

GRIEVANCES, DEMANDS, AND SILENCING: THE CASE OF MUTASAREEN-E-
MIRANI DAM MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Ahsan Kamal: Grievances, Demands and Silencing: The Case of Mutasareen-e-Mirani Dam Movement
(Under the direction of Charles Kurzman)

Sociology scholarship on social movements often conflates underlying grievances with movement demands, and fails to account for cases where disjuncture between grievances and demands matter for movement outcomes. A theory of silencing helps address this gap by focusing on the intra and extra movement factors that introduce gaps between grievances and demands. Using the case of the *Mutasareen-e Mirani Dam* movement from Pakistan, I demonstrate the existence of this disjuncture in cases where collective actors mobilize to address complex and multilayered losses faced by individuals and communities displaced and dispossessed due to the construction of mega-development projects. The research uses data collected through interviews, participant observation, and documentary archives collected between 2012 and 2015. My study shows mobilization can occur even when partial grievances are addressed, and the manner in which institutionalized power pre-configures movement demands.

To the activists who keep raising their voice against injustices even when faced with immense violence.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AMSL	Above Mean Sea Level
BNP-A	Balochistan National Party – Awami
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
DCO	District Coordinating Officer
DNA	Damage and Needs Assessment survey
FWO	Frontier Works Organization
IDSP	Institute for Development Studies and Practice
IFI	International Financial Institutions
MMD	Mutasareen-e Mirani Dam
MNA	Member National Assembly
MPA	Member Provincial Assembly
NEC	National Engineering Corps
NESPAK	National Engineering Services of Pakistan
NP	National Party
PCP	Planning Commission of Pakistan
RAP	Resettlement Action Plan
WAPDA	Water and Power Development Authority
WBG	World Bank Group

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Do you see that over there?” Mir¹ was pointing to his right. “That used to be our community club. Every evening, we would gather there, hang out, drink tea, and chat. That right there is the courtyard where we used to sit, read the newspaper, and discuss our community affairs...”

I strained my eyes to look for any signs of a community club or a courtyard, but all I could see were several mounds of mud with some dead date trees dotting the arid landscape. We were amidst the ruins of old Nasirabad village in Turbat, Blochistan, destroyed by the 2007 floods caused by the Mirani dam reservoir. Atta stopped the car, and as the dust cloud settled I rolled down the car window and stuck my head out. Everyone was a bit edgy, given that my presence in the village could raise suspicion among locals – a sense of insecurity hung over our heads with the ongoing violent conflict in the region. But, even if we could walk freely among these ruins, there was nothing left standing, nothing really to see except mounds of dirt and some debris. There was absence, a void, the loud murmurs of the haunting silence in a place once filled the hustle and bustle of a vibrant and flourishing community.

Mir continued to point in different directions, giving me an oral presentation of the outlook of the village center--houses, shops, wells, community club...all reduced to indistinguishable mounds of mud and rubble. Local construction relied on the use of unbaked mud bricks glued together with a paste of wet mud mixed with crop chaff. Tree trunks were used for beams and

¹ All names have been changed to protect the privacy of respondents.

girders, usually covered with dried leaves of date palm trees or the *posh* tree. Some structures had been built using baked bricks, cement, and steel beams, for e.g. the local public schools and a couple of shops in the bazar. So when the water from the Mirani dam flooded the upstream areas, it took merely a few hours for the whole village to turn to dust. The water dissolved the foundations of built structures. Seven years on, most of the material that could be salvaged had been salvaged and reused to build mud houses elsewhere. All that was left behind was mud. Though every now and then we came across decaying door frame, a half-buried broken plastic chair, clothes and other household items peeking through the rubble.

Mir was now speaking with Atta and Chakar in Balochi, ruminating the loss they had suffered. After a few minutes, he turned to me and said:

“Bus, hamare saath buhat ziadati hoa hai.”

“We have been wrong,” he said, “and that is all.”

This often repeated sentence, the idea that the people have been wronged, captured both the inability to effectively communicate the totality of loss and the ability to forcefully articulate a sense of grave injustice. The loss – of individuals and communities that were impacted by the 2007 floods, was beyond what could be listed and enumerated. It was more than the loss of houses, land, date trees, market shops. It was more than the loss of the community center. But the story I wish to tell in this study is the story of difficulty in communicating this loss. The anecdote demonstrates some of the difficulty in articulating the loss. One can ‘objectively’ understand what it means to lose a community center, perhaps. One can even conduct studies enumerating the social, collective, and psychological aspect of losing a place where people gather to talk, read the news, discuss community matters. But in the story I tell, the story of the communities impacted by the flood and their mobilization against the construction of the Mirani dam, is also a story of a

disjuncture between the underlying grievances and the articulated demands of the affected people – the *muatasareen* of the Mirani dam project. Standing in the ruins, I could only think of the articulated demands of this several years-long mobilization that had narrowly focused on financial compensation for loss to private property. Displaced, dispossessed, and operating in a context of extreme violence, the community and the activist of the *Mutasareene Mirani Dam* [Mirani Dam Affected People] were facing challenges in articulating their loss, but not because they were unable to provide evidence of their loss. Even by objective criterion, even if one lacks empathy or compassion, the story of the loss was etched in the haunting ruins of the affected villages, in every dirt-mound and dead tree, in every ruined house and disappeared community center. It etched on the faces of the affected people, in their nodes, their gestures, their demeanor, their ruminating eyes and their blank stares. But there has to be a register to record these modes of communication. The story I tell in this thesis is of both the ease with which this loss, the underlying grievances that map onto these losses, can be communicated. But only if anyone's listening.

Sociologist who study social movements often conflates grievances with demands in the analysis of political mobilization. If *grievances* are grounded in underlying strains, sense of injustice, or loss, these can be distinguished from the *demands* of a movement that are visible only when collectively articulated. It's reasonable to assume that articulated demands are grounded in underlying grievances, but the degree to which demands capture grievances may not be direct or simple. A list of complex and multi-layered grievances is easy to obtain, and abstract or vague sense of loss or injustice is not lost on most folks. But movement demands are forged under pressures of clear articulation, reification, and the realm of the possible and attainable. It's almost self-evident that some disjuncture between grievances and demands almost always exist, but does

it matter? Is the disjuncture between grievances and demands significant for our study of social movements?

In much of the contemporary scholarship on social movements, the link between grievances and demands is expected, and assumed implicitly or explicitly. While earliest scholarship assumed that social strains directly translated into collective behavior and protests, later scholars attended to movement discourses, narratives, and framing processes. But in as much as social movement scholarship in general, and the framing perspective in particular, attends to the differences between social strains, grievances, and demands, the concern is with the potential for the success or failure of the collective actors in spreading their message, mobilizing, recruiting, and influencing a positive or negative outcome for the participants. In most cases, the assumption holds. The relationship between articulated demands and underlying grievances is somewhat direct and simple. But what if the disjuncture between underlying grievances and articulated demands is significant? What if the articulated demands do not address the primary underlying grievances? If success of collective action is measured in terms of articulated demands, a disjuncture between demands and grievances could mean that “success” might preclude the possibility of addressing primary grievances. “Success” might even stabilize negative outcomes for movement participants.

In this thesis, I contend that the disjuncture between articulated demands and grievances can be significant yet this phenomena remains understudied by social movement scholars. I demonstrate that disjuncture are evident in cases where collective action is concerned with addressing complex and multilayered loss faced by individuals, households, or communities that are displaced and dispossessed due to the construction of mega-development projects. I follow the story of a movement against the construction of a large dam and show that a significant disjuncture exists between the demands of the movement and the underlying grievances of community

members. By locating this story in the broader context of development priorities, disasters management, and conflict between the state and separatist groups, I trace the external pressures and internal dynamics that work to make articulation of certain grievances difficult and implausible. I term these processes and dynamics as *silencing*, theorized as an operation of power on articulation.

This thesis uses the case of the ongoing *Mutasreen-e Mirani Dam* (MMD) movement by the people and rural communities in Balochistan province of Pakistan. In 2007, the backwater from Mirani dam flooded upstream communities. At first, the local community members mobilized against the construction of the dam in early 2000s, but shifted to a limited set of demands for compensation after the 2007 flood disaster caused by the Mirani dam. Through an investigation of grievances and demands, and by locating the story of the movement in the broader context of the politics of development and compensation in Pakistan, the case study demonstrate how silencing operates, and how the successful attainment of core demands, i.e. compensation in lieu of damages to individual property, is likely to stabilize undesired outcomes for the affected communities.

For this research I collected data using semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis. I conducted interviews of community members, activists, journalists, civil society members, and state officials. The interactions between the activists, dam-affected people, and state officials were observed through participation in protests, sit-ins, demonstrations, talks, and meetings between 2012 and 2014 in Lahore, Islamabad, Turbat, and the affected areas. Newspaper articles, official documents, disaster assessment documents, and material produced by the movement were used to supplement the interview and participant observation data.

Using the case of MMD, I will demonstrate that while the movement participants are able to talk about complex and multiple grievances which are linked to the complex and multiple losses

suffered by the community, the articulation of most of the grievances are silenced by different silencing operations. Some of these operations function internal to the movement – disagreements among movement participants, the different preferences of local elites. Others operate at the broader institutional and structural level – for instance, when local knowledge claims are dismissed by state officials, technocrats and bureaucrats, or when the emphasis on financial compensation limits the potentials for making other claims on the state and government officials. This thesis then makes a case for attending to the disjuncture between underlying grievances and articulated demands. The goal is to shift the focus from merely looking at how demands are framed through strategic choices of activists and instead focus on how different forms of power operate through macro and micro interactions to impact the likelihood of the redressal of the multiple, complex, and wide-ranging demands of communities impacted and affected by development induced displacement and disasters. This approach shows that people may mobilize because some grievances *are* addressed by the articulated demands, but they may also mobilize even if they believe that their primary grievances will not be addressed. It also shows that the manner in which institutionalized power allows certain claims to be made, may pre-determine the articulated demands.

Theoretical Framework

Grievances have been in and out of fashion in social movement scholarship in the U.S. Early theorists focused on deprivation or relative deprivation and structural strains (Turner & Killian, 1957; Smelser, 1963; Merton 1968). These theories emphasized grievances depending on the structural and objective conditions. But scholars noted that structural strains and deprivation was not enough to explain the emergence of movements. Thus some sought to explain collective

action in the rational calculations of individuals participating in movements (Olson 1965), while others studied the availability and mobilization of resources (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) and the economic and political context that allowed for concessions extracted from elites for effective mobilization (Piven & Cloward 1977). Resource mobilization and political opportunity theories dominated the study of social movements, and these worked on the assumptions that grievances were ubiquitous and therefore, not interesting for those who want to study why movements emerge (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982).

Starting in the late 1970s and 1980s, constructivist and symbolic interactionist theories criticized structuralist explanation and returned to the issue of grievances, albeit in a limited way. The framing perspective became influential in the late 1980s, building on Erving Goffman's work on the organization of experience through frameworks or "schemata of interpretation" which render meaningful events that would otherwise be meaningless (Goffman 1974:24). David Snow and his colleagues proposed that in order for movements to emerge and successfully mobilize, the actors have to do signifying work that aligns their selected frames to make it resonate with hegemonic culture, thus calling for attending to the interpretative aspects of grievances (Snow et al 1986:465). The framing literature has spawned into a significant subfield of social movement studies, with empirical and theoretical contributions (Gamson, 1992; Hunt et al, 1994; Benford 1997; Benford and Snow 2000; Cress and Snow 2000; McCammon et al 2007; Snow et al 2007; Snow 2008). Through the study of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames, scholars have evaluated the utility of frames in social movement processes. The concern here is with the articulation of grievances. Social psychological approaches extend the idea of 'mobilizing grievances' to talk about grievance formation as well (Klandermans, Roofs, Olivier 2001), defining grievances as feelings of injustices or deprivation (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004). The study

of feelings and emotions also gained traction during the late 1990s, which sought to move beyond the political process theory approach that combines opportunity structure, resources, and framing perspectives (Jasper 1997; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Goodwin and Jasper 2004, 2009). Emotions such as fear and anger were brought back into the study of social movements, but without falling back to the binaries of rational-emotional. Scholars sought to go beyond the binary of instrumental and expressive movements (Goodwin et al, 2001:15). Emotions were seen as central to creating meaning in movements: these are seen as useful in focusing attention, radicalization, rhetorical displays, collective solidarities, interaction rituals, disciplining, and group dynamics (Jasper 2011).

But when it comes to the issue of grievances, both framing and emotion-centric perspectives have problems. Most studies focus on static frames rather than dynamic processes (Benford, 1997), assume that the discourses deployed are simple bearers of meaning without influence of broader structures of power (Steinberg 1998:845), ignore the impact of political and cultural context on frames of articulated demands (McCammon et al 2007; Ferree 2003, 2005), and also ignore the creativity and influence of narratives and storytelling by movement participants in communicating more than mere articulated demands (Polletta 2006). The focus on framing processes, discursive repertoires, discursive opportunity structures, and the impact of cycles of contention on framing choices (Diani, 1996).

Similar criticism apply to the study of emotions in social movement scholarship—that the study of emotions during the late 1990s and early 2000s tended to focus on the strategic *use* of emotions and narratives. Furthermore, the cognitive perspective dominated even in the study of emotions (Gould 2009:p222; cf. Jasper 2010, 2014a, 2014b). Responding to this criticism, some have proposed the idea of discursive opportunity structure that describes how grievances are

formed and why resonant frames are more visible than radical frames (Ferree 2003, 2004; Koopmans & Olzak, 2004; Koopmans & Muis, 2009). In a similar vein, scholars have studied the impact of past failure and social environmental factors in the emotional work needed to sustain movements (Effler 2010), and the impact of ‘emotional habitus’ in shaping the preconscious, precognitive, and non-rational aspects of emotions or affects (Gould 2009).

At the heart of these criticism is the issue of power, how it is constituted and how it shapes the processes of formulating grievances and articulating demands. Grievances are not mere rational articulations but stem from complex losses that evoke emotional responses and can only be articulated in complex narrative forms. The articulated demands are shaped both by internal movement dynamics as well as broader cultural and structural factors. Demands and discursive claims are also ‘goal-driven’ and are reasonably “adjusted” as per intra-movement and extra-movement dynamics. The disjuncture between underlying grievances and articulated demands, I suggest, is an understudied and undertheorized aspect of social movement scholarship.

