Religion in Spaces of Social Disruption: Re-Reading the Public Transcript of Disaster Relief in Pakistan

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This paper explores how everyday religious narratives in post-disaster contexts can be interpreted as key sites of agency articulated in resistance to dominant discourses of disaster relief. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork among affected communities after the 2010 floods in Pakistan, we argue that religious discourses code everyday actions with political meaning and significance. Deploying Scott's (1990) theorization of hidden transcripts and everyday acts of resistance, as well as Mahmood's (2005) more recent framing of agency as a capacity for action, we argue that local communities are dynamic political actors capable of transformative interventions even in the wake of major disasters and the relief efforts that ensue in their wake. By exploring how religious narratives are mobilized by local communities we seek to better understand how the post-disaster arena is used to rework concepts of 'beneficiaries', 'relief provision,' and 'religion.'

Key words: Religion, agency, resistance, disaster relief, Pakistan, flooding, Islam.

Introduction
Religion in the Everyday Post-Disaster Space

Religion influences disaster relief, recovery and preparedness in important ways yet the disaster literature has offered only moderate insights into these relationships. Existing studies highlight the centrality of religion in assisting disaster survivors make sense of their experiences (Bankoff 2004), as a motivational force for survivors to return to a life of normalcy (Schmuck 2000) or as influencing individual and

collective responses to disasters (Gaillard et al. 2008). Other studies have focused on religion as fatalism in relation to preparedness measures, albeit one embedded within a myriad of other characteristics such as education and social status (Grothmann and Reusswig 2006; Kasapoglu and Ecevit 2003). Similarly some scholars have argued that religious narratives stunt the development of alternate forms of socio-political analysis (Steinberg, 2000) and several others have directed attention to the proselytizing intentions of religious groups amidst disasters (Ensor 2003; Gaillard 2006) as well as the use of religious identities to deny disaster assistance (Malik 2011). More recent works such as Paul and Menjivar (2012) have sought to understand the role of religion within civil society as exemplified during disaster recovery. However, we note that key sociological and anthropological texts within disaster studies (such as Hewitt 1997; Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999; Rodriguez, Quarantelli, and Dynes 2006; Wisner et al. 2004) offer only a limited engagement with religion, if any at all.

Drawing on ethnographic field research in Pakistan after the 2010 floods we argue that religion has a far more complex role within the post-disaster space than is often understood. Close attention to everyday religious narratives offer more nuanced understandings of what it means to resume life after large-scale social disruptions. Therefore in this paper, we explore the following key question: how can everyday religious narratives in post-disaster contexts be read and interpreted as sites of agency and resistance to discourses of disaster relief? We answer this by exploring the use of Islamic narratives by communities in post-flood Pakistan to code everyday actions with political meaning and significance.

We focus on two specific examples drawn from our field research to reorient the place of religion in disaster relief and recovery. These examples are: 1) the repeated reference to 'Allah' as being the original source of relief and assistance within the performances of survival in the aftermath of the floods, and 2) the social constructs of the 'purdah wall' and the community graveyard as refuges to contest the technocratic undertones of disaster relief. We analyze these narratives via the lens of the influence of religion on disaster relief; hidden transcripts and everyday acts of resistance (Scott 1990; Thomson 2011); and religion as a capacity for action (Chamlee-Wright 2010; Mahmood 2001; 2005).

From amongst resistance theories, everyday acts of resistance refers to covert acts of subversion and dissonance that confuse and frustrate the system, instead of overthrowing it as traditional, public forms of resistance imply (Thomson 2011, p. 447). These are "subtle, indirect, and non-confrontational acts that make daily life more sustainable" (Thomson 2011, p. 446) under systems of oppression such as the relations of power implicit in global humanitarianism and external relief. Scott (1990) argues that most political life of marginalized groups is not found in "overt collective defiance of power holders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites" (p. 136). He uses the terms "public transcripts" and "hidden transcripts" in his redefinition of 'the political'. Unlike some sociological models that see religion as serving the status quo, Scott enables us to re-

consider religious imagination and expression as a form of hidden transcript that allows negotiation with power brokers (Wimbush 1997, p. 6). [1]

Exploring community social learning after Hurricane Katrina, Chamlee-Wright documents the use of religion as an important motivator for recovery and reconstruction (2010, pp. 119–125). Her ethnographic study shows that communities actively repurposed religious narratives to shape socially embedded cultural tools, which facilitated their recovery despite a lack of economic resources. Building on the works of Swidler (1986, 1995, 2000), Chamlee-Wright argues that religious narratives serve as "mental models" (2010, p. 109), which generate specific, concrete cultural tools that aid disaster recovery. Her research shows that "religiosity affords a valuable set of socially embedded resources" (p.123), which combined with the provocative "muscularity" of structural constraints promotes agency (Giddens 1979, 1984). We take Chamlee-Wright's conceptualization of religion as promoting agency a step further by emphasizing the structural constraints and contexts within which agentive behavior is instituted.

In her examination of Egyptian Muslim women's mosque movements, Mahmood (2001, 2005) frames agency as being situated in life worlds that have been shaped by particular, in this case non-liberal, traditions. Drawing on ethnographic research Mahmood argues that agency should not simply be understood as "a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination create and enable" (Mahmood 2001, p. 210). She argues that by understanding the discourses and structures that influence the enactment of agency, agentive capacity can be understood not only as actions that "result in (progressive) change but also those that aim toward continuity, stasis and stability" (2001, p. 212).

We develop Chamlee-Wright's (2010) and Mahmood's (2001, 2005) arguments in light of our own ethnographic research on disaster relief in Pakistan after the 2010 monsoon floods. Throughout the research process we embraced the unsettling effects of local knowledge and theorize communities as dynamic political actors capable of generating transformations and disruptions particularly within the transactions performed through the disaster relief process. By exploring how narratives of religion are mobilized, the post-disaster arena is understood as a space of innovation and change challenging dominant static understandings of beneficiaries, relief provision and religion itself. Based on this recognition we extend our inquiry of religion as a social/political script by specifically exploring it within the realm of the everyday. This is based on two assumptions.

