What Makes a Balti in Karachi?

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Introduction

'we come from a backward area, you know'

Rashid, a migrant from the Shigar Valley in Baltistan, made this remark one evening, as we were sitting in a *charpar*, a village house. He had, it can be argued, adopted at least the rhetoric of a new set of premises, looking back home from somewhere else. It could be an equivalent of Hannerz' famous 'been-to', looking home, and down, at his Nigerian 'bush' compatriote (Hannerz 1992). Like many of his fellows, Rashid praised 'the facilities' that are to be found in Karachi where the bitterly cold winters of Baltistan are unknown, there is electricity around the clock, and often there is even access to a television set. Then, after a total of six years in Karachi, having supplemented his studies with a part time job, he spent the equivalent of a months wages to travel home for a job interview in order to qualify for a posting as teacher in his native village, more than 2000 kilometers away.

The return home could seem a contradiction, and it certainly provokes questions concerning the forces of coherence linking the migrant and his point of departure. The migratory move is the visible action of the individual, it is his way of using a room for manoeuvre. But it is a room that is constrained, not just by financial means or logistics, but by the social group that the migrant remains part of. It can be argued that the spatial practice is a social one, anchored in a concrete social and cultural

context: 'The structural properties of social systems provide the means by which people act, and they are also the outcomes of those actions' (Giddens 1984: XX). While the migrant is moving between culturally diverse sites, he is not an unbounded actor, disconnected from social obligations. He is moving within, and carrying around, a reality which is defined by his ethnic belonging, but also subjected to a constant redefinition due to his encounters with an entirely different cultural and social environment.

It is indeed a different environment. Baltistan is a part of the Northern Areas, also known as the Pakistani-held part of Kashmir. It is a high altitude region of approx. 25,000km2, with a population of just over 300.000. Traditionally consisting of a number of autarchic kingdoms, it is only since 1947 that Baltistan has been integrated within a larger political context, namely Pakistan, and it is only since the early 1980s that the area has been accessible all year by vehicular transport.

So the Balti is a Balti because he originates from a specific area, characterized by a population that commands a distinct language, Balti, unrelated to neighbouring tongues as it is an archaic Tibetan dialect, similar to Ladakhi. But he is also, *de facto* rather than constitutionally, a Pakistani, negotiating a position for himself between *le pays légal*, constituted by the workings of Pakistani state authority, and *le pays réel* of what can be termed more traditional village life. Hegemonic discourses that have dominated geopolitics on the Indian subcontinent since 1947 depict him as a Kashmiri, living in what outside agencies term 'a disputed area'. Perhaps first and foremost, he is, and has for five centuries been, a muslim, belonging to the Islamic *Umrah*, a sacred community that sets out quite explicit rules for how he is to live his life. Accordingly Balti livelihood is influenced by a number of factors which, while originating from outside the habitat, influence the room for manoeuvre that the local actors command.

My main objective here is to establish an understanding of the defining features of the Balti presence in Karachi. At a more general level, I will analyse how processes of religious and site-specific identification have resulted in a configuration of this presence within an overall context of ethnic and political segmentation. In order to create a picture of the motivations behind migratory moves from Baltistan to Karachi, I will focus on a group of migrants originating from a specific part of Baltistan, namely Thalay Valley.

What makes a Balti in Karachi? Karachi constitutes the biggest outlet for migrants from Baltistan. Around 20000-25000 Baltis are living here on a long-term basis, a number that swells every winter, as a few thousands flee the cold in Baltistan. Altogether the presence of Baltis in Karachi suggests that there is a Balti community in Karachi. But it does not explain the community, and even the assumption of *a*

community may be farfetched. Does the co-presence of individuals from a given region by definition turn them into a community? People from Jutland - roughly the same area as Baltistan - who live in Copenhagen, would hardly consider themselves members of a distinct, Jutlandish community. Or if so, it would be a passive membership, subordinate to other, probably more exclusive affiliations linked to narrowly specified territories or professions.

Whereas the emergence of a Balti presence in Karachi can be linked up historically with the overall development of the city, this only serves as a rather rough outline of the allocational patterns of Baltis residing in Karachi. The question is if it is also a community, or rather, if the criteria used for organizing the migrants are valid. People who come from Baltistan can be described as Baltis, but this is hardly a satisfactory categorization, neither in Baltistan nor in the urban environment. So the imagined umbilical cord, linking the migrant to his native country, should not be considered a defining feature, but rather a point of departure that serves to demarkate the ethnic group rather than define it according to the modes of organization that its members adhere to.

Furthermore, the migrant landscape does not consist of a number of static, ethnic 'boxes' that new arrivals organize according to. The composition of a migrant community, or the division of migrants into a number of distinct units, can often be interpreted as a reflection of wider economic and political processes. These influence what Dahya, in her study of Pakistani migrants in England, refers to as a developmental cycle' that the migrant community was undergoing. Before Partition, migrants from undivided India used to stay together. But after 1947, both older settlers and new arrivals began to differentiate themselves on the basis of national and ethnic identification. Later on, new sub-groups emerged, based first on regional identity, then on village group: 'with the arrival of wives and children, the village-kin group as a residential unit has very gradually begun to ramify into nuclear households' (Dahya 1974: 86-87). Accordingly, over time the migrant group is subjected to a subdivision, as ever more exclusive common denominators are employed. The nation, the region, the village, the household – the units of identification become smaller and more specific, less imagined and more concrete. This does not mean that they are mutually exclusive, but they might imply a changing focus.

Urban Ethnicity

What unmakes a Balti in Karachi? The focus on processes that come to constitute 'Baltiness' in the urban arena is necessary in order to comprehend the units of identification, which the migrant holds on to. But it is not an unproblematic focus.

Ethnicity is a variable, a function that may assume any given value or set of values (Cohen 1974: xv). But it should be established that it is not the only variable. As it will be argued, a focus on exclusively ethnic affiliation runs the risk of reducing the migrant community to a reproduced *Gemeinschaft*, thus ignoring the political and economic processes that constitute the urban fabric.

The opposite model operates with a transition between the two principles of social organisation that *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* represent. It has been suggested that urbanization, in the actual context interpreted as 'westernization', means a breakdown of traditional values, in an Indian context with the class system replacing the caste system, the nuclear family emerging from the extended one (Rao 1991). Hannerz identifies two principles of organization that characterize the study of ethnicity in urban communities. One is 'the cultural, historical, and geographical groupings of people who have come to regard themselves or to be regarded by others as being of the same kind' (Hannerz 1974: 37), and as such it leans against Barth´s definition of ethnicity as a mode of social organization defined by the group itself (Barth 1969). Or as Cohen puts it in an urban context: 'Ethnicity is essentially a form of interaction between culture groups operating within common social contexts' (Cohen 1974: xi). But as opposed to the definitions, which Barth and Cohen advance, it can be argued that the territorial base of the group, or the myth of that base, may be seen as a more prominent source of reference in a migrant population than in the study of the ethnic group within the demarcated area that they consider theirs. The physical fact takes on a metaphysical property.