Power, grievances, and silencing

A way to address this gap is by considering how power operates to shape articulation of grievances. Power does not simply allow the powerful to deny the demands of the relatively powerless, but also operates to determine what claims can be made and what grievances can be voiced (Gaventa, 1980). As an operation of power, silencing can also result in quiescence and establishment of cultural hegemony, i.e. making “common sense” the values that keep the dominant groups in power (Gramsci, 1977:258). The response by oppressed groups can range from rebellion, quiescence, and a host of everyday acts of micro-resistance against the powerful (Scott

1987). These acts, the ‘weapons of the weak’, signal that there is some degree of awareness among the relatively powerless about the silencing operations, even when they do not organize a rebellion.

In the context of social movements, the organizing and mobilizing work done by activists already seeks to confront power through direct action and making knowledge claims which undergird their demands. But power can operate by directly and indirectly regulating what kind of grievances are voiced. The term *silencing* describes the process through which power operates to introduce significant gaps and disjuncture between the grievances and demands of social movement participants. This process is different from “framing”, which is concerned with successful outcomes largely based on strategic choices of movement participants. Silencing, on the other hand, is an operation of power that impacts conceptualization and articulation of grievances making certain articulations impossible or implausible. The grievances need not be inherently vague or abstract but silencing proscribes certain articulations in certain contexts. Silencing must therefore be observable if we empirically study the dynamics internal to movements and communities, as well as by looking at their interaction with “outside” actors, such as the media or the state or other dominant groups.

For this study, my focus is on silencing that emerges from unequal power relations. The presence of unequal power dynamics often ensure that oppressed groups are only listened to if they use the frames and languages of the dominant groups (Collins, 2002, vii). Within the realm of articulated discourse, silencing can be defined as "a way of using language to limit, remove or undermine the legitimacy of another use of language" (Thiesmeyer, 2003:2). This can happen in many ways. The paradigmatic example is direct censorship and repression. But repression can also be of a “soft” nature, which can be enforced through ridicule, legal discursive requirements, or self-censorship (Whittier 2001; Ferree 2005; Walker et al 2008). Another way silencing operates

is through an explicit arrangement or implicit agreement between two parties in which they conspire not to speak about the “elephant in the room” (Zerubavel, 2009). Sometimes collective actors can deliberate make strategic choices not to speak on certain issues (Schröter, 2013). Given the particular context of a movement, some of these dynamics may be more evident than others.

Unequal power relations manifest prominently in the interactions between development actors and local communities and often result in displacement and dispossession of local communities. In many cases, especially in the case of developing countries, third world countries, or the Global South, state is a central actor in development project and thus the target of political mobilization by communities affected by the development projects. Silencing thus must be observable as an operation of state power on movement articulations in many ways including: direct repression, the enabling or limiting effects of the legal and juridical arrangements around development and political action, the everyday bureaucratic arrangements, discourses and rationale of development, and the state’s way of *hearing* and or *seeing* (Yang 2004; Gupta 2012, 1995 & 2005; Lipsky, 1980:3; Auyero, 2012).

In the context of development and social movements, silencing may operate when local contentions are based on knowledge claims that are ignored and dismissed by state officials, engineers, and experts. This can be termed as *silencing by design*. The manner in which state and development actors undermine local knowledge claims are well studied (Escobar 1996, 2008; Ferguson 1990; Scott 1998; Mitchell 2002). In the high-developmental view, formal and scientific knowledge is seen as superior to the intimate, implicit, indigenous, and experiential forms of knowledge claims by local communities (cf. Raymond et al 2010, for a classification of these various kinds of knowledges). This then signifies an ontological clash, between one particular worldview (and ontology) based on modern, techno-bureaucratic state, and the other worldviews

(or ontologies) that may be based on indigenous cultures and local knowledges (Blaser 2013). But such clashes are not exist along a modern-traditional binary – these are visible in the context of development practices in the context of advanced and “developed” countries (Corburn, 2005). In this clash, the state exercises immense power in shaping the terms of debate, or in other words, choosing (or forcing) the frame.

Contentions around the different priorities of local communities and the state, in particular the high-development imperative of centralized state authority, are also sites for observing silencing operations. Particularly in countries of the global South, development imperative of the modern nation-state often leads to the use of direct repressive measures to displace communities to “accumulate by dispossessing” (Harvey 2005) especially in the context of displacement induced by the construction of large dams, creation of special economic zones, and resources extraction (cf Nilsen, 2009, 2012; Levien 2013). The degree to which communities might be able to resist this displacement and dispossession depends on the broader climate of political opportunities, the extent of state repression, and the ability of communities to contest the very rationale and logic behind the state-led development projects through direct action. This form of silencing might be seen as an operation of the powerful *development imperative* on local contentions.

In the context of disasters and displacement, the power to classify and enumerate the loss and harm also operates to silence grievances. Development thinking is guided by an economic and growth centric view that is not best suited to accommodate and evaluate collective, communal, or community based goods, and especially the non-material or intangible aspects of value. The specific language that guides development thinking often fails to for the many forms of loss and trauma, in particular the community or communality based loss (cf. Erikson 1976, for a study of these forms of losses). Often the assessment and evaluations conducted by the state or dominant

groups can shape the articulated demands and set the terms for the ways in which the state and development actors seek to address the harmful effects of development. The evaluation of what constitutes as loss shapes the possibilities of articulation, and I term such evaluative processes as *silencing by assessment*.

Silencing may also operate internal to the movement and communities. Movement participants make strategic choices about attainable goals and how best to frame their demands. These choices are guided by what is seen as lying within the realm of possible and attainable. Furthermore, different relations to power within the community can lead to different priorities that match the socio-economic status of different individuals and groups within the local communities. Disasters in particular, whether they are natural or development-induced, impact different groups differently and the type, extent, and intensity of loss suffered by different groups varies. Thus silencing might also be induced by the different priorities and preferences of elites and non-elites. This is a form of silencing by socioeconomic class. We can also imagine different relations to race, gender, and ethnicity might also introduce certain silencing.

Power thus operates not only to prevent action or to induce certain quiescence. It also impacts in numerous ways what the action is geared towards addressing. Theoretically, it makes sense that a greater degree of unequal power relationship has a higher potential for silencing. And a higher degree of silencing is likely to introduce larger disjuncture between the underlying grievances and articulated demands. Different kinds of silencing, depending on different kinds of power, may work independently or simultaneously to make articulation of a wide range of grievances difficult, implausible, or impossible.

Research Design

The paper uses the case of the *Mutasreen-e Mirani Dam* (MMD) movement by people and communities affected by the construction of a large dam in southern Balochistan province of Pakistan.² The MMD started in early 2000s as the plans for the construction of large spillway dam were announced with construction beginning in 2002. Community members in the upstream area were concerned with that the design of the dam would flood their villages. The construction went ahead and the dam was completed in late 2006. Within the next few months, an extreme weather event in June 2007 filled the dam and the backflow water flooded the upstream areas destroying several villages and displacing almost 50,000 people. People suffered a wide range of loss including loss to individual and household possessions, destruction of public and collective goods, physical and mental trauma, and the destruction of spiritual, traditional, and cultural ways of connecting to the community, history and territories. Different forms of collective action emerged after the disaster, but by 2009 these were consolidated in a somewhat of an informally organized movement with a core sets of demands around compensation in lieu of damages. The movement has made significant gains, in terms of getting the state to recognize some of its central claims. But as I seek to show, the demands fail to address some of the major underlying grievances that are grounded in the loss and destruction faced by the communities.

To study how power operates on the MMD movement to induce silencing, I look at the various stages of the movement. During the early stages of contention, the focus was against the construction and design of the dam. Studying this phase uncovers the conflict between state and

² *Mutasreen* (مٹائرين) means victims or people affected by. This is commonly used in Urdu for victims of a disaster or conflict. The movement does not use any formal title but this term is most commonly used by the participants and media. The term *Mutasreen-e Mirani* translates as “those affected by the Mirani Dam” or “the victims of Mirani Dam”.

experts at one end, and the community members and activists on the other end – and seeks to highlight the different priorities and different understanding of the potential benefits and harms due to the specific design of the dam. I demonstrate this through a discussion of the broader political and socio-economic context, and the specific concerns and demands of local communities regarding the height of the dam and the width of the spillway. The second stage of contention is after the 2007 disaster. My focus here will be on the accounts of the various and complex losses suffered by the community members. These accounts can be compared with the official assessment of the environmental impact and the damages caused by the dam. I also study the internal movement dynamics to highlight the different priorities within the elite and non-elite members of the community. These internal dynamics are located within the context of the broader political and socio-economic context. All of these processes then provide a way to understand the silencing operations and highlights the reasons behind the disjuncture between underlying grievances and articulated demands.

In terms of data, I mostly rely on semi-structured interviews and participant observation data collected between 2012 and 2015. A total of 36 individuals were interviewed during this period –these included key movement activists, local community members, journalists, academics, local civil society members, and government officials at the local administrative and federal levels. I also participated in protest camps, rallies, seminars, internal meetings, and meetings between movement participants and government officials. The material produced by the movement including pamphlets, press statements, reports, newspaper articles, and narrative accounts were also studied. The official design documents and detailed assessment plans are not publicly available, but all public documents related to the dam, the disaster, and post-disaster assessment

and plans were studied. The movement participants also provided access to a limited newspaper archive, and some official documents that are not publically available.

The data allows me to construct a fairly detailed picture of the history of the design and development of the Mirani dam and the subsequent disaster. It also allows for presenting a fairly detailed account of how local mobilized and their shifting demands. The articulation of loss and underlying grievances was done through in-depth interviews, some of which were conducted at the site of destroyed communities during two site visits in 2013 and 2014-15. The point of view of the state and the interaction between movement participants and state officials are constructed both through recall interviews by local community members and activists, and through direct observation and participation in meetings and events. The various governmental and non-governmental reports on the plans for Mirani dam, disaster assessment and response, newspaper reports, internal meeting paper trail, interviews and observations in meetings and protest are used to look at the kind of articulations that are enabled, emphasized, or silenced from the perspective of the state and development actor.

The data has certain limitations. Since I was unable to observe the movement dynamics before 2012, I had to rely on partial accounts in newspapers, official documents, and in-depth interviews to get at the silencing processes in the early stages. While recall interviews are useful for demonstrating what kind of silencing effects take place, activists, community members, and state officials alike spoke about the difficulty in tracing the exact moments when silencing was most evident. This problem points to the fact that silencing isn't always visible in the form of direct censorship or repressive action. The data does allow for constructing a reasonably detailed historical account using multiple sources and the interpretations of key activists and community members – thus we have, at the very least, an account of their perception of key silencing

operations. Another major limitation stems from my inability to directly measure certain aspects of loss and grievances – in particular, the gendered experience of loss. I was unable to speak directly with female members of the community due to local cultural norms, and my attempts to solicit interviews through male members of the community were not fruitful either. The gendered nature of loss and grievances in this study suffer from the male-informant bias. Finally, I was unable to access the official design documents, environmental assessment plans, and the post-disaster recovery planning documents despite repeated requests to the relevant government officials and private consulting organizations. Consequently, the ‘state’ side of the story is somewhat limited. I was able to use all publically available official documents, some “leaked” memos and minutes of meetings, and supplement this with interviews conducted with several key state officials at the local and federal level. I also draw on insights from my years of experience as a researcher and activists on issues related to development and disaster relief and management in Pakistan.

In the following section, I first provide the background context of the construction of the Mirani dam and the subsequent disaster. Then I shift to the accounts by communities to present the loss felt and articulated by the communities that were impacted by the Mirani dam and the subsequent disaster. This is followed by a section on silencing dynamics which elaborates the phenomena and its effects by considering the various phases of the political mobilization by local communities and activists, labelled as the *mutasareen-e Mirani Dam movement*. The final section provides a discussion and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 2: MIRANI DAM AND THE FLOODS

Mirani Dam

Mirani Dam is located in southern Balochistan province of Pakistan 40 km west of Turbat city and 200 km north of the Gwadar seaport. The dam impounds river Dasht 10 km downstream of the confluence of two seasonal rivers, Nihang and Kech. The ‘concrete face rock fill’ embankment is the first of its kind in Pakistan and was built between 2002 and 2006. The dam stretches across 3,080 feet (1,020 meters) and has a maximum height of 127 feet (39 meters) which corresponds to 276 feet Above Mean Sea Level (AMSL). A six hundred feet wide un-gated spillway provides the primary discharge outlet. The height of this spillway is 244 feet AMSL, which corresponds to the maximum reservoir level during ordinary periods.³

The deep blue waters of the artificial lake created by this concrete embankment stands in stark contrast to the arid desert landscape of southern Balochistan where large water bodies are almost non-existent. The surface area of the lake reservoir ranges between 10,000 to 15,000 acres with the gross storage capacity of 302,000 acre feet.⁴ Several villages, agricultural land, date-palm gardens, and sites of historical and cultural importance have been submerged beneath the water reservoir. The dam has also transformed the downstream landscape. Water is stored and redirected

³ The height and width of the dam and spillway have been major points of contention for the MMD movement. These aspects of the design of the dam have consequences for the maximum upstream flood levels and the resettlement plans. This point is discussed at length later in the paper.

⁴ Based on google earth calculation for 2010 (55 square km, 81 km perimeter), 2014 (36.4 square km, perimeter of 40km) and Relief web’s analysis based on UNOST imaging for July 2007 (63 square km).

using two small canals. Consequently, the riverbed has dried up, destroying the ecology and economy in the downstream areas.

According to the official documents, the canals would irrigate 33,200 acres of land, but so far only four to five thousand acres of land has been levelled and developed. Most of the developed land belongs to big landowners with the financial means and bureaucratic connections. All in all, the official claim that Mirani dam would trigger the “environmental and socio-economic uplift of the area” have not been substantiated. Instead the impact of the dam on the ecological, environmental, and socio-economic impacts has been destructive and mostly negative.⁵

Irrigated agriculture and reservoir fishing are the only benefits listed in the official project documents, but locals point to another rationale behind this mega-project. Mirani Dam is viewed by many as a water supply reservoir for the Gwadar seaport, which lies about a hundred mile south of the reservoir. This strategically important and widely contested port was developed during the rule of President General Pervez Musharraf with an investment of over \$1.2 billion. The second-largest seaport of Pakistan after Karachi is currently leased to a state-run Chinese company to oversee operations. Furthermore, there are plans for constructing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—a USD 46 billion investment that will connect Gwadar seaport with the Xinjiang province of China. Gwadar was hailed as the new regional economic hub, the new Dubai, which led to speculative investment in real estate. Mirani dam was thus seen as an important Gwadar-centric project, which would cater for the needs of rising population in a town which is already facing water shortages. This view is now confirmed as government officials have announced plans for linking Mirani dam reservoir with Gwadar seaport.

