

The Dynamics of Changing Ethnic Boundaries: A Case Study of Karachi

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Contrary to expectation, and the generally accepted belief that ethnicity defines one's primordial identity and is, therefore, relevant and functional only in a pre-modern context, the phenomenon of ethnicity has surfaced in the modern world as a force more vital than class conflict and a source more pertinent to resolving perceived inequalities and thereby affecting desired social change. This paper examines the ethnic garb assumed by the uprisings and armed conflicts currently ravaging Karachi. The examination is undertaken within the framework of Hannan's model of the dynamics of interactions between the centre and the periphery (as based on Barth's *niche* theory). The paper, thus, seeks to understand the conditions which caused the definition, reinforcement, and functional relevance of ethnic boundaries, as well as the consequent salience of the phenomenon in the modern urban context.

INTRODUCTION

The term "ethnicity" has no standard definition. Moreover, it does not refer to a static entity. Rather, the scope and form of the social world the term encompasses change over time, i.e., the group perceived as sharing a common ethnic identity exhibits not only a variety of form, but also the capability of enlarging, contracting, and renewing itself [see papers in Cohen (1974) and Glazer and Moynihan (1975)]. As such, the contention that "ethnicity" is merely a cultural remnant of some primordial identity is not supported by the resurgence of the phenomenon that has been witnessed in the modern world. Such resurgence has surfaced regardless of whether the context is urban or rural, or whether the system in question be capitalist, socialist, or one of the third world. Substantial literature on the subject, with reference to these contexts and systems, has been produced over the past 30 years or so.

In an isolated pre-modern context, the term ethnicity has been used, particularly by anthropologists, to denote the criteria of common origin, ancestry, and cultural heritage whereby adherents to this criteria perceive of themselves and are perceived

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by others as a group, and on which basis they occupy a distinct identity in their society. These criteria, (having been primordialially conceived and developed at a particular moment in the history of a given society, in answer to the manner in which that society conceptualized of its relationship with nature and the network of social relations which developed in order to satisfy the social, economic, and ideological needs of that society)¹ assign a distinct identity and status to a particular group, and play a role (with the necessary modifications of form, in subsequent contexts) in the material and social reproduction of the society to which that group belongs [Maciver (1920) and Barth (1956, 1969)]. Within the framework of the modern state, the emphasis has shifted from the ascriptive to a more circumstantial and operational use of the term [Alavi (1988); Bonacich (1972); Cohen (1969, 1974); Foster *et al.* (1987, 1989); Flora and Stitz (1985); Gay and Barber (1987); Glazer and Moynihan (1975); Hannan (1979); Hechter (1974); Hurst (1972); Gay (1987); Lieberman (1961); Lieberman and Hansen (1974); Olsen and Tully (1972); Salamon (1985); Sigler (1987); Skrabanek (1988); and Tatum (1987)] etc. In the modern context, the exclusive (as distinct from others) and imperative (or inherent) aspects of the phenomenon have gained importance [Hannan (1979) and Horowitz (1975)]. The minimum definition of the term in this context, to use Cohen's words, refers to "a collectivity of people" within a larger population, who "share some patterns of normative behaviour" and interact with "people from other collectivities within the framework of a social system" (1974: IX). Ethnicity, as such, is "an organizing principle of populations" [Hannan (1979), p. 256] and has often been associated with migrancy.

The sophisticated treatment of the subject by Barth (1956, 1969) serves as a useful framework for analysis. The fact that he views ethnicity as a principle of social organization on the basis of "what is socially effective" and perceives the phenomenon as classifying people in terms of their "basic most general identity" as determined by their origin and background (1969, p. 13), his analysis incorporates the varying form and content of the category implied by the term, as a function of the unique historical circumstances in which specific cultural forms are conceived, have their origins, and are transformed. This definition is, hence, viable in both primordial and modern contexts. Moreover, his theory of the coincidence of ethnic boundaries with *niche* boundaries (1956), under conditions of competition, permits analysis of the actual process whereby the phenomenon evolves, i.e., its basis for salience and the manner in which ethnic boundaries are manifested in transformed socioeconomic conditions.

In this paper we seek to analyze the considerations which activate the phenomenon of ethnicity in the modern urban context, on the one hand, and the criteria

¹See [Godelier (1984), pp. 43–163].

pertinent to the manner whereby ethnic boundaries are actually defined (i.e., defended, renewed and/or recreated) within this context, on the other. Our aim, in analyzing this process, is to be able, within its framework, to examine the situation currently prevailing in Karachi.

Karachi, the largest metropolitan city of Pakistan, has been ravaged by uprisings and armed conflicts since 1985. Violence erupted in Karachi more than four years ago (and has now also spread to other parts of the Sindh Province). Sparked by the running down of a *Muhajir*² girl by a *Pathan*³ bus driver, the unrest has escalated and continues to generate fear, jeopardize public peace, and paralyze the troubled areas of the city under frequent curfew. Reports of arson, firing with automatic weapons, street fighting and casualties resulting thereof, are daily occurrences. The clashes in Karachi reportedly take place between "ethnic groups". The reasons generally cited by the media which cause the conflict are socio-political, but the manifestation of underlying discontent is invariably said to be based on ethnic prejudice.

The term "ethnic", in the ascriptive sense of a small-scale identity of a group in a pre-modern context, is not, as all records of the demographic history of the city will testify, applicable to the population of Karachi. The city, accommodates an agglomeration not only diverse in socio-cultural backgrounds, but one which is also significantly individualistic in composition. Hence, how must we understand the resurgence of the phenomenon of ethnicity within such a milieu, dominated by a market economy? Moreover, what must be the underlying forces and criteria which compel the creation and redefinition of ethnic boundaries in this context?

We borrow from Hannan's (1979) model of the dynamics of the interactions between the centre and the periphery (which he bases on Barth's *niche* theory) to understand some of the mechanisms which account for the salience of the phenomenon of ethnicity "in advanced stages of the modernization process" [Hannan

²*Muhajir* literally means "migrant". In the post-partition era, the term came to designate migrants who poured into Pakistan from all over the new State of India. Ever since, the term has become almost synonymous with, and continues somewhat specifically to be used for, the largely Urdu-speaking (difference of dialects notwithstanding) Muslims who migrated from across the border at the time of Independence and partition of the subcontinent in 1947. Given the distance and diverse regions these people came from, the *Muhajir* population of Karachi is not socially or culturally homogeneous.

