

# **The Relevance of Research: Social Science as Local/Global Resistance**

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This paper is an introduction of the work of the Social Science Research Collective in Karachi, a field-based research organization, to a community in North America engaged with theoretical concerns in the field of International Relations. The purpose is to share findings pertaining to the life experiences of people within the state, and even across states (Afghanistan and Pakistan) in an effort to bring these voices into the project of an IR theory that intends to include culture and difference into its workings. The paper also closes with some questions, based on social science research, which may be of interest to this project. For example, how to re-envision the postcolonial modern state and the rights of its citizens based on the experiences of exclusion of the poor, women and groups that are marginalized based on caste and ethnicity.

## **I. Locating Local Research in an International Context**

It has emerged that now in North America there is a recognizable problem in the field of International Relations of accommodating difference, of hearing voices that speak in foreign languages and that come from countries across the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans and are less powerful politically. Further, Ann Tickner has pointed out “given IR’s fundamental interest in explaining developments within the international system, what goes on inside the state is largely irrelevant.” (Tickner 2003: 319) She writes that among these IR theorists now there is a hunger for locally grounded knowledge to better understand conflict and how it may be resolved. There is a realization that knowledge production in conditions far from the center of political power, in the realm of everyday life and under varying conditions of social, economic and other oppressions leads to potent intellectual positions that are worth engaging with and expanding the discipline of IR. (Tickner 2003: 311, 333)

A solution that has been proposed includes setting up: “The practice of conversation among cultures.” (Inayatullah and Blaney: 83) It is an urgent question because some believe that its answers will help to create an inter-cultural methodology for authentic exchanges between different peoples, and perhaps thereby reduce conflict and exploitation. To create this practice is no small task, as theorists of IR have already shown us. And to invent such a practice in today’s world among nations still unfolding their post-colonial histories while adopting the trappings of globalization and the rhetoric of the “war on terror” is complex indeed.

Below I will address some questions that a practice of conversation of cultures, or rather a dialogue that may have no end in sight, would raise from the perspective of Pakistan, (its culture, communities, and developing nationhood).

### **What “cultures” do we mean?**

The very question of culture is already fraught with the violence and blindness of historical encounters and current political agendas that we cannot erase. We can only become more aware of how they function and in a state of heightened consciousness seek to evolve a kind of dialogue that allows for all engaged to be both speakers and listeners. First, the work of scholars such as Mahmud Mamdani becomes extremely helpful because it challenges the discourse within which countries such as Pakistan are understood at the international level. That is, Mamdani critiques the terminology and language of “fundamentalism”, “good Muslim”, “bad Muslim”, and so on, used in international political and media discourse to describe and discuss the people inhabiting Iraq<sup>1</sup>, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and many other countries, and exposes these terms as belonging to a culture of their very own which is perpetrating conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> This is most evident at moments of crisis, when it becomes necessary to justify war and plunder, genocide and looting. It was imperative, for example, that as part of the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 by US and coalition forces there was a systematic destruction of its cultural and historical archives. It was going to be necessary that the world perceive the Iraqis as a people without a civilization, malleable and pliable to the so-called higher mission of the US. Now, three years later, it is even possible for the international press and politicians to talk of Iraq’s descent into sectarian chaos, and suggest they are returning to a kind of barbarism that had pre-dated their brush with modernity in recent times. With their ancient history in ruins, so too has all memory been erased of their more modern social and political order, during which an authoritarian state managed to feed its people and re-build its infrastructure after the ravages of the first Gulf War. (Gazdar 2007: 127-139) Today Iraqis are begging for food and their farmers bankrupted by the new administration in their colonized country. (Jamail and al-Fadhily, February 20, 2007) There is an open challenge here to all researchers who wish to include voices from the so-called periphery to make something of this story of modern famine.

(Mamdani 2005:17-62) One could take this proposition even further and suggest that a process of actively dis-associating oneself from this discourse is necessary for a partner in dialogue to engage with the cultures and communities revealed at the micro-level through social science research such as the kind we conduct.