First, we believe that community life is a valuable source of knowledge whether it is encapsulated by socially constructed categories of 'civilian', 'beneficiary' or 'survivor' (Bakewell 2000; Dijkzeul and Wakenge 2010; Fernando and Hilhorst 2006; Lee 2008; Porter et al. 2008; Pottier 1996). Second, we recognize that after any form of social disruption life is reclaimed and "recovered not through some grand gestures in the realm of the transcendent but through a descent into the ordinary" (Das 2007, p. 7). While our theoretical impulse might be to think of human agency "in terms of escaping the ordinary rather than as a descent into it" (Das 2007, p.7), we examine

everyday actions and conversations in the post-disaster space to generate deeper understandings of the processes of social remaking and social repair (Aijazi, 2015) as encrypted by the socially sanctioned script of religion. Therefore by engaging with the calm, incremental, accretive violence of natural disasters (Nixon 2011, p. 2) through the lens of 'daily life', we are able to ensure that pre-existing structural inequities and debilitating power relations adequately inform humanitarian analysis of disasters and ensuing relief interventions (Berke, Kartez, and Wagner 1993; Chhotray and Few 2012; Ingram et al. 2006; Mustafa 2003; Oliver-Smith 1990).

Research Geography and Rationale

The disaster relief context examined in this paper was that following the 2010 Pakistan Monsoon Floods. Pakistan was chosen as a study site because of frequent disaster events, the rootedness of disasters within structural inequities and the pervasive role that religion plays in shaping the lives of its people. The 2010 floods affected some 20.2 million people and one fifth of the country was reported to be under water (UN OCHA 2010). The United Nations stated that the number of people affected by this disaster exceeded those affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2005 Kashmir Earthquake and the 2010 Haiti Earthquake combined. Individuals most severely affected included small farmers and unskilled laborers who are already the most vulnerable in the country, living below or just above the poverty line. Monsoon floods returned in 2011 affecting 5.2 million individuals (UN OCHA 2012), in 2012 affecting another 4.8 million (UN OCHA 2013a) and then again in 2013 affecting yet another 1.5 million (UN OCHA 2013b)

Pakistan's independence from the British Empire, and subsequently from India, was rooted in the ambiguity between identity politics and secular modernism. Shortly after independence in 1947, in light of the tremendous cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity, the ruling elite lobbied for national unification via the promotion of a singular Islamic identity. The class division of society, which is essentially a capitalist problem, further fuelled the need to unify the masses on a religious extra-class basis. Thus Islam became the preferred medium for unity, and Pakistani nationalism was crafted in the language of a uniform Muslim identity (Metcalf 2004).

The province of Khyber Pakhtun Khwa (KPK) was selected as the field site for our research after consulting with our host organization and closely reviewing existing field documents (PDMA 2010).[2] KPK was heavily affected in the 2010 monsoon floods and it is the disaster relief process following this specific flooding event that is the focus of this paper. While flooding is an annual monsoonal phenomenon in the region, the severity varies significantly. KPK was largely unaffected by the 2011 and 2012 floods, and only marginally affected in 2013.

Khyber Pakhtun Khwa translates as the 'land of the Pashtun people.' KPK until recently was called the North-West Frontier Province, a name reminiscent of the British colonial rule. The shift in nomenclature, decided by a referendum in the national assembly in 2010, reflects the unique ethnic and cultural aspirations of the Pashtun people. Pashtun is a distinctive ethnic group, members of which speak the

regional language of Pashtu (Urdu is Pakistan's national language). Pashtun occupy adjacent regions in Afghanistan and Pakistan.[3] The Pashtuns maintain strong cross-border cultural ties between the two countries despite the barriers erected by the formation of modern nation states. However the KPK province is far from homogenous and also includes a large number of non-Pashtun ethnic groups.

Since 2009, the province has also been disrupted by conflict and serves as a space for the enactment of protracted displacement and IDP camps. As of August 2013, 1.02 million people still remained internally displaced in the province (UN OCHA 2013b) and 11% of these continue to live in IDP camps (UN OCHA 2013a). Due to its close cultural, linguistic and geographic proximity with neighboring Afghanistan, KPK also has a long-standing tradition of hosting Afghan refugees. As of August 2013, Pakistan hosts at least 1.62 million Afghan refugees and a large percentage of them reside in the KPK province (UN OCHA 2013b).

Pashtun traditions typically center on patrimonial conducts of honor and protection of sexual propriety, and therefore women as sexualized bodies enjoy limited mobility and fixed social roles (Saikal 2010, p. 5–6). Pashtun cultural codes of conduct predate the advent of Islam in the region, resulting in a unique hybridization where cultural codes are conflated with religious traditions, and distinctions between the two are lacking. Therefore the region enjoys a distinct cultural interpretation of Islam that permeates most aspects of public and private life, allowing us to explore our research question with confidence and purpose.

Methodology

For our field research, we selected four villages from KPK.[4] Each of these communities was predominantly affiliated with Sunni Islam and was ethnically Pashtun. Similar to the rest of the province, important sources of livelihood in these villages included tenant farming, daily waged unskilled labor, small-scale entrepreneurship such as making prayer beads, low volume dairy farming, and honey production.[5] Most of our research participants were lifelong residents of their respective villages and had lived the majority of their lives in the same spatial community. Communities possessed some memory of past flooding but recollections varied across age and gender. Residents reported that the last incident of major flooding was anywhere from 40 to 300 years ago and this estimate varied across villages. Most residents admitted that due to poor sanitation services and crumbling physical infrastructure such as shallow uncovered drains, they endured small-scale flooding (2–4 feet of standing water) almost annually during the monsoon season.

