

Muhajir and Pashtun of Katti Pahari: Socio-Psychological Barriers to Peace

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Introduction

Karachi, like many other mega-cities, is laden with political, social, and even criminal fault lines, many of which seem to culminate around ethnicity. For the inhabitants of the city, the locality of 'Katti Pahari' (the cut mountain) comprising primarily of the Pashtun and Muhajir communities seems to embody the ethnic fault line.

One of the bloodiest "ethnic" riots, mainly between the Muhajir and Pashtun happened in 1985, when Bushra Zaidi, a young college girl was killed in a road accident involving "yellow devil", a bloody nickname for Karachi buses.¹ Whereas the level of conflict fluctuated over the following decades, still the incidents of violence between these ethnic groups continued. While the level of violence has decreased since the government commissioned the Rangers' operation in 2013, still signs of animosity and a latent conflict between these ethnic communities remain. In other words, there exists a form of 'Negative Peace'², with the possibility of violence as soon as the security forces recede.

This paper attempts to understand the phenomenon of latent conflict by exploring conflict and peace narratives of the Muhajir and Pashtuns living in adjacent neighborhoods of Aligarh Colony, Qasba Colony, Banaras Colony, and Nusrat Bhutto Colony, formed as a result of the protracted conflict. These neighborhoods are located in the shadow of Katti Pahari (also known as Khasa Hill), at the edge of Orangi, Karachi's largest and one of the biggest katchi abadis (squatter settlements) in the world. The paper specifically explores how people of Muhajir and Pashtun backgrounds conceptualize peace and violence, and how this conceptualization is influenced by their re-

spective ethnic, historical, and cultural backgrounds, and social reality.

Conceptual Framework

Laurent Guyer in his book 'Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City' maintains that initially, the violent confrontation between the Muhajir and Pashtun had little to do with ethnicity and was primarily related to heroin trade profits being invested in the transport and the unofficial real estate sector. As intercultural frictions and economic contestation spiraled into aggression, violent and political entrepreneurs reframed this confrontation as an 'ethnic' conflict.³ Whatever may be the underlying reasons for the conflict, this research suggests that the conflict between the Muhajir and Pashtun communities in Karachi may be characterized as intractable because it includes the four necessary features: being protracted, violent, perceived as irresolvable (by the local ethnic groups involved), and demands extensive material and psychological investments to cope successfully with the situation.⁴

Why it has become intractable requires exploration. Ervin Staub suggests that violent conflicts cause physically and mentally painful experiences for the people and groups involved. Thus, attaining basic psychological needs, for example the feeling of safety and positive identity becomes a challenge, while stress and fear become a norm, with the urge to win the conflict or at least not to lose it.⁵

In such protracted conflicts, societies develop a socio-psychological infrastructure to cope with these challenges. Daniel Bar-Tal suggests that three mutually interrelated elements: collective memories, ethos of conflict, and collective emotional orientation constitute this infrastructure. In this cognitive-affective repertoire, societal beliefs are the basic components of collective memories and define the ethos of the conflict.⁶ These beliefs are frequently on the public agenda, are discussed by members of society, serve as relevant references in decisions made by the lead-

¹ Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist conflicts and collective violence in South Asia*. Vol. 10 (California: University of California Press, 1997), 186.

² Negative Peace: Discussed in detail by Johan Galtung, this term refers to the absence of violence, where, for example, a ceasefire is enacted, a negative peace will ensue. Where as Positive peace includes positive content such as restoration of relationships, creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict. As cited/quoted in Johan Galtung, *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization* (Sage, 1996).

³ Laurent Guyer, *Karachi: Ordered disorder and the struggle for the city* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴ Louis Kriesberg, "Intractable Conflicts" in *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*, ed. E. Weiner (New York: Continuum, 1998), 332-342. As cited in Bar-Tal, "Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts," 1430-1453.

⁵ Ervin Staub "Notes on cultures of violence, cultures of caring and peace, and the fulfillment of basic human needs," *Political psychology* 24, no. 1 (2003): 1-21.

⁶ Daniel Bar-Tal, "Sociopsychological foundations of intractable conflicts," *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 11 (2007): 1430-1453.

ers, and thus influence chosen courses of action.⁷ It is also through these collective beliefs or perceptions that groups form narratives about various social issues.