⁵ WAPDA, 2007, *Mirani Dam: Project Brief*, November 2007, General Manager (Projects) South, WAPDA House Lahore.

Mirani dam is also an important part of nation-wide mega-development interventions in the water and hydropower sectors. Bundled together as “Water Vision 2025”, this \$33 billion investment was launched in early 2000s with funds collected through bilateral and multilateral loans, along with significant budgetary allocations. The Vision 2025 was spearheaded by Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) -- a semi-autonomous government agency that is part of the Ministry of Water and Power, which is responsible for the water and hydropower sectors. Under Vision 2025, WAPDA planned to construct four large dams, three mega-canals, five hydropower plants, and two drainage canals; WAPDA also raised the reservoir level of Pakistan’s second largest dam hydropower dam at Mangla, Azad Kashmir.⁶ A number of other government agencies have been involved in these projects. The Planning Commission, under the Ministry of Finance, oversees financing and budgetary allocations. Provincial irrigation departments are involved in developing the command areas and taking over operations once projects are completed. The National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAK) acts as the primary consultant for many projects and conducted land surveys to assess the environmental impact and prepare a resettlement plan. The actual construction work is outsourced to private contractors (such as DESCON in the case of Mirani dam), while military run engineering and construction groups like the Frontier Works Organization (FWO) and National Engineering Corps (NEC) are also involved. Thus Mirani Dam is not simply a standalone development project for the benefit of the local people of southern Balochistan, but rather it is part of the larger development-industrial complex of Pakistan.

⁶ Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) is part of the disputed territory of Kashmir that has been under Pakistan’s control since 1948, along with the Gilgit-Baltistan (formerly Northern Areas). It is also referred to as Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK).

Three inter-related aspects of the Mirani dam project are significant from the perspective of the affected communities and the MMD movement: the construction of embankment and canal headworks; the development of the command area irrigation and land; and the environmental impact assessments and resettlement of the people affected by the dam.

Figure 1: Mirani Dam Project



Source: Planning commission, *Summary of PSDP Funded Completed Projects*, Vol-I, 2009-2010

Figure 2: Mirani Dam embankment and reservoir



Source: Planning commission, *Summary of PSDP Funded Completed Projects*, Vol-I, 2009-2010

Construction on the dam embankment began in early 2002 with the approval of PKR 5.81 billion by the Planning Commission of Pakistan (PCP). Out of these, PKR 111 million were awarded for management consultancy to joint venture headed by NESPAK and involving three local and national private sector consultants including the US firm Binnie Black & Veatch.⁷ With the blueprints ready, actual construction work was contracted out to DESCON engineering group in July 2002 for PKR 4.25 billion. Construction on the embankment, the spillway, and canal headworks was completed in July 2006.

At this stage the development in the command area was supposed to have begun, but government officials admit that the progress has been slow. While no official figures exist on the area irrigated, local sources say that by 2014 only 4,000 to 5,000 acres of land has been developed through private initiative of big landowners. This is about 12 to 15 percent of the total command area developed in the first eight years of the estimated 30 year life span of the Mirani dam.

The third component of the project consisted of land surveys and environmental impact assessments. Official documents are not very clear on the timeline. What is clear is that NESPAK was hired to conduct these surveys, and the local district government were also involved in this process. The surveys were largely concerned with determining the upstream areas that would be submerged under the lake reservoir. Based on these surveys, a Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) was created with the goal of acquiring land owned privately under the land acquisition laws of

⁷ Black & Veatch (bv.com) was founded in 1915 in Kansas City, Missouri, with a history of working closely with the US government on projects such as the construction of the military cantonment Camp Pike in Arkansas in WWI (1917) and other camps during WWII (1940); on “highly secretive activities” with the US government and the Atomic Energy Commission after WWII. One of the founders, Veatch was appointed by the Truman government in 1950s to deal with water issues. In 1995 the company merged with Binnie & Partners which gave it access to the Asian water markets and expanded its water operations to the UK. The company has been heavily involved in the development of water sector projects in Pakistan, constructing Pakistan’s first mega dam in Mangla during the 1960s and involved in the raising of Mangla dam in recent years under WAPDA’s Vision 2025 plans. B&V is listed on the Forbes’s list of ‘500 Largest Private Companies in the United States’.

Pakistan. The first RAP fixed the water elevation level at 244 feet AMSL – this corresponds with the height of the dam spillway. However, these plans were contested by the local people who feared that the reservoir would swallow up land at much higher elevation. Local protests, which are detailed in later sections of the paper, resulted in a revision and a new elevation level of 264 feet AMSL was decided. The first survey for 244 feet AMSL was completed circa June 2005 and for 264 feet AMSL by April 2006. A total amount of PKR 1.131 billion was allocated by the Planning Commission for land acquisition. This was later revised up to PKR 1.688 billion in September 2007.

Local contentions and grievances related to all the three components of the Mirani Dam project. Details of these contentions and early stage of mobilization are given in the next subsection.

Protests against the Construction of the Dam

Soon after the plans for the construction of the dam were announced, local community members started mobilizing against the Mirani Dam. The contentions began in 2002, when the locals became aware of the design plans. One of the most respected political activists from Nasirabad, Wajah, was at the helm of the local contentions. Wajah had been active in the nationalist and leftist political circles since his youth, and he had won the local body elections for the Union Council of Nasirabad in 2002.

Wajah recalls that local communities were not against the construction of a dam, but they were alarmed when they saw the blueprints for the Mirani Dam. He recalled that during the 1950s, a government surveyor named Iqbal Gujjar visited his grandfather's house and told them about the plans for the construction of an 80 feet high dam, and that even with that height there was a chance

that after heavy rains the water might reach the road on the edges of Nasirabad village. But when Wajah realized that the official plans had increased the height of Mirani dam to 127 feet, he was horrified and knew that this would lead to large scale destruction.

We used to live in Dasht [downstream area] and we used to look at the sky as we had rain-irrigated [baraani] land, so we knew that if it rains we will get roti [bread] and if it doesn't we won't get any food. My maternal grandfather – all the people in Dasht, Nasirabad, Turbat, we wanted a *band* [dam] to be built. But when we saw the blueprints and saw the situation after the [potential] construction of [Mirani] dam that scared us. Dams can be beneficial. We were against this dam because it was more damaging than beneficial. What good is this dam then? It only led to our destruction.

You see, the reservoir has excess water, more than our needs. I told you about Iqbal [Gujjar, surveyor]. He said that if the dam height is 80 feet the water will come to the road [in old Nasirabad village, not the main highway]. Now if you build the dam that is 127 feet high then this will only lead to destruction.

Wajah and villagers from Nasirabad started to organize meetings and protests, a phase that started in 2002 and lasted till 2005 when construction on the dam started and was well under way.

When we saw the blueprints for the dam with the height of 127, we started organizing protest. At different levels. At the level of district council [elected local bodies and local administration] and among the general public. We took delegates [to the DCO, Turbat]. We wrote to the President [of Pakistan]. We wrote to the Government of Balochistan, to WAPDA, to NESPAK – we wrote to all the relevant departments, contacted them, pleaded our case.

After 2002, when the blueprint came forward, from 2002 till 2005 I was personally involved in this. In a way I was leading it. We got tired. People went to Gwadar [to attend a meeting or public ceremony where Mirani Dam was being announced], they weren't even allowed to meet [the President or other officials]. Whatever they had written [petition or letter], they [the organizers] said that this cannot be given to the President. They tore it up. What can we do then? Our protest and rallies, if they had accepted any of our demands even once, then we could have gone to them. But it didn't happen, and we became hopeless. We told them [repeatedly] that this is destruction, it [the dam] will destroy us, annihilate us, everything will be lost, and we did lose everything.

During this period the community members organized in many ways. First, they held meetings with the government officials and the survey teams at the various levels. For instance, Wajah and other members of the community met with the survey teams at the dam embankment

site and in the community club of Nasirabad. They also went to Turbat city, about two hour drive from Nasirabad, to hold meetings with the District Coordinating Officer (DCO) of District Kech and the Commissioner of Makenan Division. One of Wajah's relative and another key figure from Nasirabad, Dr. Tariq, also visited and met with government officials in Quetta and Islamabad. Wajah also used his position as the Union Council Mayor [Nazim] to raise the issue in the district council. Second, community members took direct action by organizing press conferences and holding protests, especially outside the offices of the DCO and Commissioner in Turbat. Third, they wrote letters to the President of Pakistan, Government of Balochistan, WAPDA, NESPAK, and all other relevant departments. And finally, they tried to meet with President General Musharraf during his visit to the Gwadar at the public inauguration of the Mirani dam project.

Another local activists recalls the early days of mobilization, about the wall-chalking in Nasirabad against the construction of the dam. He also recalls how people from Nasirabad went and protested in Turbat, sometimes renting vehicles, sometimes doing a foot march. He also refers to how Wajah wanted to keep the issue of Mirani dam separate from party politics.

I worked part-time with the survey teams... We had graffiti on the walls in Nasirabad [against the construction of the dam]. We did a lot of protest. About twelve or thirteen pickups from Nasirabad were loaded [one pickup vehicle may hold between 7 to 15 people] and we went to Turbat City. This is when the dam wasn't built. We went there to the office of the National Party as well.

At that time Wajah was the Nazim of UC Nasirabad. Our party was NP and Dr. Yasin was also there [a local influential belonging to the NP]. They had their own protest. We had people from all the parties. We had done the protest for the Mirani dam. The party people came with their flags and banners, and wanted us to protest on their platform. Wajah did not agree to this "co-option" that I won't protest with you [National Party], I am with these [locals from Nasirabad]. I am a member of your party and a Nazim, but I won't come with you. We also did a foot-march to the DC office [over 40 km].

There was wall-chalking against the dam all over the place. [Interview: ZB]

While the main demands at this point focused on changing the height of the dam embankment and increasing the width of the spillway, the lack of response from the government

created a sense of helplessness among locals. Some gave up, others focused on the resettlement action plan instead. This shifting of demands is in a way an effect of silencing, which I will discuss later in section 7. For now, I will just hint at how an interaction between locals and the state official played out during this early stage of mobilization.

We realized that the dam was going to be built in any case. So we demanded that before you close the mouth of the river, you must first settle us somewhere and then close it, we will be drowned. But they said No, you people will not be drowned but you are only doing this for money. There was this one Sindhi [engineer] whom I met at the residence of the Advocate General Nazimuddin. We got into a heated argument. I said that you are destroying us, he said that you people are lying, you are making a scandal to get money. When the flood came, this person was the representative of PD [WAPDA project director], he was going to the court [local qazi court]. I asked him, what now, were we hungry for money or what, go bring your general [Musharraf]. He ran from the Qazi court and never came in front of me.

These kinds of interactions resulted in the shifting of demands. But overall, this also caused a sense of helplessness. Wajah, who was active till 2005, stopped playing an active role. It wasn't until after the 2007 disaster that local community members started to organize once again, this time largely focused on getting compensation for damages. The lack of hope and sense of helplessness was carried ahead as a collective memory, which also played a role in silencing demands. Wajah summarizes this as follows.

We made these demands. We pleaded our case in front of everyone. But we actually can't demand anything. Demands are made by influential people, we can only plead and request. But no one heard us. And till this day they haven't heard us. We are not even considered as human, what to say about our rights, demands and citizenship, they don't even consider us as humans.

The Disaster

Despite the contentions by local communities, the construction of Mirani dam proceeded as planned. The dam embankment was completed towards the end of 2006 and the project was

declared complete in early 2007. Within a few months disaster struck and wreaked havoc in the area.

In June 2007, less than a year after the impoundment of the reservoir began, backwater from the Mirani dam reservoir flooded several villages upstream and impacted the lives of an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 people. While the flooding was partly caused due to unexpected amount of rainfall which resulted in a large scale floods of 2007, in certain areas the floods were a direct result of Mirani dam. Cyclone Yemyin hit the coastal areas of Pakistan on June 26, 2007 and triggered torrential rains across Sindh and Balochistan provinces which had already seen an uncharacteristically wet summer. The arid mountainous and desert planes of southern Sindh and southern Balochistan were heavily flooded and almost 6,449 villages and towns across 28 districts were inundated. According to official sources, 420 lives were lost and 109 people went “missing”. The floods swept away 75,626 houses and left 372,000 people without shelter. The damage to regional economy was extensive – almost 70% of the crop area of Balochistan was destroyed, four hundred thousand livestock animals died, and half a million jobs were lost which impacted 1.7 million individual household members. The economic cost of damages was put at USD 537 million.⁸ Overall, the lives of 2.5 million people were impacted by these floods.

The disaster was unevenly spread across a large area, and disaggregated data is not publically available. District Kech, where Mirani dam is situated, was one of the worst affected areas with more than a third of total population impacted. Flood levels rose up to 8 meters in some areas of *tehsil* (sub-district) Turbat. The housing stock in three districts was almost completely

⁸ IFRC, 2007. “Pakistan: Cyclone Yemyin/Floods” Appeal No. MDRPK01, 12 Nov 2007; IFRC, 2012, “Final report: Pakistan: Cyclone Yemyin/Floods”, May 25 2012; World Bank. 2007. *Pakistan - Cyclone and floods 2007: preliminary damage and needs assessment - Balochistan and Sindh*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

destroyed – 2,742 in Nasirabad (100 percent), 2,949 in Nodiz (100 percent) and 996 in Kosh Kalat (75%).⁹

The Nasirabad, Nodez and other areas of Turbat were cut off as the main road was badly damaged and bridges were destroyed.¹⁰ People were stranded and left without much assistance from the local government authorities who lacked the capacity to deal with the disaster. The Pakistan military used helicopters to evacuate and drop relief to far off communities.