The research was designed as a series of community focus group discussions, which were held during the summer months of 2012. Due to local cultural norms, discussion groups were held separately for men and women. Each discussion consisted of 20 to 30 participants ranging from young adults to the elderly. We actively recruited several key leaders (e.g. school teachers, village elders, leaders of community-based organizations) to participate in these discussions. Each group discussion was supplemented with key informant interviews and village

transects/walkabouts to generate deeper contextual understanding. Fluent in the national vernacular, we held the discussion groups in the Urdu language. In instances where respondents were only able to converse in the local/regional languages of Pashto and Hindko, a translator was used.

We had initially planned to focus our research more generally on the drivers of community resilience and were interested in identifying various factors that assisted in the survival and rehabilitation of communities. We did not question our participants directly on religion, in fact, in our preparatory notes we had listed religion as only one of the several possible cultural forces that may or may not influence community recovery to disasters. Over the course of our research, the centrality of religion as a social script became increasingly apparent. Most of our conversations eventually led to a discussion of religion in one form or the other. Over time we noticed the creative deployment of religious narratives by participants to highlight a case in point or to describe a social condition. We came to see religion as an encompassing field through which the lives of communities moved and unfolded as they engaged in their journeys to recovery. Religion provided communities with the necessary vocabulary for participants to anchor themselves in their specific social worlds while communicating with those on the outside. Religion also connected us, the researchers, with these communities in tangible ways and signaled a sense of solidarity between the research participants and us. Both of us identified as adherents of the Islamic faith, and this assumption was never questioned or contested in our conversations with communities.

Even though religion is often conceptualized as a generic trans-cultural and trans-historical category (e.g. Geertz 2002), we understood religion holistically, beyond specific rituals and practices but as an overarching script, which allows communities avenues for agency and resistance. Asad (1993, p. 29) argues that the constituent elements and relationships of any given religion within a community are historically specific and a universalized definition is itself the historic product of specific discursive processes. Informed by Asad's argument, we maintain that religion cannot be separated from specific social, political and economic processes that shape a community even after natural disasters.

While analyzing our data, particular attention was paid to the specific contexts in which participants mobilized religious narratives. This enabled us to analyze the active use of religious symbols and metaphors in relation to wider social narratives in which they were invoked. We then reconciled these religious narratives with seemingly contradictory actions adopted by communities generating particular readings of agency, resistance and creative co-option. We also noted the ways communities mobilized religious narratives to code everyday actions with hidden political significance. This also enabled us to identify points of contention between community worldviews and grand narratives of humanitarian assistance imposed by external relief providers. Additionally we paid close attention to the moments of silence and acquiescence exhibited by communities in their interactions with us, providing yet another layer of meaning.

During fieldwork, we observed the rootedness of Islam in daily Pashtun life on several occasions. For example in some villages entrepreneurship and small craft

businesses were limited to the making of 'burqas' (cloth gown covering a women's face and body) and 'tasbihs' (prayer beads). Similarly mostly bearded men in skullcaps dominated public life and only occasionally by women dressed in traditional burqas and head coverings. Beards, skullcaps and burqas are Islamic symbols as in many other Muslim regions of the world.

It was also interesting to note selective instances of engagement of relief agencies with religious markers despite the tensions that already exist between religion and relief provision. Humanitarian relief organizations distributed corrugated iron sheets for replacing roofs of mosques. Similarly some Imams held NGO sponsored health and hygiene sessions in mosques, combining Friday prayer sermons with health and hygiene messaging. Some relief organizations even distributed animals to communities for slaughtering on the religious holiday of Eid al Adha while others held iftar parties (feasts during the holy month of Ramadan) to foster community. Religion also provided a common unifying framework for communities, a framework of solidarity, which successfully created a political community. Community members participated in this political community by virtue of deploying religious narratives to both define and defend their subject positions but also to test and prod the overarching social limits imposed by relief agencies as well as by us researchers. The unequal power relations implicit in the relief exercise and our research exchange was sometimes reorganized and reconfigured by participants invoking religious narratives, because Islam and Allah were bigger than all of us. Participants therefore deployed religious narratives as a primary platform from which to contest our privileged positions as researchers who were aligned with a dominant relief organization.

'Natural' Disasters, Structure and Agency

In our discussions with community members, we often asked the question, "Why do you think the floods occurred and why did it affect your community so adversely as opposed to large nearby urban centers?" Discussants scarcely conceptualized the flooding as a mere natural event. Local understandings of the physical environment were increasingly tied to wider notions of social justice and power relations, which were attributed to both macro, and micro realities of oppression. Respondents were quick to tie the environmental hazard directly with larger issues of inequity, which predated the flooding event. In addition to climate change, increased rainfall and inefficient drainage; respondents considered the newly built motorway responsible for exasperating the consequences of the flooding.[6] The motorway is a modern highway connecting the capital city Islamabad with the province of KPK. The mega-development project was inaugurated in 2007 and came under heavy public criticism for displacing and uprooting large numbers of villages. Sections of the motorway are elevated which acted as obstructions to the flow of floodwater. Thus villages, which would have otherwise been safe or only briefly flooded, were inundated for extended periods of time.

Similarly some of the men in our discussion groups reminded us of the politics of land ownership and distribution. They recognized that the reason their homes were flooded was because they lived on marginal land:

> There is a 300 acre fruit farm near our village. It is public land and is managed by the military. They have been managing it for a long time. It was previously owned by the Angraiz [British] and handed to the military after they left [after decolonization]. We should be resettled there [instead of living on this marginal land], it is prime land. It is fenced off and barricaded, we can't even enter it.[7]

The above quote is a strong reminder of the colonial histories of the region and how the past continues to shape the present. It also indicates the uncontested transfer of power from colonial rulers to national elites, leaving the large majority of colonial subjects in continuing relationships of exploitation albeit this time with the nation state (Alavi 2002, p. 5124). It is necessary to keep in mind that people most affected from the 2010 monsoon floods were already on the margins and had learned to survive despite limiting conditions.

