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## **Migration in South Asia: Poverty and Vulnerability**

***Pakistan Poverty Report 2020***

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### **Author's Introduction**

Ammar Ali Jan has a doctorate degree in History from the University of Cambridge. Currently, he is teaching at the Forman Christian College and also the member of the Haqooq-e-Khalq Movement (HKM).

## **Navigating Precarity: Poverty, Migration and Inequality in Pakistan**

Much like rest of South Asia, Pakistan has witnessed rapid urbanization over the past few decades. While estimates range from 37 to 39 percent of the population categorized as urban, it is widely predicted that the country's urban population will reach 50 percent by 2030<sup>1</sup>. While the rural to urban migration has opened up economic opportunities for industries in the cities, it has also exposed the dangerous fault lines in the country's growth model, with the working poor in particular bearing the costs of a flawed economic model.

The story of Pakistan is similar to those of other countries in the region that have undergone the IMF dictated 'Structural Adjustment Programs' to facilitate a neoliberal paradigm in the country's economy. The ostensible aim of this policy has been to promote free-market in the production and exchange of goods and to develop the economy through an export-led strategy. This led to a bias in favor of large industries and foreign investments that are centered in the cities, while there has been a remarkable reduction in subsidies for the agriculture sector, as well to the social sector including health, education and housing.<sup>2</sup>

The situation is compounded by the fact that the country is witnessing increasing rural to urban migration as a result of increasing rural distress (see chapter 2), resulting in more stress on urban centers. This report is intended to highlight migration patterns as a result of economic choices of successive governments, and the concomitant impact it has had on inequality and poverty among the migrant population.

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<sup>1</sup> Planning Commission of Pakistan, "Task Force on Urban Development", 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Zaidi, Akbar, "Issues in Pakistan's Political Economy", Oxford University Press, 2016.

## Chapter 1

### Migration and Poverty in Pakistan

The Economic Survey of Pakistan (2018) claims the the percentage of the population living below the poverty line has reduced from 50.5 percent in 2005-2006 to to 24.3 percent in 2018.<sup>3</sup> The report claims that welfare programs directed towards the poorest sections of such as the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), have played a major role in reducing absolute poverty in the country. Moreover, it claims that the high growth rates from 2008 to 2017 played a major role in creating job opportunities, particularly in urban centers. For example, the GDP fell to 1.7 percent in 2008-2009, while it rose to 4.5 percent in 2015-2016.<sup>4</sup>

While the Economic Survey suggests that the reduction in poverty points to an “optimistic” outlook for the country’s future, other findings have contested the rosy picture painted by the survey. For example, the multi-dimensional poverty report authored by the United Nations Development (Pakistan) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative assert that nearly 39 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. The multi-dimensional approach of calculating poverty differs from the methods used in the Economic Survey which relies heavily on income and wealth statistics. The Multi-Dimensional Index, on the other hand, takes into account access to health, education and the standard of living to create a more dynamic understanding of poverty.<sup>5</sup>

A 2018 World Bank study titled “State of Water Supply, Sanitation and Poverty in Pakistan” places the figure of absolute poverty around 30 percent. More damningly, however, the report demonstrates the uneven spread of poverty across space. For example, the report found that 80 percent of the country’s poor live in rural Pakistan, a staggering figure that shows the increasing wealth-gap between the urban and rural parts of the country.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, poverty is also spread unevenly across the different provinces of the Pakistan. 62 percent of Balochistan’s rural population lives in poverty, the highest in the country. The gap in rural and urban poverty in Sindh is over 30 percent, a gap that has had serious repercussions in the political life of the province (see chapter 4).

Such divergent trends can also be seen in the rising levels of inequality in the country. A recent study by Oxfam shows that rising inequality is a global phenomenon, with eight of the richest individuals possessing wealth equal to 3.6 billion of the poorest people in the world. Such monstrous level of inequalities not only exists among countries, but also within national boundaries.<sup>7</sup>In the “Commitment to Reduce Inequality”, Pakistan was ranked 139 out of 152 countries, underscoring the indifference shown by policy-makers to alleviating poverty. Moreover, despite the reduction in poverty in Pakistan, inequality is on the rise in the country.<sup>8</sup> In 1988, the Gini co-efficient, which

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<sup>3</sup> Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2018

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “Multiple Inequalities and Policies to Mitigate Inequality Traps in Pakistan”, Oxfam Pakistan and LUMS, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> “State of Water Supply, Sanitation and Poverty in Pakistan” in World Bank Documents, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> “Public Good or Private Wealth?” Oxfam International, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> “Commitment to Reduce Inequality”, Oxfam International, 2018.

measures inequality, was 0.35 percent. In 2014, the figure had risen to 0.41 percent.<sup>9</sup> With the above mentioned disparities in wealth across region, the spatial division of inequality remains one of the biggest challenges for the country in creating a stable polity.