³*Pathan*, an Indian variant of *Pukhtanah*, the plural of *Pakhtun* [cf. Caroe (1958), p. xvii] is the name of the ethnic group (in the sense of a group's small-scale identity on the basis of perceived similarity of origin, ancestry, and cultural heritage) dominating the North-west Frontier Province of Pakistan. Whereas other ethnic groups (in the same sense of the term) live in the NWFP as well, and occupy a distinct status and identity in Pathan society, any former inhabitant of the NWFP in Karachi (having assumed a larger identity by virtue of having migrated from the same geographical region) is also called a *Pathan*.

(1979), p. 254], and the conditions which become pertinent to the definition, reinforcement, and functional relevance of ethnic boundaries in this context. This model has also been found to be relevant for explaining the dynamics of ethnic boundaries in newly independent states [Horowitz (1975)].

It may however be noted that Hannan's model (1972, p. 272), as he himself specifies focuses on form and not on the content of ethnic boundaries. A theory based on an analysis of the nature and content of social configurations, relative to the manner of conception, development, and logic for the existence of these configurations [see Godelier (1984)], and the processes of, and potentials for, the historical transformation of socioeconomic formations [Godelier (1981)], will be better able to relate form and content. Such a theory could contribute to some of the debate on the degree and extent of the pertinence, in itself, of ethnicity as a cultural construct in the society at large [Flora and Stütz (1985); Foster *et al.* (1987); Hannerz (1974); Lieberman (1961) and Salamon (1985)]. Ethnic solidarity as a function of the patterns of structural discrimination faced by certain groups within a given socioeconomic system [Charsley (1974); Dahya (1974) and Schildkrout (1974); in Cohen (1974) and Hechter (1974)], and the importance of structural and economic factors in given socioeconomic conditions [Bell (1975); Bonacich (1972) and Khawaja (1989)], could also be clarified by such a theory. Although the manner of discussion lies outside the scope of the present paper, an understanding of the nature and content of ethnicity, within the framework of a general theory of human social existence, would lead to a richer understanding of the dimensions and potential of the phenomenon. We focus in this paper on the form rather than the content of ethnicity in a given context. We, therefore, apply some of the parameters of Hannan's model to Karachi in order to identify the conditions which influenced a break-down of small-scale ethnic identities in the city. We also analyse the pressures generated during the process of economic and political modernization, which ultimately lead to the creation and resurgence of larger-scale ethnic identities.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Hannan builds upon Barth's cultural ecology of ethnic boundaries in pre-modern societies, as based on the principle of competition, to formalize a theory for the modern context. This he calls the population ecology theory. His main argument rests on two premises. First, the process of economic and political modernization increases the connectedness of, and the competition within, modern systems. As such, modernization tends to decrease ethnic diversity in terms of the number of distinct ethnic organizations within a given system. "Under conditions of resource competition", [Hannan (1979), p. 264] observes, "community species diversity is limited by the number of distinctive resources and other constraints on growth".

Effective state building, on the other hand, he notes, causes local political boundaries to dissolve in favour of a uniform set of relations, which henceforth become consequential in interactions between the various peripheries and the centre. The exposure of diverse and disconnected small-scale ethnic groups to a dominating economic and political environment, and their subjection to the same laws and regulations, hence, tends to eliminate sub-national economic and political differences in favour of the expansion and strengthening of the central state. Modernization, thus, results in a decline of small-scale ethnic identities. This finding is in keeping with Barth's model as well as the functionalist premise that the conditions which bring about an increase in the number of constraints on the expansion of ethnic groups "will increase the upper bound on ethnic diversity" [Hannan (1979), p. 265].

Hannan's second observation is that ethnic activity, particularly its political manifestation, may increase in scope and intensity during advanced stages of modernization. In this connection, Hannan specifies two cases; one in which modernization expands from a single ethnically homogeneous centre into a polyethnic periphery, and the other in which modernization expands from more than one centre, each of which has a distinct associated ethnic identity. In the second case, small-scale ethnic identities within each centre are subsumed by the latter, and ethnic political action becomes synonymous with intercommunity or inter-organizational conflict. With respect to the first case, Hannan contends that conditions of sustained competition and conflict over resources within the peripheries do not necessarily result in the exclusion of the less powerful group to the advantage of the more powerful group. The arrival of competitors in a given environment, Hannan maintains, reduces the carrying capacity of that environment for its population. The greater the similarity in the *niches* exploited by a population, the smaller will be the capacity in the environment of supporting the competitors in equilibrium. Barth (1956) and Haaland (1969) share the observation that, subject to the material conditions of an ethnic group and the power relations involved, ethnic and *niche* boundaries remain coincident, whereas a considerable amount of mobility across ethnic boundaries may occur. This finding is translated by Hannan in the modern urban context as the mobility across ethnic boundaries which occurs as a result of the activation in different circumstances towards more appropriate identities. This activation occurs in defence of, respectively, the *fundamental* (i.e., the "combination of environmental states" within which a population can survive) or the *realized* (i.e., the minimum quantity of the environment that a population actually exploits in order to survive) *niches*. Competition as a result of resource-limitedness, according to Hannan, promotes a reactive political activity, by assertion of the larger-scale cultural identities.

Individuals in a society, explains Hannan, simultaneously subscribe to multiple identities (For instance, they are members of a family, clan, language group, village,

region, etc.). Competition for access to the same resources can reinforce the larger-scale ethnic identities to which individuals subscribe. The latter option is a measure of organizing effective collective resistance against the centre, the likelihood of which will be low so long as the smallest scale identities remain strong. The widely shared identities, which relate an individual to successively larger populations may be cultural (i.e., ethnic) or some other (for instance, class), depending upon the pattern of cultural identities and on the manner in which expansion of the centre eliminates subsystem economic and political boundaries. The proposed theory of reactive political activity (also supported by Hechter's (1974) analysis of the populations inhabiting the British Isles, thus, relates the reemergence of ethnicity as a means of achieving power parity among the participants in a competition to the process that typically destroys the social validity of the phenomenon within the modern urban context. Ethnicity "as an organizing principle of populations", thus, becomes a means of grouping people together, on the basis of a larger identity which is perceived as being shared by the group, for the defence of common interest [see Cohen (1974); Hannerz (1974) and Parkin (1974); in Cohen ed. (1974); and Gordon (1975); Bell (1975) and Glazer and Moynihan (1975) in Glazer and Moynihan ed. (1975)].