The other principle deals with 'the functional differentiation of that [urban] system itself, with its distribution of tasks and resources, with slots to which personnel must be recruited in one way or other' (Hannerz 1974: 37). So a given group could be characterized by the propensity of its members to engage in specific activities in the urban context[1]. In Karachi, Bengali migrants from Dhaka are likely to take up fishing, the profession of their forefathers, whereas those, who hail from Chittagong, are likely to be found working in the garment industry (Askari 2000: 101). But whereas the principles of organization, which Hannerz advance, may provide clarity, they remain analytical tools. The migrant livelihood is a composite, as Timera demonstrates in a study among Senegalese migrants in Paris, where he identifies two spaces, within which the action space of the individual migrant is determined: 'l `espace communautaire villageois dont le centre est le foyer, l`espace de la cité à travers la mobilisation des réseaux de voisinage pour les familles soninké et africaines en général, réseaux encore fortement communautaires. L´espace social

[1] On the assumed occupational direction of specific ethnic groups: "This is perhaps the single most important fact about ethnic groups in New York City. When one speaks of the Negroes and Puerto Ricans, one also means unorganized and unskilled workers, who hold poorly paying jobs in the laundries, hotels, restaurants, small factories or who are on relief. When one says Jews, one also means small shopkeepers, professionals, better-paid skilled workers in the garment industries" (Glazer & Moynihan 1963: 17).

extra-communautaire (travail, militants) connaît un investissement fort limité' (Timera 1996: 64). This 'remake' of village space has, as it will be elaborated, similarities with the *chapar*, the Balti village house.

So the village travels? In earlier works on migrant labourers, Mitchell differentiates between historical and situational change, as he observes how urban migrants 'move back' to rural or tribal situations (Mitchell 1968). In a more recent study among Baloch migrants to Karachi, Slimbach describes the integration process in terms of a succession of stages, but, significantly, it is a process occurring over several generations. For the newly arrived migrant, 'the city is essentially a dormitory institution, a place to sleep, eat and work while they remit money back to their families' (Slimbach 1996: 142). They could have been anywhere, because the purpose of their being remains governed by obligations towards their home base. Slimbach identifies a second phase, comprising second and third generation Baloch 'in which a class identity within the urban milieu imposes itself over preexisting ethnic identities' (ibid). But the idea of one identity, imposing itself over others, seems problematic.

Identity is situational, as Susan Lewandowski states in her study of Keralite ethnicity in Madras (Lewandowski 1991: 277). The same person is a Nayar, a Malayalee, and a South Indian, taking on new identities without necessarily having existing ones replaced. Lewandowski identifies three varieties of migrant associations: *The panregional association* brings together individuals, in Lewandowski's case from all South India, on the basis of the professional activities in which they engage; *the regional association* is, as the name suggests, more linked to a distinct area, the criteria for membership being mother-tongue and place of birth; *the sectarian association* refers to the division along religious lines. However, Lewandowski also concludes that these associations should be considered additional types of affiliation, not necessarily replacing existing forces of coherence: 'The Kerala family is not breaking down in the urban environment, and it is more useful to view migrant associations as institutions that do not replicate traditional society, but often bring together caste or religious groups that would have little contact with one another in the region of birth' (278). So what Lewandowski suggests is that an increasing room for manoeuvre does not necessarily result in the breakdown of traditional institutions, but rather a flexibility in relation to other strata of society.

But the urban situation as such may also result in the emergence of interest groups: 'Urban ethnic groups are interest groups engaged in struggle with other groups for resources in the public arena' (Cohen 1974). The urban ethnic group may be based on existing structures, but if the ethnic group cross-cuts social strata, new alliances may emerge: 'The less privileged from one ethnic group will cooperate with the less priviliged from other ethnic groups against the privileged from the same ethnic

groups' (Cohen 1969: 193). Caste becomes class. Or, as it is the case in Karachi, interest groups come into existence in order to confront what they consider a corrupt state authority (Hasan 1999, Khan 1996, Sheikh 1998).

The implication of this is the necessity to discuss the overall political and ethnic context that Baltis in Karachi operate in and constitute part of. I will argue that the very intensity of ethnic and religious strife has resulted in a fragmented mosaic, which among the Balti migrants has caused greater awareness about the distinction between Baltis and other population groups residing in Karachi.

Mother of the Poor

'You will be the glory of the East; would that I could come again to see you, Karachi, in your grandeur'. Hopes were high in 1843 when Sir Charles Napier captured Karachi, the sleepy port at the mouth of the Indus. The justification for taking the town, as well as in fact the entire Sindh, was dubious, as Napier admitted in a short but stylish way in a telegram sent to London after the conquest: 'Peccani' (I have sinned), it said. But the motives were obvious, as Lord Auckland, the Governor-General, wrote: 'If I can open channels of commerce to Central Asia and if I can make the Indus the thoroughfare for navigation, that gold and silver road ... which it ought to be, I shall not care much else' (Huttenback 1962: 59-60). These visions were eventually shelved as the Indus proved very difficult to navigate, but the town nevertheless developed into the major port for the Western part of British India, emerging as the largest exporter of cotton and wheat from the Punjab. Railways were constructed in the 1860s, and the population increased rapidly, from 14,000 in 1838 to 73,000 in 1881.

By the time of Partition in 1947, the population had increased to over 400,000, but in the following 3-4 years it tripled due to the stream of *mohajirs*, Muslim migrants from India, a large proportion of whom settled in Karachi. Besides forever doing away with Karachi's image as the cleanest, most orderly city on the Indian subcontinent, the ethnic and religious composition changed completely; whereas more than half the population before Partition had been Hindus, Karachi was 96% Muslim in 1951, and Urdu was replacing Sindhi, the native tongue, as the most spoken language. Furthermore, the *mohajir*'s constituted a group of permanent refugees, a large number of people belonging to different ethnic groups. They all happened to be Muslims finding themselves on the wrong side of a newly drawn border. The implication of this was the emergence of a migrant group - actually the majority of inhabitants in Karachi - without any territorial base outside the city.

But whereas the flow of *mohajir*'s from India eventually decreased, labour migrants

from all over Pakistan kept moving to the city. Karachi became the temporary capital of the new nation, and a central administration had to be established. Moreover, Karachi was the only major port of West Pakistan, and most industrial development in the country took place around the city. Between 1951 and 1972 the population increased by more than 200%, to 3.6 million, thereby outgrowing the first of many Master plans for the development of Karachi. According to this plan, the city would not cross the 3 million until the turn of the century (Hassan 1999: 25).