The next question becomes where would the potential partner find the cultures to engage in such conversations in a place like Pakistan? This is a difficult question to answer:

a) *We have no national culture, but we have a state ideology (Islamic culture) that passes itself off for a culture.*

b) *Yet Partha Chatterjee asserts that “anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power.”(1995:6) Did this really happen among the peoples that constitute present-day Pakistan. What is/are the cultures that should be engaging in conversation with an Other? Are they authentic?*

c) *What does our social science work uncover? Perhaps it tells us more that there is no (a) and no (b) and that we have a multiplicity of communities with cultural/political histories that are changing as they are now engaging with the state in present time. There are voices that need to be heard within communities, across communities and by the state.*

Here, we have found the understanding of “culture” change across the country and across class, it is mediated through social hierarchy instruments. It is used as an excuse for oppression of women and marginalized groups, and imposed with varying degrees to resist social change (as in the case of so-called honour killings of women when caste barriers are being resisted). Its expressions are nuanced and little understood in variations throughout the country, so it is hard to imagine how “culture” will inform IR when it can barely inform nation-building at the present time. The ideology of Islam substitutes as “national culture” for the post-colonial part of that nation-building project.

### **What is conversation, or dialogue?**

The call to an authentic conversation across cultures is an intriguing one for us, because the interview is the primary research tool for us as qualitative researchers working in communities across Pakistan. There are some key elements to successful

interviews that enhance the quality of our work and these are worth mentioning here. They include the ability to ask open-ended questions, without closing oneself off to any possible set of responses; the ability to listen actively, attentive to mood, body language, and the subtleties of what the speaker is trying to convey. And finally, there is the quality of restraint during an interview, avoidance of displaying any value judgement when inquiring about the lived experiences or the opinion of the interview subject.<sup>2</sup> It takes time, however, to establish trust in a setting where the researcher and the research subject may not enjoy equal social, economic or political privilege, and we must be prepared to take that time. In the process we establish empathy with the individual or the story of the community we are trying to understand; often they have had experiences we have never had, but whose impact we share with them on a deeply human level. In a dialogue situation, presumably one would use the same techniques to question one another continually over time, but would it ever be possible to establish conditions of equal power?

### **Research as engagement**

The opening of IR as a discipline in the US to input from researchers outside the discipline and from countries around the world is clearly a beginning of an effort to engage with other cultures. It may be helpful, then, for us to share with you how in our work as social science researchers we engage with partners within Pakistan and abroad, because the richness of our work will only grow out of the extent of dialogue and feedback that we can foster and build upon.

As researchers within Pakistan our engagement is at many levels. Academic research that speaks directly to other researchers within a community whose goals may be theoretical, or where knowledge is generated and shared for its own sake, is hardly nurtured within Pakistan. The reasons for this are both political and economic, and are shared by many other developing countries with a history of authoritarian regimes and low investment in human development. We are able, however, to conduct our research within what is referred to as the “development sector” and do manage to do so.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Schatzman and Strauss (1973) and Spradley (1979) for discussions on the ethnographic interview. There are also numerous methodological issues involved in conducting qualitative research in settings where one has to use translators and operate in two or three languages, and also ethical issues when there are potential security risks for respondents. (Khan, 2002)

First, we aim to produce reasonably sound social science research, based often on primary research in locations and communities in Pakistan. Most of this research is commissioned by policy-makers, mainly affiliated with government, and donors who work in development within Pakistan and they are mainly concerned with what is known as “actionable research”, that is research valued primarily in terms of how its findings will impact the quantity and quality of social sector programmes and economic policy. It is work based on the same premise as that of social sciences in the US, born in the service of the modern state, whose purpose was to produce research that could be of use to policymakers. (Tickner 2006: 386)

We interact most closely with these partners regarding our research findings, and in a sense it is valid to consider them engaged in a kind of conversation across cultures as well. The reason for this is that in our engagement with the state we are communicating our research findings about communities that are often lacking in voice or representation at the site where decisions about their lives are being taken. In fact, in our challenging of categories that the state uses to define and understand its population, we are identifying a kind of cultural divide that exists between the government and the governed.

Second, we seek to engage with social science researchers across South Asia and the world, in an effort to add depth and insight to our knowledge of human societies. But we do not need to limit ourselves to sharing findings and comparing ourselves only with societies that are in geographical or cultural/religious proximity. Why can't social science researchers across the world engage in closer dialogue and collaboration in order to challenge each other's methodologies and enrich their knowledge of human experience? We question why our work on women is of interest internationally primarily within the category of Muslim women's studies and not linked with any social science research on women in western countries? Why should any social science research from Pakistan only be discussed in development gatherings? These questions and more suggest that we need to interrogate the broader academic categories used internationally within which this kind of research is granted credibility.