These transformations have had an impact on migrations patterns in Pakistan. Since coming into being in 1947, the country has experienced many waves of migration to and from the country. The first occurred at the time of the partition, when 4.7 million Sikhs and Hindus left the country for neighboring India and were replaced by approximately 6 million Muslims who arrived in Pakistan from India. This exchange of religiously marked populations transformed the demographics of the newly-born state of Pakistan not only in terms of religious affiliation, but also in terms of its ethnic-composition. For example, the Urdu-speaking population from India moved into country's capital, Karachi, and took over many of the government jobs and local businesses. This led to tensions with the local Sindhi-population, a gulf that has divided urban and rural Sindh's politics for the past 70 years (see chapter 4).

The second wave of mass migration occurred with the onset of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. The Pakistan government, led by the military dictator General Zia ul Haq, allied itself with the US and turned Pakistan into a base-camp for a global Jihad in Afghanistan. As a result of the destruction caused by the conflict, over 3.7 million refugees have poured into Pakistan, leading to an exponential rise in the population of Peshawar and Quetta. Moreover, over 600,000 Afghan are settled in Karachi, turning it into a city with the largest Pashtun population of any city in the world.<sup>10</sup> Due to their mobility and access to markets in Central Asia, the Afghan refugees became central players in Pakistan's transport business. Moreover, this wave of migration also saw an increase in drugs, weapons and religious seminaries in Pakistan, a by-product of the anti-Soviet Jihad fueled by US and Saudi money in the region.

There has also been protracted migration from Myanmar and Bangladesh, many of whom work in the fishing industry. There about 300,000 Bangladeshi and Burmese living in Karachi. The presence of a large number of migrant communities in Karachi has not only produced tensions with local labour, but has also created panic over the manipulation of demographics to influence the city's electoral politics (see chapter 4).<sup>11</sup>

The country is now beginning to experience climate-related migration. This phenomenon is already said to have started affected the Norther Gilgit- Baltistan region which is undergoing increased torrential rains, flash flooding and landslides.<sup>12</sup> Research on this theme is only beginning, but with Pakistan ranked seventh on the list of most adversely affected countries from climate change, this form of migration will become more dominant in migration trends and will require a deeper study.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Multiple Inequalities and Policies to Mitigate Inequality Traps in Pakistan", Oxfam Pakistan and LUMS, 2015

<sup>10</sup> Hasan, Arif. "Migrations, Small Towns and Social Transformations in Pakistan" in *Environment and Urbanization*, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "Climate Change and Migration in Pakistan" in *The Diplomat*, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> "Global Climate Risk Index", German Watch, 2017.

Pakistan has also witnessed large-scale emigration to other countries. The first wave of migration began in the 1950s and 1960s when many families, mostly belonging to Kashmir and Punjab, left to work in the industrial sectors in post-war Europe. The second wave arrived with the Middle East boom in 1970's as the Gulf States sought cheap and docile labour from poor countries to run their industries. This emigration to the Gulf and the ensuing remittances are seen as one of the essential elements that allowed for relative prosperity in the country in the 1980's, and continues to provide an economic cushion to the economy.<sup>14</sup> There are also a number of professionals and skilled workers who are based in North America, Europe and Australia. The estimated figure of Pakistani emigrants is over 5 million, making labour as essential commodity through which the country is integrated into the global capitalist network.

The most pervasive form of migration is the urban-rural migration which we discuss in detail in chapter 2. This form of migration is a direct result of the persistent inequality and poverty discussed above. It is pertinent to analyze the role of Structural Adjustment Programs in facilitating the concentration of wealth in a few hands while producing financial precarity for a large number of citizens. It would be, however, unfair to claim that the elite-bias in the country's economy began with the IMF mandated reforms in the late 1980's. The Pakistani state's attempt to industrialize began with the formation of the Pakistan Industrial Corporation, an organization setup to subsidize the businesses of specific families in the industrial sector in the 1950s. This patronage, backed by US financing, soon led to exponential industrial growth in the 1960's under the military dictatorship of General Ayub Khan who referred to these years as the "decade of development."<sup>15</sup>

Yet, this decade also led to the monstrous concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals. Mehboobul Haq's famously announced at a press conference in 1967 that only 22 families in Pakistan owned 66 percent of the industries and 87 percent share in the country's banking and insurance industry. He also revealed that the real wages of ordinary workers in the eleven years of Ayub Khan's rule (1958-1969) remained stagnant, inducing widespread discontent that led a popular revolt against the government.<sup>16</sup> This developmental model also led to immense regional unevenness, with the former province of East Pakistan providing 70 percent of the country's revenues while the profits were being siphoned off to the 22 families in the Western wing.<sup>17</sup> This unequal distribution of wealth led to a major schism between the two wings, eventually ending in a civil war in 1971 that led to the breakup of the country and the formation of Bangladesh.

