

## Interpreting Ethnic Movements in Pakistan

CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT

The paper looks into the causes behind various ethnic movements in Pakistan and finds that these identity movements do not stem from primordial collective bonds. Rather, they originate from a motivation to promote specific interests, political as well as socio-economic. Centralisation of the state is an additional factor contributing to the ethnic tensions in the country as it leads to a strong feeling of vulnerability among the smaller groups.

The main debate among the social scientists studying nationalism and ethnicity opposes “modernists”—for whom both things are constructions responsible for highly malleable identities— and “primordialists”—for whom these phenomena directly emerge from cultural features. The latter defines political identities by the “power of the ‘givens’ of place, tongue, blood, looks, and way-of-life to shape an individual’s notion of who, at bottom, he is and with whom, indissolubly, he belongs is rooted in the non-rational foundations of personality” [Geertz (1963), p. 128]. For the “primordialists”, collective identities are largely immemorial, sub-conscious and beyond reason. Incidentally, this is the way the nationalists look at their nation. So far as the realm of South Asian studies is concerned, Francis Robinson has explained “Muslim separatism” in British India in the name of these “primordialist” concepts, by arguing that these Muslims “had, in fact, a sense of Muslim identity, and they had it largely independently of levels of social mobilisation in their society, although increased levels of social mobilisation might make them more conscious of it”.<sup>1</sup> This approach was perfectly in tune with the “two nation theory” of Jinnah for whom Muslims formed a separate nation by the virtue of their own culture.

The primordialist viewpoint has been strongly criticised by Ernest Gellner, for whom “Men do not become nationalists from sentiment or sentimentality, atavistic or not, well-based or myth-founded: they become nationalists through genuine, objective, practical necessity, however obscurely recognised” [Gellner (1964), p.

Christophe Jaffrelot is Director Research, Centre de’Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, Paris, France.

*Author’s Note:* This chapter draws on a paper prepared for presentation at the 14th Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists, “Pakistan in the 21st Century”, Islamabad, January 28-31, 1999.

<sup>1</sup>Robinson (1974), where the author partly explains the emergence of Muslim separatism as resulting from a relative incompatibility between Hindu and Muslim cultures.

160]. In his theory of nationalism, Gellner assumes that there are always an unequal distribution of economic resources across the territory of a State. A people, "B", originating from a deprived region, ask for its share but another ethnic group, "A", which is relatively more prosperous resist this demand for conserving the monopoly of its privileged situation. Therefore, it exercises discrimination towards "B", putting forward as a pretext its racial or cultural inferiority. Then the members of group "B" are bound to revolt and: "... their discontent can find 'national' expression: the privileged are manifestly different from themselves, even if the shared 'nationality' of the under-privileged men from B starts off from a purely negative trait, i. e. shared exclusion from privilege and from the 'nation' of the privileged". [Gellner (1964), p. 167.] For Gellner, it is in these situations that "culture, pigmentation, etc., become important: they provide means of exclusion for the benefit of the privileged, and a means of identification, etc., for the underprivileged [...] Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist—but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on, even if, as indicated, they are purely negative". [Gellner (1964), p. 168.]

Such an analysis of nationalism in terms of socio-ethnic conflicts, that is, of conflicts in which social and ethnic cleavages are superimposed, is well represented in the field of South Asian studies by the work of Brass (1979) who argues that the "two nation theories" basically took shape when the Muslim élite of the North considered that its socio-economic interests were endangered by the Hindus. This group then used identity markers (language, religion), through political organisations, to shape a nationalist Muslim identity by manipulating cultural symbols such as Urdu and Islam. [Brass (1974), p. 45.] This instrumentalisation of identity symbols helped Muslim separatism to crystallised with the demand for Pakistan.

The Gellner-Brass<sup>2</sup> thesis is probably the most relevant one for interpreting the career of nationalist sentiments in Pakistan. It does not only throw some light on the shaping of the "two nations theory" but also explains—partly at least—how Islam failed to be the cementing force of the country: since religion was not the bed rock of an intemporal identity but simply a political resource instrumentalised by élite groups, it could be challenged by ethnic movements manipulating other identity symbols such as language when their own élite groups feel need to mobilise their community to advance their interests. The ups and downs of the nation-building process in Pakistan are largely conditioned by this tension between the strategy of a "national" élite relying on Urdu and Islam as an instrument of nation-building for establishing their own domination and the centrifugal forces stimulated by sub-national élites who can rely on ethnic identities based on language and other identity symbols. As a result, more than a half-century after the Partition of 1947

<sup>2</sup>See also, Brass (1985), pp. 1–57.

which gave it birth, everything so happens as if Pakistan was still looking for an identity.<sup>3</sup>

### **THE (INITIAL) CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC, CENTRALISED STATE AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY**

In Pakistan, the instrumentalist strategies delineated by Gellner and Brass have been implemented in a very specific framework: on the one hand, the “Muslim separatists” from the region of British India where Muslims were in a minority tried to use Islam as a means for shaping the identity of a centralised State. On the other hand, the ethnic groups forming Pakistan resented this move and the more the State got centralised, the more they resisted it and resorted to instrumentalist tactics for mobilising “their” people.

Such an identity issue could have been expected, given the initial debates about what the country had to be. When the word Pakistan emerged in the 1930s, “P” stood for Punjab, “A” for the Afghans (the Pathans of the NWFP), “K” for Kashmir and “S” for Sindh. The resolution of Lahore in which the Muslim League asked for the creation of Pakistan for the first time in 1940, regarded it as a loose arrangement of sovereign provinces.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the Muslim League, under the leadership of Mohammed Ali Jinnah regarded the Pakistan claim as a means to give a country to the Muslims of British India since Hindus and Muslims represent much more than religious communities: they form “two nations”. After 1947, he looked at Islam as a cementing force that was able to surmount the regional cleavages. [Jalal (1990).] Tahir Amin convincingly argues that he “wanted to build a strong nation, following the policies of one nation, one culture and one language. He considered provincial identities as a ‘curse’, ‘Chinese puzzle’ and dangerous to the building of a strong nation”. [Amin (1993), p. 73.] General Ayub Khan also made use of Islam—certainly under a modernised and reformist form—and the Constitution of 1962 stipulated that the laws of the State could not contradict the precepts of the religion (the Shariat). Zulfikar Ali Bhutto himself inscribed the notion of an Islamic Pakistan in the Constitution of 1973 and declared the Ahmadis<sup>5</sup> apostates.<sup>6</sup> General Zia

<sup>3</sup>Olivier Roy qualifies Pakistan as the “the unattainable nation” [Roy (1997), p. 267].

<sup>4</sup>This is reconfirmed by the convergence, in that respect, of the schemes proposed by Dr Abdul Latif, Zafrul Hassan-Afzal Qadri, Abdullah Haroon and Sikander Hayat Khan.

<sup>5</sup>The sect of the Ahmadis was founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed. He is venerated equal to the Prophet by the members of the community and this heresy very early drove the guardians of Islamic law, the most orthodox, to demand that the Ahmadis should not be recognised as Muslims.

<sup>6</sup>Islam became a reference point in the political arena also because the mainstream parties were under the pressure of Islamic movements such as, the Jama’at-i-Islami which insisted that the new State had to be officially be associated with religion. Certainly these groups never got more than 15 percent of the votes in elections but this was precisely partly due to the fact that the other parties and the military governments were always trying hard never to lend themselves to their criticisms. In 1970, their best year, the Jama’at-i-Islami got 6,03 percent, the Jama’at-i-Ulama-i-Islam, 3,98 percent and the Jama’at-i Ulama-i-Pakistan, 3,94 percent.

reasserted this approach forcefully with words recalling Jinnah's Two Nations theory: "The basis of Pakistan was Islam. The basis of Pakistan was that the Muslims of the subcontinent are a separate culture".<sup>7</sup>

Parallel to their effort for making Islam the ideological cement of the Pakistani nation, the establishment opted early for a centralised authoritarian pattern of State-building, as suggested by the way Jinnah exerted the functions of Governor General, a post fashioned on the vice-regal model. One of his first gestures was then to dismiss the government of the North-West Frontier Province, a forewarning of the coming power relations between the centre and the provinces.