While on the one hand we encourage the dominant cultures in the present world order to use such research where it exists to add depth and nuance to their encounters with the so-called Other, we note that there is an inverse response to the same movement. Within the multiple and diverse communities across Pakistan, for example, there is also a two-dimensional understanding of what constitutes American culture. Among both educated/affluent and illiterate/working class it is common to find a hostility to Americans for being trigger-happy, oil-hungry, greedy, immoral, materialistic consumers. And this is alongside a grudging respect for their wealth, their functioning institutions, their education and job opportunities. The complexity, culture and nuance evidenced within the US is not impossible to see for those who wish to look more closely, but in Pakistan too there are those who choose to ignore the wealth of evidence.

The following discussion about our own micro-level research may confound some expectations or assumptions about the category “Pakistan” itself. In the culture of current discourse that Mamdani has referred to, which holds sway internationally, Pakistanis are understood in terms of their identity as “Muslims”, potentially “good”, yet more often than not proving to be increasingly “bad”. It is something of a rogue state with nuclear weapons, and the stories of extreme violence against women hit the headlines often enough around the world that one day perhaps Pakistani women may find themselves, too, in need of rescuing by international forces like their Afghan sisters across the border. This discourse relies on essentialized categories that have no resonance with our findings or our perspective.

As we work in a country of 160 million people, at the minimum our job is to work with complexity and layers of information, and explore the richness of what we discover. I will now turn to a discussion of three areas of work that we have been involved with over the last few years, each has been selected for discussion because it demonstrates a way that social science research has interrogated or challenged a political or social definition held by the state.

### **III. Local Social Science Research in Pakistan**

The Collective for Social Science Research is a small private organization based in Karachi, Pakistan, dedicated to carrying out high quality and innovative research in a number of areas. These include economics, political economy, conflict, gender, labour, migration, health, and sociology. The Collective collaborates with a number of local and international academic organizations, development organizations, the government of Pakistan and the United Nations Agencies to conduct this research. It is recognized for three main areas of innovation in the practice of applied social sciences in Pakistan: the introduction of a political economy perspective in macro- and micro-issues; the attention to informal collective action and social networks; and the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.<sup>3</sup>

There are some features about the Pakistani context that bear mentioning, which explain why we work as a private organization rather than within a university. Unfortunately, the university system has been financially neglected and highly politicized during most of Pakistan's history. The result is that today there are few strong academics in the social sciences left in the country who can make a living through teaching at a university and who have also been able to operate free from any form of political harassment during the country's tumultuous past. Many among those who started as academics during the years of General Zia ul-Haq's military rule (1977-1988) left the stifling campuses and opened their own non-government organizations (or development NGOs), and started advocacy work for social and political change, and to that end launched small projects with donor funding instead. The country's largest women's rights NGOs in place today were started in this manner. In the case of the Collective, we felt there was a niche to be filled, which the universities had failed to develop and the NGOs lacked the capacity – to conduct quality research in the social sciences to support existing work in the social sectors.

Social science research of the kind that we are engaged in often involves detailed community-based studies that are ethnographic and requires field researchers who speak at least two languages. We work in all of Pakistan's provinces, the Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Northwest Frontier Province, in addition to studying the Afghan refugee population. Our research studies are usually commissioned by

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<sup>3</sup> See the website for more details. [www.researchcollective.org](http://www.researchcollective.org)

organizations working in the development sector, which would like to see policy or programme recommendations arising from solid research findings. While there is not always a direct correlation between our research and their development activities, we also understand that policy is not based only on government or the donors who fund programmes. Policy arises out of the whole community of actors who have some role in shaping it, and increasingly so this includes political organizations, civil society groups, key individuals, and the media. Finally, we also make an effort to publish our work and share it with an academic audience internationally whenever possible, in an effort to engage with researchers in similar fields around the world.

All of us who work at the Collective have a specific interest in the potential of qualitative research methodologies, which have gained credibility within Pakistan over the last decade, because we feel they may help us to understand better the systems that produce poverty and other forms of inequality in our society. It has happened that the work of active listening, particularly to the disempowered and the poor, has produced unexpected results. We have found that by conducting open-ended interviews with community members, as relevant to the research topic at hand, it has become necessary for us to re-examine our categories of analysis in social research.