Among migrants Karachi became, and still is, known as 'Mother of the Poor', attracting people from not just all Pakistan, but over the years also from different parts of South Asia. According to the 1981 census around 80% of all Karachiites older than 29 were born outside the city, and in the late 1980s it was estimated that of the approximately 550.000 new inhabitants constituting the annual growth of the city, 250.000 are migrants (Selier 1988). At the turn of the millenium, an estimated 12 million people are living in Karachi

A Not So Melting Pot

As sketched above, economic and political developments since 1947 have 'triggered' Karachi, and turned a middle-sized colonial town into a metropolis. But the same developments have also resulted in an entirely different ethnic composition of the city, as well as a situation where Karachi can be seen as an arena shaped by the interests of different ethnic groups and a central state, or municipal, authority. Barth is probably too modest when he suggests that we should take the state as 'a specifable third player in the process of boundary construction between groups' (Barth 1993, in Verkaalik 1994: 24). Or at least, he seems to assume an idealized neutrality that it can be difficult to find in the actual context. As Verkaaik puts it: 'In Pakistan, the state is therefore more often than not a second set of players: that is, the very institution an ethnic group sees as its rival' (Verkaaik 1994: 7). This leads to a paradox that is an inherent characteristic of the Pakistani state: 'While its rhetoric stresses the ideology of nationalism and unity, its power is often used to promote ethnic interests' (ibid). Ethnicity becomes strategy. The slogan of Muhammed Ali Jinnah - 'unity, faith, discipline' - is frequently repeated by commentaries in Pakistani media, but it would seem as if it is only applicable within the ethnic group.

The migrant status that can be attributed to such a large proportion of Karachi´s population should not belie inherent differences. For the *mohajir´s* - also a troublesome nomenclature, signalling a unity that is not - Pakistan is a new home as well as a place of exile. 'Home' has become where they are, but they are cut of from usual constituents of home, like property and kinship linkages. But migrants, who have always lived in Pakistan, retain their place of origin as a source of reference,

more often than not maintaining close contacts (Hastings and Werbner 1991: 14). In some areas, and especially so in Karachi, the mohajirs were 'catapulted' into command. The first prime minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Khan, was a mohajir. The Mohajirs were modern and urbanised, and their language, Urdu, became the national language of Pakistan[2]. Indigenous Sindhis were left at a disadvantage. Predominantly rurally based, and with lower educational levels, the Sindhis became marginalised in Karachi, even more so as the city in 1948 was moved from provincial to national control, despite the protests of the then chief minister of Sindh. The most important implications of this were the abolition of Sindhi within Karachi`s federal offices, the replacement of Sindhi-speaking office workers, and the closure of the Sindhi Department at the University of Karachi (Sardar Ali and Rehman 2001: 108). By 1951, the Mohajirs constituted a majority in Karachi, as they did in all cities of Sindh.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Karachi lost its Mohajir domination, mainly because of the influx of Pathans and Punjabis from other parts of the country. In his recent book 'Understanding Karachi', Arif Hasan organizes his account of its recent history in time spans identical with the periods that political leaders of Pakistan have held office (Hasan 1999). Besides testifying to the extremely centralized way in which Pakistan has beeen governed, this has also got an ethnic dimension. During the reign of Ayub Khan (1958-68), migrants from North West Frontier Province (NWFP) were patronized in different trades. They gradually took over the public transport system of the city (Mumtaz 1990), and local karachiites, of *mohajir* or local origin, were elbowed out of police and security forces.

The rule of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1972-77), himself of a Sindhi landlord family, could be interpreted as the revenge of the Sindhi-speaking population. Mumtaz Bhutto, a cousin of the prime minister, became chief minister. An attempt to institute Sindhi as the official language in the entire province provoked the Muhajirs to riot, ultimately forcing the provincial governemnt not only to amend the legislation to make both Sindhi and Urdu the official languages, but also to provide a grace period of 12 years for non-Sindhis to learn Sindhi (Mumtaz 1990, Sardar Ali and Rehman 2001)[3]. Furthermore, quotas were introduced in order to improve Sindhi representation within the civil service.

[2] This aspect, reiterated at more general levels by a.o. Andersson (1983) and Scott (1998), was stressed by Jinnah as a vital nation building device: "Without one State language, no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function. Look at the history of oother countries. Therefore so far as the State language is concerned, Pakistan's language shall be Urdu"(M.A. Jinnah. Speeches as Governor-General of Pakistan 1947-48, here in Sardar Ali and Rehman 2001: 25).

[3] The metaphors used by respective ethnic groups in order to characterize the other groups are illuminating: "Mohajirs themselves used akhrote (walnuts) for Pathans because they are so stubborn you cannot get anything into their heads. Choupaya (animal) and paindoo (villager) both refer to the agricultural ocupation and attitude of mind mohajirs found characteristic of Punjabis and Sindhis respectively. Sindhis hit back with makhar, a locust who eats too much of its share. Meant, and taken, as more serious insults, however, were words that flatly referred to mohajirs' Indian past, like Hindustani. Among these mohajir was just another abusive word. The word that was once used to overcome boundaries between people now served to draw and sharpen them. Once it had meant "welcome". Now it meant: "you are not from here" " (Verkaaik 1994: 13).

A main concern of Zia Ul Haq (1977-88) was to keep the ethnic groups of Karachi divided, so that they could not pose a threat at the national level. He succeeded, and from 1985 untill the late 1990s Karachi was dominated by continued conflicts between the major ethnic groups. And towards the end of the 1990s there was a general situation where 'government jobs, contracts, consultancies, admissions to educational institutions and permits for businesses are all given on an ethnic basis' (Hassan 1999: 33). The expression 'ethnic melting pot' is a commonly used metaphor describing the meeting and mingling of ethnic units. But in the case of Karachi one might conclude that rather than an amalgmation of different ethnic groups in some sort of rooted urban culture, the meeting has resulted in a crystallization of differences. A salad bowl rather than a melting pot.

Baltis in Karachi

Strictly speaking, the first Balti migrants to arrive in Karachi could also be categorized as *mohajir*`s. They were Muslims, and they happened to become refugees, as they were living on the wrong side of the border. As opposed to the *mohajirs*, however, they were not leaving their homeland. They came from Simla, the summer capital of the British Raj, and from the second half of the 19th. century until 1947 the most important destination for migrants from Baltistan. Whereas most would only stay temporarily, for 2-3 years, there was a residential population of perhaps 3-4000 in Simla.

But in the autumn of 1947 the routes linking Baltistan and the Himalayan foothills were severed due to the conflict over Kashmir that erupted in the aftermath of Partition. The Baltis, who constituted the Muslim population of Simla, were given 24 hours to leave by train. They lost all belongings, and many were killed in the journey through the Punjab. Those who survived stayed at Walton Camp, a transition camp outside Lahore, which was very congested. From here the refugees could choose either to return to Baltistan, or go elsewhere. An uncertain number of Balti families ended in Karachi. Three or four men found employment in government service. They were living in government housing in Abessinia Lines, originally a firing range on the outskirts of what had been the colonial city of Karachi, and opposite 'Garo Kabustani', meaning White man´s Cemetery, and still a prominent landmark. As there was vacant land in Abessinia Lines, other Baltis also settled there. Some of the migrant families from Simla, who worked as contractors there, established a foothold in the same line in Karachi, and they were thus able to fulfil a similar role there, giving work to new arrivals.