In case of Karachi, given the unique ethnic composition of the city and the proportions in which different populations are represented or otherwise at the national level, we see the consequences of both cases of the modernization process identified by Hannan (i.e., whereby modernization disseminates from a single, though not necessarily an ethnically homogeneous centre, into a polyethnic periphery; and whereby modernization disseminates from more than one centre, each with a distinct ethnic identity) as being operative.

METHODOLOGY

Our analysis of the salience and nature of the phenomenon of ethnicity in Karachi is primarily theoretical. The data which enables us to test the applicability of our analytical model are drawn from available Government and scientific publications documenting the history and demography of the city. Consultation of additional available secondary data of relevance to the subject (reports, political analyses, editorials, etc.) is further complemented by qualitative data collected during a pilot study conducted in Karachi in May 1989 for a subsequent household sample survey to be undertaken on the same subject. The purpose of the study was not only to select a representative sample of the groups and localities most affected by the current crisis, but also to generate qualitative data on the issues pertinent to the current situation which the questionnaire technique cannot furnish.

During the pilot study, in-depth household interviews, (often including neigh-

bours of the household being interviewed) were conducted in the affected areas. Interviews of some key informants dealing with the situation were also recorded; among them a local administrator, welfare worker, *Katchi abadi*⁴ development project manager, monthly staff reporters, and a local politician.

On the basis of the findings of available secondary and primary data, we may identify the socio-cultural content of the city, outline the problems with which it is confronted as a result of the prevalent local and global conditions, and finally try and understand, within the framework of our analytical model, the causes for the eruption of frequent riots and the manner in which these are manifested in the present context.

ETHNIC PROFILE OF KARACHI

Karachi covers a total area of 3,527 sq. kms., and houses a population (according to the 1981 Census Report of Karachi Division, which demographers feel is under-enumerated, [cf. Chishti and Rehman (1989), p. 7] of 5,437,984 persons. Considering the average annual population growth rate of 4.96 percent, this figure, according to official records, may at present be estimated at well over seven million, and even higher by unofficial estimates. Karachi, which accounts for about 23 percent of the total urban population of Pakistan, according to the 1981 Census, will become the twenty-eighth largest and most populated metropolis of the world in 1990 and the eighteenth largest and most populated metropolis of the world by the year 2000 (see Table 1).

No lucid or reliable account of the ethnic identities (in the sense of a small-scale ascriptive identity or "caste" of a group, designating in the South Asian context a group's hierarchical social position on the basis of common ancestry, and culturally inherited occupational knowhow) of Karachi's population is available. Such factors, ideally rejected in a Muslim society, and in an effort by the centre to liquidate hierarchical discriminations as a measure towards strengthening and modernizing the newly independent nation state, ceased to be recorded in the national census as of independence in 1947 [see Government of Pakistan (1951), p. 2]. This date constitutes the point of reference for our analysis of the situation currently prevailing in Karachi. However, if we consider the history of population mobility and the increase due to migration that has taken place since, we can establish a reasonably accurate picture of the origins and nature of the current affiliations of Karachi's population.

In the eighteenth century, Karachi was a small seaport about 80 sq. kms. in size, and primarily housed a community of 10,000 fishermen from the neighbouring Makran sea coast. In 1849, the area which at present constitutes the province of

⁴Unauthorized housing settlement.

Table 1

The World's 30 Largest Agglomerations, Ranked by Size and Population in Millions, 1950–2000

Rank	1950	1975	1990	2000
1.	New York-NE New Jersey 12.3	New York-NE New Jersey 19.8	Tokyo-Yokohama 23.4	Mexico City 31.0
2.	London 10.4	Tokyo-Yokohama 17.7	Mexico City 22.9	São Paulo 25.8
3.	Rhein-Ruhr 6.9	Mexico City 11.9	New York-NE New Jersey 21.8	Tokyo-Yokohama 24.2
4.	Tokyo-Yokohama 6.7	Shanghai 11.6	São Paulo 19.9	New York-NE New Jersey 22.8
5.	Shanghai 5.8	Los Angeles-Long Beach 10.8	Shanghai 17.7	Shanghai 22.7
6.	Paris 5.5	São Paulo 10.7	Beijing 15.3	Beijing 19.9
7.	Buenos Aires 5.3	London 10.4	Rio de Janeiro 14.7	Rio de Janeiro 19.0
8.	Chicago-NW Indiana 4.9	Buenos Aires 9.3	Los Angeles-Long Beach 13.3	Greater Bombay 17.1
9.	Moscow 4.8	Khein-Ruhr 9.3	Greater Bombay 12.0	Calcutta 16.7
10.	Calcutta 4.4	Paris 9.2	Calcutta 11.9	Jakarta 16.6
11.	Los Angeles-Long Beach 4.0	Rio de Janeiro 8.9	Seoul 11.8	Seoul 14.2
12.	Osaka-Kobe 3.8	Beijing 8.7	Buenos Aires 11.4	Los Angeles-Long Beach 14.2
13.	Milan 3.6	Osaka-Kobe 8.6	Jakarta 11.4	Cairo-Gaza-Imbaba 13.1
14.	Mexico City 3.0	Chicago-NW Indiana 8.1	Paris 10.9	Madras 12.9
15.	Philadelphia-New Jersey 2.9	Calcutta 7.8	Osaka-Kobe 10.7	Manila 12.3
16.	Rio de Janeiro 2.9	Moscow 7.4	Cairo-Gaza-Imbaba 10.0	Buenos Aires 12.1
17.	Greater Bombay 2.9	Greater Bombay 7.0	London 10.0	Bangkok-Thonburi 11.9
18.	Detroit 2.8	Seoul 6.8	Rhein-Ruhr 9.3	Karachi 11.8
19.	Naples 2.8	Cairo-Gaza-Imbaba 6.4	Bogotá 8.9	Delhi 11.7
20.	Leningrad 2.6	Milan 6.1	Chicago-NW Indiana 8.9	Bogotá 11.7
21.	Manchester 2.5	Jakarta 5.7	Madras 8.8	Paris 11.3
22.	Birmingham 2.5	Philadelphia-New Jersey 4.8	Manila 8.6	Teheran 11.3