### Caste

In our research we have explored the role of caste in other areas of social and economic life due to the consistent emergence of the category in interview data. Studies have confirmed its influence on labour market, access to basic services, social and community organization, and even politics. This particular “veil over social oppression” is one that the government of Pakistan, and in fact many urbanized people in Pakistan, refuse to acknowledge even exists while at the same time they will acknowledge that the other features of caste, the extended family and kinship networks, are integral to their lives and sense of belonging in society.<sup>4</sup> Caste is considered a characteristic of Hindu society and culture, and Pakistan was created as a state for Muslims who believe in the fundamental equality of all people and who would aspire organize their citizenry accordingly. Recognition of the role of caste in

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<sup>4</sup> Gazdar, Haris. 2007. “Class, Caste or Race: Veils Over Social Oppression.” Letters from South Asia. *Economic and Political Weekly*.

contemporary life is seen as a failure of national ideology. In fact, it undermines the essentialist categorization of Hindus and Muslims into two separate nations that was the basis of the “two-nation theory” that led to the formation of Pakistan as a separate state from India in 1947.

In one study, we were asked to explore if there were bonded labour arrangements in some of the lowest-income sectors of the labour force. Since Pakistan had attracted international approbation a few years earlier when human rights activists discovered that some landlords kept their agricultural workers as virtual slaves through debt bondage, it was relevant to explore whether there were similar arrangements in other sectors of the labour force. We learned instead that poverty and social hierarchy were linked in Pakistan, and that although workers in some of the lowest income jobs such as begging, domestic work, brick kiln, construction and tanneries were not bonded to their employers they were limited to only these employment opportunities due to their caste status. In other words, contractual arrangements do not bond the worker to the employer, the bondedness actually exists due the social hierarchy itself.<sup>5</sup>

It is for reasons such as these that whole communities of low-caste Hindus in the heart of the Punjab converted to Christianity under British influence, or even to Islam, to escape their low-caste status under the dominant Hindu culture before Partition, only to discover after Pakistan’s creation that Muslims would continue to treat them in the same way.

Such complexity and nuance has no place in the policy discourse of the government of Pakistan, let alone the international discourse on Muslims which is currently obsessed only with its relevance to terrorism, the veil, and its impact on the western way of life. Yet if we remain in our domestic context for the moment, it is apparent how such research can be potentially threatening in an environment where it is intended to have an impact on policy. In a meeting with the Ministry of Labour, in which we presented our research findings on social hierarchy and labour markets, we were greeted with a confused silence, and then an angry outburst by one government functionary who challenged the accuracy of our fieldwork. Yet the need for this discussion in such gatherings, however unpleasant, has to be recognized eventually.

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<sup>5</sup> See Collective for Social Science Research 2004 and 2004a.

Policy documents and government surveys do not explain much about the people who are being provided jobs, schools and hospitals, and they tell us even less about the marginalized who are left out of the human development framework altogether. The matter is of some urgency because policy to date continues to keep the marginalized and vulnerable disempowered while poverty is growing.<sup>6</sup>

In a study on social protection issues in Pakistan, which was based on field research in urban and rural settings, we found that socially marginalized, which were people who ranked lowest in terms of caste identities and within family hierarchies were the most isolated and least well-served in terms of limited infrastructure and facilities available. Social protection strategies among the poor rely mainly on informal mechanisms, such as familial, kin and clan linkages. These reinforce deeply entrenched social inequalities and inevitably leave out those who are lowest and most marginalized, who have least access to power and connections. This calls for a transformative social protection strategy, based on an active state approach that prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable. (Kabeer et al 2006)

There are additional policy lessons to be learnt from caste-related findings. For example, migration into urban areas is also managed largely through informal systems. This is particularly true in the case of Karachi, which currently has a population of 15 million, including international migrants from the region. These informal strategies tend to reinforce rather than erode parochial identities based on ethnicity and/or kinship in the absence of a citizenship-based community facilitated by a strong state presence. This has already led to long-term political difficulties and it will predictably lead to more in the future. (Gazdar 2005:26) Another finding relating migration and caste is that within Pakistan some of the most marginalized communities are so-called “low-caste” migratory communities that travel across the country, such as the beggar/minstrel castes of south Punjab and semi-nomadic and pastoral tribes of Balochistan and North-West Frontier Province. (Gazdar 2003:22) Little systematic work has been done on their livelihoods, society and migratory

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<sup>6</sup> Pakistan’s Human Deprivation Profile figures are: National Poverty Line 1990-2002: 32.6%, Population without access to safe water 2002: 10.0%, Population without access to sanitation 2002: 46.0, illiterate adults 2003: 51.3, Illiterate female adults 2003: 64.8, child malnutrition (% children under age 5): 38, Under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) 2003: 103. (*Human Development in South Asia 2005*: 210)

patterns, although historically they move across the country and occasionally land up in jail in India or Afghanistan for illegal border crossings.