Sacred Communities

The first Baltis in Karachi more or less enchroached on vacant land that was attractive due to its proximity to Sadaar, the central part of Karachi, and the Balti *Mohallah* in Abessinia Lines basically remains a *katchi abadi*, an illegal settlement. But different modes of religious affiliation also became a governing principle. So besides being a focal point for Baltis in Karachi, on account of being the first settlement in the city, Abessinia Lines also became a religious point of reference. Symbolically, the Friday mosque of the Balti shi`is stands out as the highest building in the *mohallah*.

The question is however, how these manifestations of religious belonging should be interpreted. In the beginning of the migration process where integration is only a marginal phenomenon and rests upon a very strong return project, the belonging to the ethnic group and the village are the most important factors of identity. In the process of sedentarisation, other parameters emerge, like religion and religious affiliation, which are added to the former, and sometimes even become more important. In the context of Senegalese migrants in Paris, Timera demonstrates how Islam becomes the most common and valuated element (Timera 1996). Along a similar vein, Kepel puts forward the hypothesis that the construction of thousands of mosques all over France from the 1970s is the result of an increasing awareness among many Muslim immigrants that they are in France for good (Kepel 1993). So the construction of a mosque is also symbolic, as it constitutes a claim to a territory, a symbol of belonging.

The question is if the symbolic connotations of the religious manifestation are different when they occur in a context where Muslims constitute a minority. In Pakistan, where the sacred religious community in 1947 became the foundation of a nation – 'the country of the pure' - Islam has become increasingly politicised since the early 1980s. Radical Sunni groups have made attempts to have legislation passed that denounced Shi`is as non-Muslims (Rieck 1995), and religiously motivated killings remain frequent occurrences. Baltistan is the only district in Pakistan where the shi`is, comprising 20% of the Pakistani population, constitute a majority. Furthermore, it is only in Baltistan that there is a presence of Noorbakshi`is, a Sufi sect originating from Iran. Ironically, the need to manifest religious identity may be more pressing among Muslim minorities in Muslim Pakistan than among Muslim migrants in a largely secularised France. Accordingly, the construction of Balti mosques in Karachi can be interpreted as an indicator of presence rather than an

admission to permanence[4].

Whereas the transformation of Abessinia Lines into a predominately Balti neighbourhood and its emergence as a centre for Balti Shi`is are simultaneous and logically related processes, the origin of Mahmoodabad, the second Balti *mohallah* in Karachi, can be seen as clearly religiously determined. The second largest Muslim sect in Baltistan, the Noorbakshi, constitutes approx. 20-25%, or 70-80,000, of the Balti population, but it is largely unknown anywhere else in Pakistan. The first Balti migrants of the Noorbakshi sect lived scattered in different parts of Karachi. Over the years, the Noorbakshi`is in Karachi pooled resources in order to build a mosque somewhere near the city. They chose to build in Mahmoodabad, at that time an unattractive area located close to the river running through Karachi. As Haider, one of the founders of the mosque, said: 'It was the first building in Mahmoodabad. All the area from Jinnah Hospital to here was jungle.'

Mahmoodabad, at that time largely unsettled, is located a few km north of Abessinia Lines, or a few stops on one of the inner-city bus routes. The very construction of the mosque is an example of how urban space is enchroached upon for religious purposes. At the time, in 1964, the area was of no interest to the local authorities, 'jungle' being a local epithet for uncleared land. But it was not until much later, in 1995, that the land actually was leased. By 2000, an estimated 3-4,000 Baltis, mainly Noorbakshi`is, were living in Mahmoodabad. Significantly, all the *chapar*`s, village houses, which represent villages in the Noorbakshi`i dominated part of Baltistan, are also located here. It might be wrong to consider Mahmoodabad a 'pure' Balti ghetto. The presence of a Sunni mosque, located directly opposite the Noorbakshi`i mosque, testifies to the limited powers of a small minority.

A Balti Community?

The emergence of further Balti *mohallas* was a consequence of the Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan, initiated in 1958. Two satellite towns were planned, Landhi-Korangi to the east and New Karachi to the north. Both were located at distances of approx. 25 kilometers from the city centre, and industrial estates were developed as part of the satellite towns (Hasan 1999: 26). As another incentive for moving out of the city, inner city refugee and squatter settlements were bulldozed, and it become impossible to build new squatter settlements within the metropolitan area.

[4] Furthermore, the linkage between the construction of a mosque and a claim to a territory has another dimension in Pakistan. Here the construction of mosques on vacant land, especially in cities, is often seen as a way of appropriating land. So the act of land grabbing, supported by a religious committee, takes on a religious legitimacy that makes it difficult for local authorities to challenge it.

Iqbal Nagar, a Balti settlement 20km. north of Saadar, gradually came into being in 1971, indirectly as a consequence of these developments. It is located in the part of Karachi, where there is no longer a road network, but just one pothole ridden road, stretching northwards through barren land like a lifeline that human habitations cling on to. Rather than a neighbourhood in a metropolis, Iqbal Nagar could seem like a village in the desert, cattle herds on its outskirts rather than garbage dumps, its very existence due to opportunism rather than town planning. In the late 1960s, a group of Balti labourers encroached on land adjacent to a government-owned cement factory where they were working. They built huts and sheds on the wasteland, but it was not until the early 1970s, due to the intervention of the then prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, that the squatters were granted ownership over the land they were occupying. So the *katchi abadi* was legitimized, electricity lines and water connections were established, and the settlement gradually developed into a *mohallah* consisting of approx. 150 houses, mostly single storey concrete buildings, and all of them inhabited by Baltis.

Similar stories can be told for the other Balti *mohallahs* located outside Central Karachi. Awami Colony is located in Korangi, Also known as 'The Mills Area', due to the industrial mills that are located there. Another industrial area, it was settled in the mid-1960s, and, similar to Iqbal Nagar, what was an illegal settlement became legalized due to intervention by the ruling party, The Pakistani People`s Party (PPP)[5]. So both the legalization and the gradual establishment of amenities like sewage, water and electricity is closely linked to periods where PPP was in power. By 2000 there were over 300 Balti households in the area. The Balti Basti, located on slopes north of the city, is the last of the distinctly Balti *mohallahs* in Karachi. The *mohallah* was founded founded in 1968, when three Balti migrants bought land from nearby Pathans. Afterwards 12 more came, and when there were 24 houses, they built a mosque. By 2000 there were 350 Balti houses in the *mohallah.*

Whereas a number of Balti neighbourhoods can be identified, these most of all reflect a residential pattern rather than a distinct Balti community. Apart from religious affiliations, as described, and interpersonal relations between individual migrants living in different neighbourhoods, the only established instrument of an all-Balti representation is the Baltistan Student Federation (BSF), which is, obviously, exclusive on other grounds. Numbering a total of 500 members in Karachi, BSF was established in 1986 at the University of Karachi. But, as I will elaborate now, the primary frame of reference for Balti migrants is not Baltistan or any organisation representing all-Balti interests. It is rather much more closely linked

[5] PPP, and especially its founder, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was for decades the most popular national party throughout the Northern Areas of Pakistan. It was Bhutto, who in the early 1970s abolished the rule of local rajah´s and mir´s throughout the Northern Areas. thus exempting the local populations from tax paying. A PPP poster for the local elections would in 1999 still boast a large photo of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a smaller photo of Benazir Bhutto, and an even smaller one of the local candidate.

to the territorial base of the migrant.