Continued -

Table 1 - (Continued)

23.	São Paulo	2.5	Detroit	4.8	Moscow	8.5	Istanbul	11.2
24.	Cairo-Gaza-Imbaba	2.5	Manila	4.5	Teheran	8.3	Baghdad	11.1
25.	Tienjin	2.4	Delhi	4.4	Istanbul	8.3	Osaka-Kobe	11.1
26.	Boston	2.2	Tienjin	4.4	Baghdad	8.2	London	9.9
27.	Shenyang	2.2	Teheran	4.3	Delhi	8.1	Dacca	9.7
28.	Beijing	2.2	Leningrad	4.2	Karachi	7.9	Chicago-NW Indiana	9.4
29.	West Berlin	2.2	Madras	4.1	Bangkok-Thonburi	7.5	Rhein-Ruhr	9.2
30.	San Francisco-Oakland	2.0	Bogotá	4.0	Milan	7.4	Moscow	9.1

Source: United Nations, Population Studies No. 68, Table 4.7.

Balochistan and includes the Makran Coastal Range became part of British India, just as Karachi, six years earlier, was annexed to British India along with the rest of the area which at present constitutes the province of Sindh. Henceforth, the fishing community of Karachi, living mostly in the Lyari locality of the city today, came to be known as Sindhi Baloch, or natives of Balochistan origin, and may be considered the indigenous population of the seaport.

Karachi, a mere town in the eighteenth century, gained in importance as a commercial centre as of 1832 with the setting up of the Lloyd Barrage at Sukkhar, and its use as a military port during the Second World War. Subsequent to British annexation in 1843, by when Karachi's population was estimated at 14,000, government offices were established in Karachi and employment opportunities arising out of war-generated activities and building and construction works were instrumental in attracting migrants to the city. These came as individuals, nuclear, joint and extended families, notably businessmen and labourers from Western India and Rajasthan, and settled in Karachi in search of opportunities provided by the city as it grew in size and importance. A population totaling an estimated 14,000 in 1843, had increased to 500,000 by 1947. This was due not only to growth in population and migration, but also through the expansion of the city to encompass some of the Sindhi villages, which in 1843 lay outside the seaport. By 1947, Karachi's area had grown to cover 115 sq. kms.

In 1947, Karachi, already conspicuous for its ethnic diversity, experienced a major exogenous influx at Independence and partition of the subcontinent when the city became the capital of the new State of Pakistan. Whereas the bulk of the Sindhi Hindus and Hindu business community of Karachi crossed over to India, Muslims uprooted from all over the new state of India in 1947, and in the years to follow,⁵ migrated in great numbers to Karachi. During the decade 1941 to 1951, six hundred and ninety-one thousand people, according to [Hashmi (1965), p. 19], were added to Karachi's population. This number increased the population of the city by 158.4 percent (156 percent according to the 1951 National Census). The annual growth rate for this period has been recorded as 10 percent, which is the highest ever for Karachi.

The post-partition influx from across the border thus more than doubled the existing population of Karachi. The magnitude of this inflow, only seconds the number of migrants to the Punjab and the Bahawalpur State.⁶ The two main linguistic groups among the migrants to Karachi after partition were the Gujarati-speaking

⁵ The influx of migrants from India declined, according to [Hashmi (1965), p. 19], as of the second half of the 1950s due to a more vigorous implementation of immigration rules.

⁶ The latter received a total of 52,81,194 persons from East Punjab, Kashmir, and North-west India.

business community from Western India and the Urdu-speaking *Muhajirs* from the rest of the Subcontinent. Thus, for a decade after Independence, the significant groups inhabiting Karachi were: the Sindhi Baloch; the religious minorities (i.e., the Hindus, Zoroastrians, and Christians) and the Gujarati-speaking Muslims who did not emigrate to India; the Gujarati and Urdu-speaking *Muhajirs*; and the in-migrants who had been posted to and/or settled in the city since Independence. Table 2 shows the different languages spoken in Karachi in 1961, which gives us an idea of the origins of the linguistic groups inhabiting the city.

During the years following Independence, hence, earlier tribal and caste affiliations of the settlers and indigenous populations of the city weakened in the urban context. This was due to the individual pattern of settlement and subjection of the indigenous and migrant population to a single dominating political and economic environment. Wider identities, on the other hand, became a means of socially identifying the population. The widest of these boundaries was created around indigenous and the numerically superior migrant populations. Among the indigenous population, those who constituted the original population of the seaport, i.e., the Sindhi Baloch, were distinguished from those who were later incorporated in the

Table 2

Population by Mother-tongue, Karachi District, 1961

Mother-tongue	No. of Persons	Percent of Total
Brahui	20,263	1.0
English	11,597	0.6
Bengali	25,963	1.3
Gujarati	152,471	7.5
Punjabi	260,747	12.8
Sindhi	174,823	8.6
Urdu	1,101,776	53.9
Balochi	108,024	5.3
Pushtu	105,482	5.2
Others, not Stated	82,898	3.8
Total	2,044,044	100.0

Source: Government of Pakistan, District Census Report: Karachi (Ministry of Home Affairs, 1961) Parts I-V, pp. IV-26.

city as its circumference grew, i.e., the Sindhis. The migrants were classified between the immigrants and the in-migrants.⁷ The former were divided into pre- and post-partition settlers. Among the immigrants, those who spoke Gujarati were distinguished from those who spoke Urdu. Although aligned with the pre-Partition Gujarati speakers on linguistic grounds, the post-partition Gujarati-speaking settlers were distinct from the former, but similar to the Urdu-speakers with respect to the period of settlement. The in-migrants assumed the larger identity of the province they came from. The religious minorities (Hindus, Zoroastrians, and Christians), although distinct among themselves, were collectively apart from the overwhelmingly majority Muslim population. This population invariably belonged to the pre-Partition period. However, their more important distinction was on religious grounds rather than linguistic, and indigenous as opposed to migrant, or pre-versus post-Independence settlement.