Tahir Amin argues that "as long as parliamentary system operated, ethno-national movements did not emerge. It was mainly because the ethnic groups continued to get a share in the power structure". [Amin (1993), p. 78.] Ethnic tensions certainly emerged as a reaction to socio-economic and political frustrations. But did the removal of parliamentarism really make a difference? Did Zulfikar Ali Bhutto give their share to the Balochs and the Pakhtuns and accepted their claims to regional autonomy during the first restoration of democracy in the early 1970s? Has the post-1988 democratisation process enabled Pakistan to defuse ethnic tensions such as those orchestrated by the Mohajirs in Sindh?

In fact none of the Constitutions of Pakistan—even those adopted or amended during phases of parliamentary democracy—have really been respectful of federalism in the future. That of 1956 and of 1962, for instance, gave to the Centre the task of dispatching the fiscal resources and enabled the president to veto the laws voted by the provincial assemblies. The Constitution of 1973 gave a representation to the provinces in the Council of Common Interests and the National Finance Commission, two new bodies in charge of allocating state resources. But the State remained very much centralised. The laws passed by the provincial assemblies could be declared null and void by the federal parliament, for instance.

The dialectical tension between an Islamic, centralised (even authoritarian) State and ethnic groups form the framework of what may be called the Pakistan pattern of State formation. If we look at it from a less abstract, more sociological point of view, we can see that this dialectic basically relies on élite rivalries.

### **Elite Rivalries, the Centralised State and Ethnic Tensions**

In contrast to India, Pakistan is inhabited by a clearly identified small number of linguistic groups whose elite have been gradually tight up in socio-economic and political rivalries. The country is above all the creation of Mohajirs. This term applies to all "those who migrated" from what became India in August 1947 but it has come to define more especially those who came from the provinces of India where the Muslims were in a minority (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bombay Province). It is in this social milieu, which shares a common language, Urdu, that the Muslim

<sup>7</sup>Cited in Amin (1993), p. 171.

League, and then the idea of Pakistan, found their first support, in particular, amongst a literati elite which was more and more threatened by the Hindu majority and hence worried of finding a base to withdraw into, or even a State to govern. In 1947, 100,000 Urdu speaking Biharis opted for eastern Pakistan and one million of the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat migrated to western Pakistan. They settled down above all in the cities of Sindh, in particular Karachi, the big industrial, commercial and administrative centre of the new country which was then its capital.

The Mohajirs then dominated the State through the Muslim League, "their" party, and its two chiefs, the Governor General Jinnah (initially from the province of Bombay), and the Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan (initially from Uttar Pradesh) whose government had a majority of Mohajirs. [Binder (1961) and Callard (1958).] These men made Urdu the official language of Pakistan. The Mohajirs were also over represented in the administration: out of 101 Muslim members of the Indian Civil Service, 95 have opted for Pakistan, among whom only one third were Punjabis. Whereas they represented only 3,5 percent of the population, in the early years of the new State the Mohajirs occupied 21 percent of the posts of Pakistan Civil Service. [Sayeed (1996) and Braibanti (1966).] In professions such as advocates, teachers and businessmen, the Mohajirs filled the vacuum Hindus migrants—who had held them in urban Sindh till 1947—had left behind them. They were initially well received by most of the Sindhis for this reason. [Maydar (1993).]

Jinnah died in 1948, Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951, and the Muslim League lost rapidly its influence due to the weakness of its organisation. Besides, the Mohajirs were ill accepted in Sindh where they dominated the administration and the liberal professions. In 1951, while they represented 20 percent of the population of Sindh but 55 percent of that of Karachi, 40 percent of them were employed as clerical and sales workers. Even though they were in a small minority, businessmen—mainly from Gujarat—were also influential and their quick recovery was resented by the "locals". [Ahmed (1998).]

From the beginning the Mohajirs shared their dominant position with the Punjabis, who, because of their former status of the "martial race" in British India, represented 80 percent of the armed forces.<sup>8</sup> The reign of the general Ayub Khan (1958-1969) consecrated the rise of the Punjabis inside the Pakistani State and the emergence of a Punjabi-Pakhtun axis. The Mohajirs were not any more in a position to exert as much influence as they did in 1947.

The rise of the Punjabis went on a par with the centralisation of the State and the establishment of authoritarian regimes in the successive Constitutions. In 1959, Ayub Khan instituted the regime of "Basic Democracies" that banned the political parties and relied on local notables who formed an ad hoc electorate for designating

<sup>8</sup>Cohen (1987), p. 318. They represented about 55 percent of the administration [Kennedy (1987), p.194].

the President. They were also supposed to relay the influence of the central bureaucracy. This scheme was a good means to avoid the verdict of free elections which would have placed the Punjabis at a disadvantage since they were in a minority. In fact, the law of numbers would have benefited to the Bengalis of East Pakistan.

In 1951, East Pakistan accounted for more inhabitants than West Pakistan, 41.9 million as against 33.7 and on this account demanded a representation at least equivalent to that of the "western wing" in the institutions that the Constituent Assembly was responsible for establishing after 1947. This demand that annoyed the Punjabis and the Mohajirs, paralysed the Constituent Assembly and brought the Punjabi Governor General, Ghulam Muhammad, to merge together the provinces of West Pakistan in 1955—that was the "One Unit Scheme"—for making an entity of comparable weight to East Pakistan. This institutional manoeuvre, which also hurt the regionalist sentiments of the Sindhis, the Balochis and the Pakhtuns, allowed to keep the Bengalis at bay.

In the early 1950s the Bengalis had already protested against the elevation of Urdu to the status of the national language at the expense of their language. The announcement in Dacca, by Prime Minister Nazimuddin, that Urdu would be the national language of Pakistan provoked demonstrations in January-February 1952 and the Muslim League lost the provincial election in East Bengal in March 1954 against the Awami-League. In May, the new Prime Minister, Muhammad Ali Bogra moved an amendment to the Basic Principles Committee Report according to which Urdu and Bengali should be recognised as state languages. It was adopted by the Constituent Assembly. Such a move bore testimony of the capacity of the State to make concessions—but this measure was not sufficient.

The Bengalis increasingly complained of economic exploitation by West Pakistan which, in fact, paid many of its imports with the excess commercial balance of East Pakistan. [Rashiduzzaman (1982).] The Awami League which orchestrated their protest was subjected to severe repression. Its chief, Mujibur Rahman, radicalised the movement and advanced in 1966 an openly autonomist programme. Ayub Khan replied with more repression but had to retire in 1969. Its successor, general, Yahya Khan, put an end to the "One Unit Scheme", rendering hence autonomy to the provinces of West Pakistan and organised free elections in December 1970: it was a triumph for the Awami League, which got 160 seats against 81 of the Pakistan people's Party (PPP) of Bhutto, for which the Sindh and Punjab voted in a massive way. The new Pakistani establishment refused the verdict of the ballot box and sent thousands of soldiers to East Bengal. The repression that followed resulted in innumerable victims and provoked an exodus of 10 million Bengalis towards India. New Delhi launched then a military operation which obliged Islamabad to let off their hold over East Pakistan. This resulted in outright secession.

From the One Unit Scheme to the 1971 crisis, the attitude of the Pakistani State vis-à-vis the Bengalis is symptomatic of the real difficulties of Pakistan to administer ethnic pluralism, since the crystallisation of Bengali separatism was largely due to over-centralisation and the refusal of the Pakistani elite—and first of all Punjabi—to share power. The Bengali issue therefore illustrates the Gellner-Brass theory of nationalism since the Awami League was able to instrumentalise ill-feelings arising from economic exploitation and demands for a more balanced distribution of power. The State was not only centralised but unable to accommodate ethnic movements before it was too late. In contrast, Atul Kohli convincingly argues that India has been more successful in defusing the centrifugal forces, not only because of its democratic political culture but also its federal structure. These two features enabled India to eventually make concessions in such a way as the ethnic tensions recede after some time. Hence his model of the inverse “U” curve which is well illustrated by the way Delhi dealt with the Tamils and the Sikhs in the 1950–60s. At the same time, the Pakistani state opted for more repression against the Bengalis and therefore further radicalised the Awami League.

The ups and downs of Sindhi nationalism can be interpreted within the same framework. Even though, after the Bengali secession of 1971 the Punjabis represented about 60 percent of the population of Pakistan and occupied 70 percent of jobs in armed forces, [Jalal (1995)] for the first time a Sindhi, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, took over from Yahya Khan as head of the State. The Constitution which he gave to the country in 1973 was more federal than the previous ones but its impact was limited because of the way in which he implemented it.