The Chapar

It may seem an irony, as I have distanced myself from the equation ethnic group = specific area, that the key to an understanding of Balti migrant communities should take the enquiry back to Baltistan, or at least accept a fundamental feature of Balti livelihood as a point of departure. As mentioned previously, it is a characteristic of livelihoods in Baltistan that the smallest productive unit is not the household, but the village. In Karachi, the Balti village can also be identified, not as an ecological imperative, but as a principle of social organization. Within the overall Balti migrant landscape, the *chapar*, or village house, stands out as a specific, well-defined point of reference for a group of migrants coming from the same area. Most of the *chapars* are also located in the Balti *mohallahs*. Accordingly all *chapars* of Khapulu, where the vast majority of the population is Noorbakshi`i, are located in Mahmoodabad. Likewise, *chapars* of villages in the ShigarValley, dominated largely by shi`is, are located in Abessinia Lines. So several layers of affiliation are merging, as the site-specific reference point is allocated according to the religious frame of reference that is prevalent in the native base of the migrants. As a longterm resident of a *chapar* in Abessinia Lines put it: 'Here we do not feel that we are not in our own village'.

As a functional unit, the *chapar* is not unique. In the context of urban migrants in Pakistan, the *derra* is an inexpensive men`s hostel where young and recently arrived migrants live (Selier 1988: 67). The purpose can be described as dual. From the view -point of the individual migrant it is a cost efficient means of accommodation, a function very similar to the dormitory stage referred to by Slimbach. Furthermore, co-habitation also implies a degree of collective control over the individual, whose 'singleness' is seen as a deviance. As Selier comments on the issue of single men: 'In general, their presence in Bastis is not appreciated because they deviate from the norm of living "within" a proper family' (Selier 1988: 67). In his ethnography from a *mohallah* in Karachi, Streefland also points out that 'single men living alone are seen as a threat to women' (Streefland 1975: 182).

What distinguishes the *chapar* from the *derra* is its role as a reference for a specific segment of the Balti population. In this respect there are striking similarities to the 'foyer' that Timera mentions as characteristic of Soninké migrants from Senegal, living in Paris: 'La création et le développement des caisses de solidarité villageoises marque la renaissance, la réinvention du "pays" et du terroir dans le contexte migratoire, en même temps qu´elle mettait en place le premier jalon de la chaîne d`insertation des migrants soninké: la communauté villageoise' (Timera 1996: 60). The territory of the migrant is 'reinvented'.

The *chapar* can best be described as a house unit representing a Balti village or a cluster of villages, and in most cases it is linked up with the 'Village Welfare Organization' of a given village. This is an organization established by migrants from the specific village, and it would normally comprise all male migrants from that village, who are residing in Karachi on a long- term basis. Whereas it was always stressed that the organizations are not officially registered with the authorities, their fabric is worthy of larger organizations. They are usually headed by a general secretary and/or a president, who is presiding over a cabinet. Each member of the *chapar* contributes a small monthly sum, typically 5-10 rupee´s[6], and the members typically meet once every couple of months. In most cases the *chapar* consists of a rented flat, comprising a couple of rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. But larger villages, or clusters, own their village houses. This tendency was clearly to be seen among the migrants from the Khapulu area. The *chapars* of the small villages around Khapulu were rented houses, all of them located within a small area in Manzoor Colony, a part of Mahmoodabad. But the *chapars* of village clusters were 'national houses', owned by the respective village organizations.

For the newly arrived migrant from Baltistan, the *chapar* of his village is a starting point, supplying food and accommodation while he finds employment. This does, however, not imply that it is only a temporary shelter, but the continued residence of the individual migrant is seen to depend on his trajectory in Karachi. Typically the students, who depend on part-time jobs, will be staying for longer, and periods of 5-8 years are not uncommon. Expenses for food, rent and electricity are shared, and the average monthly expense would be 1200-1500 rupees (20-25 US dollars), depending on the location of the *chapar* and the number of residents. For most it would be a sum equivalent to 30-50% of a monthly wage. For the longterm Balti resident in Karachi, the *chapar* continues to be a focal point, but with a social rather than residential meaning. News from the native area is dispersed via the *chapar*, and meetings in the welfare organisation also take place here.

The *chapar* constitutes an intensely social form of habitation. Approx. 12-15 young men share 2-3 rooms, the occupancy of which is loosely defined according to the activities that the residents engage in. Accordingly the students will be occupying one room, and the non-students another, the major distinguishing feature often being the presence of a worn out TV set in the room of the non-students. Each resident has got a padlocked bag or, for longterm residents, a small metal trunk for private belongings.

[6] This collective pooling of resources is similar to the saving practices of village organizations in Thalay, as well as in all Baltistan (World Bank 1986).

Thalay

The history of migration from Thalay to Karachi is not quite as old as the Balti community in the city, and there were no Thalay families among the Simla migrants who settled here. The earliest arrivals, whom I had a chance to meet, were two brothers who had migrated to Karachi in the mid-60s. Upon the death of their father, they had reallocated the family to Garroo, outside Karachi. They estimate that at that time approx. 15 migrants from Thalay, all single men, were living in the city.

Since then the number has been increasing slowly. Just over 30 were living in Karachi by 1980, when the Thalay Welfare Organisation was founded, and by 2000 there were 73 members of the organization, 22 of whom were living in Karachi with their families. Accordingly the total number of quasi-resident *Thalaypa* is around 120, so approximately 12% of all households in Thalay have one or more members residing in Karachi on a quasi-permanent basis. Not surprisingly, the distribution of *Thalaypa* in Karachi is to a large extent linked to the Balti *mohallahs*, as 73% are residing in Balti dominated areas. By far the majority of these, 63%, are living in Abessinia Lines and Mahmooodabad, the two most centrally located neighbourhoods. Mango Pir, located far to the north, is the home of just under 10% of the migrants from Thalay.

Migrants from Thalay also have a 'national house' in Karachi. The need for a *chapar* was realized by migrants from Thalay, who were living in Karachi around 1980. Muhammad Ibrahim, now working for the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Baltistan, was at the time president of the Thalay Welfare Organisation. He explained:

> 'A man from Thalay was dying here in Karachi. He had no relatives here, we had nowhere to take him, so he died at the Noorbakshia mosque [...] It was shame for us. After the funeral we decided to collect money to build a house.'

