs*, that is how we came from India leaving everything there, penniless. We suffered here and bore it.

The sense of pride in having left everything in India, become penniless and undergoing suffering, seems to feed into the wounded feelings of being a beleaguered community. By refreshing these wounds with a sense of proud recall, the sentiment of injury necessary for ethno-nationalist mobilization appears to be reinforced. Wounded memories tie the *Mohajirs* together into a unity, and enable them to articulate the idea of nationhood coupled with sacrifice, martyrdom and sorrow.

Cultural Superiority in the Construction of the Self

A vital element that often accompanies emergent ethnic and national consciousness, is the construction of an ingroup/outgroup ideology that relies on notions of inferiority and superiority. Feelings of representing a superior/higher culture do appear in the narratives of *Mohajir* women. For example, FM, who lived in Bengal before moving to Karachi, says

In 1951 when we went to Bengal they abused us. I felt it very much for we are of very delicate and pure culture of Hyderabad. We keep *dupatas* (head scarves) on our heads and boys keep *topies* (caps) on their heads, whereas Bengali culture is quite opposite. That's why I don't like them.

In FM's statement, the *Mohajir* Self is constructed in opposition to the Bengali Other. The Urdu-speaking culture of Hyderabad is described as 'delicate' and 'pure', the latter notion of purity playing a central part in racist undertones that characterize most forms of ethnic and national consciousness. The wearing of *dopatas* by women and *topies* by men is not only a differentiating factor, it is also meant to denote respectability and high culture. Bengali culture is described as the opposite, and the feelings of being 'abused' by the Bengalis are turned into a dislike for them. In a later part of the narrative, FM says that she did not like the habits of people in Dhaka. Upon being asked, 'which habits?' she answers by saying 'They are not cultured'. Being cultured is appropriated as an exclusive trait of Urdu-speaking people, and the Bengalis as the opposite are stripped of any claim to culture. FM explains how they are not cultured and refined:

Res: There Bengalis did not like Urdu speakers. We had a different society or class there i.e. going to club, arranging parties and minna bazaar and enjoyment. So far as the Urdu speakers of lower and middle classes were concerned, they were annoyed by Bengalis for they never accepted them. When we reached Bengal, I was seventeen and I felt that porter who had our luggage didn't like us.

Int: What did you feel and see?

Res: They had no complete clothing on their bodies. Only they had a vest and *lungi*.²⁴ They were doing their work but also continued to abuse. As we stepped out at that place we felt that they are not our friends. They didn't want us to be there. Therefore I decided not to live there. Many

24 A *lungi* is a covering worn from the waist down by men and women in the sub-continent.

proposals of Bengalis were offered, but I didn't want to marry there for I knew that they are not trust worthy.

FM creates the Us/Them division by a process of projection and reversal. She accuses the Bengalis of not liking the Urdu-speaking people, and then expresses her own dislike in her feelings of mistrust for the Bengalis, contempt for their manners, and their purportedly abusive behaviour. In FM's narrative, a mixture of class and ethnic superiority is discernible. The Urdu-speaking people belonged to a culturally superior ethnic group as well as to a better class that went to clubs and organized parties. The Bengalis, on the other hand, did not even dress properly. The overlap of class and ethnic identity shows the levels of multiple and layered identity, which breaks the sense of a singular and consolidated belonging.

This kind of Us/Them division often forms the core of nationalist formations and is mobilized for the cementing of group ties. Sentiments of *Mohajir* superiority are also echoed by KS who says

...those who came from India were financially a little weak, but where education was concerned or general manners or family background were considered, relatively superior and very well regarded.

In KS' opinion, the *Mohajirs* were superior in education, manners and family background. While education and manners may be considered the results of socialization, superiority of 'family background' seems to suggest some kind of 'natural' or 'racial' superiority. While it is not clear what kind of 'family background' is inferior or superior to another, the claim to culture, manners and superiority is made in the construction of the ingroup as a higher entity.

The axis of superiority/inferiority is used not only to describe the 'culture of the *Mohajirs*', moral and ethical superiority is also claimed by attributing negative moral characteristics to one's ethnic Others, and positive ones to oneself. For example, KS says

I felt that *Mohajirs* are not bold, they are not dishonest the way the others openly are...it was not as if there were no decent people among the Punjabis. I liked one thing about them that they were very generous and hospitable, but there was a lot of dishonesty, lots of it. I have very close Punjabi friends but I know how they made their money. From the point of view of the country also I felt that the country's foundations were weakening.

Mohajirs are thus honest, while the Others are openly dishonest. The Punjabi Others are accused of making their money in less than honest ways. However, KS, wishing perhaps not to seem prejudiced, quickly allows that there are decent people among the Punjabis and that they are generous and hospitable, but their dishonesty is weakening the foundations of the country. Hence, Punjabis, the dominant ethnic group in Pakistan, are associated with the weakening of the country's foundations. By implication, the *Mohajirs*, with their superior culture and honesty, ensure that the foundations are strong. In a weak versus strong binary, the ingroup-*Mohajir* and outgroup-Punjabis are constructed as polar opposites. Such distinctions, which often form the core of national and sub-national entities, help on the one hand to strengthen the ingroup bonds and solidarity, while simultaneously creating a reliable set of 'enemies' against whom one creates the sense of Self and becomes mobilized.

The Imagery of Kinship and Family

The imagery of blood relation, family and kinship plays a very important part in the cementing of the group, and the creation of the loyalty necessary for political mobilization. The *Mohajirs* tend to refer to one another in terms that are reserved for the family. The members of MQM call one another *Bhai* (brother) and *Behen* or *Baji* (sister). This is a manifestation of the felt, as well as crafted, closeness and affinity. The use of kinship terminology evokes familial sentiments and creates a binding feeling of loyalty among the members. Altaf Hussain (founder and leader of MQM-Altaf) is referred to by all members as Altaf Bhai. Similarly, Afaq (leader of the *Haqiqi* faction) is Afaq Bhai to the other members. This not only implies a kind of horizontal equality, it also stimulates feelings of oneness and unity. For example, upon being asked about her contacts with the *Haqiqi* group, KS says

No, my contact with them is only to greet each other, be like brothers and sisters. I never worked for the party.

Although she does not work with Afaq's faction, KS still refers to them as brothers and sisters. While this is an expression of solidarity, it also forms a part of the specific Urdu-speaking culture of Karachi. However, its political use as a legitimizing force is evident from the following words of KS, while speaking of the women she mobilized:

I had their respect as well. They would call me "Baji" elder sister. They knew that I would not be misleading them, so some of them were ready to come with me with their eyes closed, but after the first press conference, I felt as if they were gaining political awareness, as if they had woken up.