The government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came to power in December 1971 on the promise of bringing "Islamic socialism" to the country. This resulted in the nationalization of major corporations and the rise of the trade union movement across the country. Such policies, however, could at best be described as neo-Keynsian, since they neither threatened the landed elites in the country (Bhutto's

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<sup>14</sup> Hasan, Arif. "Migrations, Small Towns and Social Transformations in Pakistan" in *Environment and Urbanization*, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> See Jalal, Ayesha, "The State of Martial Rule: The origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defense", Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> "MehboobulHaq: Obituary", *The Economist*, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Zaidi, Akbar, "Issues in Pakistan's Political Economy", Oxford University Press, 2016.

land reforms were weaker than even Ayub's), nor did they challenge the country's reliance on foreign aid and investment (foreign investments were exempt from nationalization). The industries were then handed to bureaucrats who were often accused of using them for personal aggrandizement, and some of the more militant working class movements demanding workers control of industries were brutally suppressed.<sup>18</sup> The post-war Keynesian strategy for accumulation of Capital was already undergoing a decline in the late 1960s due to the falling rate of profit for major corporations, eventually leading to the global financial crisis of 1973. In Pakistan, Bhutto's state-led strategy for Capital accumulation eventually resulted in stagnation and shortages of basic commodities leading to a movement backed by industrial elites that triggered a military coup against his government by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977.<sup>19</sup>

The military junta immediately reversed the privatization of the industries and attacked organized labour across the country. The economy during the Zia-era experienced stability that was premised upon US financial aid for the anti-Soviet Jihad, a high rate of remittances from overseas workers and a growing underground economy of drugs and weapons facilitated by the Afghan Jihad. However, the country remained plagued by a persistent balance of payment crisis, a growing debt trap and increasing shortages in the energy sector.<sup>20</sup> These disparate weaknesses in the economy forced the government of Pakistan to accept an IMF package in 1982 with strict conditionality attached. This was also a time when neo-liberal thinking became dominant in the World Bank and IMF as part of the "Washington consensus". The prevailing orthodoxy demanded that governments de-regulate their economies, including the privatization of the industrial sector, lower tariffs on imports, cuts in social spending and a greater integration into the global "free market".<sup>21</sup>

In 1989, one of the top economic advisors to the Benazir Bhutto's government (1988-1990) warned that the prescriptions promoted by the IMF will not only hit the poorest sections of society, but would also have a deflationary impact on the economy by eroding demand and wiping out small businesses. Yet, Pakistan has followed the neoliberal model for the past thirty years, with disastrous consequences for the real economy and the common masses.<sup>22</sup>

The growing inequality and dislocation we examined earlier is a result of the shifts in the economy undertaken during this period. Two examples can illustrate the consequences of de-regulation on the country's economy. First, the privatization and de-regulation of the banking sector created an economic driven by financial speculation rather than productive investment. A paper by Kamal Munir and Natalya Naqvi details how this shift from industrial to speculative capital occurred in the country's economy. Until 1988, banks were mandated to provide 90 percent of its loans to industrial or agricultural investments. This meant that there was sufficient capital available for industrialists and agriculturalists to undertake long-term projects, including those related to big infrastructure.

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<sup>18</sup>Asdar, Kamra. "The Strength of the Street Meets the Strength of the State: The 1972 Labor Struggle in Karachi", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 2005.

<sup>19</sup>Burki, Shahid "Pakistan Under Bhutto", Palgrave Books, 1980.

<sup>20</sup>Hussain, Akmal. "Strategic Issues in Pakistan's Economic Policy", Progressive Publishers, 1988.

<sup>21</sup>Hussain, Akmal, "Pakistan through the Economic Minefield", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1989.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Since de-regulation, however, banks have become profit-seeking entities that are no longer bound to providing a fixed amount of loans for industry and agriculture. Instead, the banking sector boom of the early 2000's was a direct result of lending for speculative purposes, including for real estate, the stock market and consumer credit. The highest borrower from the banks is the Pakistan government, which today has accumulated an internal debt of over 17 trillion rupees. Inversely, lending for industry and agriculture make only 10 percent of the banking sector's portfolio, a remarkable shift that highlights how finance capital has taken over the industrial sector.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, rampant privatization of major public sector corporations has broken the bargaining power of labour. Today less than one percent of the labour force is unionized across the country. A study by Human Rights Watch shows how the government's attempts to make Pakistan an ideal site for foreign investment has led to repressive laws for the workforce, including unpaid working hours and lack of workplace safety regulations. Worse still, the labour department and labour courts are easily influenced by industrialists who often bribe state officials. With the erosion of the bargaining power of workers and the rise of a speculative economy, the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow exponentially.<sup>24</sup> There seems to be no attempts to remove this trend, as the two mini budgets announced by the Imran Khan-led government "incentivized" the industrial sector by reducing corporate tax from 46 to 17 percent. These tax breaks were compensated through a general sales tax, a policy that will further facilitate the movement of wealth towards the top echelons of society.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, loan repayments to International and local creditors, as well the country's bloated military budget suggest that spending on the social sector will remain abysmally low.