So *Thalaypa* as a group accepted the responsibility, and the construction of a *chapar* became a collective task. There was at that time 30-35 *Thalaypa* living in Karachi. They collected the money over five years, contributing on a monthly basis, in order to buy a plot and build the house. This finally happened in 1985. The house was built in Manzoor Colony, a neighbourhood that constitutes part of Mahmoodabad, at a total cost of 35.000 rupees. The area is 'leased', meaning that the plot, where the house is built, has been formally bought. The single storey house consists of two living rooms, as in all *chapars* doubling as sleeping rooms, as well as a small kitchen and a bathroom. Like all house units commanding unutilized space, the plot is demarcated by a two-meter high wall.

In January 2000, when I first visited, eight *Thalaypa* were living in the house, two of them temporary visitors. A year later, the house had 'moved'. The house in Manzoor Colony had been sublet, and 'Thalay National House' now consisted of a rented house unit on the first floor of a house in Abessinia Lines. 7 migrants from Thalay were sharing two rooms as well as kitchen and bathroom facilities. The move had been a matter of convenience, I was told. Abessinia Lines is located much more centrally than Manzoor Colony, with Sadaar within walking distance. Work places, colleges and universities were easier to access from Abessinia Lines, and at smaller expense. There was no talk of giving up the house, and at meetings in the Thalay Welfare Organization the members were discussing how to raise the money needed in order to construct additional rooms on the plot of the Thalay house in Manzoor Colony.

It can seem probable that the Thalay National House has a role as a symbol rather than a residential function. It would seem too farfetched to go along with Timera, who demonstrates how the 'foyer' comes to reflect the hierarchy of the village in Senegal (Timera 1997), given the fact that only such a limited number uses the house as a permanent residence. The house, even in its present state, is the manifest of the community in the urban arena.

Motives for Migrating

As it has been argued, the migratory move should not just be considered an isolated event. In this context migration to Karachi constitutes a move that goes beyond the immediate requirements of the livelihood system in Thalay. Or rather, the immediate effect of the long-term migratory move may, at least at the outset, be an indirect relief to the household economy, as the absence of a household member results in a smaller demand on household resources. Whereas such an absence in other migrant situations results in a depreciation of the local labour force, and an ensuing decline in agricultural productivity, this is usually not the case in Thalay where the local resource base is so limited.

As opposed to international migration practices, which are conditioned by major investments of the sending household, the move to the Pakistani lowland cities is more manageable. Travel expenses for the journey from Skardu to Karachi would in 2000 amount to 1500-1800 rupees, roughly equivalent to one monthly wage for an unskilled labourer in Skardu. Another 1000 rupees would, so it was estimated, be needed for expenses before the migrant could find a job. Especially among migrants, who have left Thalay at an early age and stayed away for long periods, the pursuit of religious education is a commonly cited motivation.

The story of Muhammed Jussuf Noorani, 33 years old, is in many ways characteristic of this group. Aged 15, he left Thalay in 1978 in order to pursue Islamic education in the Jhelum and Rawalpindi in the Punjab. It was, so he says 'own choice and family´s choice' that he spent 2 years there, living and studying at Sunni madrassa´s. All expenses for board and lodging were born by the *madrassa*`s, and he did not receive any financial support from home. In 1982, Muhammed Jussuf went to Karachi for further Islamic education. Whereas he knew other migrants from Thalay in Karachi, he still spent most of his time at a Sunni *madrassa*, and by 1985 he was working as an Islamic teacher in Sunni houses, receiving around 5000 rupees per month. Despite having spent so much time at Sunni *madrassa*`s, he maintains that he is still a noorbakshi. Furthermore, similar to other religious students from Baltistan (Rieck 1995), Muhammad Jussuf supplemented his Islamic education with a secular one. He has passed both his Matric and BA.

Since leaving Thalay in the late 1970s, Muhammed Jussuf has been returning home approx. once every five years. In 1995, he got married in Thalay, and his wife went with him to Karachi after the marriage. Since then he had not been at home at all. The family, now also comprising a son aged five, lives in a flat in Mahmoodabad, and Muhammad Jussuf has for the past three years been employed as an Islamic teacher at a private school, making 6000 rupees per month. When asked about the likelihood of him returning to Thalay, he would not exclude it, but linked a return to the possibility of acquiring a position as government servant. The practice of enrolling as a religious student at a Sunni *madrassa* is a well-known phenomenon that can be interpreted as both a pursuit of religious schooling and a livelihood strategy aimed at limiting the number that needs to be provided for. It should be added that these two practices are by no means mutually exclusive.

The story of Habib Mullah, 42 years old, is in many ways similar to that of Muhammed Jussuf Noorani. As his father was *mullah* in the native village of Baltoro, it was natural that Habib should be sent to the Sunni *madrassa* in Jhelum. But the six-year stay in Jhelum resulted, besides an education to Islamic Master, in the Habib´s conversion to Alhiadi, a Sunni sect. After completion of his Islamic Master, Habib went to Karachi for further Islamic studies, and since 1993 he has been working and living at the *Alhiadi* mosque at the Fatima Jinnah Colony, away from the Balti *mohallahs*. Here he stays in a tiny closet on the flat roof of the mosque, receiving a salary of 3.500 rupees per month. Habib was married in Thalay in 1991, to a girl from Baltoro, his native village. She was a Noorbakshia, and the spouse was the choice of his father. His wife and their children, aged two and nine, are living in his father's household in Thalay. Habib visits them once a year, for two months, and he remits money home regularly.

Again it seems that religious differences at the household level do not result in lasting ruptures. Whereas Habib has distanced himself from the religious path that his father, the *mullah*, represents, he still agrees to marry the noorbakshia girl, whom his father chooses for him. Noorani has spent more than half his life away from Thalay. Furthermore, his parents are dead, and his nuclear family lives with him in Karachi, so it would seem as if the incentives for returning home are less strong.

For the majority of more recent arrivals in Karachi, it is not religious, but secular education that is the key motivational force. 'A private job is like the snow – when it is melted, it is over. A government job is a fountain - it lasts forever.' It was a government servant originating from Thalay, but now living with his family in Islamabad, who explained the realities of the local job situation to me. It soon transpired that it is a well-known local metaphor, and others would be replacing the fountain with a glazier, thereby adapting the metaphor even more to local circumstances.

Acquiring a government job is a permanent solution to the problem of sustenance. It offers a fixed monthly salary for 30 years, and then a pension consisting of a big lump sum as well as smaller monthly payments. The proof of the pudding had been given by the first government servant in Thalay to retire, in 1996. He had received a pension worth 350.000 rupees, as compared to a monthly salary of 3.500 rupees[7]. A government job is the driving force behind educational pursuits in Thalay. It is also a fairly recent quest. In 1981 the literacy ratio, of the population aged more than 10, was 3.9% in Thalay, as compared to an overall figure of 10.6% in Baltistan (Government of Pakistan 1984), and the very low figure reflect the lack of local educational facilities.