Ethnicity, following Independence thus, circumscribed groups distinguished by virtue of indigenous or migrant status. Both these categories were further cut across by smaller identities defined by language, religion, area, and period of settlement on the one hand; and yet smaller identities of caste and tribe, on the other. These distinctions, during the decade following Independence, however, had no political role. In the newly independent state, the potential for absorption in both the public as well as the private sector was significant. Subject to availability of opportunity and the absence of any discriminatory state policy, ethnic distinctions primarily became a means of social identification in an anonymous urban setting, of populations transplanted from a pre-modern context, with which context they continued to be associated and had invariably maintained links.

Since Independence, Karachi has grown as the leading industrial and commercial city of the country. Agriculture and horticulture (in the rural areas of the Division, near Landhi and Malir) are nominal in terms of income generation and employment. The important occupations, apart from fishery, are manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, professional, technical, and administrative services, sales workers and shopkeepers, transport, and unskilled labourers [see Government of Pakistan (1981)].

The coastal location of Karachi, in addition to its land and air channel facilities, increased trade, and the possibilities of free enterprise created economic opportunities, which attracted migrants to the city. Table 3 shows the increase in Karachi's population due to migration from 1947 through 1959. We may note the greatest number of migrants (both immigrants and in-migrants) to the city in the year immediately following Independence. The decade thereafter is marked by a gradual

⁷In-migrant refers to migrants from Pakistan, as opposed to immigrants who came from outside Pakistan.

Table 3
Increase in Karachi's Population due to Migration 1947-1959

Year	Total Migrants	Immigrants	In-migrants
1947	531,650	502,675	28,975
1948	206,125	190,250	16,475
1949	119,475	102,650	16,825
1950	157,125	133,000	24,125
1951-52	138,776	102,250	35,326
1953-54	99,824	57,974	41,850
1955-56	74,500	30,324	44,176
1957-58	72,200	23,844	48,356
1959	9,122	2,981	6,141
Total	1,409,297	145,948	262,249

Source: See Khan (1969)

decrease in the number of immigrants, particularly after the first five years, when immigration rules became more stringent. No such pattern is observable in the inflow of in-migrants whose migration depended on factors other than government restrictions. Table 4 gives the breakup – by occupational group and the status of native, immigrant, and in-migrant – of Karachi's population in 1959. Except for parity among immigrants and in-migrants in the number of semi-skilled and unskilled labourers in the city, the migrants from India outnumber the natives and in-migrants in all other occupational opportunities. This was due not only to their superior numerical strength, and the non-discriminatory policy of the government, but also their qualification for fulfilling available opportunities. The Gujarati linguistic group disposed of capital to set up businesses, while the Urdu linguistic group consisted of formally educated migrants from the bigger cities of the Subcontinent who could be absorbed in salaried jobs in preference of the more rural population of the area that constituted the Sindh province.

In the 1960s, during Ayub Khan's regime, a significant wave of in-migrants came from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). These were not only labourers; they also gradually took over, almost entirely, the public transport system of the city. The report of the inquiry into Karachi's affairs commissioned by the Prime Minister in May 1988 shows only 557 buses in the city at present to be Government property, as opposed to 1,253 private buses and a total of 85,709 privately run

Table 4

Natives, Muhajirs, and Migrants from the Rest of Pakistan in the Karachi Labour Force, 1959

Occupational Group	Total	Natives	Migrants from Rest of Pakistan	Migrants from India	Immigrants from India as Percent of Total
All Persons in Labour Force	573,900	87,125	146,100	329,250	57.4
Professionals and Technicians	14,775	2,225	2,250	10,250	69.4
Administrators and Managers	49,300	6,900	6,675	25,650	72.3
Skilled Labourers	92,175	7,225	23,000	59,475	64.5
Semi-skilled and Unskilled	114,150	18,000	45,675	45,300	39.7
Others	303,500	51,950	68,500	178,575	58.55

Source: See Farooq (1966)

taxis, rickshaws, trucks, and mini-buses, the bulk of which are reportedly owned by migrants from the NWFP.

The other significant wave of in-migrants has been from the Punjab Province, of big and small businessmen and labourers, both skilled and unskilled. The civil servants recruited prior to the 1970s were also largely from the Punjab Province which accounts for their predominance in the police service for instance.⁶ From 1961 to 1972, Karachi's population increased from 1.913 million to 3.469 million with a percentage variation of 81.33 [Government of Pakistan (1977)], whereas in 1988-89 it is estimated at 7.63 million, a 7.49 percent of which is due to natural growth while a 0.14 percent is due to migration.

According to a survey conducted in 1959 [Hashmi (1965), p. 13], four-fifths of the then estimated two million total population of Karachi was found to be composed of migrants, while the Census Report of Karachi Division, in 1981, found that:

The total number of in-migrants were 1,728,213, i.e., 31.8 percent. The persons who had migrated into the Division during the last 5 years, i.e., after March 1976, were 19.5 percent, while 16.3 percent had migrated before the last 5 years but after March 1971. The remaining 64.2 percent had migrated 10 years earlier. (p. 10)*

At present an average of 250,000 migrants are estimated to be added annually to Karachi's population [Karim (1988), p. 3]. Thus the population of the city over the last three decades has been boosted, as a result of migration,⁹ to levels beyond the expected reproductive increase.

In addition to the immigrants who settled at Independence and the subsequent waves of in-migrants to the city, Karachi has also had to accommodate large numbers of refugees, both legal and illegal. Among the former have been the Biharis, who came after the secession of East Pakistan in 1971, and the Afghan and Irani refugees, since the breaking out of war in those two countries. Among the latter, the most significant in number are the Bengalis, the Burmese, and the Sri Lankans, with the Thais and the Filipinos in lesser numbers.

In the last two decades, hence, there has been an inflow of a new group of immigrants from within as well as from outside South Asia. This group of immigrants, forced in as a result of regional political crises, collectively bears the identity

*The average annual growth rate is recorded as 4.96 percent.