### *Afghan Refugees*

Pakistan has been home to about three million refugees from Afghanistan ever since war broke out in that country over twenty-five years ago. While policy by and large has been flexible and accommodated the needs of Afghan families with members on both sides of a porous border, it has become more restrictive in the last few years. A major reason for Pakistan's accommodative approach to the influx of Afghans in its western provinces was that it was easy to do so. Existing social and economic networks supported the movement of peoples across the borders and their livelihoods. In fact, the ethnic Pathans, who made up the majority of refugees and the residents of the North-West Frontier Province and tribal areas in Pakistan, did not take seriously the imposition of the Afghan-Pakistan border in the first place. While this worked to the advantage of those who fought against the Soviets during the Cold War during the 1980s, this attitude has come to haunt the governments of Pakistan and the United States in the so-called war on terror almost thirty years later.

Meanwhile three million refugees remains the count of Afghans in Pakistan today, and we have studied their livelihood strategies not only in the camps but in Afghan migrant communities in Karachi, Quetta and Peshawar cities as well. We have discovered that while war ravaged their country during the 1980s, 1990s, and into this century, the very survival of extended family networks has depended upon these displaced Afghans spreading themselves thin. If possible within one family one brother remains in the home village, or returns there during seasonally to cultivate what land the family may still own, while another tries out his luck with business in Kabul but keeps his family safely in Peshawar, because he cannot afford rent in Kabul. In Karachi, Afghans live in communities with their own schools and small businesses, and send their men intermittently back to Afghanistan to try their luck at finding jobs. Some women may go back to Afghanistan in the summer, and return to Pakistan to escape the harsh winter conditions. There are men and young boys who smuggle themselves out to Iran, Turkey and even further into Europe in the hope of securing jobs and incomes that they can send back to support huge extended families waiting across Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Our study of Afghan refugees living in Karachi also revealed that their experience is not different from that of other ethnic migrant communities who have arrived in the city from other parts of Pakistan or the region. They have clustered in illegal settlements in the city under the patronage of tribal and/or political leaders as a means to access shelter and livelihoods. The vast city of Karachi and its many slum dwellings is a microcosm of Pakistan's ethnic and tribal communities, and even Bengali, Burmese and now Afghan migrants, living in close proximity but not actually in a melting pot. In the case of Afghans we found that many of those (approx. 200,000) said they came to this city when food rations dwindled to a halt during the early nineties in the refugee camps further north in Pakistan. Afghans of Pathan origin made use of tribal ties with other Pakistani Pathan groups in Karachi in the city, and also got protection from religious political organizations, and/or religious groups to ensure their survival.<sup>7</sup> They are not unlike other cross-border migrants to Karachi, who required patronage and protection to survive in the new city and who found that ethnic, religious and tribal identities were the key factors in securing their protection in the absence of any alternatives being provided by the state.

The main reason Afghans remain in Pakistan, according to the UNHCR Census, is the lack of shelter if they return to Afghanistan. Our research reveals that the livelihood strategies of Afghans in Pakistan are transnational in nature, dependent upon regular movement between countries and contingent upon families spreading their earning potential across the region. The lived experience of Afghans and Pakistanis in the border regions calls into question the relevance and the helpfulness of state institutions to the lives of its people. Nomads, or *kuchis*, for example, have been following their cattle in and out of both countries long before the states even came into existence. When the Afghan refugee became a category of identification during the first *jihad* in the 1980s, the *kuchi* tribes were among the first to benefit from food rations. Today government efforts to seal the borders can be devastating for the new generation of transnational and newly urbanized Afghans. Take the case of the Afghan man who has spent his life growing fruit in orchards outside Kandahar and selling it in Quetta and onwards in Karachi. He has his wife living in Peshawar with