The feeling of kinship bonding between the women seems to have been an important factor in mobilizing the women for MQM rallies. It enabled KS to receive trust and respect, which went a long way in creating awareness. The initial meeting seems to have been based on the trust and respect engendered by feelings of being a 'family'. Subsequently, 'after the first press conference', the women seemed to have become politically mobilized.

While the brother/sister terminology seems to create a horizontally equal relationship, some MQM members also drew upon the vertical, but highly emotive, ties of mother/son. For example, MB, whose own son was 'martyred' in the ethnic struggle, began to imagine Afaq as her other son. As she says, 'my A is dead. Afaq is my other son'. MB's son told her that he would marry only after Afaq Bhai got married and not before, such is the close affiliation and emotional investment in the personalization of political relationships. MB talks about her son's reassurance when she expressed her fear over possibly losing him:

I said to him that I only have him, he said mother your elder son is Afaq.

The appeal to family relations, in particular sister/brother and mother/son dyads, might possibly be a way of desexualizing political relationships. By creating the ideal family relationships, which are usually expected to be devoid of sexual contact, a semblance of morality and purity can be provided to the movement. By making political relationships licit and 'respectable', women are *enabled* in public participation without fear. All male members of the movement are brothers or sons, hence no impure or dangerous contact is possible. This would allow a large number of women to enter the public space of the movement with a certain degree of security.

Nevertheless, in a darker underside, the politics of the MQM were sexualized in the most illicit and explicit way, when eleven sitting legislators of the MQM took an oath of loyalty to their *Quaid* (leader). They declared that 'betrayal with the chief of MQM is more shameful than raping our own mother, sister, daughters'.²⁵ This statement overturns the most fundamental moral norms that society claims to uphold. A violation of the norms of loyalty to the MQM, was declared to be more shameful than the ultimate taboo: incest. This made the public space of politics the most dangerous place for women, overturning the neatly created and binding categories of brother, sister, mother and son. It was simultaneously a massive insult to women and a violation of their basic rights. Yet, ironically it was meant to ensure total loyalty to the leader, a kind of hero-worship in which the leader takes precedence over all other relations. This may have been one of the many reasons why the MQM has often been compared with fascist parties. Its moral bases seem to contain some of the ethical contradictions apparent within German fascism, which combined the sense of 'being good Christian men' with mass genocide and murder.

KS, who was later disillusioned with the party and stopped being an activist, also refers to an oath, which required the members to place party loyalty above kin relations. According to KS

This oath was prepared after 88, must be 89 or 90, and in it was written that for the sake of the party, even if I lose my honour, my house is burnt down, my brothers and sisters are killed, I would sacrifice all of it. Girls as well as boys had to take this oath.

In most cases, ethnic and national consciousness is highly sensitive to the loss of women's 'honour', as it is seen as losing the group or nation's honour. However, within the MQM, loyalty to the party came to override the protection of this vital 'group asset'. The strong group loyalty created by invoking kinship bonds, came to be reinforced, in a contradictory way, by violating these very bonds. What tied the group together into a feeling of oneness, was to be overturned in the pursuit of higher goals, the defence of the party and its leader. FRC expresses the excessive demand on loyalty in the her statements, for example, 'we meant that we could do anything for our leader and for our party', and 'the party tells us what to do and what not to do'. The movement seemed to have been oriented to the party and the leader, rather than the higher goals or ideals in pursuit of which parties are formed.

The Cult of Leaders and the Creation of Living Heroes

This brings us to the important aspect of the cult of leadership, and construction of 'heroes', that characterizes *Mohajir* ethnic consciousness. While the heroes of many other forms of nationalism and sub-nationalism are dead, and are tied somehow to the land, the heroes of the *Mohajir* community are living, larger-than-life beings, and their relationship to the land is recent and tenuous. The founder and leader of the MQM, Altaf Hussain, acquired gigantic proportions as a saviour, hero and saint. This aspect has been pointed out by Khawar Mumtaz who writes:

The party is highly centralized: its leader, Altaf Hussain, has become a cult figure, treated as a legend in his own lifetime. Given the title of *Quaid-e-Tehrik* (leader of the movement) and called *pir sahib* (spiritual leader), Altaf Hussain has an image that has been aggressively built up, as 'blind faith' in the leader is considered a fundamental principle of MQM.²⁶

25 Khawar Mumtaz, p, 158.

26 Khawar Mumtaz, p, 151.

Mumtaz's observation is borne out in the narratives of some of the women. The spiritual dimensions that Altaf Hussain acquired, made working for MQM a kind of religious duty. For example, KS says

With the term "*Mohajir*" we also projected the leader. We would sing songs on him, would make things in his name. Nothing would move without his orders. I had already stepped aside, but later on it got to the limit that his name was appearing on leaves, and on marble. Obviously, the workers were doing all this.

The idea seems to be that the air was saturated with the leader. So large was the presence of Altaf Hussain, that the movement itself was obliterated by his enormous presence. He held a kind of magic for the community that only cult leaders possess. However, unlike Prabhakaran of the LTTE in Sri Lanka, Altaf Hussain is not a deeply sexualized figure.²⁷ He remains Altaf Bhai (more like Big Brother) to those who still follow him. Possibly, his spiritualization as a *pir*, who is often expected to be celibate in order to be pure in his relation with God, led to his desexualization. This also lent an image of purity and chastity to the *Mohajir* movement. The need to provide an image of purity and chastity to the movement by the regulation of women's bodies is described by KS. She says

...if 50 women came, these fifty women would be given the same message to spread around. I tried from the very beginning to make them understand two or three things, that the times were very difficult so it was essential that we present ourselves in an ideal manner, our characters our dressing should be immaculate. We should dress simple, clean without wearing any unnecessary jewellery. I tried to guide them, according to my intelligence, that otherwise it could result in a feeling of inferiority in others. If a woman sits there heavily jewelled, then four others would sit away from her or would envy her. Dressing was natural to women, but it should be reserved for social occasions. But for the meetings, when they were delivering our message, they should be humble. It was a fact that we had to rid ourselves of all this.