The Mirani dam disaster was tucked in larger flood disaster. Official reports on flood damages do not distinguish between the two,¹¹ but in case of Turbat the distinction can be made between the areas affected by flash floods and the areas that were inundated by backwater from the Mirani dam reservoir.¹² This distinction is evident if one compares the 2007 floods with the 1998 floods that also wreaked havoc in district Kech. An assessment carried out by a group of international NGOs makes this observation that the villages of Koshkalat and Gokdan were affected by the 1998 by flash floods, and saw similar levels of inundation in 2007. But villages in UC Nasirabad, Nodez, and Kalatuk had not seen flash floods in 1998, and the 2007 floods were

⁹ Memon, Naseer, 2007. Disaster unleashed by Mirani Dam, DAWN.

¹⁰ Anonymous, 2007, *Rapid Assessment Report of 3-B Yemyen Cyclone affected areas in Kech and Gawadar Districts, Southern Balochistan, Pakistan*, Joint Assessment Team Oxfam, Catholic Relief Services, etal. July 2007. reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A26B880C897149D8C125730F0042EADB-Full_report.pdf

¹¹ Official documents by the National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMA), rapid assessments carried out by the World Bank and ADB, or the situation reports by international humanitarian groups such as the International Red Cross Foundation, do not provide disaggregated data and do not as much mention Mirani dam. C.f. World Bank. 2007. *Pakistan - Cyclone and floods 2007: preliminary damage and needs assessment - Balochistan and Sindh*. Washington, DC: World Bank; UNOCHA, 2007, IASC Inter-Agency Real time Evaluation of the Pakistan Floods/Cyclone Yemyin, 31 Oct 2007; IFRC, 2007. “Pakistan: Cyclone Yemyin/Floods” Appeal No. MDRPK01, 12 Nov 2007; IFRC, 2012, “Final report: Pakistan: Cyclone Yemyin/Floods”, May 25 2012;

¹² The only publically available document that mentions Mirani Dam as the cause of the disaster is prepared by the Kech District Disaster Management Unit (DMU), which relies on two sources. The first is an article by the head of a national NGO that was active both during the disaster as well in challenging the development of the Dam in the first place on grounds that it would cause destruction in the area. The second is a rapid assessment done by a joint team of International NGOs. Apart from these sources, no official records directly identify the disaster with Mirani dam.

due to the expansion of the lake reservoir.¹³ The claim makes sense given the location and proximity of these villages to the newly formed Mirani dam lake reservoir.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster everyone was focused on relief and recovery activities. Most of the people of UC Nasirabad, Nodez, and Kallatuk (areas affected by the Mirani dam backwater) and Gokdan and Koshkallat (areas of Turbat that were heavily impacted by flash floods) were left stranded given the destruction of key roads and highways. They relied heavily on relief provided by other nearby communities, people of means, local and international NGOs, welfare organization, and the military/state.

Community members recall how they gathered on the main highway which was at a higher elevation level, but were disconnected from Turbat due to destruction of bridges and sections of the road. The military used helicopters to airlift people who were stranded on their rooftops, and for dropping relief goods. But given the failure of a well-coordinated humanitarian response,¹⁴ the local communities faced a slow path to any reasonable recovery. Locals staged several protests, usually on the rare occasion of a visit by a politician or government official. As time went on and water receded, local people made regular trips to Turbat to protest outside the offices of district and divisional government offices.

These protests were in some sense the beginnings of the post-disaster round of contestations by the MMD movement. Since the main concern in this paper is with how silencing operated on the movement, it is worth considering the range of the loss that undergird the primary grievances and of the community and compare it with the movement demands. This way, the

¹³ Anonymous, 2007, *Rapid Assessment Report of 3-B Yemyen Cyclone affected areas in Kech and Gawadar Districts, Southern Balochistan, Pakistan*, Joint Assessment Team Oxfam, Catholic Relief Services, etal. July 2007. reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A26B880C897149D8C125730F0042EADB-Full_report.pdf

¹⁴ UNOCHA, 2007, IASC Inter-Agency Real time Evaluation of the Pakistan Floods/Cyclone Yemyin, 31 Oct 2007

effects of silencing will be visible and allow for investigating why many of these grievances were not articulated as movement demands.

CHAPTER 3: GRIEVANCES AND DEMANDS

Articulating Loss and Grievances

Disasters cannot be understood simply through stats on deaths, injuries, damaged houses and built structures, or the number of people displaced. Neither can we reduce a disaster to the economic cost of damages. There is an underlying experiential reality to disasters that is accessible through the accounts of the affected peoples and communities. Here's how people and communities experienced the Mirani dam disaster.

The Night the Water Came

The floods caught the people unaware and unprepared. Here are three descriptions of the night of June 26, 2007 by residents of three different villages.

“When it started to rain that night [June 26], I was home and getting ready to sleep. But then I got a phone call from my relatives who live in Turbat. They said that a big torrent of water was flowing down river Kech and would hit the Mirani dam soon. We didn't have a lot of time, about six or seven hours before the water reached us around dawn. We tried to move our possessions to safer locations, but we didn't have time. We Baloch have so much stuff that it was impossible.”

Another residents gives a slightly more detailed picture of the night.

“There was a lot of commotion [in the village] and everyone was saying that the Dam has been filled up and water is coming for us. I went to the bazar and saw many women, children, and elderly who were carrying their belongings on their heads. It was raining. People had already started moving to higher ground. I rushed [on my motorcycle to the nearby highway] to arrange for a vehicle in order to transport my possessions to a safer location. But they didn't believe me and even laughed at me. ‘How could the water reach your house?’ Eventually I managed to

get a car and we worked through the night to get as much of our household possessions moved out as we possibly could. But there was so much stuff [our whole household] and we couldn't save everything. We also had two shops [in the village bazar] full of goods and merchandize. But we were not able to save even a single thing from the shops. The water started to reach our house at around 3 am. At this point we abandoned everything and rushed out with children and other family members.”

Others were not so lucky and were caught in the flood waters. Many were stuck on the rooftops of some of the sturdier built structures. Locals from Nodez recount being stuck on the rooftop of a mosque for a day. Some were evacuated through military helicopters, other's waited it out and waded through shallow waters to reach higher grounds.

The most telling thing about these narratives is the sense of being caught unprepared by the disaster. The locals are used to experiencing flashfloods in low lying areas next to the seasonal rivers and streams. But the backwater floods from Mirani dam was a new phenomenon for which locals were not adequately prepared – even if they feared this outcome when the dam was being constructed.¹⁵

The shock and trauma of losing your homes and household possessions in the dead of night is something that locals were unable to recover from fully. In a public conversation with students during a protest camp setup in Lahore, the affected people narrated how the night impacted them psychologically.

About 99% people were mentality disturbed – they were in shock when the water flooded their houses, since they knew that this was unusual. When I speak to the people, they say that when we had to leave our houses in the dark of the night, we can't describe our conditions. We didn't have any clothes, any luggage, nothing. We just left there and sat under the open sky. [Chakar, seminar, Lahore]

People left there, under the open sky, struggling to get by. The speaker goes on to add:

¹⁵ Details of these fears and protests by locals at the time of the construction of dam are discussed at length later in this paper.

As you know, if you take away the roof from someone's head, then this homelessness, we can't make up for this loss. If you lose something else, if your education is lost if you are not educated, even then you can get by and live. But if you become homeless than it's an immense loss.

Homeless at home

The shock of the night gave way to a state of homelessness that lasted for years. By far the biggest concern of the communities affected by the disaster was the loss of home. As mentioned earlier, the housing stock in three districts was almost completely destroyed. In Nasirabad, all 2,742 houses, in Nodez all 2,949, and in Kalatuk three fourth of the houses (996) were destroyed.¹⁶ Most of these houses are made out of baked mud and the trunks and leaves of date-palm trees. According to locals, it took about four or five hours for water to dissolve the foundations of these houses.

Given the scale of destruction vast number of people were displaced. Some stayed with their relatives in nearby areas, others moved to the city. Those who had means started reconstructing their houses, often by purchasing new land as the pre-disaster locations were deemed unsafe for rebuilding houses. But rebuilding houses has been a very slow process lasting several years, even for those with some means and savings. Part of the delays in rebuilding housing has to do with the manner in which houses are traditionally built – large spacious rooms with the compound walls spread over several acres. Consider the following account by a member of an influential family from the Turbat area and a local activist from one of the destroyed villages.

Houses were built on savings from people's time in Masqat. They were wage laborers. One person would send remittance from there to support a whole [extended] household. During those days our houses were built from mud, in our own Balochi traditional of construction. We didn't use to measure length in feet. We used the trunk of a date-palm tree as girder [support beam for ceilings], which

¹⁶ Memon, Naseer, 2007. Disaster unleashed by Mirani Dam, DAWN.

we used to get for free. We used to build according to the length of this tree girder. Who knows what a 10 foot room would be like [referring to the construction plans or estimates on cost of construction]. Maybe it [the date-palm girder] used to be 20 feet, 25 feet or 30 feet. [Mir interjects, we used to build very big houses]. We used to build like this. So when they did the survey, the local people raised the objection that the survey team hasn't even looked at the size of the houses and rooms. They just looked at the rubble and couldn't believe that a single room can be 40 feet long. [In cities and other areas] the length of the whole house is usually forty feet. But for us the situation is different. We have a lot of land. Even the walls of our [housing compounds] can extend to 4 acres or 6 acres [and the built structures also consist of very large rooms]. [Interview, Turbat, G]

This quote indicates several aspects of what the loss of these houses entailed. The built structures consisted of large spacious rooms usually built from material obtained from the date trees, which allowed for reduced construction cost. The housing compounds were also spacious, which allowed for a certain form of protected mobility for the family, especially women. The large compounds allowed for several smaller structures to be built ensuring that certain parts of the house were open to visitors while others were restricted for family member use. This also points to the fact that constructing a house is often a multi-generational investment and depends on obtaining construction material from date trees and savings from migrant labor work.

A small number of the community members had to means and savings to start reconstruction on their own. But given the limited resources the process was both slow and required settling for building smaller structures on smaller pieces of land. Informants also point out that the damage estimates done by the government also ignored the size of the houses, often making the estimates on the size of a modern housing structure which had much smaller rooms and land requirements.

Many of the community members have not been able to rebuild their houses. One of the main source of livelihood and saving, other than agriculture, was through remittances from migrant labor in the Gulf Coast Countries. Many locals whose ancestors were not large landowners relied

on the savings of their grandfathers or fathers who had worked as migrant labor in Gulf Coast Countries or as mercenaries for the militaries of Qatar and Oman, a common and ongoing practice in the region. These savings were often barely enough to building houses and acquiring small plots of agricultural land. These inter-generational lifesavings were destroyed with the disaster. Such pattern of loss of inter-generational investment was repeatedly referred to by locals and activists. Such stories were commonly told in interviews and various protest events. Consider this description by an activist who is translating the story of another affected person who spoke at a People's Tribunal in Lahore.

No one has a house now. Some people had means, they had business or savings, or some permanent employment. But this person [pointing to one person] has only studied till Middle or Primary grade, he doesn't have any employment. His father didn't earn any money here [Turbat, Balochistan]. His father was in the Oman Army and earned from there and invested everything here [to build house and date-palm gardens]. But all his investment was drowned. Then it is obvious that he suffered heart attack.

Another local from Nodez notes that it was the dam and the subsequent disaster that destroyed their ancestral home, and the stress of this state of homelessness is what contributed to the death of his father.

My father was alive when the dam was being constructed. He used to say that our *jaidad* is being destroyed, our land is being destroyed. He became a heart patient under this stress. He passed away in 2008. Everyone dies. But this is all due to the dam. It's not that my father was old and had no more days left to live. No. I say that this mega-project, this dam is the reason why my father passed away. [Amin, seminar, Lahore]

As we will see, the demand for housing has been central to the political mobilization of the people after the disaster. But the state of homelessness, or residence in temporary shelters for up to eight years left many emotionally drained and in state of depression and hopelessness. This link was repeatedly brought up in conversations, but not only with reference to those who had already died but as a concern for the life of those who were alive and struggling. Consider one of the

activists speaking about the psychological impact of losing homes and waiting for government compensation on the mental health of one of his friends and fellow activists.

There is a patient sitting with us in the hunger-strike camp. I have known him for a long time. He has in his heart the idea that we will never get the compensation [to rebuild his house and restore date gardens]. The stress has made him ill. Others have been feeling this hopelessness. Two people have already died, waiting for the compensation. They used to say that our land was destroyed, our lives were destroyed. Their deaths were due to this stress. Now we are concerned about him [the protestor at the hunger strike camp] that he will meet the same fate.

These description signify that the loss of houses and the condition of homelessness goes beyond material dispossession and has an emotional and psychological cost. While it is difficult to produce evidence that would demonstrate a direct and causal link between deaths and mental illnesses, the key point here is that these articulations and descriptions of the physical features of houses and the inter-generational investment point to complex and multiple forms of loss and grievances.

Livelihood and lifeworld destroyed

The dam inundated the agricultural lands and date-gardens. This destroyed standing crops as well as the date-palm trees and gardens. Part of the destruction was indirect – as a result of the destruction of the underground water tunnels known as *Karez* (plural *karezat*) which then led to the slow destruction of hundreds of thousands of date palm trees. The loss of cattle and livestock also ran into thousands.

The degree of this loss is not measureable in terms of the monetary value of the crops and livestock. Even considering mere economic factors, the shock impacted different socio-economic groups differently. Those who solely depended on livestock or small scale agriculture and date fruit harvesting were unable to recover, either forced to migrate out to the cities, or resorting to

menial jobs. Others who had some supplemental sources of income, such as government employment or small businesses, were able to get by and make the gradual transition towards partial recovery.

Only a handful of big landowners were able to privately invest in tube-well based irrigation or repair some of the destroyed *karezat* to revive agriculture in the upstream areas.

In Nasirabad, for instance, there were seven *karezat* that were completely destroyed by the backwater floods. A single *karez* consists of a series of wells that are connected by underground tunnels which provide an underground channel through which the water is transported from watersheds to the fields. These are collectively build and maintained, and the distribution of water reflects the proportionate investment of labor and resources. Built and maintained by successive generations, the regular upkeep of *karezat* is a relatively simple task. But all of the *karezat* in Nasirabad collapsed due to the backflow. Locals were able to revive one *karez* in Nasirabad using personal funds and some money provided by the Agriculture department, but were reluctant to rebuild more of these.

The reluctance stems from both a lack of resources and the fear of the investment going to waste. As two locals activists explained:

Atta: The government gave us some money, under water management department, a sub-department of the Agriculture department. So during Musharraf's time some money was given -- for each *karez* they gave PKR 500,000. Nasirabad only got money for only one *karez* [out of the seven].