These quotations draw us into the age-old debate over the primacy of structure or agency that has remained at the heart of classical as well as contemporary sociological theory. Using Bourdieu's (1980, 1984) negotiation of structure and agency, via his framework of "field" and "habitus", we are able to avoid the redundancy in having to choose either side.[8] We also draw attention to Paul Farmer's use of the term structural violence in his work with marginalized groups in Haiti. In our research we examine localized experiences of religion and disaster relief, yet we note, "these local understandings are to be embedded, in turn, in the larger-scale historical system of which the fieldwork site is a part" (Farmer 1997, p. 273). Therefore disaster survivors are also united by their experiences of various oppressive external social and economic forces that exacerbate the effects of natural disasters. For our context, these include historic experiences of colonialism, identity politics of the Taliban and the formidable "War on Terror" which categorize our research site a battleground for global liberal peace building agendas (Khan and Nyborg 2013). It is important to be mindful of these forces external to the lived realities of our research participants, which constrain and diminish their lives in important ways.

In the following sections, we focus on two examples from our field research that illustrate the use of religious narratives within the post-disaster space. Both these examples highlight the important role religion plays in influencing disaster survivors' recovery strategies as well as conditioning their articulation for autonomy within the context of social/ecological disruption and disaster relief provision.

Performances of Survival: "Only Allah Will Help Us, Only Allah Has Helped Us"

Through our discussions with communities we were able to examine the processes by which the flooding event was experienced and negotiated, gaining a glimpse of the resources that were mobilized for survival. We mapped these within the performances of (1) evacuation and displacement; (2) return and recovery; and (3) preparation for future floods. We are not implying a rigid sequence and are aware of the various theoretical shortcomings of using a phased approach to disaster research (e.g. see Neal 1997). Rather, we are cognizant that community members navigate these larger processes in many different ways. However, ordering it this way, allows a clearer presentation of our field data. This is not intended to theorize community responses to disasters as a linear and predictable exercise. Rather by arranging community narratives this way we are able to locate the precise deployment of available resources by communities despite overwhelming structural constraints. In these performances of survival, mundane practices of daily life were embedded with new meaning of political significance via the creative usage of religious scripts. These served as counter-narratives to competing projects of control and order in post-disaster spaces of exclusion and disorder.

The province of KPK mostly experienced flash flooding. Evacuation was extremely difficult because communities did not have much time to plan or collect their belongings in a systematic manner. Most households were given warnings by government monitoring agencies to evacuate at midnight the day of the floods.[9] Usually it was the women and children who made the difficult decision of leaving their homes and communities. This is because a large percentage of men in our selected villages were migrant workers in the urban centers of Karachi and Rawalpindi and were thus not at home when the floods struck.[10] Women often recalled how quick and surreal their experience of evacuation was and men narrated feeling helpless as they instructed their families on their mobile phones to immediately evacuate. Collectively speaking, a male discussant remarked: "When we got news of the floods we ourselves were not home. We told the kids to lock the house and leave. Then we heard how fast and how much water was coming and everything we had went under water."[11]

Evacuation was complicated not just because of the politics of indecision but also because there was limited transportation available in these rural settings. Roads were damaged and severely restricted mobility. Households navigated the chaos in three important ways. First, those who were able to activate extended social relationships outside of the village made use of these connections. For example, one woman told us that "during the flood, our uncle sent a vehicle from Peshawar [nearest city] and we went with them."[12] However, the majority of the residents adopted the strategy of moving to neighboring villages located at higher elevations and therefore less susceptible to the flooding. The decision to evacuate to neighboring villages was made on the basis of local social geographies which identified which villages were anticipated to respond with care and hospitality and which villages were elevated enough to escape the anticipated flooding. Finally those who could not leave because of their inability to navigate the evacuation process due to a lack of resources or social networks, decided to camp on their rooftops. A woman recalled her experience: "All

of our assets were lost during the flood. When the flood came we camped out on top of our houses. Our bones were broken [from sleeping on hard brick roofs] but no one came to help us. Only Allah was there." [13]

By and large, households depended on personal networks and relationships to navigate the evacuation process. One teenage boy who was at home with his mother when the government ordered immediate evacuation, recalled: "All of us villagers helped one another. Some saved lives, some helped carry luggage and possessions, even though there were heavy rains we helped everyone. We gave others space and cover to shelter from the rain."[14]

As this case illustrates, most residents relied on themselves and fellow members of their communities to navigate the evacuation process. At this stage, there was no or limited external help from relief agencies. However disrupted communities did not simply remain waiting, praying for a metaphysical solution to their dilemma. The disaster event was real, rooted in their concrete realities and so were their responses to it.

As displacement became prolonged, not all residents had alternative places to stay. The local madrassa (religious school) became an important site for relocation and camp as households anxiously waited for the languishing waters to recede. A woman recalled her experience: "The flood water was up to our chins. We were running to the madrasa, which is outside of the village. We stayed there for 2-3 days. Some others stayed there for 3 months."[15] The madrasa was a natural choice of refuge for many households because of its sanctity and reputation as a site of protection and safety. Similar instances were reported after the 2005 Kashmir earthquake when madrassas served as important safety nets for displaced populations (Aijazi and Angeles, 2014). Another site of evacuation was the community graveyard, which we will discuss in more detail in the coming sections. Households only chose to relocate to formal displacement camps managed by government or private relief agencies if they had no other choice.[16]

State authorities were anxious to close down camps and push residents to return home. Some camp inhabitants could not return to their villages because they lacked the resources required for rebuilding their homes. Those who were able to return home faced the overwhelming task of getting their homes into an acceptable state. While government authorities were eager to close down camps and push people back into their villages, limited assistance was given to households to actually make their communities suitable for return. They often had no choice but to camp in the courtyards of their then damaged homes. Relief agencies did not offer tangible shelter support until nearly a year after the flooding.[17]

In order to survive in a strict cash economy, access to credit became an important contributor for recovery. Most disrupted households were unable to extend loans to their neighbors,[18] and once again informal support networks were activated. Many residents reported relying on their relatives and social networks extending outside of the immediate community. Even at this point, external help from relief agencies was minimal, if any. One man laughed when we asked him whether relief agencies had become operational in their communities upon their return, he stated: "At that point

most people had not been approached by relief agencies; we took loans and relied on relatives.