Chastity, simplicity and austerity were designed not only to create a sense of unity with the less privileged among the women, they also constituted the core of purist values that the movement was trying to project in order to increase membership. Khawar Mumtaz notes this kind of regulation of the female body. She writes:

Instructions were also given to women regarding the mode of dress (the head must be covered with *dopatta* – head scarf), attitude (patience, willingness to listen) and behaviour (politeness) when contacting other women in their neighbourhoods.²⁸

This highly conservative regulation of the female body, while designed to increase members, is also a form of the containment of sexuality, and a subtle form of control over women. This kind of regimentation would ensure that even as women were politicized, their 'feminine' and 'Muslim' identities remained intact. The politicization of women via the ethnic struggle, was not meant to challenge the norms of patriarchy. The values inculcated and encouraged were conservative and patriarchal, so that the women's participation would remain confined to ethnic issues, without the accompanying awareness of

27 Neloufer de Mel lucidly describes how, in a play on the LTTE in Sri Lanka, the Supremo of the liberation movement becomes invested with sexual passion and becomes an object of desire for the women. Neloufer de Mel, 'Body Politics and the Female Suicide Bomber'. Paper presented at the WISCOMP Summer Symposium on Human Security in the New Millenium. New Delhi. August 21-26, 2000. p. 5.

28 Khawar Mumtaz, pp, 157-158.

their own oppression as women. The ethnic movement was thus simultaneously liberating and containing women. Traditional forms of morality and norms were imposed while they were mobilized for political work. This may be one reason why the MQM women were not represented in any significant way in the women's movement in Pakistan.

Women's Voices and the Rupture in Ethnic Identity

Mohajir identity, as a distinct social entity, has emerged in discourse, primarily in the 1980s. In spite of the rhetoric of its leaders, and their attempts to construct a unified, whole, integrated, solid and homogenous identity, there are many points of interruption and fracture. *Mohajir* women have not internalized this identity in a straightforward way. There are many points of conflict, contradiction and interrogation, which destroy the myth of 'the *Mohajir* nation'. It is an evolving identity that has many gaps, which can be filled in by other and competing identities. The fact that it is tentative, evolving and fluid, may be the reason that women seem to move, quite imperceptibly and easily, between several different identities and levels of belonging. At times they say quite forthrightly that the identity did not exist prior to the formation of the MQM, and has come into being very recently. We now turn to this aspect of the narratives of *Mohajir* women, who punctuate the sense of *Mohajir* nationhood or identity, with references to other belongings such as national, regional or religious identity.

AM expresses a strong sense of religious identity, and her family are followers of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*. At one point during the interview she says, 'we are Muslim and there should be Islamic rule', and avers that Pakistan was made for Islam. A little later in during the interview, when asked: do you feel any shame about being *Mohajir* or Urdu-speaking? She replies without hesitation

This very thing is our identity. People don't understand the purpose of being *Mohajir*.
But...it is shameful to be called *Mohajir*.

The shift from a strong sense of Muslim identity to an equally strong assertion of *Mohajir* selfhood, seems to occur quite unconsciously and spontaneously. There is no contradiction in the two identities as one can occupy both positions simultaneously. However, in AM's case, she privileges each one alternately, so that there seems to be some tension between the two parts of the self. The religious identity fractures the ethnic one, and the ethnic one interrupts her religious belonging. She tries to explain the confusion by saying that people do not understand what being a *Mohajir* means, and then achieves a tentative resolution by saying that after the incidents of murder and violence, 'it is shameful to be called a *Mohajir*'. This rejection of *Mohajir* identity, and a sense of shame in it, enables her to externalize the negative aspects of this identity. She tries to grapple with the multiple identities by saying 'there is another politics of *Mohajir*, Sindhi and Hindu. But we are Muslims, we should be united and solve our problems by getting together.' Her religious identity seems to override ethnic and other concerns, and helps her make a choice despite the tension from competing sources of identity.

A similar unresolved conflict punctuates AR's narrative and her sense of identity. Along with a sense of being located at the intersection of competing identity discourses, her narrative depicts a constant tension between her political affiliations. At one point in the interview, AR says

I think there must be no political party, there must be one party only... There is no use for political parties. Everyone must have one party.

Slightly later in the interview, AR reveals her political affiliation with the *Jamaat-e-Islami* by saying, 'I voted on my own. I voted for the *Jamaat-e-Islami*. And we always give it to the *Jamaat-e-Islami*'. At this point she seems to be saying that there should be only one party, the *Jamaat*. A little later in the interview, she accuses the other parties of spreading provincialism and hatred of people towards one another. As she moves through the role of the state and police in murder and violence, her narrative arrives at her ethnic belonging when she says

It is not a sin to be a *Mohajir*? We are born here. Our brothers speak Punjabi in Punjab. I look at their faces and tell them "Brother speak in Urdu" I am proud of being a *Mohajir*.

By expressing pride in *Mohajir* identity, AR shifts from an emphasis on her religious belonging and upholds the notion of her ethnic self. The interviewer then interrogates her about ethnicity-based parties and asks whether they should exist, to which AR spontaneously replies, 'yes, they must be formed, everyone must get their rights'. Ethnic parties are seen as the basis for getting one's rights. When reminded that she had earlier said that there should be only one party, she replies, 'yes, only the *Jamaat-e-Islami*'. When her attention is directed to the contradiction between only one religious party, as well as ethnicity-based parties, she tries to resolve the conflict by saying, 'If there is no massacre then they [ethnic parties] should be created. There is no harm'. After some more probing by the interviewer, AR says, 'like there are riots that provinces must become independent, if this happens there is really no harm in it'. The last statement indicates that AR's sense of Pakistani national identity seems to be overlaid by her sense of ethnic belonging which, in turn, is over-written by religious affiliation. She moves between three different levels of identity, each of which comes to the fore at different times. AR is not just a confused person who does not know what to think. She represents the dilemmas of contemporary existence within multiple, layered and contradictory discourses. Each of her identities seems to fracture others, as she tries to make meaning in a world that is laden with absurdities and overlapping discourses.

While a large number of women felt that their *Mohajir* identity was a source of pride, there were others who contested it at its inception. Some women intervene, and resist or reject the identity at the very moment of its articulation. Contestation and resistance to dominant notions of what it means to be *Mohajir*, take varying forms ranging from the claim that the identity did not exist before the 1980s, to an outright rejection of the imagined nationhood. For example, the following extract from HK's interview reveals her sense of the absence of identity until its political articulation:

Q. What is your nationality?

A. *Muhajir*.

Q. Do you call yourself *muhajir* or do outsiders call you *Muhajir*?

A. Outsiders call us *Muhajirs*. Ever since the MQM has been formed they have given us this title. Otherwise we had no name.