Hypothesis & Methodology

It is hypothesized that Muhajir and Pashtuns of Katti Pahari have developed divergent socio-psychological infrastructures, which are reflected in each ethnic group's perceptions of peace and violence and fuel the cycle of animosity between them. To test this hypothesis, semi-structured interviews were conducted in one of the most densely populated areas of Karachi. Within District West, localities of two towns adjacent to Katti Pahari, namely SITE and Orangi, and in District Central, North Nazimabad Town adjacent to the northeast end of Katti Pahari were visited for interviews. Additionally, few interviews were conducted in squatter settlements situated on Khasa Hills, which has been cut to make a link road between Orangi Town and North Nazimabad Town, hence the name 'Katti Pahari', the cut mountain.

Analysis

During the interviews, almost all the interviewees demonstrated the effects of the ongoing protracted conflict in their area and members of both ethnic groups talked about the same issues and concerns: the safety of life in their locality and city, and the security of 'rozee roti' (job and earning bread) for their family. Their thinking and memory, shared experiences, and perceptions of the other community were assessed according to the constituents of socio-psychological infrastructure.

The Qasba-Aligarh Massacre was part of larger Pashtun-Muhajir 'ethnic' riots, also known as 'The Karachi Riots' from December 12-17, 1986. These riots erupted in the wake of a military operation, codenamed 'Clean-up' at Sohrab Goth.⁸ On December 12, army trucks surrounded the area and bulldozed houses to remove residents, to stop arms and drug dealing. Just before this operation, the police entered Orangi township, a predominantly Muhajir area, and seized arms and bombs.



1986 Karachi Riots⁹

On December 14, several hundred Pashtun men armed with Kalashnikovs attacked the Muhajir residential areas of Qasba, Aligarh, and Sector I-D. Hundreds of Muhajir were killed and their houses, businesses, and shops were burnt in what is remembered as the "Qasba Aligarh Massacre".¹⁰

Collective Memory

Though the complexity of this conflict keeps the chain of events from falling into a simple cause-and-effect equation, the interviewees narrated recollections of the event in black and white. Among the interviewees, two particularly stand out because of their clear reminiscences of that specific day and also because their memories seemed closely related but dissimilar at the same time.

Fatima Bibi, a Muhajir age 65-75 remembered shifting to Aligarh some time before the 1986 attack. While sitting in her Aligarh home's veranda, she recalled the day of the attack:

"My husband had died, my son was young and there was no one to support us, so my daughters and I worked at a Pathan's (Pashtun Man's) Mill. We woke up that morning and went to work. While at work Hajji Bhai (Pashtun mill owner) came inside, slamming the door open with his scooter and dragging the vehicle indoors with him. We were all startled thinking why he had brought the scooter inside while normally he parked it

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sohrab Goth: a suburb of Gadap Town in Karachi, notorious as an area sprawling with criminals and miscreants.

⁹ Ali Chisti, "Qasba Aligarh Massacre: a forgotten story," Digital Image, *Blogspot*, July 8, 2009, accessed August 25, 2017, <http://akchishti.blogspot.nl/2009/07/qasba-aligarh-massacre-forgotten-story.html>.

¹⁰ Charles H. Kennedy, "The politics of ethnicity in Sindh," *Asian survey* 31, no. 10 (1991): 948.

outside the door. He seemed to be in a hurry, and told us to sit down, and closed the door behind him. Our hearts sank and we said, ‘Hajji Bhai! Open the door’. When I opened the door, what I saw was a swarm of Pakhtuns (Pashtuns) while firing was going on. When we came towards our area, people said to us, ‘everyone is running, are you coming this way to die?’. When we reached home, we heard that Pathans have reached the nearby street. So, we ran back with the children. We came back home the second day. The situation was horrible. (hastily touching her ears in an inward gesture of pardon) ‘Tauba, tauba’ (roughly translated to ‘God forbid!’), So many were dead.”¹¹