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<sup>7</sup> Collective for Social Science Research, March 2005.

his children in schools there, because it is still the safest place for them and it has all the urban amenities that they have gotten used to over their years of displacement. Yet he lacks a valid Afghan passport or work permit for Pakistan and is about to lose his refugee registration card, and his children have no citizenship at all. With the loss of refugee status he has lost his food rations, yet without a work permit he cannot earn enough within Pakistan to eat. He cannot be easily classified in today's world, other than as a refugee, an illegal migrant, or a terrorist suspect, but he actually deserves our respect for being a great survivor and there are policy options to enable him to continue his livelihood strategies.<sup>8</sup>

It has not helped our Afghan survivor that he has become the focus of renewed world attention. If we ask him who he is, he will tell us his name, his tribe, and his village, and possibly what political party he belongs to. From this information it will become possible to know his recent history, and also his forefather's history, which may well have included migration from Iran, into Pakistani Balochistan, and then to Afghanistan, in an era when current borders meant nothing but the right of his tribe to migrate was intact. This man's son may fit the profile of today's Taliban insurgent, but the father was yesterday's mujahideen; yesterday's good Muslim is today's bad Muslim. Yesterday's Afghan national is today's father to stateless children. Tomorrow he may be dead in an encounter with the military.

### **Gender**

To take on women's issues in Pakistan is an important and serious task, but contrary to what one often hears outside the country, it is an ongoing and lively engagement that has given rise to women's civil society organizations, publications, development organizations, as well as religious groups. There is also a growing women's professional and entrepreneurial sector and media presence. It is unfortunate that women's experience within Pakistan has been marked with so much violence, but as women have worked to raise awareness on violence issues they have also developed solidarity amongst themselves in innovative ways. The persistence and seriousness of the modern women's movement has influenced the kind of intellectual discourse that

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<sup>8</sup> Also see Collective for Social Science Research (January, 2006)

has taken shape among civil society in Pakistan, and its effect on research is now beginning to be felt as well.

The study of gender in Pakistan is fraught with difficulties, not least because the state has not played an effective role in promoting the goals of gender equality and equity through its policies and programmes. The dominant paradigm through which policy-makers have allowed themselves to look at women is through that of “women and development”, in effect legitimizing investment in the human development of women as a population group based on the argument that it will further the goals of national development. However, the vocal women’s movement has introduced the language of feminism into the discourse of women’s development, at least outside of government, over the last twenty-five years. These activists have influenced the content and direction of research on women, even that which is funded by the government, partly because they are the best-informed, most articulate advocates for women’s issues. The state has been forced to work with them because they have been able to engage with international agencies and donors and ensure that programmes for women remain alive even under the most hostile political circumstances, such as international sanctions for Pakistan’s nuclear programme. Despite occasional improvements, such as the softer face of the current regime when it comes to women’s issues, it is imperative nonetheless to recognize the nature of patriarchy within the state and trace its linkages with the local patriarchies we encounter in diverse communities across Pakistan.

Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947 it has been politically expedient, or vital, for the state to reinforce the cultures of patriarchy within the nation and within itself, not least through the manipulation of Islamic ideology as part of its nation-building project. At the Collective we are currently preparing a book on the structural impediments to the development of a just and equitable society in Pakistan, and the analysis will include a discussion of how the state has grown more, not less, patriarchal, over the course of its development as an overly militarized authoritarian entity. As we all know, this has not taken place in international isolation, or despite threat of international approbation. Somehow the deepening of the state’s commitment to patriarchy has been tied up with its growth as a nation, and possibly

with the state's survival in the community of states, and this relationship must be unraveled and examined in future research.

#### **IV. Questions Raised by Our Social Science Research**

There may some questions raised by our research that are relevant for specialists in the field of IR.

##### **1. Who are the people?**

There is a dissonance, at best, between what our research shows us to be the way communities in Pakistan perceive and define themselves and the way in which policy-makers do so. The people of this country are more than a population, defined by their numbers in the cities, their urban/rural distribution, their concentration in the four provinces and the federally-administered tribal areas and disputed territories. Within the state itself they are hugely unequal citizens, some of them almost invisible in terms of their access to the rights afforded to them by virtue of being Pakistani. Many are voiceless within their own communities, not to mention their own homes. The people of this country are by and large strangers to each other, and those that govern them will not see how their people live.