Q. You don't remember being called *Muhajir* before this?

A. No.

If the sense of being a nation depends upon collective memory, HK certainly does not participate in this remembering. To her, *Mohajir* is an invented identity, which took shape after the formation of the MQM. Before this 'we had no name' reflects a sense of time when the identity did not exist. The naming was done by others, and the *Mohajirs* introjected the name, rather than fighting what was being thrust upon them. HK unhesitatingly responds with the word '*Mohajir*' to the question of her nationality. This is a

subtle but sure undermining of national identity which is punctuated by another, divisive consciousness. In HK's narrative, the identity was first ascribed by others, and then its invention was consolidated and elaborated by its political expression in the form of the MQM. The recent invention of the identity seems to challenge the notion of a primordial, pre-existing and already-formed identity, which only gained political expression later. FRC provides an interesting example of how a conflicting identity is negotiated in a contest with the Other. She says

The reason is that you can go anywhere and they ask you where you are from? And when you say that you have come from India, then at that very instance whether they say it or not, they will block you. Just for this word that your parents are from India, even though we are Pakistanis and proud of it. But because we were blocked like this, the word *Muhajir* came into existence, so you can see what our feelings would be.

FRC explains the construction of identity in a process in which the Other tries to 'block you'. The word *Mohajir*, according to her, arose because of 'blocking' by which she probably means the stifling of opportunities for Urdu-speaking people, and the lack of jobs and college admissions that were the original issues in the conflict. New identities are thus formed in conflict, and are consolidated and reinforced by the continuation of violence and discursive acts.

FRC distinguishes between a surface and a deeper layer of identity. She says

All of us say that we are Hindustani but when they ask us what our caste is? We have to tell them that we are Hindustani. On the surface we are Pakistani and it feels nice, but this has been going on since our forefathers. This is our identity.

It almost appears as if the surface national identity is a camouflage for the 'real' and deeper identity of Hindustani. This is a telling distinction as it reflects the fragility of the national belonging. The strength of the Hindustani identity is emphasized by FRC in her claim that 'this has been going on since our forefathers'. This is a reference to the idea that the Hindustani identity is older, hence more solid, while the apparent and surface identity of Pakistani is a later addition. However, the *Mohajir* identity appears in FRC's discourse as a suddenly invented one – an identity of which they suddenly became aware. As she says

A: I was telling you that in August 89 this had just started. Everywhere there would be one slogan, long live the *Muhajir*, so we also thought that we had an identity.

Q: What do you mean by identity, didn't you feel that you had an identity before this?

A: No we had a totally normal life up to then, we would just go to college and come back. We knew nothing else. But when it came in 89 or 88 and when it emerged then we found out that we were *Muhajirs*. We didn't know before this that we were *Muhajirs*, we thought that we were only Urdu-speaking and Hindustani. That our parents belonged here and that was all. But then we found out that we were *Muhajirs* and we had migrated here and that is why we were called *Muhajirs*.

Q: You would call yourselves Urdu-speaking before and then people started to call you Muhajirs but you didn't know that you had not gotten your rights before?

A: I told you that up to the inter level we didn't know that we were *Muhajirs*. When we came to the BA level then we found out that we were *Muhajirs* and we were given a slogan, "long live *Muhajirs*".

FRC's responses seem to suggest that *Mohajir* identity did not exist prior to the slogan of *long live the Mohajirs*. However, the Hindustani identity seems to have existed from the time of the forefathers. It seems that Hindustani identity was converted into *Mohajir* identity with politicization. The word Hindustani may have been dropped because of its reference to Hindustan (India), while the *Mohajir* (as refugee or migrant) does not suggest the connection with any specific place. The constant refrain of sudden discovery in the words 'then we found out that we were *Mohajirs*', reveals how fragile, new and tentative was the new identity being forged. In the process of the invention of ethnic identities, the discourse of the moral, ideological and political Other, who 'blocks you', needs to be deployed. The rhetoric of the Other who has harmed (blocked) one's own group, and who has usurped the group's rights, then must be deployed to ensure passionate emotional investment in the new identity. An interesting feature of FRC's discourse on identity is that she opposes the emergence of *Mohajir* identity consciousness to leading a 'normal' life. This implies that the invention of the new identity was a disruption of perceived 'normality', a discontinuity in the continuous 'stream of consciousness'.

BS feels that the seeds of hatred were sowed by the invention of the *Mohajir* identity. She says

It means that we have sowed the seeds ourselves, since they [differences] have risen up with the name *Mohajirs*. *Mohajirs* were in every department since Pakistan came into being. There was no such thing. So the others started to hate them. Meaning the seed of hatred was sowed by the name *Mohajir*.

In BS' memory, there was no such thing when Pakistan came into being, however the name *Mohajir* sowed the seeds of hatred. She blames the community for the wrongs done to them and does not participate in the collective articulation of the identity. She expresses shame at being a member of the community and, when asked why, she feels this way, she says

Because we were no longer *Mohajirs*. We had taken this country in the name of Allah. We came. We lived here. We spent so many years here. And thank God they were everywhere, in Sindh, in Punjab, in N.W.F.P. But since then, they have gotten a bad name, everybody thinks -- the thief is *Mohajir*, bad girls are *Mohajirs*. So they have never been this disgraced.

BS contests the whole notion of *Mohajir* as 'migrant'. She feels that once they had come and had settled in Pakistan and lived and spent years here, they should not have retained the sense of transience and temporary shelter associated with the word '*Mohajir*'. She interrogates the very foundation of the construction of the identity as based on movement from one place to another. The feelings of disgrace and shame seem to pain her, but she holds the construction of such an identity responsible for the consequences.

Mohajir identity is not only interrupted by religious belonging, it is also subverted by reference to national identity. GF feels that MQM and its members are 'enemies of the country'. When asked about her feelings regarding Pakistani identity, she replies with conviction:

Res: I am proud of my country. Last year I went to India and saw the atmosphere prevailing there. There I saw women doing labor from morning to noon and selling vegetables. I thanked God that we are at a better place compared to India and we are at peace.

Int: Did your children ever go to India?

Res: Yes two of my children, who are of the opinion that our condition is very good. We spent a month there and couldn't live there more than three months. What is in Pakistan is not in India.

Int: Do you think Pakistan should have come into existence?

Res: Yes if we are poor we are still better than India. I can't imagine living there. Only edibles there are cheap. We make a face when we hear of salaries like Rs. 2000 or 2500 but in India they are happy to hear of a salary of Rs.1200. So our country is quite a bit better.