Mir: What good is 500,000?

Atta: It's not enough.

Mir: When we started the work on our *karezat*, each contributor paid 5 or 6 thousand. We also provided labor. Sometimes we'd contract it out and hire labor. [...] The probability is 100 percent that this [flooding] will happen again.

Atta: But we should repair the *karezat*. We must. Despite the fears that there will be more floods or not. But people are scared of this unknown fear. Psychologically they are affected. People need psychological.

The situation in Nodez was worse, since the area was at lower altitude. The water inundated the areas for longer, and the *karez* system is below the reservoir's normal surface level. While folks in Nasirabad fear another backflow tragedy, Nodez is permanently impacted under normal conditions.

Mir: When the backflow water came in Nasirabad, it discharged within a day or two. In Nodez the situation is different. The water remained there for 10, 20 days a month even. It is at a lower level on Kech kaur [river]. We can maintain ourselves. But they don't get anything. We still manage to get some morsels of food. They are at 244 level, but our karezat are at 264 level. I remember when the flood first came, I believe, the trees were planted [in Nodez, 244 level]. In order to get the fruit from these trees, we used a launch [boat]. People used these boats to get to their gardens, climbed on top of the trees and then get the fruits.

The *karez* system undergirds the whole agricultural economy of the region. Even the date trees that were left standing after the floods gradually died as water supply sources dried up. Only a handful of large landowners were able to revive their date-gardens by using tube-well irrigation. But for most of the people, the economic dimension of loss was immeasurable, only expressed in phrases such as “the total destruction of our economic way of life” or even “our economic murder.”

But the loss and this murder had non-economic dimensions as well, as the date gardens were a source of local pride and embedded in the social and communal lifeworld.

Our source of livelihood was our date-palm gardens. We produce certain types of dates that are not found anywhere else in the world. These have been destroyed. What can we do now? We have certain date-trees that are more than a hundred years old. For a century these trees have been bearing fruits. [Interview, Gichki, Turbat]

Dates were also central to the barter economy of exchange on which social relations were built. Those with date gardens would give away large quantities of dates to their relatives, which could be processed, saved, and used throughout the year. The social debt could be repaid in a number of ways – people would exchange date for fish brought from the ocean. Others would even

sacrifice animals and hold feasts during the harvest season. The destruction of the gardens not only robbed people of a source of income, but of the pride and social value of dates.

During the harvest season, we used to give away date fruits to people by the maunds [unit of measurement, 40 kg to a maund). We used to give it away for free, without taking any money. Now when it's the date season we have to go buy dates form the market. Now we don't have dates for our own consumption, what to talk about giving it as gifts or selling it for money. All the date-palm trees are also withering away [because of lack of water supply]

During a visit to the one of the date gardens, the locals pointed to several uses of date-palm trees beyond the use and sale of fruits.

We call this puss [پس] in our local language [pointing to the bottom part of the trunk covered with rough fibrous straws covering the trunk]. This is used for fuel. We also use this when we have to bury our dead. This is called kalampog (کلمپوگ) [the spines or thorns arranged on the outer edges of the trunk].¹⁷ We take these out and use it in the oven for cooking food, for cooking meat on a grill. We also have several uses of the leaves. We take these and make rope out of them, which is very useful. The stem of the leaf is called *karz*. We use this in the construction of roofs. And after a 100 years when we need to, we cut off the tree trunk and clean the trunk and use it as girder/beams for constructing ceiling. We also use the white part at the top of the tree for fuel. Thus each and every part of a date tree is useful for us. That's why we are distressed at the loss. We have suffered grave injustice. [ہم سے بہت ظلم ہوا]... ہے]....

The date-palm tree was thus not only an important source of livelihood. It was also central to the local cultural, traditional, and communal exchanges. Date fruits were exchanged as gifts and provided an important source of food. Different kinds of products were prepared for different social occasions and gift-exchanges were central to maintaining local communal ties. The tree was

¹⁷ “As well described by Dowson (1982), the base of the frond is a sheath encircling the palm. This sheath consists of white connective tissue ramified by vascular bundles. As the frond grows upwards, the connective tissue largely disappears leaving the dried, and now brown, vascular bundles as a band of tough, rough fibre attached to the lateral edges of the lower part of the midribs of the fronds and ensheathing the trunk. Varieties differ in the height to which the fibre grows up the central column of unopened fronds, and in the texture of the fibre and also somewhat in colour. [...] Spines, also called thorns, vary from a few cm to 24 cm in length and from a few mm to 1 cm in thickness. They are differentially arranged on the two outer edges of the fronds while their number varies from 10 to about 60. Spines can be single, in groups of two, or in groups of three.” <http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/y4360e/y4360e05.htm>

also used in many other ways, as described in the quote above – as fuel, construction material, burial ceremonies, making ropes, baskets, and other household items.

The loss then is not merely of economy, but of a social life that is tied to the land through a long history. The loss is all but irreparable. In particular, the locals are critical of the dam as the supposed benefits, even if they were to be realized, would not make up for their losses.

[person 1] Even if we accept that they will eventually irrigate and develop 32,000 acres. Let's assume that this will be developed tomorrow, after a year, two years. *Aray Zalim* in order to develop 32,000 acre how many thousands of acres have you destroyed. One date-palm has life of a 100 years. At least a hundred years. Even our elders don't remember how long ago these date-palm trees were planted.

[person 2] I am nearly 60 years old. I don't even know who planted the date trees that we had in our garden. Probably my great great grandfather did. They are still going on.

[person 1] and you [officials/Wapda] were saying that we will give you more benefit at low cost. But you are given us more damage with little benefit. You have the estimate of the project cost as 2 or 3 billion but the loss may be up to trillions of rupees.

Downstream Disaster

The last quote shows how the residents of the areas upstream from the Mirani dam look at the cost and benefit of the Mirani dam. Even if the project reaches its stated goals and develops 33,200 acres of new land for agriculture, the loss of date gardens that date back a century is seen as not worth the economic gain.

But did the people in the downstream area fare any better? Not at all.

The area downstream from Mirani dam is known as the Dasht area. Dasht is both the name of a sub-district and the name of the desert terrain. Large swathes of land here are largely uninhabited. Before the construction of Mirani dam the local people and community adopted a semi-nomadic lifestyle, relying on livestock and seasonal flood or rain irrigated agriculture. Most

of the land in the command area of Mirani dam was held by few large landowners, some of whom also had land in the upstream areas.

Speaking of the downstream area and the destruction caused here, one of the elders from Nasirabad who also owns some land in the downstream area describes what he calls a “large-scale ecological disaster” and the “economic murder of local communities”. Water is redistributed in a manner that only the influential elites get water supply. Those who used to rely on floods and grew crops in the flood plains are displaced. Small landholders are also denied access to water from the Mirani dam canals.

Whatever it is that they have made [referring to the dam], it is our economic murder. The dam is built at a site close to the *katche* area [floodplains]. People used to rely on floods and thousands used to grow crops, raise livestock and got by. Now all of them are dispossessed [*muhtaj*]. The whole area is deserted. There isn't a single drop of water to drink. Hundreds and thousands of acres of land, and no one got even a single rupee of compensation. I myself am affected... we used to grow different crops and that was our source of livelihood. Now they have redistributed water in a way that the land that was previously good for agriculture gets no water. Instead the water is redirected ten miles away. There's the land for Nawab of Makran [influential landholding elite].... That land has water... my own land doesn't get a single drop of water.

The dried up river bed has severely and negatively impacted the downstream ecology. While there are no formal numbers about migration, but locals report that most of the population that lived around river Dasht has gradually migrated out. The water from the dam reservoir is distributed unevenly, benefiting only the most influential and biggest landlords. Locals estimate that only four to five thousand acres of land has been developed so far – eight years after the completion of the project.

Mir: If you assume that someone has 100 acre of land in that [downstream] area, how much of it do you think they can make productive using their own money and resources? Two acres or three acres at most. ... The benefits in the downstream area are not enough to counter the damages and destruction in the upstream area. This area [upstream] is already developed and it was destroyed. The government said that with low cost they are providing more benefit. 32,000 acres were the plan.

In 2013, we went to them and said that, only 4,000 acres of land in the downstream is developed. ... We don't have the resources, how can we develop that land.

Speaking about the situation of the downstream communities, he further observes. The water is going from here to Jiwani [where river Dasht discharges into Indian Ocean]. All the people that were living in the [downstream] area, from Tump till Jiwani, ask them how much they have suffered.

Barkat: They don't have water to drink. They used to drink the same water (from River Dasht) and used it to for irrigation.

Mir: They used to drink it, use it for irrigation. Once water would come in the river, sometimes water runs out, they used to grow three four crops during this cycle between the water coming and going. Now there's nothing.

Barkat: Cotton, mash, mong [pulses], all used to be grown using this [seasonal] flow of water. What's left now? There's no water. The whole [downstream] belt is destroyed. Some people have migrated to Gwadar, others to Karachi.

Mir: And there are no date trees there [downstream]. Only crops.

Death of a community

The destruction was not limited to individually owned property, built-structures, or sources of livelihood. The destruction of *karezat* were an example of the loss of a certain collective way of being. There were other aspects of the collective life that were destroyed, which included destruction of schools and health facilities. The roads and infrastructure was also badly damaged.

But a community is not merely defined by public goods. The locals speak of the vibrant market place, the ancestral cemeteries, and historical sites that gave them a sense of connection with their neighbors and with their land. In particular, Nasirabad bazar was a vibrant place where people from various villages would gather in evenings.

The bazar was very peaceful [پیر سکون]. This person is from Nodez. We are coming from Shekhan. Every evening people from Shekan to Uthabad (far off villages) would come to Nasirabad bazar. And we used to sit together and talk about our issues and joys. We shared things [and there was a sense of community]. But all of that is no longer there. [Mir].

Nasirabad also had a community club which was an important point of gathering for local intellectuals, activists, and community members. The club was also a central location for the anti-

dam mobilization efforts and local activists spoke about the numerous meetings that were held at the club to come up with strategies and plans to resist the construction of the dam. This was also a site of many encounters with the state officials, engineers, and survey teams that visited Nasirabad from time to time. But the destruction of the bazar and, with it, the community club created a sense of the social death of the community as well. During one of the meetings in Nodez after the disaster, one of the key activists Mir was reminiscing about their daily ritual at the club.

Every evening, we would come together here to hang out, drink tea, and talk. That's the courtyard where we used to sit and discuss our community affairs...

Mir was interrupted by another person who had just walked into the meeting and inquired about another one of their colleague and activists. Mir picked up his cell phone and started going through his contact list. After a couple of minutes he looked up and said in a matter of fact manner.

He used to be my neighbor. And now I don't have any idea where he lives.

Displacement and Distances

Once the community had been displaced it effected the whole social fabric. Distances between friends and relatives disrupted relations that were central to the sense of community itself.

IQ: People had been living together for centuries. We have not known any other land than this. But everyone has been displaced

But the displacement also impacted the communities in very specific ways. For instance, when speaking about the date gardens and water channels, the local emphasize that these were places of recreational and spiritual nature as well. People used to visit the gardens which were like small green islands amidst the dry arid and hot desert. The proximity of houses to the gardens also provide access to groups that are less mobile, for instance the women and the elderly.

Mir: We used to step out of our houses and go the oases [نخلستان]. It wasn't very far. It was easier for women as well. They could get of the house more easily and walk

around. Since the bazar was close by and everything was available to it was easy for them to move around.

The displacement also impacted access to education and health facilities. This also disproportionately impacted women.

We used to be all at one place and now we are all spread out. There's a problem of schools [accessibility] for girls. The schools exist in the old locations, while people have moved to new places. [...] Men can go anywhere, but given our society women don't have mobility. That's their biggest problem. A women cannot walk alone to the hospital at such large distances.

In the context of loss, development induced displacement has many facets. I have chosen to present only those that were directly articulated, and beyond the other "categories of loss" that have been talked about earlier.

Between Grievances and Demands

The loss experienced by the affected communities, described in the previous section, can be summarized in different categories of grievances, as given in Box 2: "Grievances as categorized loss". While these categories do not correspond to how affected people experience or talk about their loss, we do get a sense of the wide spectrum of grievances. Grievances as categories of loss are neither vague nor incommunicable. There's nothing inherent in these grievances that would make their articulation impossible or inherently difficult. Nonetheless, most of these grievances are not articulated as movement demands. There's a disjuncture between the grievances and the demands. The discussion of this disjuncture is done after a brief overview of the post-disaster phase of MMD movement and the core demands of movement participants.

Box 1: Grievances as categorized loss

1- Individual or household material possessions

This includes houses, other built structures, household items, date trees, shops, and any other individually or household owned property. Most of these items have a dollar-value associated with these. However, some of these also constitute elements of barter and have uses beyond the market or exchange value of the items. For instance, this includes multiple uses of date-palm trees and other trees as timber, fuel, construction material, and ceremonial uses.

2- Individual or household non-material loss

This form of loss or damage includes psychological and health issues, including trauma experiences at the individual or household level. A related issue here is loss of sense of self-worth and integrity. Some locals also report spiritual loss, as they felt connections with their forefathers in their ancestral lands or through date trees, which were lost.

3- Communal and Collective Possessions

Public goods, such as school, health facilities, roads, community centers, and market places constitute a kind of collective or communal possession. In the case of the Mirani Dam affected areas, the local irrigation system composed of karezat is also a form or asymmetrical collective good.

4- Communal and collective non-material loss

- Loss of sense of safety and security due to displacement
- Disconnection from land and ancestral history
- Disconnection from close friends and relatives
- Spiritual losses
- Destruction of “subsistence” and “Barter” based exchanges and relations
- Environmental destruction

5- Downstream areas issues

The problems in the downstream areas are different and distinct from the upstream areas. These are listed here as some of the community members have land in the downstream area as well.

The Post-Disaster Phase of MMD

After the 2007 floods, members of the local community and activists worked in different ways to try and address some of their grievances. The first year and a half consisted largely of ad-hoc organizing and lobbying activists involving some individuals from the different communities and villages. Things started to converge in 2009 around a set of activists from Nasirabad, Nodez, and Turbat city who not only infused a new vigor in the movement but also used new protest strategies and tactics and expanding their support base to Lahore and Islamabad by organizing

protests and meetings in these cities as well. These efforts resulted in many gains and successes, but also shaped the nature of demands of the movement.