She expressed her mistrust towards the Pashtuns saying, “When one sees the Pashtun grandmothers and daughters, it doesn’t seem that they can harm you. But when something is about to happen, they leave for Banaras. And then I don’t know, they just assemble and attack. Wonder how they find out.”¹² Upon being asked, where she hid with her children after running from her house, she answered, “Where could have we gone, back there, at the Pathan’s place!”¹³

Sayed Samar, a Pashtun resident of Katti Pahari came to Karachi from Mingora, Swat around 1958-59 before Ayub Khan imposed Martial Law and lived in PIB (Pir Ilahi Buksh) Colony before shifting to Katti Pahari in 1990. He initially worked in a mill and then was employed by the army. He shared:

“In 1985, I was in PIB colony, and was listening to what was happening. There was an incident involving a girl (Bushra Zaidi), and then there was the Aligarh incident (in 1986). When the attack on Aligarh took place, what happened was that two Pashtun brothers (not literal brothers) were going their own way, when they were fired upon and killed by the Muhajir who had climbed up the mountain.

(You know), our Pashtun culture is such; there was an

announcement (from the mosque) in the area about the matter. I had a friend here, he also belonged to Mingora, he phoned me that ‘Samar Sahab, do me a favor, please come here’. He said ‘we want to attack Aligarh, see they killed our men without any reason’. So, I came from there, but before I reached here, the attack had started. Coming here was quite difficult (because of the blockade). I hired a taxi, came from PIB colony via Garden (Town), a longer route.”¹⁴

He did not elaborate any further on his role in the events that followed, but clearly, in his mind, the actions taken by the Pashtun that day were justified. Both Fatima Bibi and Sayed Samar presented a narrative of events that took place on 14th December 1986 in a way that indicated their unique side of the story and met their unique ethnic group’s prevalent needs.

Further, during both interviews, youngsters, the majority of whom were not present in 1986, were listening to the story. Five of Fatima Bibi’s grandchildren were present at her cramped-up Aligarh house while at the small school on Katti Pahari, young school teachers in their early to mid-twenties eagerly listened to the old Pashtun man’s story, known to them as the trusted Samar Baba. The discussion that followed with these younger members of Muhajir and Pashtun ethnic groups revealed how they had in fact inherited the biases from the older generation, thus suggesting that societal beliefs are based on collective memory as they are shared and treated by many members of the community as truthful and valid accounts of the past.

Cairns & Roe argue that in an intractable conflict, collective memory evolves to present the history of the conflict to societal members.¹⁵ The narrative develops over time, and describes the conflict’s beginning and its course, providing a coherent and meaningful picture,¹⁶ which is both black and white, and enables a thrifty, quick, unambiguous, and simple understanding of the history of the conflict.¹⁷ Thus for Samar Baba, the events of Qasba-Aligarh

¹¹ Fatima Bibi, interview by author, Aligarh Colony, Karachi, December 10, 2016.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sayed Samar, interview by author, Katti Pahari, Karachi, December 10, 2016.

¹⁵ Ed Cairns and Micheal D. Roe, “Introduction: Why memories in conflict?” In *In The role of memory in ethnic conflict*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 3-8, seen in Bar-Tal, “Sociopsychological foundations,” 1430-1453.

¹⁶ Devine-Wright, “A theoretical overview of memory and conflict”, 9-33, seen in Bar-Tal, “Sociopsychological foundations,” 1430-1453.

¹⁷ Ibid.

were a straightforward retribution by the Pashtuns for the injustice against their community while for Fatima Bibi it was nothing but plain cruelty against her community.

Ethos of Conflict

There is a sense of self-pity, and being on the right side of the conflict in each ethnic group living around Katti Pahari. In remembering the Qasba-Aligarh attack, Ghulam Rasool, an elderly Muhajir man working at a grocery store in Orangi Town, stated, “We lived in Bukhari Colony and saw Aligarh being looted in front of our eyes. Now there are all Pathans in Bukhari Colony.” When asked, “So you sold and left?” He exclaimed, “Sold! Sold what? We were forcefully handed over (nominal amount of) money and pushed out. Isn’t this cruelty? There is no one to protect us. Even the police do not protect us. The protection is only for them (Pashtuns). It is just wrong.”