GF's sense of Pakistani national identity is strong and she constructs this sense in opposition to 'enemy' India. She compares Pakistan with India and feels relieved that Pakistanis are not so poor and are at peace. By contrast, Indians are poor and have no peace. GF's Other is India and not the competing ethnic groups or the State. She ruptures the identification with *Mohajir* nationhood by referring to her nationalist belonging.

The strongest rejection of *Mohajir* identity at the very point of its construction, is evident in the narrative of IJ. IJ denounces the murder, killing and looting as the work of MQM boys who, according to her, are the root cause of Karachi's destruction. As she says

They are from MQM, who else is there you tell me? They are nobody but the MQM. I can say this with truthful guarantee and nothing happens against them. They have destroyed Karachi.

In an almost violent rejection of the MQM, and a passionate commitment to national identity, IJ says

A: I said that all the MQM people should die. I hope Allah does that. Honestly, I curse them in my heart because we are all human beings and they are cruel to humans. Is it not a bad thing, see whatever happens we are *Muhajir* also, are Pakistanis and you have given a bad name to all the *Muhajirs* with yourself. Was Pakistan created for this reason? So much cruelty. The Hindus did not even do as much as we are doing.

Q: Even though you are Urdu-speaking yourself are you with the MQM?

A: No I am not absolutely not, I do not belong to any one I only say that may Allah keep Pakistan secure.

IJ seems anguished that the MQM has given a bad name to all *Mohajirs*. She invokes her own *Mohajir* identity and connects it with being Pakistani. For her, the two are reconciled at different levels. However, in the words, 'may Allah keep Pakistan secure', she reveals her emotional investment in Pakistani identity and her fear that others may threaten this belonging. An interesting aspect of her narrative is her comparison of MQM boys with Hindus: 'The Hindus did not even do as much as we are doing'. Her Muslim Pakistani self is constructed in opposition to Hindu India. Hindus, and what they purportedly did during partition, form her yardstick for judging the violence of MQM boys. In other words, she asserts that what the MQM has done in Karachi is worse than what the Hindus did at partition.

IJ claims to have rejected the politicized form of *Mohajir* identity right from the beginning, at the very moment that initial forms of the identity were being articulated. As she explains:

In my view, the MQM has been the cruelest, they have done a great deal of killing and plundering and it has never happened like this in any time. In Bhutto's time and Ayub's time, we were not very aware. They did a lot of stoning and beat up the Pathans a lot. We the *Muhajirs*, remember, they made the lives of the Pathans very difficult. They would not utter a word. Then the time of the Sindhis came, according to me, the *Muhajirs* were unfair to them also. So much of this happened. I am only talking about Karachi and besides this I do not know what happened in Punjab and NWFP. Anyway, it was not like

this before but these people have a different style, these MQM people. I am really irritated by them after looking at their cruelty and injustice. You believe me, in the beginning my husband said that the MQM is very nice, but I would say that they were totally wrong. I have not voted for them to this day. You believe me that to this day we fight over this. My husband says that we must vote for the 'kite one' I say, "to hell with the 'kite people'"²⁹ I will never vote for them."

The above extract not only reflects IJ's staunch opposition to the MQM, it is also very revealing of her independent rejection of the politics of ethnic identity. She reveals that despite her husband's sense of belonging with the MQM, she refused to vote for the party. Right from the beginning, she said that they were 'totally wrong' and despite her husband's insistence that she vote for MQM, she responded with "to hell with the 'kite people', I will never vote for them". Her act is a rejection not only of the imposition of identity from the ethnic group, but also a defiance of her husband's politics. This is fairly uncommon in Pakistani society where most women tend to follow their male kin in their political choices. IJ resisted not only *Mohajir* politics, but also patriarchy. IJ's *Mohajir* identity is fractured by her national identity. The resistance seems to have come from the beginning, which belies the idea of an old, solid, wholesome and/or primordial identity. On the contrary, IJ highlights the tentativeness and fragility of a precarious identity, contested at the same time as its invention.

Women's lack of participation in the patriarchal construction of a monolithic *Mohajir* Selfhood, is also evident in NP's narrative. NP is not emotionally invested in the MQM, while her husband seems to offer blind loyalty to the party, a loyalty which NP finds disturbing. The extent of her husband's commitment to *Mohajir* politics is apparent in the following words of NP:

After leaving the children he said to me that 'I will leave wife, children, mother, father, everything but will not leave the organisation'...He used to go in processions (*jalsay juloos*) then he used to take me and the child, and used to say that even if I am not here, but you have to go to the processions.

NP contests the imposition of *Mohajir* identity and politics with reference to her religious identity by saying, 'Everybody is after all a Muslim, Allah's men, now people understand them different. They have formed separate organisations, but they all will go to the same place'. The latter statement is an answer to the question, 'what do you mean by *Mohajir*?'. When pressed by the interviewer to explain what she understands by the term *Mohajir*, NP declares it to be an ascribed identity in the following interchange:

- Q: You call yourself *Muhajir* (migrant)? What is the meaning of *Muhajir*, did you migrate (and) come?
- A: No (they) have just given the name (*laqab*)³⁰ of *Muhajir* hence we are *Muhajirs*.
- Q: Who gave the name (*laqab*)? We ourselves or somebody else?
- A: Altaf bhai (brother) gave it and we took it.
- Q: Then there would (have) been talk that why are (you) called *Muhajir*?
- A: I did not understand this.
- Q: One specific community is called *Muhajir*. (The) people of Punjab are called Punjabi, people of Sindh Sindhi. Imagine that you did not get married in the family and a match for some Punjabi came then would your family like it?
- A: My two sisters have married and gone into Punjabis. They are pure Punjabi.
- Q: What is the meaning of pure Punjabi?

29 The Kite was the MQM's election symbol.

30 *Laqab* means title.

A: Those that lived in Punjab (and) learnt to speak Punjabi.....My sister in law has married her daughter in Sindhis.

NP's explanations bring out the arbitrary, ascribed and temporary character of identity. The *Mohajir* identity was internalized because Altaf Bhai provided the title. Being Punjabi means living in the Punjab and speaking Punjabi. This is a territorial and linguistic basis of identity. How changeable, fluid and tentative such an identity can be, is reflected in NP's understanding that relocation, and the learning of another language can lead to a change in identity. Her two sisters married Punjabis and are described as a 'pure' Punjabi, which is defined as living in the Punjab and speaking the language. NP then hints at the fact that her sister-in-law's daughter may have become a Sindhi. She highlights the idea that identity is a historically evolving phenomenon and lacks the solidity of permanence or transcendence. While she thus punctures the myth of ethnic identity, she simultaneously rejects patriarchal domination when she asserts that she holds the MQM responsible for all the destruction, since if it had not been formed, 'my husband would not have been in the MQM, nor all this would have happened. There are other people who are living a life without an organization'. Women appear to have contested the identity at its inception and its core, and at the very moment of its articulation, even at the expense of annoying their husbands.