Even when relief came from organizations, their help was so little and temporary. Not everyone was even covered."[19] Instead of choosing to discuss external relief organizations, a women respondent emphasized local support networks and acts of generosity: "We gave clothes and food to each other when we could. My brother's house was not affected so he helped us and a few others."[20] A crucial institution in this landscape was the village grocery store that ran multiple tabs for residents and allowed families to purchase necessary food and household items on credit. These shops, often small in size, on average extended credit of about Rs. 2000 (US$20) per household per month.[21] A woman commented: "For six months we were borrowing here and there. The Turkish NGOs came and brought some food. They left very quickly. After that we had to make do ourselves. It was Allah and we."[22]

Before the floods most village houses were made of mud, locally referred to as 'katcha'. Communities were eager to convert these 'katcha' houses into 'pakka' buildings made from bricks and cement.[23] This transformation from 'katcha' to 'pakka' was a strong perceived indicator of post-flood recovery.[24] Relief assistance that helped in this transformation was perceived to be extremely valuable.[25] Housing support by relief agencies was not offered to everyone. Even two years after the flood, some village residents were noted to be living in tents or in visibly damaged homes.[26] Many residents had no choice but to resume living in a katcha house. Relief support that helped in the transformation from katcha to pakka housing was in the form of technical instruction and building materials. It was up to the household to do the actual construction and repair work. This meant that households, which lacked labor and skill, were dependent on their neighbors. A woman informed us: "Those of us who had a husband familiar with building, they helped make the houses, otherwise it was a stranger [neighbor] who did it. We weren't involved, but we made roti [flatbread] for them."[27]

Therefore even in the crucial area of shelter relief, external assistance was interpreted as being insufficient and unable to perform on its own. Communities equally supported these projects and the credit for successful housing interventions remains a shared enterprise. An elderly woman happily informed us: "Before the flood, almost 60% of the houses were katcha. Now a lot more are pakka. Thanks to Allah."[28] We hardly ever heard any praise directed toward relief agencies for this pakka outcome, although some community members argued that despite their shortcomings the relief agencies still made *some* contribution. In contrast, blatantly rejecting the usefulness of the relief enterprise, a young man in his late twenties blurted out during one of our discussions: "The truth is only Allah will help us and only Allah has helped us."[29]

We asked our research participants how they were preparing for this year's monsoons, and whether they were doing something different from previous years. Several men spoke up, one man reported "Every day after Asr prayers [early evening] we go to the river and check its level,"[30] another man added: "When it rains, we take bags of sand, and bags of stones, and put them around the open drain that runs

through the village."[31] Sharing a similar belief in preparation, an elderly man said "We can't really predict the severity of floods, but now onwards we will have the national identity cards [government identifications] of every household member ready and in a safe place [since access to relief was tied to the identification card]. We also remain alert to weather forecasts."[32]

Several authors have pointed out the concerning consequences of external relief on human subjectivity, particularly with reference to confidence in one's decision-making power, cultural resources and capacities (Anderson and Woodrow 1989; Schuller 2008). However our field research reveals the opposite. The experiences of disaster relief in post-flood Pakistan consolidated rather than fragmented the worldviews and sensibilities of communities. When communities assert that only Allah can help them they are actively asserting the legitimacy of their cultural and spiritual knowledge over those of relief agents. During the chaos and uncertainty that followed the flooding, communities received assistance from multiple sources with relief agencies being only one of these. In public communication, communities firmly placed their faith in Allah and expressions of gratitude were directed at Allah alone. This ties into the widely accepted understanding that help comes only from Allah but is actualized through different physical channels on Earth (ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb 1996, chapter 14). Thus Allah alone is the source of all help, but 'help' becomes apparent through different avenues in one's life, such as kind shopkeepers who allow groceries on credit, neighbors who helped repair one's house or relief agencies. By maintaining their allegiance to Allah who was seen as inspiring all acts of generosity and charity, communities were able to maintain their independence, in part by denying exclusive allegiance to any single relief provider. This way they are able to sculpt out pockets of dignity in the otherwise unequal relations of "giving" (Fassin 2012, p. 3).

Space for Politics: The 'Purdah Wall' as a Site for Contestation, the Graveyard as a Refuge for the Living

Disaster relief transactions that occurred after the floods became a site of contestation for control and legitimacy. These contestations involved a collision between community knowledge and the technical expertise of relief providers. Two such sites of confrontation were housing design for reconstruction and displacement to refugee camps. In both instances communities mobilized religious narratives to actively assert the legitimacy of their cultural knowledge over those of relief agents.

Purdah can be roughly translated as 'cover' which enables specific forms of male/female segregation based on a culturally mediated religious interpretation. The 'purdah wall' is a socially sanctioned physical wall that surrounds a home or a collection of housing units; it is therefore a concrete manifestation of 'purdah'. The walls allow women a safe space outside of the housing unit where they can freely move and interact with extended family without worrying about personal safety, gender segregation, and public notions of modesty. Essentially these walls extend the physical space available for women household members in the village setting. The purdah walls are therefore an extension of the social world available for women and

help maintain the culturally mediated separation of the public (village life) and the private (womenfolk). The purdah wall became a site of contestation between flood-disrupted communities and relief organizations working on shelter interventions or in camp settings for displaced communities.