Further, ethnicity seems to bind members with the feeling of brotherhood and unity while allowing for self-glorification. Haroon, a Pashtun polio worker and Union Council Communications Support Officer at the Polio Center situated to the north-east of Katti Pahari shared, “When we go to a Pashtun house, they ask us, why we are doing this work. I introduce myself that I am your Pashtun brother, I came from Swat. Look if polio drops were a bad thing, I wouldn’t have come to you. We give this to our own children as well, you should do the same. A Pathan respects a Pathan more” he said. “They see our dress, they say he is here for a purpose; respect him! Pathan has this quality, if a Pathan goes to a house as a guest, he is honored. They often say I am giving these drops to my children because of you; otherwise, I am not keen at all to do so.”¹⁸

Rashid, a Muhajir man in his early thirties exhibited a perfect example of self-glorification while stating, “Sometimes when the situation is unstable, people let others hide in their house until the situation boils down and it is safe for them to go home. Even a few Pashtuns have some humanity left in them and do the same. But we make sure that if a Pashtun brother is stuck in our area, we escort him

to safety. If we do the same as they do, that you killed two of ours we shall kill five or ten of yours, then there will be no solution to this problem.”¹⁹

Under a prolonged intractable conflict, societies develop a particular ‘ethos of conflict’ that generates a particular dominant orientation of society by providing a clear picture of the conflict as a point of reference supported by the direction, goals, conditions, requirements, and the images of both the in-group and the rival.²⁰ Both collective memory and the ethos of conflict complement each other and together constitute a solid and holistic narrative that societal members from each group share.²¹

Collective Emotional Orientation

Along with societal beliefs, the socio-psychological infrastructure of a group in situations of intractable conflict includes a collective emotional orientation. Societies caught up in an intractable conflict tend to be dominated by a number of collective emotional orientations, the most explicit being fear but may also include hatred, anger, guilt, and pride.²²

Fear was the most common theme encountered. Although everyone acknowledged that physical violence had receded (interviews were conducted in December 2016) mainly due to the efforts of the federal government and Rangers, many still feared this as temporary, and thus a form of ‘Negative Peace’. For example, while talking about ‘fear’, Fatima Bibi, an old Muhajir Lady from Aligarh Colony, talked about how she was anxious when her young grandsons went out for work²³ and she prayed to Allah for their safety as she mentioned that one of them was recently mugged at gunpoint. One of Fatima Bibi’s teenage granddaughters studying at an all-girls school also expressed her concern about safety, stating “People come and fire at the mosque! No place is safe”.²⁴

The dynamics of fear limit mobility and force residents to rethink and reshape their lives and movement in the area. Hina, a young Pashtun teacher at a charitable school in

¹⁸ M. Haroon Khan, interview by author, Nusrat Bhutto Colony, Karachi, December 14, 2016.

¹⁹ Rashid, interview by author, Aligarh Colony, Karachi, December 10, 2016.

²⁰ Daniel Bar-Tal, *Shared beliefs in a society: Social psychological analysis* (Sage Publications, 2000), seen in Bar-Tal, “Sociopsychological foundations,” 1430-1453.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Fatima Bibi, interview by author, Aligarh Colony, Karachi, December 10, 2016.

²⁴ Fatima Bibi’s granddaughter, interview by author, Aligarh Colony, Karachi, December 10, 2016.

her early twenties, shared her emotions of anxiety saying that earlier the situation was very scary. “No one knew if a bullet would come from here or there. In the past, we did not go beyond the Qasba Modh (beyond Qasba Colony). Our elders at home stopped us from going out.”²⁵

Haroon, a Pashtun polio worker and Union Council Communications Support Officer talked about the unrest of 2011 caused by political, ethnic, and religious violence in his locality. He stated that “A few years back things were so bad that I was not able to leave the house. In the place where I live in Qasba Colony, Muhajirs fired from the bottom (of the hill), and Pathans²⁶ (Pashtun) fired from the top, so we did not leave the house. We were isolated, could not even go out to buy ration, and ate whatever we had at home.” He further said, “I was working here (Local Government Clinic and Polio Center) at that time. I emailed and asked for leave as I wasn’t able to get out of the house. I told the administration that I would return as soon as the situation improved. My leave was approved. Everyone was aware of the conditions, there was no work, and all businesses were closed. Nobody could come or go. Everyone knew what was happening here. The Polio Campaign was also adversely affected.”²⁷ This indicates the linkages between the ‘fear for life’ and the ‘fear for livelihood’.