AY finds not simply another region, but another country India, as the reference point of her identity. She seems to feel disconnected to all the identities available in Pakistan, and her belonging seems to be connected to her past. The sense of dislocation in AY's construction of her world is evident in her words:

A: We are Indians. We are from India. Here people do not think so. They give no importance to *Mohajirs*.

Q:- I mean what should be your identity over here?

A:- Over here, this is our country, this is everything, this is our children's country. This is the identity of our children.

I think we should go back to India.

AY expresses a poignant dilemma in feeling connected to her ancestral part, while her children belong to Pakistan. Even when she says 'this is everything, this is our children's country, this is the identity of our children', she is unable to connect herself with their identity and ends the interview by saying 'I think we should go back to India'. The desire to return to the homeland (in this case India) is in conflict with her children's belonging to Pakistan. The partition of 1947 not only imagined and rigidified artificial boundaries on the landscape, it also created deep emotional fissures and tore apart families. Time got divided into *before* partition and *after* partition, and space into *there* and *here*. AY belongs to a world *before* partition, her children to a universe *after* independence. Emotionally she lives *there*, and her children live *here*. The disruptions and ruptures of partition are painfully obvious in similar dilemmas expressed by ZBQ, who feels that she left her 'motherland' and could not understand things in Pakistan. She and her children also occupy different times and a different space. As she says

Q. Don't the children want to go there?

R. They are not even ready to listen to the name of India. They say, Pakistan is everything for them and they will live or die here in their homeland. They however, allow me to go if I wish, but I can't live away from my children.

Caught between her identity as a mother and as an Indian, ZBQ feels torn but chooses motherhood over national belonging. However, the pain of dislocation, poignantly foregrounds the dilemma of false boundaries and forced borders. It is women who seem to be disconnected with their natal families

through the partitioning of space, time and people, as they are forced to choose to go with the husband rather than remain with their natal families.

MB, who migrated from Hyderabad, Deccan punctures the notion of a totalized identity by referring to an even larger, and more distant, belonging. MB strongly feels that Pakistan was created because of the *Mohajirs* and that is why they are fighting for their rights. She first foregrounds her ethnic identity as the very basis of the creation of Pakistan, and then uses this to claim rights. A little later in the interview, she draws upon the notion of originality and authenticity to argue that, 'we were originally Arabs. We are Arabs. We were the guardians.' This sense of a distant belonging seems to arise from a feeling of superiority associated with the place of Islam's origin. The reference to being guardians (most probably of Mecca), further shores up her claim to rights and her notion that Pakistan was created for the *Mohajirs*. The claim to religio-racist authenticity, and moral superiority (in the idea of being the guardians of the holy place), seems to bolster the claim to the *Mohajir* appropriation of Pakistan.

The tentativeness, permeability and recency of *Mohajir* identity are underscored in TK's description of a fluid and changeable identity. As she says

I would only like to be identified as a Pakistani rather than a *Muhajir* even though I am Urdu-speaking. There are Urdu-speaking people who come from the Punjab, they are also called this since they have started to speak Urdu, even though their mother tongue is Punjabi.

TK's reference to Punjabi Urdu-speaking people reflects the fluidity of *Mohajir* identity. Anyone who comes from other regions and begins to speak Urdu, comes to be called a *Mohajir*. This very elasticity belies the notion of fixed, frozen and rigid identities existing primordially. TK prefers to identify with her national identity as she fails to see how the Urdu language can be the basis of identity. The sense of being lost people, unsure of who they are comes out movingly in TK's following words:

There are four provinces in Pakistan and likewise there are four ethnic groups also. The Punjabis speak Punjabi, the Sindhis speak Sindhi and in Sindh you have Karachi also. So how can we identify ourselves to others? When friends are sitting together in school or college they call themselves Punjabi and ask us who we are. Then we feel a lot of hesitation because we don't know who we are. If we are Sindhis, we should know how to speak Sindhi. It is the tradition that Sindhis must know how to speak Sindhi. Then the other girls say that if you are no one then you must be Hindustani. We say no we are Urdu-speaking so then they say that we are *Muhajirs*. By *Muhajir* they mean that we must be members of the MQM. Then there is killing and the Pathans are killing the Sindhis and most of the Sindhis have killed the *Muhajirs*. They have done this to *Muhajirs* mostly and you can see in most jobs there are Punjabis and Pathans. If we go to them and ask them for jobs, they are not ready to accept *Muhajirs*.

TK's observations manifest a number of elements of the *Mohajir* construction. It seems like a category in which anyone who does not belong, gets placed. In this sense, it is akin to the question: Other, in official forms. TK's friends seem to be saying that 'if you are no one then you must be Hindustani'. Feeling uncomfortable with an association with India, TK tells them that they are Urdu-speaking. This gets them the label of *Mohajir*, which is considered synonymous with the MQM. TK's dilemma comes out in the statement that 'we don't know who we are'. An undefined, fluid and labile identity, *Mohajir* can be used

in political mobilization by *Mohajirs* themselves, who can use it to make rights claims, and by Sindhis, who can use it to deny them rights by arguing that they do not belong to the land. The absence of belonging thus also seems to be a constitutive part of *Mohajir* identity.

Multiple levels of caste, class and ethnic identity are interwoven in AK's narrative, which is based on generational memory. Her information is received from her parents, and her own experience of her 'original' belonging is absent. In this sense, it is a secondary narrative, representing the remembering processes of a generation before her. She does not refer either to her national or religious identity while trying to understand her sense of self. Notions of superiority/inferiority and caste prejudice, make her story different from the ones discussed above. AK is worth quoting here:

First of all I want to tell you that I have not seen India. I don't know what India is like but I have been hearing things about it and they would tell me. My father was from Agra in India. We are from Agra Taj. And my father would tell us that our grandfather traded. He did business in marble stones so my grandfather had a shop in the Taj Mahal, that is, in Agra. Father told us that this is why we were called tajgun. But in India we were called people from Agra. One is ashamed of being called this now because people say that the people from Agra are very bad tempered and foul mouthed. And they are known for swearing and for being ill mannered. And they are shoemakers. And they are cobblers. Because it is true and it is a specialty of Agra, that I have seen and you must have seen that the business over there was such that shoes were made there. Maybe because most of the people who are here from Agra are shoemakers. So that is why people call us this and it doesn't seem nice. That is what we are called. But my father and I were from India, from Agra. But my mother was from Ajmir and my in-laws are from Allahbad. That is what I have heard but I don't know anything about these places. I don't know from where? But my husband told me that they were landlords.