Among migrants from Thalay in Karachi, the quest for secular education was also by far the most cited reason for going down country, particular among the younger generation of migrants. Among the older migrants, poverty, unemployment and religious education were the most common motives. Religious education is traditionally a strategy to combat poverty. In a *madrassa*, a religious school, the students are provided with board and lodging, thereby relieving the household of that obligation.

Educational migration is not typical in Pakistan. Other studies of migrant communities in Karachi refer to mainly economic motives, and one study observed that 'educational migration is rare in Pakistan' (in Selier 1991: 48, 1988)[8]. It can be

[7] These characteristics compare well with the military career, also a popular employment option. The monthly salary and pension arrangements are similar to those of the government servant, but the normal contract period is "only" 15 years.
[8] Selier has compiled the results from his own survey on rural-urban migration, completed in the mid-80s, as well as two other surveys carried out in the late 1970s (Institute for Economic Research 1978, Rafi Qureshi 1981).

argued that the situation in Northern Areas is different, as especially secular education has a very short history, basically starting after 1947. Before Partition students would have to go to Srinagar, a three-week walk, in order to pass Matriculation. In Thalay, the first primary school was opened in 1947, and in 1989 a high school was inaugarated in the valley. But though it is now possible to continue schooling in Thalay until 10th class, the pursuit of education in Karachi is in most cases not a continuation of the level reached at home, but rather a preferred alternative. Few, at home and away, have any praise for the quality of the teaching offered in Thalay.

Why then go to Karachi? It is possibly the longest distance a Balti can travel for educational purposes within Pakistan. The answer to this question was largely identical among all the migrants I talked to, both from Thalay and from other parts of Baltistan. In Karachi it is far easier to find part-time employment that can finance the students´ stay in the city. Or at least it used to be like that. In January 2001, new arrivals, who had been in the city for a couple of months, were encountering difficulties finding employment. So whereas the motivation for the migrational move is educational, its direction seems decided by economic imperatives. The implication is that the migrant typically is economically independent of his home. The migrant over time becomes a contributor to his household in Baltistan.

Why return home? Inherent in the allocation of government positions is what can be characterized as an 'ancestral clause', linking the 'sons' to their 'soil'. It is a quota system that favors those who can document that they originate from a specific area. Accordingly government jobs in the Northern Areas, including Baltistan, will be given to holders of Domicile Certificates, which document that they originate from the Northern Areas. Do they get their education? Or is the education-motive – almost a stereotype among the migrants - just another metaphor for the famous 'city lights', pulling people away from their dark and dull villages? It would not seem so. Out of the migrants from Thalay, 70% had at least passed Matriculation (10th class). 45% had passed F.A., or they had advanced beyond that level. 8, or 11%, had not received any education. Overall, the level of education seems very high among migrants from Thalay, as compared to the general picture in Karachi, where just over 40% of the adult population had passed Matriculation (Hasan 1999).

Permanency

What is a permanent move? Or rather – how is permanency interpreted from the livelihood activities that the migrant engages in? Selier makes a distinction between what he terms *lifetime* and *working-life* migrants (Selier 1991: 22-28). But this distinction is difficult, because there are, as argued, different types of working-lives.

Government servant in Baltistan is more attractive than waiter or clerk in Karachi. Furthermore, the working-life migrant may not consider himself a migrant for life, though circumstances may indicate otherwise. An example is Ghulam Abbas who has been in Karachi since 1967. He was among the founders of Iqbal Nagar, the Balti *mohallah* in Mango Pir. Here he has got his own house where he lives with his family. Nonetheless, he is adamant that he will return home when he turns 60 and retires from his job at the local cement factory: 'What is there for me to do here?' he asked, after 33 years in Karachi.

In her study of Pakistani ethnic groups in Bradford, Dahya refers to 'the myth of return' as 'an important factor that has consequences with regard to the immigrant community's social organization, the immigrants' willingness to endure hardship in work and living conditions, and their emphasis on savings which are remitted to their families in Pakistan' (Dahya 1974: 83). But when does the return become a myth? The impression that I had gained in Thalay was that the migrants' stay in Karachi most of all was to be considered a phase, a period of up-qualification before returning, ideally for a government servant position. Based on interviews with those who had returned, I could identify a scheme, or a schedule. The fixed points in the scheme would be the departure of the young, unmarried man, with the declared purpose of pursuing an education. He would sustain himself by part-time employment. Over the years he would be visiting home, once a year, or every 2nd. or 3rd. year, some even more rarely. On one of these visits he would get married, to a girl from one of the villages of Thalay. After the marriage, the girl would move to the household of the migrant. But he would return to Karachi, in order to resume his studies. The final move would be the return to Thalay in order to take up a position as government servant. It was, however, a move, which I knew to be more of an ideal than a reality, given the number of unemployed graduates, both in Thalay, and generally in Baltistan. The overall impression was partly confirmed. The large majority of migrants from Thalay had been unmarried by the time they left Baltistan. But 60% of those who lived in Karachi by 2000 had married. And, three apart, they had all married back home.

The final leg of the journey, the return leg, was acknowledged, but also in many cases postponed. As Ali, the president of Thalay Welfare Organization, put it a bit exasparated after having overheard me pose identical questions to a number of people in the Thalay House: 'You finish studies...you go home ... that's the system.' Then again, Ali had completed his studies, and he had a wife and a baby son installed in his father's house. But he was still in Karachi, hesitating to return.

Seen in isolation, disregarding my data from Baltistan, the migrant community from Thalay could seem in a process of settling in, as demonstrated in the table below. Or rather, the overall picture that emerged was much more complex than the pattern I

had identified in Baltistan. The typical migrant, who left Thalay in order to go to Karachi, was unmarried. 50% of the migrants from Thalay had been in Karachi for over 10 years, and almost half of these were living in the city with their families.

Characteristics of Migrants from Thalay

Period (years)	No. of migrants	Married	Family in Karachi	Property in Karachi
0-1	8	0	0	0
1-5	13	2	0	0
6-10	16	9	2	0
11-15	19	14	7	2
16-20	9	9	5	2
>20	8	7	8	4
Total	73	41	22	8

Approx. 10% of the migrants from Thalay have bought property in Karachi. Obviously it is very difficult to generalize from such a limited number. The first Baltis, who invested in property, bought their houses or land in the Balti *mohallah*`s, or just outside these. As the prices since then have increased, more recent purchases have occurred outside the central parts of the city. Whereas the investment in property can be seen to imply a long-term commitment, this does not exclude other, similar footholds. As Selier observes, a high level of commitment to livelihood projects in the urban arena does not exclude commitments to the native area (Selier 1988: 49). So what can be concluded is that territorial affiliations should not be considered a 'limited good' in the sense that linkages established in one location are replacing similar linkages somewhere else. However, the kinship relations, which the native land has been seen to embody, become less prominent, and it is a characteristic of all property owners from Thalay that they have brought their immediate family to Karachi, usually after having acquired the property. So the investment in landed property can, as it was seen to be the case in Skardu, result in the consolidation of a nuclear family in a place outside Thalay.