The situation is expected to only become worse as Pakistan inches closer towards an IMF bail-out package, the 13<sup>th</sup> in the country's history. The IMF has demanded cuts in public health and public education, with the latter already slashed by 50 percent. Moreover, the prices of petrol, gas and electricity have risen, creating further financial precarity for poor households. The State Bank estimates that the country will continue to experience low-growth for at least the next two years, an explosive situation considering that over a million young people are entering the job market annually. An IMF bail-out package appears a stop-gap measure, but may not be enough to spur growth or make necessary investments in the social sector.

Apart from the IMF-package, Pakistan is increasingly dependent on Chinese loans and investments under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor Project. While the project promises to be a central feature in Pakistan's economic future, there are also worries that there is a Chinese debt trap brewing for the Pakistani state. Current estimates show that soon, Pakistan will be forced to pay an annual rate of 3.5 billion dollars in debt repayment to the Chinese banks that are financing the Corridor. Moreover, Pakistan's Chamber of Commerce has repeatedly complaint of the inability of local businesses to compete with Chinese companies, further decreasing the confidence of local

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<sup>23</sup> Natalya, Naqvi, and Munir, Kamal, "Pakistan's Post-Reform Banking Sector: A Critical Evaluation", Economic and Political Weekly, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> "No Room to Bargain: Unfair and Abusive Labor Practices in Pakistan", Human Rights Watch. 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Hussain, Khurram, "Building a New Order" Dawn. 2019

investors. Some political commentators have termed CPEC the new “East-India Company” for its slow but steady dominance of Pakistan’s financial resources, an ominous sign that requires urgent policy debate.

## Rural Distress and Migration

The Capital intensive techniques introduced by the Green Revolution in the 1960’s commercialized agricultural land, including the use of High Yielding Varieties (HYV) of food grains. It also made access to technologies such as tractors and tub-wells an essential element for economic prosperity. As a result, there was a concentration of land and wealth in the hands of those who could afford it as many small land-owners and tenants failed to compete with those who had access to modern machinery.<sup>26</sup> Today, over 50 percent of the rural population is landless, fueling migration to small towns and urban centers for employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the desire to produce value-added goods as a way of overcoming economic stagnation (as well as the recurrent balance of payment crisis) has come at the cost of neglecting development in the country’s rural areas. For example, the reduction of subsidies on agriculture has disproportionately affected small farmers, who are now beholden to middle-men and local money lenders for survival. Some of the major struggles led by the KissanItte had (Farmers Association) has been against the exploitation of mill owners who consistently refuse to offer the support price for crops as announced by the government. With the government firmly behind the big industries in its pursuit for cheap raw materials, farmers are being forced to sell their produce for much less than the price announced by the government. In the sugar industry last year, the government announced a support price of Rs. 180 per kg but the refusal of mill-owners to honour this announcement meant that farmers were often forced to sell sugarcane at as low as Rs. 120 per kg, with disastrous consequences for their households.<sup>27</sup> Yet, the state machine stood on the side of mill owners, often resorting to violence against the protesting farmers.

Such problems are compounded by the lack of commercial credit available for the small farmers in the villages who have to rely on local money-lenders for sustaining their work. As discussed earlier, it is a direct result of the privatization of the banking sector in the late 80s and early 90s, a move that deregulated the sector and made banks only answerable to their share-holders. In 1985, 90 percent of banking credit was available to the industrial and agricultural sector. Today, only 10 percent is available for these sectors, providing access only to industrial tycoons or the landed gentry.

Rural life has undergone massive transformations in Pakistan, particularly in the Punjab where 60 percent of the population is now engaged in non-agricultural labour. This trend towards diversification of work led to optimism that despite poor growth rates in the agricultural sector, many people will be able to find alternative avenues within the countryside. Yet, rural areas faced another massive disadvantage when they bore the brunt of load-shedding throughout the country,

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<sup>26</sup>Tarique Niazi, “Rural Poverty and the Green Revolution: Lessons from Pakistan”, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2004.