This fear also seems to inhibit youth energies for constructive and peace-oriented work. Yahya Khan, a young Pashtun government school teacher with an MA English degree stated that “the situation is dire, it saddens me. I was born here, and plan to spend my life here, however long or short it may be”. While “one can work a lot through politics, but I am not in politics of course. There are several risks involved in politics...” as “when I observe my surroundings, this wealth and happiness is short-lived and the end is horrible!”²⁸ In his view, working for peace through politics is dangerous and his fear is grounded in reality as thousands of political activists have been killed since the ethnopolitical rift between the Muhajir and Pashtun started in Karachi more than three decades ago.

The continued fear experienced by communities living around Katti Pahari seems to transcend gender, class, age group, and economic status. The fear of the possibility of actual ethnic violence erupting in the streets is a result of latent ethnic animosity and the general lack of justice in society. In essence, the expression of fear, for each group appeared to translate into trepidation, anger, and mistrust towards the opposite group, be it in terms of direct or indirect violence. Even when they talked about target killings, extortion, mugging, or broad-spectrum injustice, the implication was that the perpetrators belonged to the other group. This indicates the bias and some degree of hatred toward the opposing group, which can rekindle the conflict. Allport states that hate has behavioral implications as it is an “enduring organization of aggressive impulses toward a person or class of persons, since it is composed of habitual bitter feelings and accusatory thoughts, it constitutes a stubborn structure in the mental-emotional life of the individual”.²⁹

Conclusion & Policy Recommendations

The analysis suggests that the presence of socio-psychological infrastructures in both Muhajir and Pashtun communities residing in the Katti Pahari area of Karachi encompass a unique set of societal beliefs and perceptions of collective memory and ethos of conflict, as well as collective emotional orientations of fear, hatred, and anger of the other. As these infrastructures were institutionalized and dispersed, and with time, they became prisms through which members collected information and interpreted new experiences, fueling the cycle of violence and animosity.

But, in contrast to the hostility, mistrust, and contrasting narratives, the study also found instances or pockets of relative harmony like the cricket ground where young Pashtun and Muhajir played together, or the dedicated multi-ethnic staff at the Nusrat Bhutto Colony Government Clinic, who fulfilled their duty towards the community without bias even in times of conflict and violence. These examples can help picture the possibility of a more cohesive environment around Katti Pahari and help for-

²⁵ Hina, interview by author, Katti Pahari, Karachi, December 16, 2016.

²⁶ Haroon was the only Pashtun who referred to Pashtuns (including himself) as Pathan. Probably, due to his regular interaction with Muhajirs at his work place and in the field while administering polio drops. Muhajirs normally use the term ‘Pathan’ for Pashtuns, and many of the Pashtuns find it derogatory towards themselves.

²⁷ M. Haroon Khan, interview by author, Nusrat Bhutto Colony, Karachi, December 14, 2016.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gordon W. Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, (Addison-Wesley, 1954), 63, seen in Bar-Tal, “Sociopsychological foundations,” 1430-1453.

ulate a line of action for conflict transformation by deconstructing and transforming socio-psychological infrastructures in the long term.

The following are recommended for this purpose:

Recondition a Collective Memory that currently shows the whole opposite group in a bad light. Therefore, be factual and objective. Ensure that the immediate culprits are held to account and the whole ethnic community is not targeted.

Challenge the Narratives of each ethnic group that consider their own goals just, while reserving the virtues of their morality. This can be achieved through inter-community interactions such as collective training, working, and peace-building at the grassroots, middle-range, and top-level leadership.

Build Civic Institutions to meet basic human needs inclusive of basic goods and services for all regardless of ethnicity and political affiliation, while encouraging community participation for peacebuilding and sustainable development.



Sarah Wasti Ayub has contributed to an edited book by SBL Press and has volunteered for International Church of Copenhagen and Tværkulturelt Center. Currently she is on parental leave.

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