In Sindh, the success (certainly relative) of the Mohajirs had given rise to a stock of increasing jealousy among the Sindhis. Those who had hoped to take the place of the Hindus in the cities and recover the land that the former had acquired on account of money lending in the rural areas, found it to be taken over now by the Mohajirs, to which the State had given possession of most of the vacant lands, even though they already formed an elite of professionals and civil servants. The Sindhi nationalist movement sought to exploit this discontentment. This movement was old. Even before independence, G. M. Syed, its principal spokesperson, evoked the age old Sindhi culture since the Indus valley civilisation (the principal remnants of which are found in Sindh, in Mohanjodaro). Even though he was then the president of the Muslim League of Sindh, he had accepted the adhesion of his province to the project of Pakistan in the 1940s only on the condition that this country should be a union of sovereign and independent states, as it had been promised by the Lahore resolution. After 1947, he had been excluded from the Muslim League after denouncing the arrogance of the Mohajirs and the Punjabisation of Pakistan, two phenomena of which the transformation of Karachi into an administrative entity distinct from Sindh in 1948 and then the transfer of the national capital from Karachi to Islamabad in

1967, testified successively. [Samad (1989).] Syed criticised also the development of Urdu at the expense of Sindhi. For all these “subversive reasons” he spent the better part of his political career in custody.

In the 1970s, the Pakistan People’s Party of Bhutto partly took over from Syed in articulating the grievances of the Sindhis showing its dual identity: on the one hand it presented itself as a national party, on the other it was perceived as the spokesman for a particular community, the rural Sindhis. In the general elections of 1970, the PPP received the largest number of votes in the districts which were strongholds of Sindhi nationalism (Thatta, Dadu, Tharparkar, Larkana, Khairpur and Nawabshah). [Amin (1993), p. 95.] In 1972, the PPP won the elections in Sindh and formed the government in Karachi. It then tried to take the wind from Sindhi nationalists like Syed by fighting against the Mohajirs. First, it made Sindhi compulsory in school for those who had another mother tongue by passing the Sindhi Language Bill. And then it forced bureaucrats to use Sindhi as an official language. These decisions triggered off violent manifestations of the Mohajirs. Bhutto, who had supported the initial measures, intervened and persuaded the government of Sindh to give 12 years to the bureaucrats to learn Sindhi. However, a quota of 11.4 percent was established through the 1973 Constitution in favour of rural Sindh—where most of the local Sindhis lived—in the central administration, for redressing the unbalance of which the Mohajirs were the principal beneficiaries: in 1973, they still occupied 33.5 percent of the posts in public administration when they only represented 8 percent of the total population; the rural Sindhis, themselves occupied only 2.7 percent of the posts of employees and 4.3 percent of the posts of the officer grade. [Kennedy (1991).] In the army, they represented only 2.2 percent of the total in 1947 (as against 80 percent of Punjabis) and according to S.P. Cohen these proportions have remained more or less the same since then. [Cohen (1998), p. 44.] According to Khalid B. Sayeed there was not even one Sindhi in 1968 among the 48 to military elite, as against 35.4 percent. Punjabis, 39.6 percent Pakhtuns and 23 percent Mohajirs—the Bengalis were 2 percent. [Sayeed (1968).] Besides, the nationalisations decided by Bhutto—which reinforced the impact of the quotas in the public sector—penalised the Mohajirs since they were in a dominant position in the business circles.

The coming to power of the PPP in the 1970s therefore deprived Syed of arguments in the same proportion as it dissatisfied the Mohajirs. The latter reacted especially vehemently to the Sindhi Language Bill, their demonstration leading to communal riots in July 1972. These ethnic tensions did not stem from the deprivation of a minority by an over-centralised State but from interest politics anyway: what was at stake was not the beauty of the language, but the access to jobs it could provide. The instrumentalist model is still more relevant than the primordialist one. But this case studies enables us to refine it: not only Sindhi nationalism is not rooted in the people’s sub-conscious identity but activated for



promoting group's interests, but the more the group is successful, the less militant it becomes. The contrast between the situation prevailing in the late 1970s and that of the late 1980s is very revealing in this respect.

In the late 1970s, Sindhi nationalism found itself exacerbated by the dismissal of Bhutto from power by Zia-ul-Haq, a Punjabi, his condemnation (by a tribunal, constituted of a Punjabi majority)<sup>9</sup> and later his execution which made him a Sindhi martyr in the opinion of many Sindhis. Zia then favoured the Punjabis at the expense of the Sindhis. Some of them were evicted from the provincial administration. In the mid-1980s, the central administration was over dominated by the Punjabis, who detained 56 percent of the jobs while the rural Sindhis got only 3 percent of them (almost as little as the Balochs—2.5 percent—and much less than the Mohajirs—25 percent—and the people from the NWFP, 11 percent). Not surprisingly, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, a PPP sponsored alliance of opposition parties, which organised a series of demonstrations against Zia in 1983, was especially successful in Sindh. 45,000 soldiers were deployed for a repression which lasted six months and resulted in 300 death and 100, 000 arrests. The charter of the movement demanded the establishment of a confederation where Sindh would enjoy the maximum autonomy.

The movement was not well structured but it got demobilised and lost its Sindhi nationalist overtone for another reason, that is: the electoral successes of the PPP and the appointment of Benazir Bhutto as Chief Minister in 1988. The PPP, in fact, appeared as a Sindhi Party (did it not win all the electoral seats in the constituencies of rural Sindh?) and that a Sindhi could be at the helm of power militated in favour of a renewed loyalty of its "compatriots" to the notion of a Pakistani nation, even in the form of a centralised State. This going and coming identification with the state in function of an ethnic belonging of the persons in power showed that the state was not above all social conflict but represented a stake in the competition between different communities.<sup>10</sup> This pendulum-like oscillation according to who is in power is also obvious in the case of the Mohajirs.

The case of the Mohajirs is very revealing of the malleability of political identity according to the interests one pursues. To begin with, they identified themselves with the new State of Pakistan which was largely their creation. But the more they *felt* threatened, the more they projected themselves as an oppressed minority with a distinct identity. They really started to raise their voice under Zia. While he had proclaimed once on TV that the Mohajirs deserved special favours because of their sacrifices for Pakistan, and while the Mohajirs approved of his policy of Islamisation since, for them, Pakistan's identity was rooted in the "two

<sup>9</sup>The four Punjabi judges considered he was guilty whereas all the others, who came from other provinces, were in favour of acquitting him. [Noman (1992), p. 193.]

<sup>10</sup>After the victory of the PPP, Nawaz Sharif, leader of the Muslim League and then the Chief Minister of Punjab qualified the central government of Benazir Bhutto a "Sindhi government" and gave the slogan "Jag Punjabi Jag" for the "awakening of Punjab".

nation theory", Zia gradually alienated the Mohajirs. They protested first against the introduction of new quotas in the administration: 10 percent of the posts in the public service were reserved for the retired military personnel, who benefited also from additional commercial and industrial licenses. The army being dominated by the Punjabis, that was an indirect bonus to the dominant community.

Parallel to that, the Mohajirs were affected by long term sociological tendencies. On the one hand the Green Revolution, of which Punjab was the first beneficiary, since the end of the seventies, reinforced the domination of this province and permitted its natives to invest in the industry, including in Karachi. On the other hand, the migrants poured in this city and benefited from its dynamism: in 1984, the city accounted for 3.3 million of Mohajirs but one million Punjabis, 1.1 million Balochis, 700,000 Pakhtuns—a good number of refugees from Afghanistan—and a few hundred thousand Sindhis.