<sup>27</sup>“Sugar-Crisis Looms on the Horizon”, *The Nation*. 2018

with certain rural districts experiencing 18-hours without the supply of electricity per day in 2011. This infrastructural breakdown not only had an adverse impact on the quality of life, but also played havoc with the nascent businesses emerging in rural districts of the country. According to a World Bank Report titled “Electrification and Household Welfare”, power outages cost Pakistan approximately 5.8 billion dollars per year (2.6 % of the GDP), impacting the livelihoods of millions of poor households.<sup>28</sup>

In short, it was this financial asphyxiation that has increasingly made life unbearable in the villages and has significantly reduced prospects for dignified work in the villages. On top of these economic problems, the almost complete lack of facilities for higher education and health (which are centered in major cities) as well the increasing problem of climate change and weather disruption, have drastically reduced the opportunities for personal or social advancement in the countryside. This explains why 80 percent of the country’s poor live in rural Pakistan, propelling thousands to the cities in search of livelihood.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, urban centers neither have adequate infrastructure facilities nor enough employment opportunities for the migrating populations. For example, the lack of investment in public housing has led to an exponential rise in the formation of *katchiabadis* (informal settlements) across the country providing a precarious existence to its inhabitants who are perpetually under threat of demolition campaigns. Moreover, many young individuals are moving to urban centers to seek education and social mobility. As many as 1.5 million new jobs, mostly centered in urban areas, will have to be created annually in order to provide a stable lifestyle to this large section of the population. Yet, the fault lines in the country’s economy make this youth bulge a ticking time bomb which will have significant impact on the political and social life of contemporary cities.<sup>30</sup>

### **Internal Migration Patterns**

According to the 1998 census, 66 percent of internal migration occurred to urban areas. According to a study by Shahnaz and Khan, 43 percent of migrants cited “Moving with household head” as the primary reason for migration. 17 percent of the respondents cited marriage, followed by employment (12 percent) and business (9 percent).

As discussed earlier, the poverty is a major contributor to internal migration as workers from labour abundant regions move towards urban centers where there is demand for labour. According to a study by Harris Gazdar, urban centers of Punjab and Sindh were the primary recipients of internal migrants. Lahore, Rawalpindi and Karachi alone for 33 percent of the migrants who moved to cities from rural areas. While details of the migration patterns remain scarce, migration to urban centers for finding employment presents the strongest evidence of unequal distribution of resources across class and region. This migration often takes place by mobilizing informal social networks of kinship that facilitate the entrance of migrants to cities. While data on the labour market remains scarce,

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<sup>28</sup> “Electrification and Household Welfare: Evidence from Pakistan”, World Bank Documents, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> State of Water Supply, Sanitation and Poverty in Pakistan” in World Bank Documents, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Ammar Ali Jan, “A Ticking Time Bomb”, The News International, 2018.

Gazdar argues that employment in the formal and informal sector depends on personalized networks, including political patronage. Not only does this reliance on overt relations reproduce many social structures, but these same networks also fill the vacuum created by the absence of the state in managing migrant populations.

Yet, there are a number of other factors that lead to internal migration that need to be discussed as well. For example, pastoralist communities and seasonal migrants make up a sizeable section of internal migrants. There are a number of pastoral communities in Balochistan and Sindh that move with their livestock to search for grazing and to bring their livestock to the market. Similarly, nomadic communities take up employment in rural areas in the harvest season as demand for seasonal labour exponentially increases during this period. Moreover, Gazdar argues that migration in Pakistan is not merely an individual phenomenon undergirded by financial difficulties. It is a group phenomenon structured around caste, kinship, ethnicity, and gender.

For these reasons, migration does not necessarily produce relatively liberated, anonymous individuals assumed by the Western experience of urbanization. Instead, both social hierarchies and ethnic identities are reproduced and often strengthened from the migrant experience, creating a distinct urban culture stamped by communal affiliations. This is also a primary reason why ethnic tensions remain a major fault lines in urban life, as we shall discuss later.

## **International Migration Patterns**

As discussed above, Pakistan has seen a wave of migrations to the Gulf States. This migration can be partly explained in terms of the religious affinity between Pakistan and the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia. But more importantly, the oil boom of the 70s played an extremely important role in absorbing the surplus labour from Pakistan. This migration was facilitated by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who initiated closer relations with the Arab countries by hosting the Second Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore. Ironically, however, it was his opponent, the military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, who benefitted from the remittances that started pouring in from the Gulf in the late 1970s.

In fact, one of the reasons for the Zia regime's (1977-1988) political stability despite widespread opposition was the financial stability it was able to accord to households whose members worked in the Gulf. The remittances sent from the Gulf were also one of the three key elements of macro-economic stability along with US financial assistance to fight the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the increasing smuggling across the Pak-Afghan border. In NWFP, today nearly 10 percent of households in NWFP receive foreign remittances, while in upper Punjab, foreign remittances accounted for 12 percent of household income for poor households.