⁶The provincial quota now limits the recruitment of non-Sindhīs to civil posts in urban Sindh (i.e., Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkhar) to 2½ percent.

⁹Migrants from the Northern areas and Kashmir constitute a comparatively negligible numerical minority.

of a "refugee", although a distinction is made between those who are legal and those who are illegal. Both are further identified on the basis of region/country of origin.

A large majority of the immigrants, in-migrants, and the refugees, who have arrived during the last decade, live in unauthorized settlements or *Katchi Abadis*. There is a total of 568 such settlements in Karachi, housing a population of 3.24 million, which constitutes 44.57 percent of the total population of Karachi. Thus Karachi, with an area of 3,527 sq. kms., has a population density of 4,333 persons per sq. km.

There has been a tendency within the *Katchi Abadis* for people from the same or neighbouring geographic regions to settle in close physical proximity to one another. Ghettos or pockets of residential areas, predominantly inhabited by individuals, and families (nuclear, joint, and extended) belonging to tribes and/or castes from the same province, and invariably speaking the same language, have thus been created in certain parts of the city. There are, for instance, concentrations of Gujarati-speaking *Khojas*, *Bohras* and *Memons*; Urdu-speaking *Muhajirs*; *Pushto*- and *Hindko*-speaking migrants from the Frontier Province; migrants from the Punjab; the Sindhi-Baloch and Baloch; not to mention entire Sindhi villages engulfed by the city.

The picture which emerges, hence, is motley, depicting a population fed by a sizeable and an almost continuous exogenous inflow. The multiple ethnic identities to which the inhabitants of the city successively subscribe, however, did not become politically salient, nor did they result in violent outbursts, until the last few years. What, then, has caused the present crisis to develop? And what is the nature, and manner, in which this crisis is manifested?

Nature of the Crisis Afflicting Karachi

Karachi's present crisis cannot be understood without reference to the city's relationship with the larger political and social structure of the country. The encapsulation, during the British period, of former tributaries to the king within provincial boundaries (drawn around concentrations perceived to be socially and culturally similar) provided a larger identity to the pre-colonial quasi-autonomous administrative units inhabited by several small-scale ethnic groups. The incorporation of such a structure within the frontiers of a single nation-state, and the economic and political modernization that followed, resulted in weakening of small-scale ethnic identities within the provinces and the gradual emergence of a provincial identity. The strengthening of provincial identities can be measured by the pressure generated on the central government to dissolve the One Unit form of government a little more than a decade after Independence, and to recognize provincial autonomy by the establishment of provincial governments. These developments coincide with the case described by Hannan where modernization expands from more than one centre and poses

a continuing challenge to the supremacy of a single state. Any initiative by the centre which appears to favour a particular group has to contend with the resistance offered by the provinces. The relationship between the centre and the periphery, thus, becomes an inter-provincial tussle. The centre is invariably equated with the province to which the head of the state belongs. The threat of a provincial coalition against the centre undermines the creation of a strong central government, although the opposition to the centre may be cut across by divisions of class and political ideology.

Given the fact that Karachi forms part of the Sindh province, on the one hand, and that, on the other hand, the ethnic composition of the city is somewhat unique in that the bulk of its population has no roots in the regions which constitute the present state of Pakistan, the city is not only affected by the kind of inter-provincial conflict noted above, but simultaneously becomes peripheral and subordinate to the central government on account of its non-represented polyethnic majority.

Since Independence, two notable incidents of public group confrontation in Karachi reflect, in embryonic form, the undercurrents of the processes at play that developed in to the situation with which the city is faced at present. The first incident occurred in 1964 and the second in 1972.

In 1964, (the then *Pathan* President) Ayub Khan's electoral victory over Fatima Jinnah (the sister of the Founder of Pakistan, of West Indian origin, domiciled in Karachi) was publicly celebrated by the population of Karachi originating from the Frontier Province. In 1972, the Chief Minister of Sindh, Mumtaz Bhutto (himself a Sindhi, like his cousin, who was the head of the state), declared the intention of the Sindh Government to institute Sindhi as the official language in the Province. In the first case, the population of the city that did not originate from the Frontier Province, and in the second case, the population that did not originate from the Sindh Province, publicly reacted to the possible hegemony of a particular group being established. Resistance against the potential threat posed by the ethnic group supported at the centre took the shape of a bipolar conflict between the favoured ethnic group and all other ethnic groups. An inter-provincial tussle, supported or otherwise, by groups not represented at the provincial level did not escalate to any visible extent, because Ayub Khan's power began to dwindle shortly afterwards, and the decision to make Sindhi the official language was never implemented. Both incidents were thus short-lived.

These reactions, however, illustrate the ethnic identities (the Pathans versus the non-Pathans and the Sindhis versus the non-Sindhis) that gained salience under threat of dismemberment and as a measure to counter the power of the centre by organization of groups with reference to larger identities that promised a more successful platform for resistance and protection of self-interest. Since the events of

1964 and 1972, however, a number of issues critically affecting the socioeconomic existence of the population of the city have matured to a magnitude that has resulted in a redefinition and a resurgence of ethnic boundaries.

Criteria Pertinent to the Salience of Ethnicity in Karachi

Of the total population of Karachi, only about 15 percent comprises the indigenes of the area. These are the Sindhis, Sindhi-Baloch, and the few businessmen from Western India who lived before partition in the then town. Of the remaining 85 percent, about 58 percent came to Karachi from India at the time of Partition and during the eight years following. The rest consist of in-migrants, refugee migrants, and illegal migrants. Roughly, less than 25 percent of this agglomeration originates from the regions that were chalked out at the time of Partition to constitute the state of Pakistan. The non-representation of the bulk of the inhabitants of the city at the national level places the city in a peripheral relationship with the centre. In Karachi, thus, we see a simultaneous and overlapping applicability of variations of both cases of the modernization process identified by Hannan. About 25 percent of the city's population is potentially affected by inter-provincial politics, which gain momentum under strained conditions, whereas the bulk of the city's polyethnic population is subject to the policies of the central government by virtue of their peripheral status and in consideration of the state's relationship with the provinces.