The Mohajir Qaumi Mahaz (Mohajir national movement) was born in this context in 1984. One may object that theories of nationalism cannot be tested on it since the MQM was only representing an ethnic group but its very name shows that it looks at itself as representing a "qaum", that is a nation. Its cadre and even its chief, Altaf Hussain, came from the middle class and above all recruited its members amongst the students frustrated in their aspirations of social mobility. The MQM demanded that only persons settled since au minimum twenty years in the Sindh should be considered as a resident and enjoy the right to vote; that the foreigners could not acquire properties in the Sindh; that the Mohajirs should be recognised as the fifth "nationality" of Pakistan; finally, that Karachi, the first city of the country, should be named a province (Karachi suba), which would be in fact a Mohajir province. [Rehman (1994).] Altaf Hussain occasionally claimed that he wanted to partition Sindh the same way as Bangladesh was carved out if Islamabad continued to ignore his demands.<sup>11</sup> Yet, his strategies of contesting elections and allying the MQM with other, national parties suggest that he is still interested in exerted power in the institutional framework of Pakistan than anything else. It seems that this stand is more or less in tune with the aspirations of his own basis. An opinion poll of 1996 indicated that 46.7 percent of the people of Karachi were favourably inclined towards the creation of new regions in Pakistan (53.3 percent of the interviewed were opposed to such a move).<sup>12</sup>

The MQM programme was spelled out in 1987 and permitted the party to win, in the same year, the municipal elections at Karachi and Hyderabad (the second city of Sindh). The party then made inroads in the region during the general elections of 1988, when the PPP came first but without having, all the same, an absolute majority. Benazir Bhutto then concluded with the MQM—whose presence in terms of seats was sufficient to constitute an absolute majority—an accord which took

<sup>11</sup>Interview in *India Today*, 15 July 1995, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup>*The Herald*, Annual, January 1997, p. 160.

into account the essentials of the charters of the Mohajir party. But she abstained later from fulfilling her commitments: she refused the entry of Biharis of Bangladesh, who wished for a long time to migrate to Pakistan (a demand supported by the Mohajirs, for whom it would be a good way to increase their ranks); she did not name Mohajirs to any of the important posts in the administration and finally, she surrounded herself with personalities known for their Sindhi chauvinism. In 1989, the MQM organised big demonstrations which often turned into ethnic violence, particularly because of the recruitment of a number of musclemen by the movement. It broke away with the PPP and these troubles comforted the president Gulam Ishaq Khan in his views that Benazir Bhutto was not able to handle the situation. At least, that was the argument he used to dismiss her. While the 1990 elections were approaching, the MQM allied itself this time with the Islami Jamoori Ittihad (IJI) of Nawaz Sharif, the Chief Minister of Punjab. This party won an absolute majority but, once in power, it did not show itself better disposed than the PPP as regards the Mohajirs. In June 1992, the army was deployed in Karachi with the mission of "cleaning" the city of its anti-social elements: that was the "Operation Clean Up". Its mandate, firstly fixed at six months, was finally extended to two years. The MQM was the main target of the military. The elected representatives of the MQM resigned from the National Assembly and that of Sindh, where they constituted an important element in the coalition in power. The leaders of the MQM went into hiding or ran away to foreign countries (Altaf Hussain had already established himself in London). The Operation Clean Up only radicalised the population in favour of the MQM and the military implicitly admitted this before leaving in November 1994. The MQM had boycotted the general elections of 1993, which had brought Benazir Bhutto back to power, but participated in the elections in the province of Sindh, which also resulted in a victory for the PPP but with only 56 seats out of 100, against 27 to the MQM (A), the faction of MQM headed by Altaf Hussain. The MQM, indeed, had split up in 1992, with the formation of a MQM (Haqiqi) which pretended to represent the "real" MQM. This group appeared in fact to have been tempted by the offers of the army a little after the Operation Clean Up, and it counted in its ranks a number of militants that Altaf Hussain alienated by an autocratic style of functioning. It was composed of militants all as violent as those of the MQM (A)—whence the vendettas and other bloody confrontations—but may be more linked to the local Mafia. The army had apparently not hesitated to favour the most criminal elements. The politics of the authorities was largely summarised by this tactic of divide and rule and repressive measures. The violence assumed its height in the mid- 1990s (1500 dead in 1995) and then the MQM abstained from contesting the elections of 1997. This election enabled the PPP to remain the most important party of Sindh with 36 seats out of 100 but did not permit it to lead a majority coalition. The PML (N) and the Haq Parast Group—the political front organ of the MQM—won respectively 15 and 28 seats. This success drove Nawaz Sharif

and Altaf Hussain to ally themselves for forming a coalition with a sufficient majority thanks to the support of the small parties and independents. The heads of MQM renamed their movement Mutahidda Qaumi Movement (United National Movement) in a manner to attract groups and lobbies other than those of the Mohajirs. However, the entry of the MQM in the government did not result in the return of peace in Karachi. The violence came mainly from vendettas between the MQM(A) and the Haqiqi fractions, which fought for controlling the drug and arms traffics. The unleashing of violence is all the more difficult to contain as the two MQM often turn out to benefit from police complicity. In September 1998, the MQM broke away with the PML (N) for returning to the opposition and since then repression continues unabated.

This rather detailed narrative was necessary to show to what extent the Mohajir issue offers a relevant illustration of our main thesis: far from sticking to their original pro-State identity, the Mohajir have developed separatist tendencies as soon as they started losing ground in the administration as well as in socio-economic terms. They may not be involved in a pauperisation process as they feel, but they may well have reached a plateau and they are under the impression of a decline because of this very stagnation. The State apparatus reacted harshly to their demands, so much so the MQM radicalised its position, following a scenario which had been already tried in a much more repressive manner in the early 1970s in East Pakistan.

To sum up, the ethnic movements we have examined so far, in East Pakistan, in rural Sindh and among the Mohajirs through the MQM substantiate the Gellner-Brass thesis from two points of view. First, these movement always crystallised in reaction to some marginalisation—relative and subjective in the case of the Mohajirs—by an exploitative and centralised State. Second, they got mobilised to support socio-economic and political claims more than anything else. They rely on materialistic, power-oriented agendas in which cultures are instrumentalised. Culture and history provide a stock of myths and symbols, but they do not shape the identity of their proponents which turns out to be very malleable, at least, the feeling of identification with the nation considerably varies according to the proximity of the community vis-à-vis the State. Sindhis and Mohajirs have oscillated between identifying with the State or, on the contrary, rejecting it according to the political and socio-economic context. Can we draw similar conclusions in the case of the Balochs and the Pakhtuns or does it make a difference when ethnic groups have transborder “brothers”?

### **THE LIMITS OF IRREDENTISM**

Pakistan, which has Iran, Afghanistan and India as its neighbours, is situated at the cross-roads of three regions: it participates in the dynamics of Central Asia and South Asia and identifies more or less with one or the other depending on the

situation. Its South Asian anchorage, symbolised by the civilisation of the Indo-Gangetic basin and a language, Hindustani, found itself institutionalised by its adhesion of the country to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) founded in 1985. But Bhutto could proclaim that Pakistani identity owed less to the jungle of the South Asian sub-continent than to the sands of the Arab Peninsula, the land of Islam... and of petro-dollars to which many Pakistani workers owe their salaries and Islamabad, a solid financial support. [Shah (1977).] This "look West policy" found expression in the sending of military professionals to Saudi Arabia, to the Emirates, to Syria, and to Libya, to the countries short of Sunni troops, which would be neither Arab nor Persian, for their security needs. During the Iran-Iraq war, as much as 40,000 Pakistani soldiers were stationed in Saudi Arabia. Nawaz Sharif sent there 5,000 persons more during the Gulf war.

The efforts of Pakistan in the direction of Central Asia are well illustrated by its role in Afghanistan—developed below—but also its tentative rapprochement with the former Soviet republics. Pakistan was the first to recommend their entry into the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and it welcomed them in 1992, just as Iran and Turkey, in the Economic Cooperation Organisation. The regional geo-politics in which Pakistan fits itself all the more conditions its foreign policy as Balochs and Pakhtuns are spread on both sides of the border. Some domestic tensions thus articulate themselves on international conflicts. Amin considers that "Afghanistan's role in providing both the sanctuaries and financial and material help to the guerillas of Baloch and the Pakhtun movements was of critical importance to their activities". [Amin (1993), p. 29.] However, we must distinguish the guerillas from regional politics because the provinces of Balochistan and NWFP, ethnic movements only acquired some weight in reaction to the attitude of the State.

### **The Baloch Problem**

Though it shelters not more than 3 percent approximately of the population of Pakistan, Balochistan represents 42 percent of the country's surface and occupies a strategic position at the Iran and Afghan frontiers. The Balochs have never got their political unit. The Goldsmith line, which the English traced back to 1871, gave a quarter of the area under Balochi population to the Persians and few years later the Durand line, in 1893, gave a part of it to Afghanistan. In addition, a good fraction of the Balochs of colonial India would stay as the subjects of the princely states, primarily that of Kalat. In 1947, the ruler of Kalat opted for independence, but the Pakistani army broke his resistance in a few months. The government then succeeded in co-opting influential Sardars and even their chief, the Khan of Kalat. The national movement, inhibited by rivalries, did not survive, except through a guerrilla warfare of low intensity which persisted under the rule of Ayub Khan. It really crystallised

rather late but highly significantly for us as a reaction to the centralism of the Pakistani State.