While religious affinity has made the Gulf an important site for International migration from Pakistan, there are also serious disadvantages for Pakistanis living in that region. Unlike Europe or North America, the Gulf States do not provide citizenship rights to expats, leaving millions as second class citizens even after generations of work in the adopted countries. There are also cases of systematic

prejudice reported against migrant workers from Pakistan, who neither have the right to unionize nor the right of dissent. In fact, imprisonment rates are high among Pakistani nationals living, with 2397 Pakistani prisoners being currently held in Saudi Arabia. According to the Human Rights Watch, 17 Pakistanis were executed last year, the highest number for any foreign country. The issue has been neglected by the Pakistani government which remains dependent on Saudi Arabia for economic aid and geo-strategic support. Recently, the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Prince Muhammad Bin Salman, visited Pakistan and announced the release of over 200 Pakistani inmates in Saudi prisons. However, such whimsical decisions are not a substitute for policy changes that can ensure the safety and security of the hundreds of thousands of migrants in the Gulf who remain vulnerable.

As mentioned earlier, Pakistan has also witnessed international migration to developed countries, including North America and Europe, and recently to South Korea and Japan. In the 1950s and 1960s, migration to the UK stemmed mostly from Azad Kashmir and parts of Punjab. This wave of migration saw mostly men from poor households who took up work in the industrial sector in the UK. They were soon joined by their families and began building a distinct British-Pakistani community in places like South London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bradford. Due to their working class status and the difficulty of assimilating into metropolitan cultures, the Pakistani community faced racist attacks from different sections of society. The derogatory term 'Paki' was also coined to essentialize and target the Pakistani community as backward and alien to British culture.

These tensions around the Pakistani community have remained a political issue in British politics, a debate that has only intensified since the rise of Islamophobia since 9/11. Visa and immigration policies have been tightened for Pakistani citizens, leading to young Pakistanis illegally settling in the UK by overstaying their visa. Such policies have exacerbated the tensions between the Pakistani community and the Home ministry, leading to a number of repressive measures by successive governments. However, many individuals from the Pakistani community have risen to important positions in British society. Sadiq Khan, son of a Pakistani bus driver, is today the mayor of London and one of the most important politicians in the country, signaling the social mobility experienced by sections of the British Pakistani community.

North America has often witnessed migration from middle class and upper middle class families, where many individuals have settled after completing their higher education. Today, both the UK and the US diasporas play a central role in the politics of Pakistan. Many political figures chose London as their destination for exile during military dictatorships, with the city London was home to three major exiled politicians during the Musharraf era, including Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and Altaf Hussain. The "Charter of Democracy", one of the most important pro-democracy documents, was also signed in London in 2006. Washington has also been a major site for lobbying by exiles, including figures such as Hussain Haqqani, who was forced to seek refuge in the US after allegations of treason, and Baloch separatists. Both these regions have also been important sites for raising financial resources for political parties resulting in a significant number of Senators selected from the diaspora. A recent Supreme Court ruling has barred individuals with dual citizenship from holding

public office, but individuals from the diaspora continue to operate on important positions within political parties.

Perhaps the strongest contribution made by the diaspora is in respect to the remittances sent home, which are the highest contributor to Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves. The recent downturn in the global economy and the turmoil in the Middle East led to apprehensions that the flow of remittances would slow down. However, the latest State Bank Report states that remittances have actually picked up over the last quarter and continue to play a vital role in replenishing foreign exchange reserves of the country.

## Women and Migration

The main reasons for rural-urban migration and emigration from Pakistan are family related, such as marriage. According to the International Labour Organization, only one percent of labour migrants from Pakistan happen to be women. In fact, 60 percent of individuals migrating declare "family-related" issues as the main reason for their migration. This shows that work places still remain segmented along gender lines. Female participation in wage employment is merely 15 percent, as nearly 54 percent do unpaid labour at home.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps the major reason for this inequality in the workplace is the rigid societal norms surrounding women. Women are still overwhelmingly expected to run the household and take care of her husband, her in-laws and her children.<sup>32</sup> Yet, it is important to integrate contemporary feminist analysis around family, care and housework in order to better appreciate the central role played by women in sustaining economic activities in society.