Informal social networks play a major role in the structure of migration (and non-migration) in Pakistan. "Government, donors and development organizations need to broaden their understanding of 'community' to include a range of social networks that might be organised on a parochial basis." (Gazdar 2003:22) Such networks also feature in the segmentation of labour markets, access to social services such as education/health, local representation, and political power. It will require an active formalizing role of the state to ensure that access to services becomes more equalized.

##### **2. Possible lived relationships of people across nations, and across states.**

Our work on livelihoods of Afghan migrant communities in Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta was part of a three-country study involving Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. The purpose was to examine the cross-border experiences of Afghans as part of a

possible re-thinking on the part of the UN system and the states in the region of the management strategy of the largest caseload of refugees in the world. By the time we started our work in 2005, along with researchers from the University of Teheran, a discourse of “transnationalism” had entered the language of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the organization responsible for management of the Afghan refugees to a large extent, and also funding non-government organizations involved in research and programmes with Afghans.<sup>9</sup> It had become possible for some policy-makers to make the paradigm shift from viewing Afghans solely as refugees who must be repatriated, to migrants whose complex livelihood strategies spanned borders and nations. But would the states involved rise to the occasion and make the same paradigm shift?

We recommended some creative changes in policy, for example work and travel permits for Afghan migrants, citizenship for those born in Pakistan, on-going refugee status for those who continued to be vulnerable, educational and professional opportunities for Afghan youth in Pakistan. In short, it meant an acceptance of the reality of their lived experiences within transnational networks.<sup>10</sup> Yet the broader international political context was growing increasingly more conservative, enhancing the security apparatus of the state as the military government supported the US in its war in Afghanistan, and pushing for closer monitoring of its borders. The government has had mixed reviews regarding its sincerity in closing the border to Taliban traffic, but it must be mentioned here nonetheless that it is almost impossible to completely seal such a lengthy and historically open border between these two countries. In recent weeks the government announced, and then retracted, plans to fence the border and even to mine it, to prevent people from crossing over. Instead the government has returned to its alternative approach when under pressure of this kind, which is to close down some refugee camps and step up repatriation efforts with the assistance of the UNHCR. It has also started a process of biometric identification of travelers at the border check-points, to make it easier to track them once they are inside the country. Our research has shown that camp closures actually lead to an increase in Afghan migrants in Pakistan’s cities, and in the absence of government policies to facilitate

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<sup>9</sup> Our partner organization, Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, had conducted two studies on transnational networks and migrant workers from Afghanistan’s western provinces into Iran. See Stigter (January 2005) and (February 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Collective for Social Science Research (2006).

their work and security, this only deepens their vulnerability. In the end it is unlikely that such policies will further the cause of peace and security in the region.

### **3. The relevance of citizenship, its rights and possibilities in a developing state.**

Pakistan is a postcolonial state in the tradition of India and many other third world nations. As Partha Chatterjee has so eloquently argued, the colonial state brought the modular forms of the modern state to the colonies but it was also an agency that was “destined never to fulfill the normalizing mission of the modern state because the premise of its power was a rule of colonial difference, namely, the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group.” (10) After the departure of the colonial power and the achievement of Pakistan’s independence, however, the new state has failed to become the secular, democratic, model nation for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent as envisioned by its founding fathers. “Here lies the root of our postcolonial misery: not in our inability to think out new forms of the modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state.” (Chatterjee 1995: 11) In the case of Pakistan, not only has the state extracted full benefit from the colonial apparatus left behind, but it has strengthened the political role of the military and weakened the power of the judiciary and representative political institutions too.

There have been a variety of responses to this unfolding of the state in Pakistan. Ethnic- and regional-based nationalist movements arise and clash with the state. Some are violently suppressed, yet others are managed through political accommodation. The independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971 was the result of a civil war; smaller violent engagements between the military and nationalist resistance groups in the provinces continue. Political accommodation does not appear to be the solution of choice. The critiques of the state abound, in the press, political organizations (both banned and permitted), community groups, and cultural articulations. In our short history as an independent state, political organizations, particularly the political party, have been deliberately prevented from developing by what is arguably a growing military authoritarian state. (Jalal 1995) There is nonetheless great interest in participatory democracy on the part of people and communities across the provinces, and electoral politics, when permitted, have stimulated robust response despite the fact that they are manipulated by state agencies and the results are rigged.