Organizations working on shelter interventions in the four selected communities did not provide any assistance for the construction of the purdah wall. They concentrated on getting the structure of the housing unit up. Nonetheless, communities perceived the purdah wall as a major indicator of recovery. The purdah wall surfaced as a site of contestation almost immediately. Humanitarian organizations claimed there was no budget allotted for constructing the purdah wall in their program proposals and thus their hands were tied. Households strove to replicate some form of a purdah wall around their homes. This often meant setting up a tent wall or erecting plastic sheets (distributed initially by relief agencies as temporary shelters) around their semi pakka homes. Even households, who were living in katcha housing, damaged housing or still in tents prioritized the purdah wall. We noted several tents with unfinished brick walls surrounding them. Sometimes we observed houses with broken doors, smashed or no windows, but surrounded by a partial purdah wall. Clearly, in such instances the purdah wall was considered essential for recovery.

The purdah wall became a site of unity for affected communities, a transient political community where each member was unified by forces beyond the commonality of suffering and companionship as disaster survivors. Through the medium of the purdah wall, communities were able to consolidate their subject positions as anchored within their life worlds and cautiously poked and prodded the limitations of recovery prescribed by relief agencies. The notion of purdah became particularly important in the micro politics of displacement camps and gave communities symbolic resources with which to defend their dignity and independence.

As discussed earlier, the province of KPK is no stranger to disruption and displacement. Displacement camps are an integral part of the social imagination of its inhabitants; their memory spanning more than a few decades including events such as the influx of Afghan refugees in the 1990s to the more recent outpouring of human bodies from the troubled Taliban influenced Swat region just a few hours away. Residents were not just wary of the apparent misdemeanor of camps. Camps were perceived as spaces of control, humiliation and exploitation. The camps set up by both government and relief agencies served as the last possible space of refuge for displaced families. Most participants of our discussion groups had intentionally 'evaded' reallocation to these camps. One man explained;

> Two camps were set up, one was in a school 2km away. There was a problem of purdah in these camps [because of their communal nature and random placement of families side by side]. We did whatever we could to avoid going to the camps. Those who could afford it rented houses from relatives. But the really poor had no choice but to go the camps.[33]

Those who did move to the camps recalled what the absence of a purdah wall meant for their household, particularly for the women. A man explained: "Women and their children just stayed in their tents all the time [tents in the displacement camps]. The tents heat up very quickly. One family used a gas heater inside their tent, the tent caught fire and the women and children burned to death."[34]

Not every household was able to arrange for alternate temporary housing. As mentioned before some took refuge at the madrassa (Islamic seminary) before heading out to their relatives. The preference to avoid the humiliation of displacement camps was so strong, that households searched for any possible alternative to these camps. In this search, one unique site emerged as a safe space of refuge: the community graveyard.

The community graveyard was used as an alternative by those who did not have extended social networks and desperately wanted to avoid the humiliation of a displacement camp. In all of the communities we visited, the graveyard enjoyed a privileged status. The graveyard is an elaborate site of burial and since in Islamic tradition the body of the deceased continues to be sacred, the graveyard by default has spiritual significance. The sanctity of the public burial ground was matched in most cases by a unique geographical feature: raised elevation. Some respondents informed us: "This graveyard is at a significant height so it didn't get flooded by the raging water. The graveyard has been there for centuries and it is raised. Allah protects it."[35]

Some displaced households chose to pitch tents in their community graveyard. This was a collective decision by a number of families who were trusted friends and neighbors. This allowed them to negotiate the dynamics of the purdah wall by creating a familiar yet unique geography of displacement. By creating an alternate space of refuge other than what was being provided by relief agencies, these households were able to exercise agency and address the problems of displacement and exclusion (from social networks) in culturally acceptable ways. The sanctity of the burial ground also provided displaced households with a certain sense of safety and security. They were under the watch of the dead, and not just any dead but their own ancestors.

Analysis

In light of our field research, we ask the following question: How does religion operate in relation to the project of disaster relief? We do not attempt to address this question via the operatives of Islamic relief organizations or the theological support for engaging with relief activities, but will instead explore (1) the influence of religious belief in 'intercepting' disaster relief and (2) the way religion provided a vocabulary to marginalized groups to negotiate and challenge relief services and selectively accept provisions.

As shown in our first example, relief recipients welcomed assistance from all sources. However, faced with extensive needs and limited resources, it was difficult for relief providers to offer comprehensive support. The scattered and insufficient

provision of relief was intercepted via the belief that all help originates from Allah alone and Allah sends assistance to people via different avenues. Thus relief providers were interpreted as only one such medium through which Allah sent assistance and His mercy, along with other mediums including the village grocery store or one's relatives. This greatly fractured and undermined the presence of relief organizations, which seek individual recognition from communities. Faith in Allah also reoriented the inherently unequal, dichotomizing receiver and giver relationship. There was little gratitude expressed to relief workers, who sometimes in turn referred to recipients as being ungrateful. According to Islamic principles, as interpreted by local communities, gratitude has a powerful spiritual dimension and is properly expressed to Allah alone. This does not mean that expressions of thanks cannot be offered to others but fractures the relationship between assistance and patronage to any organization, group or individual.

Our second set of examples shows how communities were able to contest the design of relief provision by demanding a purdah wall and selectively choosing assistance by rejecting displacement camps but accepting other forms of assistance. These choices were informed and motivated by religious narratives. Essentially communities challenged the technocratic assumptions of relief provision, humanizing and contextualizing the process. Religion thereby provided a vocabulary to challenge the basic assumption of the relief machinery that recipients on account of their dire circumstances will accept anything that is given to them. Religion provided texture and features to the singular category of 'victim'.

Through our examples, we have already demonstrated the transformative potential of everyday acts of politics via the injection of a religious subtext. We conceptualize the public transcript as the overtly religious narratives deployed by communities, and the hidden transcript as the points of departure formed by communities. For example articulating a desire to escape the humiliation of displacement camps by conversing in the need of a purdah wall is in our opinion a negotiation between the hidden transcript and the public transcript. The public transcript here is the articulation of a religious necessity and the hidden transcript is the evasion of the humiliation of a displacement camp.