For example, Nancy Fraser has argued that capitalism's production cannot be divorced from its conditions of reproduction. If the factory is the site of the production of Capital, then the media, schools, religious institutions and the family are the sites for the reproduction of the conditions of capital. Family in particular is important not only for ideological inculcation, but also as an informal institution of care for the worker. The engendering of "feminine" virtues is an attempt to produce a workforce that can lower the costs of reproducing the worker by doing unpaid care work for him and his family.<sup>33</sup> If we analyze how the work of care has been outsourced to women, only then can we understand how the system continues to function despite the monstrous inequality and inadequate social infrastructure. According to one study, the contribution of female housework in the Pakistani economy was about 25 billion dollars.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Strengthening Labor Migration Governance in Pakistan", ILO documents, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Ahmed, Iftikhar, "No Country for Working Women", The Express Tribune, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Fraser, Nancy, "Capitalism's Crisis of Care", New Left Review, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Arshad, Zehra. "The Economic Contribution of Pakistani Women Through Unpaid Labour", Health bridge documents. 2008.

Since a majority of migrants exist in the category of care work (either as recipients i.e. children/elderly or as care-givers), any migration reform has to focus on improving the lives of this important but neglected segment of society.

## State and Migration

The Pakistani state and its political spectrum have been widely affected by the movement migrants and refugees. On the legal side, the first treaty signed by Pakistan regarding the rights of refugees was the Liaqat-Nehru Pact signed on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 1950 between the prime ministers of Pakistan and India. The bilateral treaty allowed refugees to return to their homes, dispose of their looted property and be reunited with abducted family members. The pact also stressed the protection of minority rights in India and Pakistan which led to the formation of the Minority Commissions in both the countries.<sup>35</sup>

Pakistan is not a signatory to either the 1951 Convention on Refugee Status or the 1967 Protocol on the status of refugees. Yet, as mentioned earlier, Pakistan has hosted over 3 million Afghan refugees over the past four decades. The Pakistan government has concluded a series of ad hoc agreements with the UNHCR that give legal protection to Afghan refugees. More importantly, the agreement includes repatriation programs to facilitate the return of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> The first deadline for the repatriation program was 2009, which was later extended to 2017 (An extension to the expiry date has been granted six times, the last one being the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, 2018). While many refugees returned to Afghanistan, there remain at least over 2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan today. Their legal status is in a limbo since the expiration of the extended repatriation date in 2018. The government of Prime minister Imran Khan declared its intention to offer citizenship to Afghan refugees, a move that drew praise from human rights group but also a swathe of criticism.<sup>37</sup>

The reason for these tensions over the legal status stems from a history of anxiety and violence over the question of demographics. For example, the entry of migrants in Sindh after the partition of India immediately created tensions between the indigenous Sindhi population and the migrants. Part of these tensions flowed from the fact that the Urdu-speaking migrants were more educated and took over lucrative government jobs and businesses. This created a rift as early as 1948 when the Sindh government refused federal orders to accept more refugees, leading to the dismissal of the provincial government. Since then, the politics of urban and rural Sindh remains divided on the question of migration, with the Urdu-speaking community largely represented by the Muttahda Qaumi Movement and Sindhi-speaking represented by the Pakistan People's Party.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Jalal, Ayesha, "The State of Martial Rule: The origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defense", Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Marjoleine Zieck, "The Legal Status of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, a Story of Eight Agreements and Two Suppressed premises", International Journal of Refugee Law. 2008.

<sup>37</sup> "Unwanted Afghan Refugees Pin Hopes on PM Imran Khan's Promise for Citizenship", Dawn. Jan 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Naqvi, Tahir, "The Politics of Coimmensuration: The Violence of Partition and the Making of the Pakistani State", in Historical Journal. 2007.

This split on migration continues to structure the various responses to the new waves of migration witnessed since partition. In particular, the movement of Pashtun migrants to Karachi has led to tensions with both the Urdu-speaking migrants and the local Sindhi-speaking populations. Pashtun migration to the city began in the 1960s when the Green Revolution displaced many small farmers from agricultural lands, who sought work in the newly-setup industries in the port city. The second major wave came with the advent of Afghan refugees in the 1980s that made Karachi a hub of their cultural, social and financial activities. The third wave began in the aftermath of the “War on terror” when many Pashtuns, particularly those belonging to FATA and Swat, were forced to migrate due to the persistent war between the Pakistani military and insurgent groups.<sup>39</sup> The effects of counter-insurgency efforts of the state have led to massive displacements, with some studies suggesting that the number of Internally Displaced Pashtuns is over 1 million. These displaced communities are fleeing areas that are now under a military logic of governance and where discussions on economic growth are superseded by security concerns of a paranoid state.