AK's identity arises from an unseen place, of which she only knows through what she has heard. The reference point of her sense of self, in a historical perspective, is Agra. There is a sense of dislocation at the level of community, but not personally as in some other narratives, since she has never seen these places herself. AK refers to the class identity of her shoemaker ancestors with a sense of shame as the 'people from Agra are very bad tempered and foul mouthed...known for swearing and for being ill-mannered'. *Mohajir* identity, in most cases, prides itself on superior and higher manners and sophisticated ways of behaving. The husband, on the other hand, claims a landlord background, implying a richer class and superior origins. AK's conflict stems from her ascribed identification with *Mohajir* people, and her ancestral belonging to the 'ill-mannered, bad-tempered people of Agra'. The reference to identity location outside Pakistan, belies the myth of national identity and also interrupts the idea of being a *Mohajir*. To some extent, this demonstrates how fictional was the rupture of partition, at least in terms of identity, the two-nation theory notwithstanding. Belonging for many is still traced to India, and to regional places in India, thus transcending the politically demarcated, and militarily defended, territories.

AK, however, rejects her identification with *Mohajir* identity, contesting it from the basis of religious commonality. She says,

I feel ashamed, I don't feel proud [of being *Mohajir*]. I marvel that there is no one more shameless than we are because we have been left no where trusting a *Muhajir* (she is probably referring to Altaf Hussain). We are lowly in everyone's eyes and we have no status.

They should work together and not be disunited that so and so has not done this or that. We should think that we are all Muslims and we are one in a house and one in this country even if there are Christians or Hindus or *Muhajirs*.

AK's appeal for oneness is based on being a Muslim, despite her recognition that there are Christians and Hindus in the country. This is a rhetorical device towards desired equality despite religious and ethnic differences. She stresses the importance of being 'one in a house' connecting the feeling of nationalism with family. The invocation of the notion of oneness/commonality, is usually done by powerful groups that seek to deny difference, and override the diversity of social existence. However, religious or ethnic minority groups, which often contest the imposed notion of oneness, can also deploy this strategy as a route to equality. AK uses the idea of unity and oneness as a way of making claims to equality within the state. This enables, or perhaps forces, her to weaken her link with *Mohajir* identity of which she feels ashamed.

The sense of a fractured, dislocated and displaced identity is evident in the following poignant words of FM, who has been quoted earlier regarding her fear and dislike of Bengalis. Later in the interview she says

We were happy for Pakistan but we were also very gloomy for our own country. When we got into the train I was weeping and asked my mother to leave me with my grandfather, but she didn't for she knew 'who will come back'. Then we reached Pakistan and found some Bengalis were also good.

These words reflect not only the pain of a forced rupture, but also underline the falsehood of an inflicted nationalism. FM expresses joy over the creation of Pakistan, but was 'very gloomy for our own country'. Her feelings of belonging here are clearly for India, which is described as 'our own country'. She wanted to be left behind but her mother's words express the sorrow of a violent loss and separation, 'who will come back'. There is a vague, but perceptible, sense of nostalgia and yearning in the latter words, perhaps a deep-rooted longing to return knowing it will never happen. FM seems to have been a reluctant migrant, forced to break away from her home never to come back. For her, the migration fails to become the basis of identity. However, interestingly she 'found that some Bengalis were also good'. This is a reversal of her abhorrence for Bengalis expressed earlier. Acknowledgement of her own feelings of loss, render her softer towards another ethnic group.

Identities are seldom formed for good. With time they change, take on new elements, discard some aspects, develop further or even degenerate. Ethnic identities, as recognized by Inayatullah, move through various stages of politicization, which takes them to different levels.³¹ The *Mohajir Qaumi Movement* was transformed into *Muttahida* (Joint, unified) *Qaumi Movement*, after a certain level of politicization. This happened when it required a larger membership and sought to become a more inclusive identity. FRC explains the reason for the shift:

It is Mutahida, it has been made this way. If we are talking from a platform, then we are talking at a Pakistani level. It was very important to form Mutahida because of which level are you talking from. You cannot say that you are talking at the *Muhajir* level.

The movement was widened to include other people at the point at which the term *Mohajir* made it restricted. However, this indicates a transformation of the very notion of an ethnic identity, as the word

31 See Inayatullah for how identities develop through stages and move through levels of politicization. p. 13.

Mutahida broadens the concept to include, possibly, non-Urdu speaking people. For a political movement it is important to be inclusive and broad-based (as numbers matter in electoral politics), but for a bounded identity, its exclusiveness is a defining trait. At this point, there seems to be a tension within the notion of *Mohajir* identity, brought about by political and electoral imperatives. FRC's idea of talking at the Pakistani level, seems to shift her sense of Selfhood to the national level, thereby undermining the very identity that she initially adopted. This slide between levels, and between national and sub-national identities, reflects the failure of the process of nation-building, so fundamental for the formation of the modern nation-state. Regional and ethnic consciousness, seems to continually puncture national consciousness with its uncomfortable stirrings and irritating presence.

Women seem to move between the fluid levels of identity, and tend to perpetually cross the permeable boundaries of national, regional, ethnic, religious and ancestral identities. This suggests the changeability and incoherence of the notion of the national or sub-national, and the arbitrariness of territorial divisions of the world. The tension between conflicting identities is eloquently brought out in FRC's understanding that 'there is this slogan of *Mohajir*, I didn't know what it was, then I realized that it was wrong. So I say, we Pakistanis are our own enemies, there is no third enemy...I want to tell the coming generations that they are only Pakistanis. And they should remain Pakistanis. They should work for Pakistan'. In her concluding statements, she reverts assertively to national identity as the only true identity.

Women interject in the discourse on *Mohajir* identity construction in a number of ways. One theme that runs across this discourse is of betrayal by the leaders and people of the community. For example, KHB says

Our nation is hypocritical. The Punjabis, the Pathans and others unite but the *Muhajirs* are always disunited. If they were one, the Haqiqis would not have been formed. If they were one, this organization would have really risen. We cannot do anything. These Haqiqi people are after our children. If we do not allow them to go, they say that we will take them by force. This is how they have become our enemies.