In 1972, the alliance of the Awami Party and the Jamiat-Ulema-Islam (a conservative party supported by the Sardars) won the elections in Balochistan, as in the NWFP. Interestingly enough, one of the first decisions of the new governments was to make the administration more indigenous by replacing the officers coming from other provinces, mainly from the Punjab, by "sons of the soil". The Centre denounced this spoil system which would have deprived the members of the national elite (and firstly the Punjabis) of coveted posts. The despatching of the industrial investments constituted another bone of contention. Balochistan and the NWFP blamed Islamabad for not contributing to the development of their territory and demanded to exert control over the industrialisation process. Both issues pertained to the will of the provincial governments to assert their socio-economic and political interests against the Centre.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dismissed the government of Balochistan in 1973 by invoking separatist activities, for which, allegedly, Soviet arms and ammunitions, by chance—so to say—had been discovered in the house of the military attaché of Iraq, were allegedly to be used. The chiefs of the Baloch movement being in jail, the second rank leaders, often more radical, occupied the front scene: the Balochi Peoples' Liberation Front (BPLF) and the Baloch Students' Organisation (BSO) then initiated an uprising which mobilised some 55,000 militants (including 11,500 regular combatants) for four years. The Pakistani army deployed approximately 88,000 men for a war which resulted in approximately 5,300 victims in the ranks of the Balochs and 3,300 amongst the soldiers.<sup>13</sup>

The Baloch issue entailed an international dimension, at least regional. The Shah of Iran who feared the contagious Baloch movement on its territory, appeared to have encouraged Bhutto to dismiss the government of Balochistan and helped Islamabad in carrying out the repression, in particular by lending him helicopters and the pilots. In Afghanistan, by contrast, Sardar Daoud Khan who had deposed the king at the beginning of 1973, supported the idea of a "Free Balochistan" which would spread out on both sides of the Irano-Pakistani frontier.

While the role of Iran and Afghanistan needs to be taken into account for understanding the Baloch issue, these external factors did not make a major impact, as if the international borders were too strong for irredentist feelings to transcend them. This is obvious in the case of Iran where a strong State was eager to maintain

<sup>13</sup>K. B. Sayeed, *Politics in Pakistan—The Nature and Direction of Change*, [no date, no place and no publisher] See chapter 6 entitled "Pakistan's central government versus Balochi and Pashtun aspirations", pp. 113–138. Sayeed mentions that "There is not much evidence that the Bhutto regime explored every possible avenue to reach a compromise with the Balochi provincial government whereby a central government with its legitimate concerns could coexist with a provincial government committed to increasing provincial autonomy, as in other cases, Bhutto was interested in the aggrandisement of power, not in its sharing".

the *status quo*, but even with Afghanistan, a country which had to admit it too in a way since the Shah was able to convince Daoud to talk to Bhutto in view of his recognising of the Durand line (a \$3 million package was allegedly offered to Afghanistan in that respect but Bhutto was overthrown before the deal could be finalised). [Amin (1993), p. 157.]

In Balochistan General Zia initiated an inverted "U" curve on the Indian pattern. He appeased a section of the Baloch nationalists by liberating thousands of prisoners and forgiving those who had taken refuge in Afghanistan. Some of them took the path of exile, like Attaullah Khan Mengal, who left for London for founding the Sindh Baloch and Pakhtun Front with the help of Mumtaz Bhutto. Mengal still did not want anything short of a confederate regime in Pakistan enabling Balochistan to become an independent country. Similarly, Khair Bux Mari established himself in Afghanistan with about 3,000 armed activists. But most of the other Baloch leaders showed greater moderation, partly because of Zia's ability to co-opt them. The former BSO president and guerrilla militant, Khair Jan Baloch gave up the cause for that reason. The former governor Bizenjo created the Pakistan National Party in order to put pressure on the regime from inside for a better functioning of the federal structure, as written in the Constitution of 1973. Many of the Sardars preferred to collaborate with the central power, which demanded nothing better than to co-opt them.<sup>14</sup>

The democratisation process that was engaged in 1988 did not result in the re-emergence of regionalists forces since the Sardars preferred to tie up alliances with the parties in power in Islamabad, either the PPP or the PML(N).<sup>15</sup> During the elections of February 1997, no regional party obtained a majority and out of 43 seats at the assembly of Balochistan, 10 only had been won by Balochistan national Party, but these so-called autonomist forces made deals with national parties for getting a share of power. Such alliances indeed enabled Akhtar Mengal, the son of Attaullah Khan Mengal to become Chief Minister. He resigned in 1998 and fell back on a Baloch nationalist discourse. In an interview to *The Muslim* he declared for instance: "We are forced to look for our identity".<sup>16</sup> But political and economic issues seemed to be responsible for his resignation, rather than identity questions. Mengal had very

<sup>14</sup>Their rallying around the State apparatus was crucial given the influence they exerted at the grassroots level. Indeed, the middle class and the intelligentsia formed a microscopic minority: Balochistan presented the lowest literacy rate of the country (8.5 percent).

<sup>15</sup>In addition to this handicap, the province was increasingly losing its cultural homogeneity: not only the Balochs migrated towards other provinces (one-fourth of the 4 million of the Balochi from Pakistan live in Sindh, in the NWFP and in the Punjab), but Balochistan received large numbers of immigrants since one million Afghan refugees, mainly Pakhtuns, settled down there between 1979 and 1988. In 1981, 57 percent of the inhabitants of the province spoke Balochi and 28 percent Pashto (and 8 percent Sindhi). The "sons of the soil" then demanded the return of the refugees to Afghanistan. In reaction, the later founded in 1991 a Pashtunkhwa Mili Awami Party whose principal demand concerned the introduction of bi-linguism in the province and, at a later stage the creation of a Pashtun Watan, a province mainly for the refugees

<sup>16</sup>*The Muslim*, 31 July 1998.

much resented the fact that the Pakistani nuclear tests had taken place in Balochistan in June 1998 without advanced notice and even more importantly, the Baloch leaders strongly objected to the monopolisation of the royalties of the gas of their province by Islamabad. One may wonder whether they would articulate a strong nationalist rhetoric if they had access to these royalties. In any case, the Baloch movement has lost its intensity compared to what it was not only at its peak in the 1970s but also in the 1980s and the external factors were not terribly important in determining the course of the inverted “U” curve: the evolution of the ethnic relations in Balochistan was rather conditioned by the centralisation—and even repression—of the State or, on the contrary, its capacity to accommodate and co-opt the regional leaders. This interpretation seems to be relevant in the case of the Pakhtuns too.

### **Pakhtun Irredentism and the Afghan Wars**

Of all the provinces of Pakistan the NWFP is the only one to have a name that does not reflect any ethnic feature, even though it shelters most of the 16 percent of the Pashto speakers who live in the country. In 1947, the Pakhtuns engaged in an anti-British struggle that had been organised inside the movement called Red Shirts (or Khudai Khidmatgar), opposed their integration to Pakistan and asked, instead, through their main leader, Khan Ghaffar Khan, the formation of a Pakhtunistan that would cover the Afghan Pakhtun and the Pakhtuns (or Pathans) of the NWFP. Ghaffar Khan and his supporters boycotted the referendum by which NWFP was finally integrated into Pakistan<sup>17</sup> and later demanded at the Constituent Assembly of which he was a member that the Province be named Pakhtunistan. He was arrested soon after and his brother, Dr. Khan Sahib Zada, the then Chief Minister of the NWFP, was dismissed by Jinnah.