The movement of Pashtuns in particular has had political repercussions throughout the country as many families remain under perpetual surveillance even as they move across space. From 2008 to 2016, there were repeated clashes between Urdu-speaking migrants and Pashtuns in Karachi leading to the phenomenon of “target killings” that took hundreds of lives in the city. Recently, Sindhi-speaking nationalists killed three Pashtun migrant workers in the district of Larkana, demonstrating the ethnic fault-lines that threaten social and political stability in Pakistan.<sup>40</sup>

This sense of marginalization has given rise to the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, a civil rights campaign that mobilizes the sense of hurt and humiliation felt by ordinary Pashtuns. It is also remarkable how this movement has mobilized Pashtun migrants across Pakistan by holding massive rallies in cities as diverse as Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad.<sup>41</sup> Its popularity, broad appeal across the Pashtun community, and blunt criticism of the war on terror has led to accusations of treason by the country’s powerful military establishment which recently banned the movement’s leadership from entering Sindh.

On the international front, Pakistan facilitated the migration of its citizens to the Gulf in the 1970s through facilitating access to passports to a large number of potential migrants. Despite the fact that migrants have played a crucial role in stabilizing the financial conditions of the country, the attitude of the Pakistani government remains callous towards their well-being. There is a specific ministry dedicated to Overseas Pakistanis, the regulatory framework to protect Pakistani migrants abroad remains poor. This is perhaps the reason why Pakistan has the highest number of prisoners in the Gulf and extremely high rate of executions in places like Saudi Arabia. Moreover, there is little work on how the country’s class structure has been transformed due to the remittances from abroad. One

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<sup>39</sup>Hasan, Arif. “Migrations, Small Towns and Social Transformations in Pakistan” in *Environment and Urbanization*, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Three Labourers Gunned Down in Bajaur, February 2019.

<sup>41</sup>Manzoor Pashteen, “The Military Says Pashtuns Are traitors. We Just Want Our Rights”, New York Times, February 2019.

paper suggests that the money pouring in from expats has played a major role in subverting the traditional hierarchies between the landed elites and the non-landed population by turning many in the latter category into entrepreneurs. Similarly, there are suggestions that money coming from the Gulf plays a central role in fueling religious organizations, including the Madrassah system. Yet, more research needs to be done on these influences of expats on the state and society.

## Policy Recommendations

A number of policy measures need to be adopted in order to fight poverty and marginalization that dominates the lives of poor migrants. Only a holistic approach that not only provides decent job opportunities and protection to migrants, but also transforms the neoliberal and militaristic logic that uproots people from their points of origin can ensure a life of stability and dignity to ordinary people. Some of the recommendations in Pakistan's context can include

- 1) Pakistan has to reject the neoliberal model that has crippled the state's ability to provide basic amenities to its people or to provide stable, well-paying jobs. One of the greatest challenges will be to curb financialization and speculation in the economy which has replaced investments in industry and agriculture.
- 2) There needs to be a national commitment to invest in basic infrastructural facilities such as public housing, transport and education if we are to prevent further infrastructural breakdown in the major cities.
- 3) The country's labour regulations have to be thoroughly revamped to ensure that workers in the industrial sector are provided with the means to live a dignified life. In this regard, the recommendations of the Human Rights Watch in strengthening the labour departments and courts should be a high priority for the government.
- 4) The government needs to devise a strategy for tackling rural distress in the country. This means providing subsidies to small farmers and low-income groups in order to make their work sustainable. More importantly, the government should encourage the burgeoning non-agricultural industries in the city by providing them with basic infrastructure, credit and sustainable employment opportunities.
- 5) Pakistan should become a signatory to the International Convention on the Status of Refugees to end uncertainty in their lives and provide a path to citizenship for those who have made Pakistan their home for the past three decades.
- 6) Climate change has to be confronted as an existential threat to the country's future and one that would make any notion of stable work an impossible desire. For these purposes, the state has to discourage more investment in fossil-fuel related infrastructure and begin diverting resources towards a cleaner, greener future.
- 7) The country has to review its bloated military budget which not only is a drain on its resources, but is increasingly pushing everyday life under a logic of war and surveillance.
- 8) A comprehensive review of social pressures hindering the entry of women into the labour market is required. This not only means incentivizing the hiring of female staff, but also creating an enabling environment at work places, including the enforcement anti-

discrimination and anti-harassment policies, to make female employment an attractive option both for workers and the employees.

- 9) The government has to not only build public institutions to facilitate internal migrants, but also work with the informal social and kinship networks that are already playing an important role in the lives of migrants. A dynamic state-society relationship would be more beneficial than a top-down imposition of new regulations on migration.
- 10) Pakistan needs to develop a regulatory framework for its citizens working in adverse conditions abroad. This could mean working with human rights organizations to ensure that rights such as a right to fair trial are safeguarded for migrants. Moreover, the government should also use its diplomatic channels to ensure that the Gulf countries do not violate the basic labour and human rights of Pakistani workers. Considering the centrality of expats in the economic and social life of the country, a special regulatory framework needs to be established to ensure that they receive due support from their home country if they find themselves in adverse conditions.