Because our research is primarily carried out as part of larger development initiatives, the communities we study are among the poorest and most marginalized in the country. This affords us the opportunity to gain insight into how various communities see themselves in relation to the state, and to explore whether there are incompatibilities between their cultural and other identities and their identities as citizens of Pakistan. Our findings on caste reveal a strong dysfunction between the reality of social hierarchy in the lived experiences of people across Pakistan and a state that willfully ignores this reality in its policies, programmes and services.

On the other hand, the state has been zealously proactive in another project, the “gendering of citizenship”, described by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (2003:2) as the way the state constructs women as different from men (good and bad, normal and deviant, working and nonworking, child and adult). Women were central to the nationalist project of Pakistan’s creation and then to establishing the subsequent Islamic credentials of most political leaders.<sup>11</sup> Sunder Rajan argues in the case of India that, “The relationship between women and the state sheds light on both the issues of gender that the women’s movement has brought to prominence and the crises of the state that these issues have provoked.” (2003: 4) This is so in the case of Pakistan as well, but in a more extreme sense, because the state is not a functioning liberal democracy even in any loose sense of the term. Our research has shown us that in the absence of alternatives, the poor, vulnerable and marginalized<sup>12</sup> (in terms of caste, ethnicity, religion, language and gender) will rely on a variety of social protection strategies, among them many informal strategies, to access basic needs. These informal strategies reinforce the “citizenship gap”: ie, inequalities within Pakistani society that include class, caste, gender, kinship, ethnicity, and language. To bridge the citizenship gap requires a series of measures by the state to build a “minimum social floor to eradicate inequalities in the basic necessities of life, and promoting the collective organization of the poor and socially excluded on the basis of non-parochial identities and affiliations.” (Kabeer et al 2006: 5)

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the experience of women in the Partition of India see Menon and Bhasin (1998) and Butalia (1998) and for the manipulation of women in Islamist politics see Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) and Shaheed et al (1998).

<sup>12</sup> It important to mention that “marginalized” is meant here in terms of access to power and services, and not in terms of numbers. In any given community, the low in social status may outnumber the powerful.

All of the work does not just lie with the state, however. It is up to the citizens to redefine what their roles and responsibilities mean as well, and some of this work is already taking place. The power of the women's movement and indeed the demands of other social movements lie in their demands for justice and equity. Naila Kabeer writes in the introduction of her edited volume entitled *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions*,

The values and meanings of citizenship discussed in the chapters about various communities in the world are drawn from the narratives "of groups who have been assigned a marginal status within their societies. They therefore offer a particular standpoint from which to consider some of the central debates in the field of citizenship studies. These groups may share the universal or abstract values of liberty, equality and fraternity but they may rank them and interpret them differently and at different times.(8-9).

The opportunities held out by exercising the rights of citizenship to resist oppression, not only by the state, but by institutions of society, culture, religion and more, are too real and too unexplored. In Pakistan the debate over citizenship has just begun and it is being led by those who see the state as centrally responsible for providing the basic needs of the people and potentially the guarantor of fairness and justice among the citizens.

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This brief summary of the kind of research we do in Pakistan has hopefully demonstrated that there are no easy responses to the questions about culture and community in this state. We have found that the categories used by the state to define and identify its people are inadequate and inaccurate, and do not allow for social policy to address the needs of those who are victimized by caste, race, religious, and gender categories. We have also found that peoples' lived experience of statehood is not the same as their national and ethnic identity, and that the survival of Afghans has been based on their ability to traverse borders with relative freedom over twenty-five years of war. Migration from village to city, whether it is from Punjab to Karachi, or

Afghanistan to Karachi, is changing people and their cultures, and we can hardly do enough social science research to follow events as they unfold. Our research has shown us that people have multiple identities which overlap and gain in importance when circumstances permit. Among those circumstances are increased vulnerabilities due to poverty, marginalization, and lack of protection on the part of a state to the weakest among the people in a community.

The challenges that we are facing in Pakistan are still the challenges of independence: how to build a state that is meaningful for its citizens? The fact that the project is not over after half a century does not tell us enough to help us at this juncture, but what we are learning about the lived experience of the people and their imagined futures is more important. It may become possible, then to re-envision the state built on the needs of the citizens in the years to come. The question that will always hang over our heads, though, is this: will the broader world of international relations allow this to happen?

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