Yet, the heirs of the Red Shirts movement got integrated to the new régime. In 1956 the son of Ghaffar Khan, Wali Khan, founded the National Awami Party, which became part of the political system. This moderation can partly be explained by socio-economic factors. The Pakhtuns were already well represented inside the Pakistani state because of their place in the army (a legacy of the colonial period, the British having classified them among the martial races), of which they composed 19.5 percent of the personnel in 1948. [Cohen (1998), p. 44.] As mentioned above, in 1968 they were almost 40 percent of the 48 top military elite, getting a bigger share than the Punjabis (35.4 percent). Three successive Commanders-in-Chiefs were of Pakhtun origin, like Ayub Khan himself. Because of this growing presence of the Pakhtuns in the State apparatus, it was difficult “for the younger educated middle classes to believe the ideology of the movement leaders that they were being ruled by other ethnic groups”. [Amin (1993), p. 91.] Right from the beginning, the intensity of Pakhtun nationalism turns out to decline in proportion to the possibilities

<sup>17</sup>Even though this boycott partly explains the overwhelming success of the supporters of the integration of the NWFP to Pakistan with 99 percent, this figure suggests that large numbers of Pakhtuns were most willing to join the new State.



of upward mobility opened by the new State.<sup>18</sup> For all these reasons the NAP remained below 20 percent of the valid votes in the general as well as provincial elections of 1970, a strong incentive to dilute its programme for the NAP which had already accepted the borders of Balochistan and the NWFP in 1969.

The fact that the Pakhtuns had close contacts with their Afghan brothers did not make much difference. Kabul has always had views on part of the NWFP, so much so that it has been a bone of contention going back at least to the tracing of the Durand line which, in 1893, partitioned this ethnic group in two almost equal halves. In 1947, the Afghan government asked the British to give the Pakhtuns two other choices—in addition to the possibilities of acceding to Pakistan or India—to merge with Afghanistan or to form an independent Pashtunistan. Subsequently, this question poisoned the diplomatic relations of the two countries to the point of provoking their break in 1961-62. This thaw in their relations did not last long. But tension remained, especially after the rise to power of Daoud, one of the staunchest partisans of Pashtunistan in Kabul. In his first speech, he singled out Pakistan as the only country with which Afghanistan had unresolved problems and mentioned Pashtunistan in this respect. Daoud was then helping Ajmal Khattak, the General Secretary of the NAP who was self exiled in Kabul where he declared in 1973 that his aim was to carve out an independent Pashtunistan on the model of Bangladesh. The irredentist dimension of the Pathan movement was therefore helping the NAP by providing its self exiled leaders with some logistic and support.

But this external factor would not have played a major role if, at the same time, the Pakistani Pakhtuns had not been alienated by the centralised authoritarianism of the Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. After the victory of his party, the NAP, in the 1972 election and the formation of a government coalition over which he exerted a strong influence, Wali Khan, tried to acquire a national stature. He put his Pakhtun nationalism on the back burner, to the point of forgetting his promises about the renaming of the province and the replacement of Urdu by Pashto as the region's official language. But Bhutto's policy regarding Balochistan and the NWFP led Wali Khan to fall back on Pakhtun nationalism. When Bhutto dismissed the Awami party led government of Balochistan, the government of NWFP resigned immediately as a sign of solidarity and Wali Khan returned to Pakhtun nationalism. Two years later Bhutto got him arrested and dissolved the Awami party under the pretext of his implication in the murder of a minister of the NWFP. The trial of Wali Khan lasted right up till the dismissal of Bhutto in 1977; then the accusations were withdrawn. After his release from prison in 1978, Wali Khan decisively downplayed his Pakhtun nationalism.

<sup>18</sup>In addition, the Pakhtun elite had been educated in Aligarh and Punjab rather than in Peshawar where it would have probably imbibed a stronger ethnic identity, like the Bengali and the Sindhi intelligentsias who had been trained in their own province.

The Afghanistan war revived the Pakistani fears of an eventual revival of the Baloch and Pashtun irredentism as a result of the massive influx of refugees: between 1979 and 1981, 2.4 million Afghans settled down in the NWFP, which now had 16 million inhabitants, as compared to Afghanistan's 14 millions. However, Islamabad was not under the threat of a Pakhtun mobilisation, and again there were good socio-economic reasons for that. The NWFP saw its economic situation improving itself from the end of the 1970s onwards. The Pakhtuns joined the army and the bureaucracy in great numbers and those who did so came primarily from these districts which had traditionally been strongholds of the Pakhtunistan movement. Secondly, after Punjab, it was without doubt the NWFP that profited most from the rural exodus towards Karachi and the emigration to the Gulf countries: the Pakhtuns represented 35 percent of the Pakistanis who went abroad in 1976-1981. For all these reasons, the ANP of Wali Khan showed a solidarity with Zia (during the MRD of 1983 for example) and the Pakhtun leaders who were still exiled in Afghanistan returned to Pakistan in 1986.

The process of democratisation started in 1988 did not result in the revival of Pakhtun nationalism. The collaboration between the Pakhtun notables and the national elite remained the rule at the moment of the elections to the provincial assembly. After the 1988 elections the ANP made an alliance with the PPP such a phenomenon led to the emergence of an unprecedented alliance between the ANP and the PPP, and then in 1990 formed a coalition government with the IJI, a formula which was reiterated under a slightly different form in 1997, through an alliance of the ANP, which won 28 seats out of 83 at the assembly in NWFP, and the PML-N which had wrested 31 seats. This alliance broke down when the government of Nawaz Sharif refused to rename the NWFP Pakhtunkhwa (and not Pashtunistan). This marked apparently the return of the ANP to some ethnic mobilisation. Begum Nasim Wali (the wife of Wali Khan) declared in an interview: "I want an identity [...] I want a name change so that the Pakhtuns may be identified on the map of Pakistan".<sup>19</sup> And she emphasised that Pakhtunkhwa was "the 3,000 year old name of this area", the name used by Ahmed Shah Abdali who said he forgot everything including the throne of Delhi but not Pakhtunkhwa. This kind of emotional rewriting of history is inherent in the nationalist discourse. The primordialists take it at face value but such a discourse is only resorted to when it serves some purpose. In that case, Nawaz Sharif had probably antagonised the ANP less with the renaming issue than with the Kalabagh Dam project whose royalties were bound to go in Punjabi pockets. Once more, the real motives behind this resurgent nationalism were socio-economic—but they were presented under the garb of national sentiments.

The case studies of Baloch and Pakhtun nationalisms suggest that the instrumentalist model that we used for interpreting the trajectories of the ethnic

<sup>19</sup>*The News*, 1st March 1998.

movements in Sindh and East Bengal, remained by and large relevant. The fact that foreign countries may be involved to a certain extent did not make much difference. The fate of these movements remained determined by internal factors and more especially the two variables with which we are now familiar, that is the level of centralisation of the State and the degree of socio-economic as well as political marginalisation of the ethnic groups. Both things may naturally be related since the centrifugal forces may well be exacerbated by the group's perception of a relative deprivation which a corollary of over centralisation.

## CONCLUSION

The identity movements affecting the unity of Pakistan do not stem from primordial collective bonds: their ideologies have been constructed in order to promote specific interests, political as well as socio-economic. Hence the hyper sensitivity to the census figures and to the representation of the different communities in the administration and the army. Identity issues have much to do with quotas and shares of the budget. As a result, the militancy of the Mohajir, Sindhi and even Pakhtun leaders vary according to their access to state power and other resources. This conclusion is also reconfirmed by the socio-economic dimension of the Shias-Sunnis conflict in Punjab. If both communities were on the same footing, "sectarian" conflicts would not be so easily exacerbated.

Yet, ethnic politics cannot be equated with interest politics. It has also much to do with the functioning of the State. Bengali separatism derived largely from its excessive centralisation and Baloch nationalism really crystallised in reaction to the reduction of provincial autonomy by Islamabad. Atul Kohli argues that in contrast to India, Pakistan cannot accommodate centrifugal movements (as in Tamil Nadu and Punjab in India) because it does not have a federal framework and the democratic culture to do so. [Kohli (1997).] These two characteristics enable or oblige India to make concessions in such a way as, finally, ethnic movements recede—hence the metaphor of the inverse "U" curve. One could object that in Pakistan too some ethnic movements followed the shape of an inverse "U" curve: in Balochistan and in the NWFP the tensions are much less than in the 1970s, however it may not be so because of the State granting them more autonomy but because of the co-optation of local leaders and some economic development in the NWFP. Thus, the centralisation of the State is an additional factor of ethnic tensions that we must take into account along with group rivalries.