In the immediate aftermath of the floods, the first attempts at organizing were focused on gathering donations and providing immediate relief to the affected people. One activist from Nasirabad who was central to organizing protest during the period following the floods recalled how they organized donation camps and protests since the government was failing to provide relief:

When the flood came, I along with other friends gathered people on the road and asked them to come so we can collect funds and help people, because relief was not getting to us on time as the roads were damaged. The government wasn't showing a lot of interest [in helping us]. So we gathered people, the local elites [mo'tabar] gave some donations. We had nothing, no food, no utensils or cookware. So we collected donations on the road. Then we started protesting. We protested in front of the politicians who visited and the army officers. We demanded that they should make proper arrangements for us. They gave us guarantees, and said that [President] General Musharraf directed them to conduct surveys of damages as well. They did a survey, but there were many problems with the survey – of exclusion and other things. So they didn't do the survey responsibly. Some people who came took bribes and got their own people on the list. All of these obstacles existed. When we were protesting, the survey had already been done. But the survey people hadn't given us money – they hadn't include the damages at the 271.4 level. Almost 25% of the people hadn't received any compensation. Our demands was that they money should be given to everyone.

The organizing and protest against the provision of relief gradually transformed into protests for the compensation in lieu of damages from the Mirani Dam.

At first our friends, Fida Ahmad, Jameel Ahmad, Noor, Wahid Baksh, Zubair – we first gathered them together and spoke about our issues. Then people spoke to their friends, who spoke to their friends – and we started holding meetings and protests. At first we were four or five people who were gathering others. People were facing many difficulties and were feeling hopeless, but we tried to counter these feelings of hopelessness. We even forced the people to meet with the [damage assessment] survey teams and sign the survey. We also went to Quetta [and met with the Chief Secretary] and found out that the survey list has reached [the provincial government] and Lahdi sb [the Chief Secretary] gave us his assurance that he will speak on our behalf. Others went to Lahore and Islamabad. ... Then they formed a committee, who visited here and raised objections about the survey list. When we

did protests in Turbat, the DC says that he had done what he can [conduct the survey], and that we should go to Quetta. Then we went to Quetta. People also went to Lahore. I organized two protests in in Karachi and we did a press conference there. We got our friends together and also had other Baloch [who are living in Karachi] to get together and did a protest. We did the press conference with about 80 journalist. So everyone knows about our problems – they know the issue. [Interview: Ghulam Jan, Nasirabad]

The quote gives an overview of how organizing efforts spread from local communities first to Turbat and then to Quetta, Lahore, and even Islamabad. Organizing efforts by community members began with holding informal meetings among small groups of friends and spreading information about protest through word of mouth. Much of this form of organizing was done along the same lines as during the pre-disaster stage. Activists held meetings among community members, held protests in Turbat, and slowly moved up the bureaucratic hierarchy – first going from Turbat to Quetta and then to Lahore and Islamabad. Many of the activists involved at this stage, GJ, Atta, Mir, and ZB had been active during the pre-disaster stage of mobilization but no longer had the central figure of Wajah to lead them. But this core group then worked with an activists from Turbat, Chakar, who became central to the MMD movement.

Chakar first got involved in late 2008 when he completed a research report on the Mirani Dam disaster, which was later published by a development sector non-governmental training institute, Institute for Development Studies and Practice (IDSP).¹⁸ During this study, he worked closely with ZB and met with Wajah, Atta, and other community members. At these informal discussions and meetings, the issue of RAP and payment of compensation was brought up, and Chakar and ZB tried to hold further meetings with others. Nasirabad became the base of their organizing efforts.

When I first started working, I saw that people in Nasirabad were active, so that's where I started as well. Since we were a small group, we decided to focus on

¹⁸ <http://www.idsp.org.pk/?p=475>

Nasirabad. We were in a situation when the dam has caused damages and we had a small group, and the damage in Nasirabad was 98, 95 percent, which was a lot. So we started with this and started working with the people from Nasirabad. And whenever we met, it was mostly with people like Atta, Mir, ZB and we all used to go hold the meetings in Nasirabad. Gradually we started holding a few meetings, three or four meetings in different communities. Then eventually we called a big meeting an invited people from the whole area, so that we can have one or two representatives from all the affected communities.

During these informal meetings, Chakar and others brought up a host of issues, including the issue of RAP, damages to houses, date-gardens, as well as other losses such as hospitals, schools. They also discusses the issue of land and actual resettlement beyond compensation. However, the sense of helplessness from earlier stages of mobilization and the difficulty in getting government officials to recognize the right of compensation were all obstacles that came up during these meetings. Chakar, Mir, and ZB speak about several meetings organized outside of Nasirabad and among other affected communities, where they often faced discouragement when they brought about the issue of schools and other forms of demands.¹⁹

The organizing efforts gave this small group of activists some credibility and they built on this to create momentum. In December 2009 a delegation went to Quetta and with the help of IDSP organized press conferences and meetings with government officials. In March 2010, Chakar and Mir organized a seminar in Turbat which was attended by human rights activists, political leaders, journalists, lawyers, NGO professionals, and local community members. The seminar gave them more visibility, and helped recruit people from other villages in Nasirabad, Nodez and Kalatuk. Chakar and others penned several opeds in local newspapers and held press conferences in Turbat. With this work the activist highlighted the various dimensions of loss and emphasized the need for the government to address their grievances. While they emphasized the issue of payment of

¹⁹ Discussion on these in section 7

compensation, they also spoke about other interventions. Given the inability and unwillingness of local administration in Turbat to address these demands, the activists decided to pursue the case with the provincial government in Quetta. Another delegation went to Quetta in June 2010 and met with the Chief Secretary and other officials. Chakar recall this delegation as strengthening the movement.

This visit by our delegation strengthened our movement. Commissioner Makran visited the affected areas and within a few days, Chief Secretary Balochistan also came to Turbat to visit the affected areas. During this visit, on the directions of the Chief Secretary, the Deputy Commissioner made a committee composed of the affected people and organized a conference in his office. After the conference, a list of the damaged residential and agricultural properties of the affected families was given to the committee [made by the Deputy Commissioner], after which the list was sent to Quetta. [Written account of Mirani dam, by Chakar]

Promises were made, but nothing came to fruition. On 30th March 2011, Chakar and others decided to organize a hunger-strike camp in Turbat city. Bringing in people from different affected communities, they held a week long hunger strike camp. During the first few days of the camp, representatives from the major political parties, bar association, human rights activists, and journalist visited the camp to show their support to the movement. The absence of certain politicians, particularly the Provincial Minister Syed Ehsan Shah, was highlighted in press releases during the protest camp. The hunger strike was called off after MMD activists received assurances from DC Kech and Commissioner Makeran that they would personally make efforts.

By this time, both the district government and provincial government officials had been pointing to Lahore and Islamabad and saying that the delay was caused by objections raised by WAPDA and the Planning Commission. The MMD activist decided to mobilize resources and sent a delegation to Lahore and Islamabad in June 2011. One of the largest and most recognizable Development Sector think-tank organized a seminar during this visit, which was attended by

Senator Malik Baloch who is from Turbat and is the current Chief Minister of the Balochistan Province. The delegates held several meetings with officials of WAPDA, Planning Commission, Federal ministers, and politicians. Subsequently, the issue was raised in the Senate and Balochistan Assembly by the Senator and Syed Ehsan Shah. The rest of the year, MMD activist continued to organize protests, meetings, and press conferences in Turbat and Quetta. In March 2012, a delegation of sixteen affected people and local activists left Turbat by bus to travel almost 1,500 miles and setup a hunger-strike camp in Lahore outside the headquarters of WAPDA. During this camp, the locals found out about a meeting to be held on April 2, 2012, of an official committee that was dealing with the issue of compensation for the Mirani Dam affected people, which was attended by WAPDA, PCP, Commissioner, Senator and Ministers from the area. While MMD representatives were not invited to the meeting, Chakar, Mir, and Atta showed up and the pressure from the hunger-strike camp also helped them secure a place on the table. This was a major step and victory for the local communities. At the meeting, the MMD activists were able to present their case and describe how the water from Mirani dam had caused wide-scale destruction. AT the conclusion of the meeting, WAPDA and PCP decided to setup a team that could visit the affect areas to verify local claims. On the return to Turbat, MMD activist organized more protests and held press conferences to object to the long delays in the survey verification process. After three months, a team visited Turbat and stayed for three days. According to MMD activists' accounts, the team verified their claims and supported their claims:

This team met the affected people and visited the affected areas. These people conceded that the dam had caused severe damage and the government should have done in the five years [since the damage]. They said that they understood our pain and we are like their brothers. We should rest assured that not only would they recommend that the compensation is given to us, but they would also lobby for a development package for us to provide schools, hospitals, water supply, and other facilities. [account by Chakar,]

But while the head of the inspection team promised to submit his findings in a week, the delaying tactics continued on the part of the government officials. MMD activists decided to organize another hunger-strike camp in Lahore to put pressure on the relevant officials. Mobilizing support from a wider group of activists in Lahore and Islamabad, a delegation of twenty affected people and activist once again arrived in Lahore in February 2013 and set up a hunger-strike camp that lasted twenty days. During this camp, they obtained records of official minutes of meeting from December 2013 where their right to compensation was finally acknowledged. These were significant gains, but the delaying tactics have continued and the money has not yet been transferred.

As the MMD take a more organized shape the demands of the movement also converged to certain specific aspects of the grievances. While community members and activists articulate a wide range of grievances, during interviews, site visits, and public protests and demonstrations, a specific set of demands are usually presented in front of government officials, and emphasized in the pamphlets and press releases of the movement officials. For the most part, the MMD activists demand payment of compensation in lieu of damages. But the damages are specific and restricted to housing, crops and date trees, for the most part, while the issue of *karez* and irrigation is also sometimes brought up.

Consider this excerpt from an account of the movement's history and current demands written by one of the main activists written in 2012-2013:

Demand 1: Give compensation in lieu of the [destroyed] residential property of the affected people at 264 "level" who haven't received compensation, and to those with damaged houses at the 271.4 "level".

Demand 2: Give compensation in lieu of the [destroyed] agricultural property between 264 "level" and 271.4 "level".

Demand 3: Restore the damaged schools, hospitals, and all other public departments, and the alternate *karez* (underground irrigation channels).

In the next subsection, I turn to how these demands relate with the key grievances. For now, to complete the sequence of the MMD history, it must be pointed out that the government has been force to revise the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) of the Mirani dam and has allocated funds for the payment of damages to house and “fruit trees”. While local activists report that funds have been set aside and transferred, these have not been released to the affected people.

Demands against Grievances

The MMD is by no means a failed movement. By all accounts, locals and activists have persisted with a sustained movement for eight long years in the post-disaster period. MMD activists are also aware of their extra-ordinary achievements and this point is widely acknowledge in the ranks of the local and national political, activist, and academic circles. Yet, as I have observed, my main contention is not with the success or failure of the movement as measured in terms of the articulated demands. It is, rather, with the disjuncture between underlying grievances and articulated demands. So how do the demands fare against the stated grievances? Let’s compare the three demands listed above with the underlying grievances as summarized in Box 2: “Grievances as categorized loss”.

Demand #3 does refer to public goods (schools, hospitals, karezat) which correspond to category 3. But this demand is not related to compensation, and in the post-disaster period references to this category of loss articulated as demands is made rarely on public forums. This fact is readily acknowledged by the movement activists themselves.

The public and articulated demands that define the MMD movement are demands for compensation. These demands undoubtedly don’t capture all the complex grievances and loss described in the previous section. Most significant, these demands don’t address the central issue

of displacement and dispossession. In fact, when asked to reflect on the limitations of these demands, activists readily acknowledge that this will not solve the problem.

So is this then the question of demanding what can be achieved, rather than demanding what is perhaps implausible?

Certainly, movement participants and key activists reflect on what demands are plausible and which grievances should be left aside. But the main issue here is why certain grievances can be articulated as demands and why certain grievances cannot be articulated as demands. I have theorized this as a consequence of *silencing processes that operate on movements to shape articulation of demands*. But before delving into the details of silencing the next section, I want to emphasize that the disjuncture between demands and grievances is not only obvious to the participants and affected people, they also reflect on the limited nature of “success” they will achieve if and when they do receive financial compensation in lieu of destroyed individual and household properties.

For instance, many claim that if they get compensation for their agricultural land, they will set up a shop or small business, migrate to Karachi, or use the money to somehow migrate to the Gulf or Europe. While this signified many creative ways of using the compensation money, it underscores that the outcome will stabilize the condition of displacement and permanent destruction of links and ties with ancestral land, occupations, and the collective and community-based aspects of their lives that are enmeshed in their status as peasants and small landowners.

Furthermore, alternative solutions do exist, and the communities readily present these as potential ways of ensuring that some of the key grievances are addressed. These range from investment in flood protection mechanism so they can go back to their land, building a new spillway at a lower height, using modern construction techniques to restore the traditional system

of karezat to ensure that the local economy based around date-palms is restored, and allocating land and building residential units instead of paying compensation so that the whole community can be relocated. These various options are discussed and debated, but don't feature as the demands of the movement. These are rather silenced through external pressures and constraints that interact with internal dynamics to shape the nature and extend of the articulated demands.

Silencing Operations

In this section, I look at the various ways in which certain grievances and even the demands were silenced through operations of power on movement participants and articulations. Corresponding to the two phases of the movement, I first look at the silencing operations on the contentions against the construction of the dam. Silencing here is: by *development priorities*, where the priorities of state clashes with the priorities of local communities; by *design*, where local knowledge claims are dismissed; by *repression*, where potential political action is restricted due to the broader context of violence and state repression; by *assessment*, where the enumerative and evaluative practices of state decide what gets classified as loss; by *compensation*, where the design of monetary compensation packages limits the potential for articulating other forms of demands; and by *internal conflict*, where different priorities of different socioeconomic groups and classes clash to determine which grievances are emphasized.

By Development Priorities

Mega developing projects are often contentious and large dams have particularly been a source of contention between local communities and state or private corporations, especially in the Global South. The same dynamics are visible in the case of Mirani Dam. Even though many locals

wanted local irrigation and agriculture to be developed, they had different ideas on how to go about it. The Pakistani state, however, had different priorities.