The major problem with which Karachi is faced today is overpopulation. A size of roughly 3,527 sq. kms. is having to accommodate a population close to 9 million, almost half of which lives in unauthorized residential localities. The sheer number of the inhabitants the city has to accommodate places pressure on the availability of employment opportunities and civic facilities beyond the capability of the city to cope with.

Average unemployment in the city is officially estimated at 10 percent. The public transport, water and housing facilities are, in general, inadequate in relation to the demand for such fundamental civil amenities. The insecurity generated by such scarcities has provoked hostile reactions amongst different categories of the population. These reactions are relative to the status of the different populations in the city, with respect to the provincial and national framework of the country and the strategies (subject to the power relations involved between the centre and the periphery) they are prone to adopt in order to survive.

The private transport and bulk of the construction wage labour, for instance, have been concentrated, since their migration to Karachi, in the hands of the natives of the Frontier Province. Migrants from the Punjab Province figure significantly in administrative and public services and big businesses if they are better educated. These they monopolize to the detriment of the existing Gujarati-speaking business

community of the city. The lesser educated migrants from this province complement the Pathans in the ownership of some of the public transport. The potential for this enterprise is under-exhausted as compared to the needs of the city. The Punjabis, furthermore, provide competition in petty businesses and skilled and unskilled wage labour to a wide range of ethnic groups (see Fig. 1). This group, in fact, is the only one in the city that is engaged in all categories of occupations (more significantly in administrative and public services, and less so in others) that can be adopted. The

A	B	C	D
Administrative and Public Services	Big/Small Businesses	Transport	Skilled and Unskilled Labour

Serial No.	Category of Populations	Economic Niches per Ethnic Group: 1947-1960	Economic Niches Exploited Since 1960s
1.	Sindhi Baloch	D	D
2.	Sindhis	D	A D
3.	Pre- and Post-Independence Gujarati-speaking Population	B	B
4.	Religious Minorities	B D	B D
5.	Urdu-speaking <i>Muhajirs</i>	A B D	A B D
6.	Pathans	—	C D
7.	Punjabis	—	A B C D
8.	Refugees	—	B
9.	Illegal Immigrants	—	D

Fig. 1. Fundamental Niches of Different Populations of Karachi

Sindhis of the city, having been incorporated, for the most part, as a result of the accession of their villages to the expanding circumference of the city, had primarily been engaged in skilled and unskilled wage labour. Those of this population, or migrants from interior Sindh who have had the opportunity since Independence, to become literate and thereby eligible for administrative and technical jobs, are now pressing for maximum representation in all sectors, on the ground that Karachi forms an integral part of the Sindh province, and they as Sindhis deserve priority over others. The position of the Sindhis is thus twice reinforced: once as part of the population that, like other in-migrants, originates from regions within Pakistan; and, secondly, as natives of the province with which Karachi was administratively aligned after British annexation. The resentment caused at being overwhelmed and underprivileged on what is perceived to be home ground, is beginning to assume proportions that are generating movements towards political autonomy. The recent illegal immigrants to the city are significant for increasing the population of the city and providing labour at cheaper rates which is lowering wages and placing a strain on the earlier unskilled labourers of the city. Refugees from Iran and Afghanistan, though expected to be only temporary residents accounted for by the UN Fund for Refugees, have nevertheless bought up some businesses and have been instrumental in the import of illegal arms into the city.

The earlier inhabitants of the city, i.e., those living in the metropolis before the arrival of the first wave of in-migrants in the 1960s and successive waves of refugees and illegal immigrants, thus find themselves increasingly deprived of privileges, and structurally disadvantaged for access to fundamental civic and economic facilities.

The Urdu-speaking *Muhajirs* figured significantly in jobs in the public and private sector to which they had relatively easy access during the decade following Independence. However, the scarcity of such opportunities in the following years has been further limited by the imposition of provincial quotas by the government for civil employment.¹⁰ Some sections of this group also figured in big and small businesses and skilled and unskilled wage labour. All these *niches*, however, are being challenged by the more privileged in-migrants and the large number of illegal immigrants, but nominally so by the refugees.

The Urdu-speaking *Muhajirs*, alongwith the Gujarati-speaking *Muhajirs*, constitute the bulk of the population of the city. They, however, unlike the Gujarati-speaking pre- and post-Partition population of the city, are unable to fall back on private businesses. The Gujarati-speaking migrants may resent the barriers to their future access to administrative and public services. However, since they have almost exclusively been engaged in private businesses, their real resentment is levelled at

¹⁰It may be recalled that a 2½ percent quota for administrative posts has been allocated for non-Sindhis in urban Sindh (i.e., Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkhar).

the business competition provided by the Punjabis. The religious minorities have invariably been self-employed, or figure, though less frequently than the other groups, in private services.

Adapting Hannan's schema of *fundamental* economic *niches* to the population of Karachi, we may see the overlapping of the *niches* exploited by the different populations of the city, and the strain placed on the carrying capacity of these *niches* with the arrival of fresh competitors.

The above schema would be meaningfully enriched if we had access to statistical distribution per ethnic group with respect to different occupations. In the absence of data on the percentages of the different ethnic groups who are eligible for particular occupations (as distinct from their actual occupational engagement or absence of employment), we can only make general statements about the competition over economic *niches*, which takes on an ethnic garb. The overall validity of these statements may, however, be accepted as sound on the basis of the primary and secondary data to which we have access.

With reference to Figure 1, it may be noted that only the refugees and the illegal immigrants have been forced in recent years by historical circumstances to reduce the scope of their *fundamental niches* to *realized niches*. The economic *niches* exploited by different classes of the different populations of Karachi until the 1960s corresponded, by and large, to their potentials. In consequence of the pressures from the Sindhis for greater representation in the public and private sectors, the *fundamental niches* of the vast majority of the present population of Karachi, have been directly challenged.

Given the unequal numerical strength and political support (for Sindhis, Punjabis, Pathans, and, indirectly, for refugees), or absence of support (for pre-Partition inhabitants and post-Partition *Muhajirs*, not to mention illegal immigrants), at the provincial and national level, larger ethnic identities become activated to create pressure groups as a means of self-assertion in a hostile and competitive environment.¹¹ The reason which compels the inhabitants of Karachi to assume a larger identity, therefore, is the search for a common foothold that would enable them, as groups, to press for and safeguard their collective interests. Within the prevalent regional and global circumstances, the larger ethnic identities that are activated are provided for by the different categories of immigrants or in-migrants to which they belong, and the status and position of these categories at the local and national level.