But can we separate these two phenomena? This distinction is probably artificial. Ethnic groups demand more autonomy to promote their interests while over centralisation directly results from the consistent effort of the Punjabi establishment to defend theirs and to correlatively marginalise the regional identities, under the pretext of national integration through Islam and Urdu. Besides group

rivalries and the centralisation of the State, a third element has emerged from our survey, the irredentist dimension of several ethnic movements. Interestingly, this factor does not play a very important role in the case of Balochistan and the NWFP. The successive Afghan governments certainly supported the cause of Pakhtunistan, but the Pakhtuns preferred to get integrated in the Pakistani political system in great part because it increasingly met their expectations in terms of socio-economic and political interests. So far as Balochistan is concerned, the separatists did not receive any significant help from Iran: the "raison d'Etat" prevailed over ethnic solidarities. Tehran might have played a more active role in favour of the Pakistani Shias but it remains to be seen.

Thus, the pursuit of group interest appears to be the most important factor in the development of ethnic movements in Pakistan, even if other factors have been mentioned such as the centralisation of the State and the irredentist dimension. One more need to be mentioned. So far, we have focused on objective phenomena, at the expense of the politics of subjectivity. Even if relative deprivation and resentment towards the State might be the root causes of most of the ethnic movements, we must not ignore their representation of the world, especially because it gives rise to a deep rooted political culture once the conflict become routinised.

Naturally, all the nationalist ideologues emphasise the primordial, specific characters of their community but we do not need to believe them while reconstituting their strategy identity-building. In a path-breaking article, Clifford Geertz—the same author who had articulated purely primordialist views in the early 1960s—suggested that nationalist ideologies were often constructed against others, who are seen as posing a threat to the group. [Geertz (1973).] Such threats can be physical, economic and social but also psychological since the group's self-esteem is often at stake in its relations with dominating communities or nations (in the colonial context for instance). Over the last thirty years scholars from different quarters such as Smith (1971); Plamenatz (1973) and Greenfeld (1992) have shown that nationalist ideologies take shape in a conflicting relationship between the Self and the Other, usually in an effort to resist to the latter's power or cultural influence.

In Pakistan, the nationalist-like ideology of the Mohajirs, for example, did not only result from socio-economic frustrations but also from psychological strains. Both dimensions have to be integrated to get a true picture of their movement. They have in fact inherited part of this strain from their pre-Partition situation. Feroz Ahmed even suggests that "As a result of living under constant threat of being economically, politically and culturally overwhelmed by the Hindus during the British period, the Mohajirs had developed a paranoid strain not uncommon to minority groups. This fear syndrome in a relatively privileged group carried the potential of both motivating the group toward greater achievement and colliding needlessly with other groups". [Ahmed (1998).] This inferiority complex was certainly reactivated by the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 which shattered the two

nation theory: the Islamic discourse with which the Mohajirs were so closely associated could not be the rallying point of Pakistan and therefore they were condemned to remain in a minority situation. Even though most of them belonged to the middle class they interpreted all the revisions of the quotas as posing them a serious threat. And in addition to these more or less objective elements, their psyche was over sensitive to subjective ones. For instance, in 1983, the MRD reawakened the Mohajir fear of being persecuted by the host population with which they had never come to terms. Hence their slogan then: "We do not want to become Biharis". [Ahmed (1998), p. 123.] In order to resist the threats posed by dominating Others, the Mohajirs propagate mythical views of the past: they have created Pakistan and made great sacrifices for this cause—therefore they deserve to be treated as more equal than others; they have been badly treated and the State must put up with this unfair treatment, a claim which cannot be reconciled with their relatively privileged situation in comparison to other groups—but their expectations have always been higher than the average. [Ahmed (1998).] This feature recalls the Sikh psychology in the Indian Punjab.

Such claims and counter claims result from a strong feeling of vulnerability which is one of the psychological root cause of the Mohajirs' movement. Even if the Mohajirs' socio-economic situation was the catalyst of their mobilisation, such a political culture was an important factor which one can also find in G. M. Syed's nationalism, an ideology based on many other myths regarding the historical and linguistic grandeur of Sindh. [Chitkara (1996).] Which means that further research need to be conducted regarding the subjective dimension of nationalism.

## REFERENCES

- Maydar, Afak, (1993) *The Mohajirs in Sindh: A Critical Essay*. In J. Henry Korson (ed) *Contemporary Problems of Pakistan*. Boulder: Westview. p. 117.
- Ahmed, F. (1998) *Ethnicity and Politics in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Amin, Tahir (1993) *Ethno-National Movements of Pakistan. Domestic and International Factors*. Islamabad: Institute of Policies Studies.
- Binder, L. (1961) *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Braibanti, R. (1966) *Asian Bureaucratic Traditions Emergent from the British Imperial Tradition*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Brass, P. (1974) *Language, Religion and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brass, P. (1979) *Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity among the Muslims of South Asia*. In D. Taylor and M. Yapp (eds) *Political Identity of South Asia*. London: Curzon Press.
- Brass, P. (1985) *Ethnic Groups and the State*. In P. Brass (ed) *Ethnic Groups and the State*. London: Croom Helm.

- Callard, K. (1958) *Pakistan, a Political Study*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Chitkara, M. G. (1996) *Jiy-e-Sindh G. M. Syed*. New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation.
- Cohen, S. P. (1987) State Building in Pakistan. In A. Bannazizi and M. Weiner (eds) *The State, Religion and Ethnic Politics: Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan*. Lahore: Vanguard.
- Cohen, S. P. (1998) *The Pakistan Army*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1963) The Integrative Revolution—Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States. In C. Geertz (ed) *Old Societies and New States*. London: The Free Press of Glencoe.
- Geertz, C. (1973) Ideology as a Cultural System. In C. Geertz (ed) *The Interpretation of Culture*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gellner, E. (1964) *Thought and Change*. London: Weidenfield and Nicholson.
- Greenfeld, L. (1992) *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University.
- Jalal, A. (1985) *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jalal, A. (1990) *The State of the Martial Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kennedy, C. H. (1987) *Bureaucracy in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Kennedy, C. H. (1991) The Politics of Ethnicity in Sindh. *Asian Survey* 31:10 938–955.
- Kohli, A. (1997) Can Democracies Accommodate Ethnic Nationalism? Rise and Decline of Self-determination Movements in India. *Journal of Asian Studies* 56:2 325–344.
- Noman, O. (1992) *Pakistan—Political and Economic History Since 1947*. London: Kegan Paul International.
- Plamenatz, J. (1973) Two Types of Nationalism . In E. Kamenka (dir.) *Nationalism, The Nature and Evolution of an Idea*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Rashiduzzaman, M. (1982) East-West Conflicts in Pakistan: Bengali Regionalism, 1947–1970. In A. J. Wilson et D. Dalton (eds) *The States of South Asia—Problems of National Integration*. London: Hurst. p. 117.
- Rehman, J. (1994) Self-determination, State-building and the Mohajirs: An International Legal Perspective of the Role of the Indian Muslim Refugees in the Constitutional Development of Pakistan. *Contemporary South Asia* 3:2 122–23.
- Robinson, F. (1997) Nation Formation, the Brass Thesis and Muslim Separatism. *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 15:3, Nov. p. 219.
- Robinson, F. (1974) *Separatism among Indian Muslims*. Cambridge University Press.
- Roy, Olivier (1997) Nation Sans Nationalisme (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran). In P. Birnbaum (ed) *Sociologie des Nationalismes*. Paris: PUF.

- Samad, Y. (1989) *Nation in Turmoil: Nationalism and Ethnicity in Pakistan*. Chap. 3. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Sayeed, K. B. (1966) *The Political System of Pakistan*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Sayeed, K. B. (1968) The Role of Military in Pakistan. In Jacques Van Doorn (ed) *Armed Forces and Society*. Mouton: The Hague/Paris.
- Shah, M. Ali (1977) *The Foreign Policy of Pakistan—Ethnic Impacts on Diplomacy*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Smith, A. D. (1971) *Theories of Nationalism*. London: Gerald Duckworth.