The tendency by the Pakistani state is to centralize resources using authoritarian means, often under military regimes, and distribute the benefits unevenly to certain geographic regions, ethnic and socio-economic groups. Accumulation of wealth is linked to extraction of revenue and resources from peripheral areas, resulting in historic under-development and continued dispossession of marginalized ethnic and socioeconomic groups. The situation is particularly alarming in Balochistan, which is Pakistan's least developed province even though it contains enormous wealth in natural gas, coal, copper, gold, and other minerals. The historic underdevelopment in Balochistan is also linked by some to the "military-industrial" complex of Pakistan – the large number of industrial, agriculture, real-estate and financial enterprises controlled by the Pakistan military (Siddiqi 2007).

This is the context of the Mirani Dam project. While the official rationale for the construction of Mirani Dam was the socio-economic uplift of the local communities, analysts and local communities contest this view and point to the phenomena of land grabbing and links to the Gwadar seaport. One local activist notes:

“Work on Mirani Dam was started by General Musharraf, linked to the development of Gwadar port.... When the plan was announced, we were only told about the impact of the dam for local economy. There was no mention of the Gwadar port or the Navy, which occupies large swathes of land in the command area and in Gwadar.

We knew from the beginning that this is not a mega-development project, but it is a mega-destruction project.”

An activist, writing for a major English language newspaper questioned the very viability of the project, pointing to its link with the Gwadar project and the "military-industry" complex.

“The very purpose of the dam is being disputed. According to informed sources the government of Pakistan is constructing the dam primarily for the consumption of

military-industrial complex at Gwadar and for the water supply of the future population of Gwadar estimated at 2.5 million within 10 years. It is estimated that 150 million gallons of water per day will be required for Gwadar.”²⁰

Most local community members were not against the idea of developing local agriculture through dam based irrigation, but had different ideas about how to improve the local economy and agriculture. Consider the story of the construction of the Mirani Dam as told by local residents and activists. As the project was announced, community members started voicing their concerns about the dam design and the resettlement action plan. Their contestation were based on their understanding of the longer history of the plans to dam river Dasht. Wajah, a seasoned and respected political activists from Nasirabad describes plans dating back to the British Colonial rule for the construction of five smaller dams instead of one large dam.

The story of Mirani dam does not begin in 2000s. Plans for developing the local area through the construction of a dam date back the British rule during the 1930s and 1940s. The purpose of this dam was to store water and use it for promoting agricultural in the Dasht area. After conducting preliminary studies, they abandoned this plan and instead opted for smaller dams at five locations: Shehrak on river Kech; Gosazi on Nihang; Mirani at the confluence of Kech and Nihang; Zaren Bg on Dasht, and Sante Lumr near Jiwani. Later during the Second World War, the British were trying to find cost-effective ways of supporting their naval based at Jiwani [on the Gulf of Oman] since transporting wheat and other food grain from Sindh and Punjab was not cost-effective. These plans however did not come to fruition.

Wajah goes on to describe the concrete plans for constructing a large dam first emerged in the 1950s, but these plans were for a smaller dam. However, when General Musharraf announced plans to develop the Gwadar seaport, work on Mirani dam also started.

The plans were picked up again after the creation of Pakistan. When I was in grade seven or eight, an engineer affiliated with the Land Survey department of Las Bela state, Iqbal Gujjar, used to visit my maternal grandfathers house in village Kunjdar of Dasht [the area downstream from the current location of Mirani dam]. He

²⁰ Dashti, N. (2003, September 1). Mirani Dam: is it viable? *DAWN*. Retrieved from <http://beta.dawn.com/news/113180/mirani-dam-is-it-viable>

conducted a preliminary survey in 1950s, and further surveys were done in the 1960s and 1970s... but nothing happened. It was only during the rule of General [President] Musharraf that the project was picked up again, but this time it was linked to the development of the Gwadar port. The land from Turbat to Gwadar has been allocated to the Navy. [Interview, Wajah, Nasirabad]

Through this reference to the longer history of the dam project, Wajah makes it clear that he wasn't opposed to the idea of the dam or irrigation development. He considers the recommendations of the construction of five small dams as the best possible way of promoting agriculture in the region.²¹ His opposition to Mirani dam is from a position of knowledge of the possibilities of alternative designs and some understanding of the broader political imperatives driving these development projects.

By State Repression

The scale of the Mirani dam project, its links to the Gwadar port, and the general sense of distrust of the Pakistani state were all factors that created a sense of hopelessness among the locals. But the criticism of the state policies towards Balochistan is somewhat muted, largely owing to the climate of fear in Balochistan.

The climate of fear stems from the situation of conflict in Balochistan. A consequence of this historical and continued underdevelopment is armed resistance against the Pakistani state by Baloch nationalist and separatist groups. The conflict has a long history with five major cycles of violence, beginning in 1948. The most recent cycle began in 2002-2003 and has claimed over

²¹ The idea of multiple small dam has also gained global currency as opposed to construction of large dams. Ak::references to the recommendations by the WCOD's and other reports/papers on small versus large irrigation dams

12,000 lives.²² For the last five or six years the violence has intensified. Baloch separatist claim that the Pakistani military has been engaged in a kill-and-dump policy, where the military and its proxy groups pick up Baloch youth, activists, and *sarmachars* (local term for a separatist fighter) and dump their tortured and mutilated bodies by the roadside. Human rights group put the number of disappeared between a thousand and two thousands while Baloch sources claim that number upward of 16,000. The military has reportedly used gunship helicopters, and closely monitors the flow of body across towns, villages and cities through check-post manned by regular and paramilitary forces.

The Mirani Dam activists are confronted with the violence of this conflict, and seek to maintain movement based on non-violent direct action. But they are careful in not speaking directly about violence and the broader conflict. For instance, during the hunger-strike protest camp set up in Lahore, some activists spoke at a public seminar at a radical political space filled with university students and some activists. After describing the story of dam and the disaster, one activists emphasized the use of non-violent political means in staging protests, hunger-strikes, sit-ins, and other activities. He underlines the non-violent nature of their protest by adding: “We have never even damaged a single leaf.” During the Q&A one student sympathized with their cause and showed surprise that the movement was non-violent adding rather naively: “Why haven’t you picked up weapons against the government yet?” The activists offered no response, but later at the protest camp spoke about the insensitivity of this question. One speaker said: “You see what he was saying – why don’t you pick up guns. These Punjabi kids, they don’t know anything.”²³

²² Exact numbers on death and violence are hard to come by, estimate range between 3,500 to 11,375 civilian fatalities since the start of the current phase of the conflict. www.ozy.com/acumen/balochistan-the-bloodiest-war-youve-never-heard-of

²³ Most Pakistanis don’t know much about Balochistan in general, much less about Turbat and Mirani dam. Another activist at the hunger-strike camp jokes – “When they [students] asked me where I am from, I said Turbat. He said ‘it must be very cold there, I hear Quetta is covered in snow.’ Turbat is so far away from Quetta. It is the hottest area of

In public protests, especially outside of Balochistan, the activists stick to the issue of compensation even limiting their critique of mega-development in Balochistan. Public statements and press releases are also edited to take out any references to violence. For instance, during the same protest camp in Lahore activists were going over a jointly written press release. The concluding paragraph refers to the non-violent aspect of the *Mutasareen* movement, adding how the violent context of Balochistan with the sectarian violence against Hazara Shia in Quetta and the violence of the military against Baloch youth activists. One of the key activists from Turbat requested that all references to the violence in Balochistan be removed. The violence is palpable, intimate, personally experienced, yet it cannot be spoken about.

This form of “self-censorship” suggests a certain kind of soft repression and impacts not only what can be spoken about, but how. For instance, local activists cannot use the same critical discourse of state repression and underdevelopment which is used by separatist militant groups to classify Pakistan as a colonial state. Activists also speak about their encounters with state officials, even when they are being “sympathetic” to their demands of compensation, admonish activists not to use “anti-dam” or “anti-development” rhetoric.²⁴ For instance, recalling a 2012 visit by an official commission set up by the government to the affected areas, one activists noted how he was admonished not to speak against the dam in general.

“The Commission member ... fully understood our situation, gave us assurances, and accepted that mistakes were made by the rulers and bureaucrats. He acknowledged that before this day he had been unaware of the devastation caused by Mirani dam. Addressing me specifically, he said that I should not oppose dams in general, because I give the impression that I am against big dams. He said that a lot of money had been spent on the construction of this dam ‘Benefit from it. Live

Pakistan.” But mere geography is not the only issue. Knowledge about the conflict is limited, diagnosis about its problem even more so. For many in the center peripheries don’t matter.

²⁴ Interviews with Chakar, Wajah, Mir; Interview with WAPDA officials and PC; Activists’ account of their encounter with state officials in “the story of Mutasareen-e Mirani dam” report.

in harmony. We are all Muslims and if one Muslim is hurt this is felt by all Muslims.” [Chakar]

This description has several elements that demonstrates aspects of silencing. First, it shows the willingness of the government to accept that Mirani dam caused the destruction, but it emphasizes that the project in itself was beneficial and there shouldn't be any opposition to the dam. While there's no direct threat mentioned here, but the reference to religion and the brotherhood among Muslims has a broader significance. Visiting Turbat city and parts of southern Balochistan, one can see graffiti and wall-chalking by both the separatists and the military. The separatists and their sympathizers usually write anti-Pakistan graffiti, calling it a colonial state and those who support the Pakistani government as traitors. The military on the other hand uses graffiti consisting of Quranic verses and Hadiths that emphasize that Muslims should not fight among themselves and live in peace and harmony. Verses commonly found on the walls of Turbat city include verse *hold tight the rope of Allah and do not be divided among yourself* (Quran 3:103), and the famous hadith, *"A Muslim is a brother of another Muslim, so he should not oppress him."* This discourse is consistent with the nationalist imagination of Pakistan which sees Islam as the basis for national unity, dismissing claims of regional and ethnic historical and cultural independence.

Two more instances of encounters were told by activists based in Lahore and Islamabad who were helping the local activists organize meetings and protest camps. During a meeting with the Public Relations representative of WAPDA, one activist recalled being told that anti-dam rhetoric was against the interest of the Pakistani state, and the MMD activist must stick to their legitimate demands of compensation rather than talking about the problems of the dam. In another incident, an activist recalls an encounter with a senior bureaucrat at the Planning Commission of Pakistan when he was accompanying two other MMD activists. The activist was a public employ

himself, and was asked why he was supporting the Baloch, and told that this could have consequences for his job.

Overall, the broader context of state repression in Balochistan and the sensitivity of the issues of large dams, coupled with state priorities towards development, create a climate of fear and caution among the Mirani dam activists. This shows a form of “soft repression” and silencing operates to limit how activists can make a case for their cause through a critique of the state’s repressive practices tied to the underdevelopment in Balochistan. For their part, the state officials also directly tell the locals to stick to the issue of demanding compensation.

By Design - Silencing Local Knowledge Claims

The design of the dam was a major source of contention during the pre-disaster stage of the MMD movement. Community members and water activists had started raising their concerns about the design of the dam and the resettlement plans soon after the project was announced. While there was some local support for the construction of the dam, locals were concerned that the dam would wreak havoc in the upstream areas. Locals also believed that the situation could be ameliorated by making modifications in the height of the dam.

Wajah recalls these early days and speaks about their specific demands – reducing the height of the dam to 80 feet and doubling the width of the spillway.

Iqbal Gujjar [engineer with Las Bela survey department] had said that if the height is kept at 127 feet, the backflow water will reach the main highway and will destroy all of Nasirabad. [...]

The current design of the Mirani dam has a height of 127 feet but the previous plans kept the maximum height of dam to 80 feet. Furthermore, the width of the spillway has been kept at 600 feet which is not sufficient for the discharge of surplus water. When we became aware of these plans, we knew that this [dam] will destroy us. So we started protesting.

On questioning how can he be certain that this difference in height of the dam and the width of the spillway was so harmful, Wajah pointed out this knowledge was based on both local experience and awareness of what earlier design experts had said. The experts, he contended, came from areas of Punjab where the weather patterns and geography was different and perhaps more suited for the kind of dam they wanted to construct. These ‘outsider’, Wajah contended, were not aware of local conditions.

These engineers [of Mirani dam] came from Punjab. They were not aware of the local geography or weather. In the first few years after work began on Mirani dam, the area was in drought and that’s what they say. We told them that you are not locals. You should have asked us. Our experience, the experiences of our elders [should have been taken into account. But they did not listen to us. They should have involved the local people in the design and development of the project. They had no awareness of the local weather, the land, and the ups and downs. Furthermore, if they stop all the water here it will have serious consequences for people in the downstream area. They will have no access to water. They would be forced to migrate.

Thus a combination of local experiential knowledge and knowledge of past official surveys and design is the evidence presented by locals who are in opposition to the dam. These concerns were however silenced and the construction of the dam went ahead. Another local resident noted:

We told the builders and engineers that sometimes when it rains water levels reach Nasirabad village. But this is the natural ebb and flow of the river. Water recedes quickly. But if the dam is constructed, it will prevent the water from receding. But the engineers dismissed our concerns and told us that they had scientifically studied the geography and the water flow data, and they knew things better than the locals and the dam will benefit the local people. They further added that the compensation that was already being given for land was already more than what was just, since there was no water there anyways.

In response, Wajah told them that they had come there to build the dam without any local consent. We haven’t asked for the dam. We are satisfied with seasonal rains. You talk of benefits but what you are doing will destroy our lives.

The tendency to dismiss experience based local knowledge is a manifestation how the knowledge claims of state bureaucrats and engineers are deemed as “scientific” while local contentions are considered as based on anecdotes that are not seen as knowledge or evidence.

Furthermore, the tactic of ridiculing locals is also used. This is evident in the early years of dam construction when the area was faced with drought-like conditions – a fact that was used by the engineers and builders as evidence against local claims.

When the work on the dam started, for two years we did not receive a lot of rain. So the water levels in Kech and Nihang was very low. This is something that the engineers repeatedly asserted. They used to taunt us, laugh at us.

Another resident/activist shared these views.

Since we didn't have a lot of rain during the early years, whenever we would hold a protest or a meeting with the project personnel, they would mock us. They would say that we should not complain as our fears were baseless. Instead, it is them who should be complaining as they were building a huge dam which won't even get filled due to low rainfall.