Affected communities learn to negotiate a delicate balance between compliance with disaster relief actors and their own aspirations of disaster recovery as rooted within their lived realities. This essentially means a negotiation between 'expert' and 'community' knowledge, as demonstrated by the inadequate housing design as part of relief provision. We again understand this as a negotiation between public and hidden transcripts. Communities are careful not to irk relief providers, which could result in restrictions on, or the withholding of, assistance. They strategically steer their interactions in a way that does not overtly remind relief agencies of their ineptitude but at the same time allows communities some room to engage in the dialectic process of disaster relief with some purpose and dignity. As shown by our research, religion can provide the means and vocabulary for this fragile negotiation.

The centrality of religion in KPK is uncontested and allows for a political currency that can render actions of contestation, reclamation and resistance invisible.

By escaping public scrutiny, religious narratives in this context of deep-rooted inequity allow communities to exercise their dignity and agency. The "infrapolitics of subordinate groups" (Scott 1990, p. 183) enable communities to redefine the political and challenge grand narratives of the neutral humanitarian institution. We perceive this as communities reclaiming the political within the humanitarian space. Religious scripts allowed participants to resist the performance of disaster survivors/victims by alluding to a higher order and cosmological reasoning that superseded the authority of relief organizations. This allowed them to sculpt pockets of dignity and reclaim themselves as human despite living in an environment of diminishment and marginalization.

The concept of everyday resistance has been criticized for collapsing human struggle into the binaries of dominator and dominated, simplifying politics to a homogenous and singular terrain and depoliticizing the human condition by only drawing attention to the politics of resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990; Ortner 1995). The usefulness of the concept, according to scholarly volition, lies in its ability to reveal everyday machinations of power in its diverse and relational forms in the Foucauldian sense (Abu-Lughod 1990; Ortner 1995; Thomson 2011).[36] While we agree with most of the limitations and inadequacies of the concept of "everyday resistance", our theoretical impulse is not to completely reject it but rather to use it as one frame among others to make sense of the human experience in particular terms.

By drawing attention to a particular form of politics we are not signaling the absence of all others. Similarly we are also not shutting down other forms of interpretation. A reading of our research material for everyday forms of resistance and hidden transcripts presents just one of the many possibilities of sense making. More importantly rather than being concerned with identifying actions as everyday resistance, we are interested in understanding the tensions, negotiations and transformations that took place during the interaction between our research participants and relief agencies.

Mahmood (2001, 2005) suggests agency is not only the capacity for progressive change but also as the capacity to endure, suffer and persist. Understood this way, the use of religious narratives by our research participants indicated their agentival capacity on several occasions. For example, a woman described the condition of her house:

> I have a katcha house even now. The wall collapsed and my husband died. It fell again and killed the goat. It is breaking again and I can see it [breaking]. Only Allah can protect me.[37]

The above example can be interpreted as an instance of helplessness, where the discussion respondent is unable to prevent the collapse of a wall in her home despite it previously killing her husband and goat. Conversely, her decision to continue inhabiting her house as motivated by local norms of dignity, purdah and the social status of having a roof on one's head, signal the very capacity to endure, suffer and persist, Mahmood (2001, 2005) speaks about. It also signals the respondent's

persistence in making her house inhabitable by repeatedly attempting to mend the collapsing wall once after it killed her husband and then again after it killed her goat. We urge that the interviewee's response should be understood in relation to her context of poverty and lack of alternative housing options. We offer a similar analysis for a household's decision to relocate to the community graveyard and to construct makeshift purdah walls around their homes. In each of these instances, households employed the religious and social norm of female segregation and purdah to enable particular forms of action. This way, the religious norm of gender segregation in Mahmood's terms were "inhabited" and "aspired to" (2005, p. 23). The instance of women making roti, discussed above, is a calculus of the gendered division of labor to contribute to the masculine act of house repairing is yet another example. A modest analysis of our research findings this way allows us to highlight the seemingly impermeable boundaries instituted by religion which determines the experiences of disaster survivors in relation to both disaster relief and recovery.

Conclusion

Existing disaster literature tends to address human agency through the two interlinked frameworks of coping mechanisms and resilience. Coping mechanisms are processes embedded within communities that allow them to navigate their unpredictable social worlds. Specific processes of marginalization influence these coping mechanisms (Bird, Gísladóttir, and Dominey-Howes 2011; Carter et al. 2007; Seitz 1998). Therefore it can be argued that regardless of natural disasters, daily lives of marginalized communities are a continuous exercise of coping. Research interest in disaster coping mechanisms has essentially focused on evaluating coping practices against existing vulnerabilities (Alam and Collins 2010; Paul and Routray 2010) or documenting coping practices to influence disaster response that builds on these coping strategies instead of diminishing them (Lambert 1994; Peter-Guarin, McCall, and Van Westen 2012; Spence, Lachlan, and Burke 2007).

Similarly, the related concept of resilience is used to connote the ability of communities to maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure (UNISDR 2005). The entrance of the term 'resilience' into disaster discourse was seen as the "birth of a new culture of disaster response" (Manyena 2006, p. 434). Resilience implies that a community's adaptive capacity has to be built up, rather than "just reducing something, which is the case when talking about poverty or vulnerability reduction" (Manyena 2006, p. 435). Resilience is largely constructed as a technical term and researchers are interested in measuring this adaptive capacity of communities (Cutter, Burton, and Emrich 2010; Cutter et al. 2008; Zhou, Wan, and Jia 2010) or finding ways to enhance these responsive capacities to disasters (Paton and Johnston 2001; Sun, Zhou, and Yuan 2012).