## Comments

### 1.

Before I come to the central thesis of the paper, let me focus on two important aspects of ethnic question in Pakistan—overlapping ethnic boundaries and post-modern discourse on identity, which most of the academic writers on the subject tend to ignore. The paper by Professor Jaffrelot is no exception. Generally, the scholars have treated each province of Pakistan as an ethnic category, ignoring exigencies of colonial rule and post-independence process of demographic shifts and migration patterns. All the provinces of Pakistan were carved out by the British as administrative units for the convenience of the *Raj*, without eliminating or substituting for the historic names. The British Indian Government created North-West Frontier Province out of diverse ethnic elements more for security reasons than for any other consideration. All other provinces are equally diverse in their ethnic composition. More Balochis live out of their own province, and they share the territorial domain in Balochistan with the Pashtun. In recent decades because of their migration to other provinces and inflow of the Pashtun Afghan refugees, the ethnic balance in the province is more or less equal between Balochis and the Pashtuns. Non-Sindhis in Sindh are very close to the numerical strength of the natives, if one counts Balochis and Seraikis as separate ethnic categories. Again, the large presence of Balochis and Seraikis in Punjab complicates the question of ethnic boundaries. Pakistan, in fact, presents a strong tradition of common ethnic homelands within the administrative boundaries of the provinces, which were drawn much earlier than the creation of Pakistan in 1947. This is both a source of strength, as well as source of potential conflict over resources, jobs, political representation and issues of distributive justice.

Second important thing to note is that the whole discourse on national identity has changed during the past decade. Identity is multi-layered concept and it is always contextualised. A Balochi can identify himself, and he does, with his sub-tribe, or tribe. Islam, province and Pakistan depending on the social, political and territorial context. The question is, do these identities come into conflict? Obviously, not. The political tradition of post-colonial state is different in this respect than the historical experience of the European state where single national group succeeded in establishing its dominance quite often through violent means, and then imposing its own definition of identity on weaker groups. Over the centuries, this strategy of group dominance and successful elimination of minority ethnic groups and



languages succeeded in creating a more homogenous "nation". The international context of national building has changes, and so have the means from violence to political accommodation, pluralism and sharing. It is unfair to judge this process through the current yardstick of Europe, ignoring the turbulent history of conflicts. Therefore, Jaffrelot's assertion that "Pakistan is still looking for identity" is out of academic fashion. The most-modernist thinking on the issue of ethnicity would rather leave all groups to maintain their cultural and lingual traditions and be at ease with the question of identity. One must recognise the fact that societies evolve, lingual preferences change over time, and issues of identity lose salience or become politicised. The market place of ideas, job requirements and mobility both physical as well social determine one's choices. The Punjabis who are socially and economically mobile upward have adopted Urdu as the first language in conversation with their children, which is a sign of remarkable change in Pakistan. Again, the physical mobility and the requirements of an integrated national economic system in which all the ethnic groups participate for profit has popularised the use of the Urdu language.

The central thesis of Jaffrelot's paper is interesting. He uses materialistic interpretation to explain the problem of ethnicity. His main argument is that frustrated élite groups mobilise ethnic groups to advance their political agenda, enter the contest for political power or legitimise their own representative status. I do find this argument plausible, and if applied to study politicisation of different ethnic movements, this thesis will hold the ground. This argument is rooted in the well-studied question of relative deprivation and how the ethnic élites exploit such situation to their own political benefit. Both researchers and policy-makers have widely accepted the material causes, like unemployment, discrimination in jobs, unfair allocation of resources, and underdevelopment, as promoters of ethnicity. The other side of this debate is that state policies are primarily responsible for the rise or decline of ethnicity. Just distribution of resources, economic growth, job creation and better opportunities for sharing political power would reduce the salience of ethnic issues. Therefore, one may use Jaffrelot's argument to explain the decline of ethnicity in Pakistan or elsewhere.

The question of centralisation of both political power and the state apparatus, and its effects on ethnicity has been intensively debated in Pakistan. Many of us have argued that multi-ethnic character of the state in Pakistan would require greater autonomy to the federating units. This is something that the rulers in Pakistan have stubbornly resisted. They have rather for more centralised approach to building nation and state. It is equally important to explore the reasons for this choice, which has been quite controversial in the political history of Pakistan. Professor Jaffrelot thinks that structural factors in the creation of Pakistan led to centralisation. It is not place to elaborate on those factors in these comments. But two need to be mentioned, the primary concern with security against India, and the demographic imbalance

between the former East Pakistan and the vastly powerful West Pakistani élites. A series of political crises and imposition of martial laws in the country with the ascendancy of the military-bureaucratic élites strengthened the trend toward centralisation in Pakistan. The restoration of democracy in the country may redefine this issue in the politics of Pakistan in the coming years. Already the ethnic élites are demanding greater provincial autonomy and better sharing of taxation powers and financial resources. New adjustments are likely to be made on this question through political bargaining. The sentiment in favour of devolution of power, decentralisation and provincial autonomy seems to be growing. But this sentiment is invoked more by genuine concerns for good governance than ethnicity, which in the process may also address the problem of autonomy.

The question of methodology in assessing the rise or decline of ethnicity is important. Here I have a problem with the author. Many of his assertions about Pashtun, Baloch and Sindhi ethnicity are based more on journalistic impressions than on hard facts or quantifiable data. I would prefer to use the electoral results in assessing the rise and decline of any political group, ethnic, religious or mainstream. By these criteria, Muhajir ethnicity is becoming more politicised, assertive and popular among the Muhajirs of urban Sindh than any other traditional ethnic group in Pakistan. This is understandable and can be explained by the relative decline in the share of power of the immigrants from India. For decades, they dominated the state apparatus, business, industry, cultural, and intellectual life of the country despite their relatively small numbers. Both democracy and economic development along with state policies initiated by late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto have ensured greater share for the native ethnic population.

Surprisingly, the Sindhi ethnicity has declined. This can be demonstrated by the absolutely poor showing of the Sindhi nationalist political groups. There are two reasons for this. First, it seems that the Pakistan Peoples Party that has dominated the electoral politics of the interior Sindh has appropriated the nationalist agenda of the traditional ethnic groups of the province. In doing so, it has built up a strong constituency for itself, even on the expense of losing its support base in the larger province of Punjab. Second, land owning élites dominate the social and political structures of interior Sindh. They occasionally espouse ethnic sentiments, but their interests are woven into inter-élite integration across the provincial and ethnic boundaries.

Many of the students of ethnicity in the South Asian region have projected aggravation of ethnic problems that could destabilise the foundations of multi-ethnic states. They regarded the Baloch and Pashtun ethnic movements as the major challenge to Pakistan in the decades of 1970s and 1980s. Both of these movements have declined in their severity and popular appeal. They are fragmented, have narrow support bases and face new political competitors from the mainstream political parties and religious groups. The Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, the

Mujahideen resistance and the vastly altered geopolitical landscape with the fall of communism and disintegration of the Soviet Union are some of the factors that explain the decline of the two movements. In the process, mobility of the Pushtuns their dynamism and inter provincial migration has created new class of socially and economically mobile Balochis and Pashtuns who are not attracted by old notion of ethnicity. A glance at the electoral results of the past five elections would prove this point.

In explaining the removal of elected governments in Balochistan and NWFP in 1974, and military action in Balochistan, Professor Jaffrelot argues "Arm was immediately worried about the strategic provinces in the hands of separatist parties". The question of separatism of the National Awami Party that formed the government in Balochistan and formed a coalition government with the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam in the NWFP is debatable. Contrary to the impression that the author seems to have gathered, the Balochistan Assembly was the first to unanimously adopt Urdu as the official language of the province. In understanding what really motivated Bhutto to dismiss the Balochistan government two things need to be mentioned. First and foremost, the power ambitions of Bhutto, and second, the Shah of Iran's sensitivity toward the Baloch nationalism. Bhutto was too eager to oblige Shah of Iran, which in retrospect was not justified by realities on the ground.

In the end, let me comment on the assertion that Punjab has marginalised other ethnic identities. In recent years, ethnic élites have very forcefully used this expression to make their point. But when we judge this notion against the objective phenomena of culture, language, values, literature, dress and social movements in the civil society. Punjab has gladly accepted all the good characteristics and colours from other groups to its renewal and enrichment, even rejecting its own language, which is the most authentic source of one's identity. It would require more thinking into Punjab's adaptive ability, open-mindedness and utilitarian mind-set than the space would permit here. Historicism and deeper look at the social roots of cultural variants in the regions that now comprise Pakistan would suggest that they are all shades of the Indus valley civilisation, and their interaction over centuries, now more rapid than ever before makes them more similar than distant.

**Rasul Bakhsh Rais**

Quaid-i-Azam University,  
Islamabad.