The pressure groups and the corresponding overlapping ethnic identities that

¹¹The strength of these groups as a percentage of Karachi's population may be measured by their voting behaviour in the recent elections. The new political party of the *Muhajirs*, called the Muhajir Quami Movement, won 14 seats in the National Assembly from Karachi alone.

have gained salience in Karachi consist of: the Sindhis (who claim exclusive rights over all facilities the city can provide) vs. the non-Sindhis; the Punjabi and Pathan¹² in-migrants who see themselves aligned against the *Muhajirs*; and the *Muhajirs* supported by the pre-Partition *Gujarati*-speaking community as pitched against the Pathans and the Punjabis. The position of religious minorities and illegal migrants is somewhat neutral and exclusive in this tussle. The patterns of structural discrimination [see Hechter (1974) and Lieberman (1961)] with respect to the religious minority population, and the differences in resources and motives [see Bonacich (1972)] of the illegal immigrants, account for their invisibility with respect to the present crisis, insofar as any public expression of their socioeconomic plight is concerned.

Such a situation has a high potential for exploitation by vested interests, both national and international. National political rivals are accused of being involved in murders of members of conflicting groups, and of inciting further actions such incidents are likely to have. Their motive is identified as seeking to create a state of emergency in the city in order to press for and legitimize transfer of power. At the international level, the present crisis is believed to have been accentuated by hostile countries in reaction, or as a deterrent, to the country's policies and/or stand on international and/or regional issues.

The exacerbation of hostilities is, furthermore, attributed to the involvement and corruption of the administration, perceived increase in the number of drug abusers (who are believed to be supplied by a mafia from the Frontier Province), and the massive infiltration of automatic weapons into the country as a result of the country's role in the Afghan civil war, subject to the decade of military occupation of the latter by the Soviet Union.

Our examination, thus, illustrates how in the case of Karachi, under conditions of sustained resource competition, and subject to the support or absence of support for the different categories of the population at the national level, ethnic boundaries are crystallized around interest groups to create a more effective large-scale platform for resistance and defence of common interest. The uniting of in-migrants with respect to provinces, and that of immigrants with respect to their status as refugee or pre-Independence population of the city, is thus the activation of larger ethnic identities which has common interest as its basis, as sanctioned by the local, regional, and national conditions and forces. The ethnic boundaries activated are subject to change, given the multiple identities to which the populations subscribe, and depending upon which identity is emphasized at a given time for the most effective defence of a particular interest.

Within the possible multiple ethnic identities, there is room for further sub-

¹²The term *Pathan* in Karachi refers to all inhabitants of the Frontier province.

divisions. For instance, class associations exist on the basis of the difference in the degree to which individuals are affected by the current situation. Loyalties are also defined in view of the perceived smaller-scale identities, inter-personal kin and non-kin social relations. Factions thus develop across interest groups giving rise to sub-groups that do not, either actively or passively, subscribe to the views and/or behaviour of the main group. Given the heightened nature of the crisis afflicting Karachi, however, such sub-divisions in the present circumstances are overshadowed by the larger, more effective, ethnic identities. Ethnicity, as Bell notes, is more salient because it combines interest "with an effective tie" [(1975), p. 169].

EPILOGUE

Modern nation states not only house diverse ethnic and religious groups, they also often divide groups that are ethnically or religiously homogeneous. The local and globally integrated monetary system, mechanization of technology, and centralization of the power structure, moreover, tend to create a universal model of society. Despite these homologous forces, ethnic and religious differences may not only persist but actually become activated in advanced stages of the modernization process.

The degree to which ethnic differences persist in modern societies, and the extent of the political salience of these differences in the modern context, depends upon the strength of the state as a function of its resources, technology, and organizational capability to eliminate subnational differences that might challenge or counter its supremacy.

On the basis of an examination of the situation prevailing in Karachi and within the framework of the analytical model developed by Hannan, we have tried in this paper to illustrate how in conformity with the functionalist premise, the process of economic and political modernization tends, in the first instance, to dissolve small-scale ethnic boundaries on the one hand, and the conditions that become pertinent to the resurgence of ethnicity in a more advanced stage of the modernization process on the other.

The pressure placed by successive waves of migrants on the economic *niches* exploited by the earlier inhabitants of the city has boosted the population of the city to levels far beyond the natural reproductive growth rate, so that it has challenged the very existence of the bulk of its population. The phenomenon of ethnicity is activated in Karachi, as a means of organizing collective resistance against the conditions which threaten the survival of the bulk of its population. The ethnic identities activated, however, are not fixed in space. The individuals inhabiting the city are related by means of different criteria to successively larger sections of the population. The availability of these criteria permits groups to activate the largest and the most appropriate identity in a given situation for a more effective defence of shared

interests.

Because of the connectedness of modern systems, and as a consequence of the kind of agglomeration of which Karachi is composed, the city is placed in a dual relationship with the centre, with which both its horizontal and vertical relations are operative. In the first relationship, the representation of a small minority of its population at the provincial level activates a tussle between the centre and the periphery, which, as a result of the social and political structure of the country, becomes analogous to an inter-communal conflict. In the second relationship, because the bulk of its population does not originate from within the frontiers that were chalked out to constitute the state of Pakistan, the city becomes peripheral to the centre.

Given the excessive population and the inability of the city to provide the necessary economic and civic facilities for survival and thereby maintain its population in equilibrium, the ethnic manifestation of the crisis afflicting Karachi is not likely to subside so long as the problems of over-population and competition over economic *niches* continue. One measure towards dissolving the present crisis lies in the emergence of a strong democratically represented centre which can establish its non-aligned status, and thereby contend with ethnic resistance by measures of economic and political modernization, as well as control the additional menace of drugs and arms. The pressure on the economic *niches* exploited by different populations of the city can be released by developing the other urban centres of the country, and thus discouraging future migrations to Karachi.

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