Studies of coping mechanisms and resilience are ultimately tied to the project of interventionism. They are primarily concerned with improving disaster response and planning while attempting to be cognizant of place-based understandings of communities (Longstaff and Yang 2008; Maguire and Hagan 2007). This has the

effect of depoliticizing the analysis of disaster recovery and makes communities appear neutral to the technologies of interventionism. Our research asserts that religious narratives are important practices and performances of social remaking. In our reading of religion as resistance and agency, we combine the notions of coping mechanisms and resilience without taking off the political edge.

Current disaster relief literature has also been unable to sufficiently highlight tensions between impacted communities and relief processes. At present research attempting to explore such dynamics is primarily situated within the discourse of aid effectiveness including the analysis of specific practices such as targeting for food-aid (Clay, Molla, and Habtewold 1999; Jayne et al. 2002), or surveying interventions in relation to wider social-political environments (Jayne et al. 2001; Lucchi 2012; Mattinen and Ogden 2006). These are complemented by works examining the unintended consequences of disaster relief written from a range of social locations and analytical perspectives (Büscher and Vlassenroot 2010; Duffield 2002; Jobe 2011; Luft 2008; Paul 2005).

Our exploration of the hidden transcript allows us to redefine the political to include micro-spaces of subversion within the dynamic space of disaster relief. Our conversations with receivers of disaster relief offer a rare glimpse into the political life of oppressed actors highlighting their agency and calculations of power. Communities successfully resist grand humanitarian narratives and poor program design by communicating in a language that feigns compliance with relief actors while preserving their dignity. This has important implications for relief programming. It points to the need of additional research that troubles disaster relief by contesting social interventionism using a language other than that provided by aid effectiveness.

Due to its intimate relationship with the human condition, religion serves as a daily script for re-negotiating and re-making life. We contribute to the understanding of religion in the post-disaster space by examining it as a social tool for everyday resistance and human agency as the capacity to act, endure, suffer and persist. Examining everyday actions and conversations in the post-disaster space as encrypted by the socially sanctioned script of religion allows a nuanced understanding of what it means to resume life after large scale social disruptions in a continuous space of marginality. This also enables us to conceptualize religion in the post-disaster space beyond the notion of religion as a coping mechanism.

Notes

[1] Horsley's (2004) edited volume is one such example, which explores the use of Scott's ideas on everyday resistance and hidden transcripts to address key issues in the interpretation of biblical texts.

[2] Our research in Pakistan was hosted by the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT). We were affiliated with the organization as independent researchers.

[3] In 2007, an estimated 12.5 million Pashtuns formed 42% of the total population of Afghanistan, and some 30 million made up 16% of the total population of Pakistan, with a significant concentration in KPK (Saikal 2010, p. 6).

[4] Selected villages were Deobandi Jehangiria and Kurvi (in Nowshera District) as well as Hayatabad and Majookay (in Charsadda District).

[5] KPK is largely rural with only 20% of the population living in urban areas (KPK Bureau of Statistics 2011). The province has low female literacy rates (27% in 2004) (Choudhry 2005) and a large average household size of 8 members (FATA 2013).

[6] Village Kurvi, male group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012.

[7] Village Kurvi, male group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012.

[8] Theoretically this paper falls within the intersections of structure and agency and offers a course for reconciliation between the two as demonstrated by the lived experiences of disaster survivors. In terms of sociological theory, this brings us closer to the works of Bourdieu (1980, 1984) who using the concepts of "field" (structured social spaces) and "habitus" (dispositions) has argued for a dialectic relationship between the two. In Bourdieu's work structure only becomes real through practice, which in aggregate, create and reproduce the structure in which the actions are embedded. For our research context, we identify religious beliefs and practices as contributing to our research participant's 'habitus', and the larger context of social and environmental disruption in relation to humanitarian operations as contributing to their 'field'. Conceptualizing religion in this way not only allows us a more theoretically sound understanding of religion as embodiment (McNay 1999) but also helps us map the important influences of religion within the post-disaster space.

[9] Village Kurvi, female group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012.

[10] Village Kurvi, female group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012. Village Hayatabad, female group discussion conducted on 19 July 2012.

[11] Village Deobandi Jehangiria, male group discussion conducted on 18 July 2012.

[12] Village Kurvi, female group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012.

[13] Village Hayatabad, female group discussion conducted on 19 July 2012.

[14] Village Deobandi Jehangiria, male group discussion conducted on 18 July 2012.

[15] Village Kurvi, female group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012.

[16] Village Majookay, male group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012.

[17] Village Kurvi, male group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012.

[18] Village Hayatabad, male group discussion conducted on 19 July 2012.

[19] Village Majookay, male group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012.

[20] Village Majookay, female group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012.

[21] Village Majookay, male group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012.

[22] Village Deobandi Jehangiria, female group discussion conducted on 18 July 2012.

[23] Village Majookay, male group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012. The katcha-pakka distinction is common throughout the South Asian subcontinent. Through this distinction, notions of backwardness and progress are physically inscribed into the materials and architecture of houses.

[24] Village Kurvi, female group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012.

[25] Village Majookay, female group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012; Village Hayatabad, female group discussion conducted on 19 July 2012.

[26] Village Majookay, female group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012.

[27] Village Hayatabad, female group discussion conducted on 19 July 2012.

[28] Village Kurvi, male group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012.

[29] Village Hayatabad, male group discussion conducted on 19 July 2012.

[30] Village Majookay, male group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012.

[31] Village Deobandi Jehangiria, male group discussion conducted on 19 July 2012.

[32] Village Hayatabad, male group discussion conducted on 19 July 2012.

[33] Village Majookay, male group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012.

[34] Village Kurvi, male group discussion conducted on 26 July 2012.

[35] Village Majookay, male group discussion conducted on 25 July 2012.

[36] Foucault's (1980a, 1980b) work in particular stresses the delocalized as well as relational nature of power, and has closely contributed to the development of these theories of resistance which also understand the relationship between power and counter-power as "decoupled, complex, ambivalent" (Bayat 2010, p. 51).

[37] Village Hayatabad, female group discussion conducted on 19 July 2012.

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