KHB's feelings about the terror of the Haqiqi group, are shared by many women who feel that initially they were very impressed with the MQM, but later the party forcibly collected money and murdered members of its own community. The betrayal is attributed to disunity within the community, and each faction blames the government as well as the other faction, for the unspeakable level of violence unleashed upon the people. Total loyalty and blind following, which ostensibly characterize the ethnic movement, seem to be absent as so many points of disruption tear the fabric of identity. Women's voices, arising from multiple levels of discourse, do not appear in the mainstream identity discourse of MQM. Women, at times, seem to be the Others of the movement, the outsiders, whose voices are silenced in the overwhelming need to project a unified and monolithic image.

In public and political discourse, *Mohajir* identity, like other national and sub-national identities, is constructed as a unified, homogenous and monolithic wholeness. Ethnic claims are premised on a solidified, integrated and unitary identity as the basis for rights and benefits from the state. Upon closer examination, it appears that such an identity is a mythological construction and does not reflect a reality that is complex and multi-faceted. Women's narratives reveal a wholly different picture, which shows that when the voices of the excluded are added to the discourse, the 'realities' look different. Women are interlocutors in the fabrication and deployment of *Mohajir* identity. Their interventions reveal many cracks in the seemingly smooth surface of ethnic consciousness. Women's voices refer to the myriad

sources of interruption of the identity at the very moment of its birth. They bring out the contradictions, ruptures, dissonances and disruptions in the apparently neat text of ethnic articulation.

The many sources of resistance to the mainstream construction of *Mohajir* identity, arise from other forms of identity including religious, national, supra-national, regional, and even familial belonging. Women participate in the discourse as interrogators of the dominant vision created by the leaders. While many women participate in it with pride and a sense of belonging, there are others who fracture the unity of ethnic consciousness by reference to other identities from the past and the present. The space of women's identity is geographically wide including India and Arabia, and the time is continuous including the past, present and future. Within these space-time dimensions, women move fluidly and, occasionally imperceptibly, between one layer and another of identity. The multiple levels of identity that women's voices reflect, tear apart the hegemonic fabric stitched so meticulously by the demagogues of the party.

Theoretical Implications

The findings in this paper do not endorse Akmal Hussain's contention that individuals tend to 'seek security in the most proximate identity, and to assert with militancy this parochial identity as an emblem of his membership within a parochial group'.³² Hussain seems to focus only on men and, in particular, the leaders of the MQM. When women's voices are heard, the 'parochial group' seems to disintegrate into a cacophony of disruptive voices. By claiming that ethnic and sub-national groups have 'an intense emotional charge rooted in primordial loyalties',³³ Hussain seems to take for granted that identities are already-made, pre-given 'primordial' facts. The argument presented here is that identities are new, are invented and the appeal to the past is often an ahistorical attempt to provide the identity with a timeless 'primordial' prop.

This paper lends support to Hamza Alavi's argument that 'scholarly perceptions of ethnicity have, in recent years, tended to discount notions that treated it as a manifestation of primordial sentiments, a culturally predetermined social fact that exists *sui generis*'.³⁴ In agreement with Alavi, it is asserted here that the ethnic category emerges simultaneously with the forging of a community. This study also lends support to Alavi's understanding that the presentation of an ethnic community as an already existing social 'fact', and as sacrosanct, serves political functions. However, Alavi's analysis does not take the gender factor into account, and, as a result, one important aspect of ethnic formations seems to be missing in his analysis. When the voices of the excluded, the downtrodden, and the dispossessed are added to the understandings of identity constructions, the ethnic terrain looks different. The absence of women's perspectives has been a major roadblock in understanding ethnicity, and such perspectives can greatly enrich the study of ethnic consciousness.

Women's perspectives are also missing from Rajni Kothari's analysis of the role of the state, modernity and development in the creation of ethnic violence. This absence enables him to argue that ethnic identities have always existed³⁵, a statement which implies that communities were always homogenous or monolithic. While Kothari recognizes that ethnicity seems to arise as a reaction to modernity, and the

32 Akmal Hussain, 'The Karachi Riots of December 1986: The Crisis of State and Civil Society in Pakistan', in Veena Das' (ed) (1990). *Mirrors of Violence*, p, 192.

33 Akmal Hussain, 'The Karachi Riots of December 1986: The Crisis of State and Civil Society in Pakistan', p, 193.

34 Hamza Alavi, 'Politics of Ethnicity in India and Pakistan', in Alavi, H.& John Harris (eds) (1989). *Sociology of Developing Societies: South Asia*, p, 223.

35 Rajni Kothari, 'Ethnicity', in David, Kumar & Santasilan Kadirgamar (eds)(1989). *Ethnicity: Identity, Conflict and Crisis*, p, 20.

forced homogenization of the world, which threatens diversity, he fails to discern its fundamentally patriarchal character, especially as it makes a move toward grabbing state power. The insertion of women's perspectives in the discourse on ethnicity, nationalism and sub-nationalism, seems to be important if ethnicity has to be understood in all its complexity. Such complexity defies simplistic explanations or a singular definition of ethnic identity. The absence of women from an analysis of ethnic identity formation is discernible in the work of Akbar Zaidi, Akmal Hussain, Irfan Hussain and Farida Shaheed, who otherwise provide provocative insights into the ethnic conflict. However, all of them offer valuable explanations and analyses of the role of the state, political parties and cultural dimensions within ethnic conflict.

The emphasis on women's roles within ethnic movements in Khawar Mumtaz's work is useful, although she focuses mostly on outward characteristics of women's participation, such as their numbers and the symbols of femininity employed by the women activists. However, the use of sexist language and imagery is an important insight provided by her work. Sheen Farrukh also concentrates on women's subservient roles in a highly masculine movement. In spite of a fairly descriptive level of analysis, her work is useful in providing an overview of women's relation to the movement. The analyses of both Khawar Mumtaz and Sheen Farrukh are important in order to understand the genesis and development of the *Mohajir* movement and its gender dimension.

Coming from a different perspective and methodology, Nafisa Shah looks at the details of the impact of conflict on women. Her analysis of the role of the state and its law-enforcing agencies is a significant contribution to the discourse on ethnic conflict. In our study, we have tried to consciously go beyond the impact of the violence upon women's lives. We have tried to understand various other aspects including the sense of self, nation, state, belonging and identification in relation to the movement and the identity. We have also tried to understand the ways in which women fracture and interrupt the ongoing construction of *Mohajir* identity, even at the point of its inception. It is hoped that future researchers will go beyond what we have tried to accomplish, and add further dimensions to the current understanding of ethnic identity formation and conflict.

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