Boa Ali is one of those who have bought property in Karachi. He is 36 years old, and comes from the village of Gagoderik. In 1981 his father had allowed a younger brother, Yaqub, to go to the Sunni *madrassa* in Jhelum. But Boa Ali ran away from home, having arranged to meet up with his brother in Belghar, just south of Thalay Valley. The brothers went to the Punjab, and it was not untill 1983, when they heard of the death of his father, that they returned home. But they left again, as another, elder brother still was living at home, taking care of the family lands. The two

brothers then went to Karachi, where they were living and studying at a Sunni *madrassa* for five years. The brothers then moved to Defence, a *pakka* area of Karachi where Boa Ali worked as a house servant for five years. He also passed his Matric in 1988, and around 1990 he started working at the tuition centre where he is still employed, making a salary of 4000 rupees per month.

In 1991, Boa Ali and his brother moved to Pakhtunabad in Mango Pir, a 13 years old settlement located approx. 2 km from Iqbal Nagar, the Balti *mohallah*. Here they bought a house plot for 11,000 rupees, considerably less than it would have cost in Iqbal Nagar. It was only after having bought the property that Boa Ali returned home to his native village, married a girl, whom he had been engaged to since 1985, and brought his wife to Karachi. She returned, however, in 1995 in order to look after her aging parents in Thalay. In 1995, the three brothers also divided their parental property in Thalay, but even though Boa Ali had been away from Thalay since the early 1980s, he never considered selling his property: 'If you sell your father's land, you have no security at home. It is a shame to sell the land ... the villagers will not allow it'.

The Karachi Balti

The return in order to get married seems a confirmation of the ties linking the migrant and his point of departure – as well as the prominence of existing household hierarchies. Along similar lines, the disinclination of migrants from Thalay to part with property in the native valley also testifies to a lasting attachment to what in many instances was referred to as 'mother's land'. As to the ability to endure the hardship of livelihood in the mountains, identical opinions were voiced repeatedly among Balti migrants: 'If you are not born in Baltistan, you cannot live there', was a general opinion. But these characteristics, interweaving family obligations and a territorial linkage, are absent for an increasing group of Baltis, namely those who are born in Karachi. They are living as part of nuclear families in Karachi, so the intergenerational linkages that commit other migrants to their households in Baltistan, link these to their families in Karachi.

As one of few Balti men born in Karachi, Ghulam Hussain had tried to return on a permanent basis. 26 years old and born in Karachi, Ghulam Hussain had visited his ancestral village twice. The first time was in 1987, when he stayed for six months. The second occasion was for his marriage in 1998, in the parental village of Olding: 'It was my parents' idea, they arranged it. I tell them that if it did not work out, I want divorce ... It was difficult, in the village there are no facilities. Baltistani Baltis are much more oldfashionned.' After a few months of marriage, he had got his divorce. He paid his entire savings, 20.000 rupees, to the girl, 'for her loss of

honour', as a friend of his put it. His parents had later come up with another, similar scheme. But he had put his foot down, referring to his position as a provider: 'I pay money to my father. I decide.' Ghulam Hussein is still living in his father's house, and he pays most of his monthly salary to his father. This should, he argues, entitle him to decide himself who he is going to marry. He stresses that he would not mind marrying a Balti woman, but it should be a woman living in Karachi.

Another characteristic of Baltis born in Karachi is the dwindling command of the Balti language.'They are losing the language', an English nurse, working for many years in Baltistan, said of the children of Balti migrants, who came to her clinic during their vacation. The children - 'any bug in the air, they catch it' - usually understood Balti, but they could not speak it. An old migrant, originating from Simla, told a similar story. He said of his sons: 'They like going to Skardu, but they do not know anyone, they cannot talk to anyone'. This was a general picture, confirmed by 'second generation' Baltis in Karachi. The Balti language, invisible as only its oral form is used, is, if not disappearing altogether, then degraded to second rank behind Urdu. Furthermore, the Baltis born in Karachi have not got the social networks needed to make them integrate in the villages.

Muhammed Ali belongs to the generation of Baltis who are born in Karachi. At 22, he is the oldest son of Muhammed Husein who migrated to Karachi in the early 1960s. He has been living in Garroo 50 kilometer east of Karachi all his life apart from the last year that he has spent in Mahmoodabad where he now lives in order to complete his studies. He is living in the house of Hadji Jan, a fellow villager of his father. He has passed Matric and is now completing part two of a B.Com.. Muhammed Ali has visited Thalay a total of three times, in 1993, 1994, and 1998, every time staying two months. He said, almost apologetically: 'I was not so happy to be there. I have no friends in Thalay ...I do not know my relatives'. It did not make things better that he only knows little Balti, not surprisingly, as he speaks Urdu to his parents. On the last visit, in 1998, Muhammed Ali mainly went to Baltistan in order to pick up his Domicile Certificate, a journey undertaken by all Baltis growing up outside Baltistan. It is the place that the holders of Domicile Certificates come from, according to the certificate, which entitles them access to certain quotas at colleges and universities, and in government service.

So the implication is not that the Baltis born in Karachi cease being Baltis, or that they come to consider themselves Pakistanis, but rather that the connotations of being Balti are changing. Baltistan might still be a specific point of reference, but the place that is Baltistan has no longer the same relevance.

Conclusion

The majority of Baltis in Karachi live in one of the five Balti *Mohallah*'s, thereby reflecting a residential pattern that is characteristic of the city, namely allocation along ethnic lines. It is, however, difficult to speak of *a* Balti community, as there is no regular communication between especially the outlying *mohallah*'s and the older ones, closer to the city centre. There are no 'pan-Balti' organizations which include all Baltis in Karachi.

The migrants' most important acts of identification take place in relation to the *chapar* and various forms of religious affiliation. The *chapar* is the most prominent point of reference that the Balti migrant commands in the urban landscape. Whereas it might be a bit farfetched to call the *chapar* a satellite of the native village, it constitutes an important nodal point in the network linking the migrant to his territorial base. The networks linking the individual migrant and his domestic base in Thalay are most clearly manifested by way of the marital practices. Almost all migrants who have left Thalay, have returned in order to get married, mostly to a girl of their father´s choice. Furthermore, most migrants also remit money home, and some have invested in houses in the native village. Most migratory moves to Karachi are motivated by an'urge' for education, the ultimate reward however being a government job in the native valley.

The situation is different for the generation of Baltis born in Karachi. The 'cultural stuff' that Barth refers to is changing. The affiliation to a 'mother's land' or a 'homeland', which other migrants and especially returnee's refer to, is becoming much less prominent. 'Baltiness' will not implicate an affiliation to a certain, distant place, nor the obligations that such an affiliation would ensure, nor the linguistic characteristics of that place. Baltistan becomes an idea.

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