Nonetheless, such local knowledge claims were the basis on which local communities start to organize protests and held press conferences in the villages and outside the district government office in Turbat. They held meetings with government officials and Members of National Assembly (MNA), Members of Provincial Assembly (MPA), and Senators from the area. Delegates went to the provincial capital Quetta to present their concerns to the Chief Secretary to the Provincial Government,²⁵ and also met with officials and sympathizers alike in Lahore and Islamabad.

Eventually though, it was the fact of the disaster itself that validated the claims of the local communities. As a local activist recalled, the WAPDA officials were constantly trying to counter their claims by classifying their demands as “doing politics.” But after the disaster, they had no such excuses, and would literally flee the scene when confronted by local activists.²⁶

²⁵ The highest civil servant at the provincial level.

²⁶ The term “doing politics” – سیاست چمکانا is often used in a derogatory manner signifying some form of scheming for the sake of selfish and personal gains.

We realized that the dam was going to be built in any case. So we demanded that before you close the mouth of the river, you must first settle us somewhere and then close it, we will be drowned. But they [from the office of the Project Director, WAPDA] said no. They said that we were “doing politics”, that we will not be drowned but were only making a fuss to get money. There was this one Sindhi Engineer who I met at the resident of the [current] Advocate General Nazimuddin. We got into a heated argument. I told him that ‘you are destroying us.’ He said that ‘you people are lying, you are making a scandal to get money.’ When the flood came, I saw him at the Qazi court [local civic courts]. He was representative [WAPDA, in a case regarding land dispute]. I stopped him and asked, ‘what now? Were we hungry for money or what? Go bring your general [President Musharraf].’ He ran out of the Qazi court and disappeared and I have never seen him since. [Interview, Barkat, 2014]

These activities resulted in some positive impact. First, it highlighted the issue at the national level and gained support of development experts and high level bureaucrats.²⁷ Several articles were published in the local and national newspapers –the writers borrowed from the arguments of Wajah and other local activists. In the post-disaster period, the activists and locals regularly referred to these articles during their rallies and meetings, thus using the authority of the expert and bureaucrat to support their own arguments. The second impact was the modification of the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP). Some details of the RAP were mentioned earlier. The government plans at first indicated land acquisition plans for up to the elevation of 244 feet AMSL for the dam reservoir – this elevation corresponded with the height of the dam spillway. These plans were later revised.

Wajah recalls the events that lead to the change. After the first couple of years of dry seasons and low rainfall, the area received higher rain in 2004. This prompted the engineers and survey people to reconsider their plans. Wajah recalls:

In 2004 there were heavy rains. After that a survey team planned to visit Nasirabad. During the visit, I asked the engineer what he thought about the water scarcity problem. He denied that he had ever said anything to that effect. When the team had visited the area, the head of the official delegation asked his staff to point him

²⁷ Reference to articles by Naseer Memon and Dashti.

the marker for 244 level. They pointed in the distance towards the area what was flooded with water. This was shocking for him. He then told them to put a new marker beyond the water, which raised the level to 252 feet.

This arbitrary revision of elevation level from 244 feet AMSL to 252 feet AMLS was later revised to 264 feet AMSL after a fresh survey was conducted by NESPAK in 2005-2006. There's no mention of why this new level was set at 264 feet AMSL. The height of the spillway is 244 feet, and the height of the dam is 276 feet AMSL. Since I wasn't able to gain access to NESPAK surveys, and no rationale behind these revisions in expected flood level is given, it is hard to say why these seemingly arbitrary revisions were made. As we'll see, the backwater flow from the Mirani dam exceeded the 264 feet AMSL mark and reached 271.4 feet AMSL according to official estimates.²⁸

These changes were not what the locals had demanded. Locals had wanted the dam to be built at a lower height and a wider spillway. But dam construction went ahead as planned. The oral histories and claims to local knowledge based on historical experiences of the terrain and weather patterns were silenced, ignored, and dismissed. The testimonies were not granted the status of scientific or factual evidence, neither was there any mechanism to incorporate local knowledge based contention. Instead when locals voiced their concerns, they were mocked and ridiculed by the official engineers and technocrats. Thus during the early stages of MMD, they participant faced silencing stemming from a combination of non-inclusive nature of the development projects, direct state repression, and the ridicule of local knowledge claims.

²⁸ Request for interviews with the engineers and consulting firms have been denied. Official bureaucrats, when interview, only provide a vague answer of the survey being done 'scientifically'.

By Assessment

Another important manner in which silencing operates is how the state makes assessments about the potential and actual impacts of loss in the context of development and disaster. Given that the institutional and discursive arrangements of power (state institutions, representativeness, discourses of development) shape demand articulation, it is also worth looking at what the government “enables” through its own promises, plans and policies. The role of assessment in silencing is somewhat ambiguous. And as my discussion demonstrates, the shifting discourses and institutional arrangements around development, disasters, and recovery opens up the potential for articulating certain kinds of grievances as demands. To the extent that MMD activists were successful at doing so is a function of the ability of a stand-alone movement to influence the broader discursive and institutional arrangements of development, *as well as* making use of the “new” forms of enabling conditions.

A brief overview of post-disaster procedures in Pakistan will help identify the manner in which disasters are “seen” and handled by the state and development actors. Historically, disaster response in Pakistan is overseen by the district commissioner or other district and division level government officials, who work with other departments such as health, education, public works, buildings & roads, and the revenue department to address various aspect of relief and reconstruction. The revenue department is involved in assessment of loss and damages, in particular when it comes to loss of private property. In terms of relief and recovery, provincial and district governments can legally request the military to step in and provide support. Given the general lack of capacity of civilian governments and departments to deal with disasters of large magnitude, the military is almost always called in cases of large-scale disasters. The military may also provide manpower for conducting damage assessment surveys, and has been part of the post-

disaster development and recovery efforts. One of the ways in which government tries to mitigate the long-term impact of disaster is by giving out cash compensation to the affected people. These assessment and distribution of cash compensation are mostly handled by the revenue department at the district level.

While the disaster response mechanism still operates in the same manner, things changed in after the 2005 Earthquake in northeastern parts of Pakistan and Kashmir. For the concerns of this paper, few of the changes must be pointed out. First, the Pakistani government gave a bigger role to international humanitarian and development actors and international finance institutions both in terms of the assessment of damages, and actual implementation of post-disaster plans. The IFIs such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank usually conduct rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (DNA) surveys in the aftermath of disasters, estimating the cost of damages and rebuilding efforts. The DNA usually form the basis of post-disaster relief and reconstruction efforts. Based on these DNA's the government of Pakistan made financial aid appeals to bilateral and multilateral donors. Given a shift in the broader development discourse away from “economic growth” to “human”, “participatory”, and “sustainable” development –the DNA assessment also demonstrate a shift, at least in principle, from a cash compensation only model.

In the context of the 2007 floods, the Damage and Needs Assessment (DNA) survey provides an important documentation of how the loss were assessed. This survey details different kinds of damages and cost of recovery.²⁹ The details of this assessment are given in the appendix. The damages are classified as housing, sources of livelihood, water and sanitation, environmental

²⁹ The report by the World Bank has detailed sections on economic aspects, livelihood, governance, but gives little attention to the “social” and “environmental” impacts. World Bank. 2007. *Pakistan - Cyclone and floods 2007: Preliminary Damage and Needs assessment - Balochistan and Sindh*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2007/10/16449395/pakistan-cyclone-floods-2007-preliminary-damage-needs-assessment--brbalochistan-sindh>

and social impact. For the most part though, the cost of reconstruction and damages is largely restricted to things that can have a dollar value against them— while the document acknowledges environmental and social losses, one can see that these are not taken seriously. The priorities are also clear when one looks at the space afforded to the various kinds of damages. While “sector-wise” damages such as health, education, and transportation each span over six pages of text, only half a page is given to “social aspects”.

Consider how something like psychological shock and trauma is dealt with in these assessments:

“Psychological shock and trauma: The shock and trauma of a natural calamity is likely to affect a considerable number of people, particularly children (especially single parent children and orphans), pregnant women and elderly. They would require counseling and emotional support to overcome the shock and trauma. ”
(p17)

While trauma and psychological shock is acknowledged, it is ambiguously reduced to “natural calamity” and a generic suggestion of “counseling and emotional support” is given. There are no details of the cost of these services, neither any indication of the actual impact of this form of trauma.

Furthermore, the DNA does not mention displacement, destruction of public space, and the destruction of communal and collective ways of being. The report also excludes “anecdotal evidence and post-disaster experience of similar nature,” from the possible sources of data that would help in assessment of the social impact.³⁰ If such losses are not even classified and recognized by the state and IFI led assessment, then to articulate these grievances as demands will put an additional burden on the locals and communities. The movement will need to demand that

³⁰ It then goes on to talk about “security for women and girls”, noting issues of privacy and mobility of women, even in relief camps; “unattended children,” which is not seen as a big issue due to low numbers; “single-headed households”, which recommends collecting more district-level data; “shock and trauma”.

such claims be recognized. These kinds of contestation are made by various movements across the globe, and a comparative analysis would provide a way of separating the cases where such demands are silenced and cases where such demands can still be made.

But in the context of the Mirani Dam disaster, a source of hope and, subsequently, the target of political contention was the recording of loss as damages in the various surveys that were being conducted by different humanitarian actors.³¹ This is a fact that activists and affected community members referred to. One member of Nasirabad community recounted how they were running around after survey teams to get his livestock “registered” in the early days after the disaster. The person had himself been part of the earlier survey conducted before the construction of the dam and seemed more aware than others about the significance of these surveys. He mentioned how he also urged his relatives and friends to go after the DNA survey teams and register their losses – the implication being that what is not registered cannot be demanded.

As noted above, the DNA assessment itself ignored certain kinds of losses, focusing primarily on the monetizable individual or household level items. The health and psychological impacts re referred to, but no real assessment is provided. Furthermore, these early assessments also fail to capture the long-term effects of displacement and dispossession caused by the Mirani dam disaster. And while some activists spoke about assessments and the government pronouncements after the disaster about reconstruction and rehabilitation, they did not formulate these other losses as core demands. One reason for this is the focus on compensation as per the Resettlement Action Plan of the Mirani dam. Let’s consider this aspect now.

³¹ Interview, GJ, new Nasirabad, 2014

The Politics of Compensation

The core demands of the MMD movement revolves around compensation in lieu of damages to houses and date-palm trees. These demands are actually rooted in pre-disaster mobilization efforts. While the communities had failed at getting their original demands being accepted, they were able to gain some ground in terms of changing some aspects of the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP). RAP was part of the required Environmental Impact Assessment carried out for development projects. In the case of Mirani Dam, the plan envisioned resettling communities that would be submerged in the reservoir, which was official deemed to reach a maximum height of 244 feet AMSL. Collective action by the communities was able to get this level revised first to 264 feet AMSL, and later to 271.2 feet AMSL. Claims made on the basis of RAP have a better “legal standing” when compared with claims based on the government’s announcement regarding the post-disaster relief and reconstruction efforts.³² The RAP is based on federal and provincial laws and rules, along with policies by IFIs.³³

For local activists and affected communities, this manifested in claiming the identity as *mutasareene Mirani dam* (متاثرين میرانی ڈیم), or the people affected by the Mirani Dam. This distinguishes them from the *sailab zadgan* (سیلاب زدگان), or the people affected by the floods in general.³⁴ The distinction allowed the MMD to focus on RAP claims, and make renewed efforts

³² These points are clearly articulated by the broader group of activist, journalist, and lawyers that have supported the movement, but are not locals from the Turbat area. The author has personal experience of working in post-disaster government policy and plans. Cheema, M 2006, 'Forgotten Lessons: One Year After The Earthquake', South Asian Journal, vol. 14; Interview, Mushtaq Gaadi, Dec 2014; Video Proceedings of people’s Tribunal, Lahore, February 2014.

³³ The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (LAA) is the main legal setup used for acquiring private land for public use. The different provinces have made some modification and policy rules also apply.

³⁴ The distinction is important during protests and negotiations with government officials, but it is also repeated among movement participants. For instance, WB spoke about a protest outside the DC office in Turbat for flood affected

to get payments quickly. The payment on the basis of RAP had been a slow moving process. Even those classified as eligible for payment at 244 ft AMSL had to wait a few years after the disaster to receive compensation. As one affected person recounts how they got the payment. While he refers to a survey done within two or three months, this is likely to be the DNA survey, rather than the survey done by NESPAK in 2005 which formed the basis for payments to levels up to 264 feet AMSL.

After the destruction [by Mirani dam backwater], the survey people came after one or two months to look at the damages to the houses. But many were left out. Some people left for Gwadar after receiving the payment. They got the payment, but not in a good way.

What do you mean a good way?

They didn't receive enough money. They did not receive compensation for trees – only trees for 244 level but not up to 264 level. There were five or six karezat at the 244 level [in Nodez], but we have not received any money for karezat and wells as yet [Dec 2014]. Only for some trees, but that is not enough. My family had 300 trees but we got payment for only 30-40 trees.

What happened after the survey, how did you get the money?

We got a check from DC office. And deposited it in the bank. I don't remember exactly, but it took at least 2 or 3 years. For getting this money.

What did you do during this time?

Sometimes we stayed with some people, at other times with others. With relatives, with friends, on rent. This created a lot of problems for them as well. There were problems of water and power supply everywhere as well.

These issues of payment and the grievances around it are typical of what many people faced: the long wait, lower amounts of payment than actual damages, contention around the level at which damages must be compensated for, and the demands for compensation for trees and karezat.

people covered by a national news channel. When I asked if he could tell me more about the protest, WB notes that “No, they were flood affectees [سیلاب زدگان], we are not flood affected.”

In addition to these, the key issue in the post-disaster period was a revision in the level from 264 to 271.4 feet AMSL, which is the level that the backwater reached. The locals of course had no way of knowing for sure what the level was. But their contention was based around which areas were included and previously excluded from the RAP plans.

Thus in the post-disaster period, the key demands of the MMD revolve around compensation for houses, date-palm gardens, and local irrigation system.³⁵ In particular, the demands can be succinctly captured as: *Provide compensation for all houses, fruit-trees, and karezat up to 271.4 level, and rehabilitate all karezat.*

Obtaining compensation entailed further revisions to the RAP. When the RAP surveys was first carried out, it was decided to pay compensation for houses and land up to 244 feet AMSL—which is the maximum height of the spillway and the reservoir level. While some locals claim that payment for 244 level had been made before the construction of the dam, others dispute this by pointing out that the earlier payment was only for houses and not for the date-palm gardens and karezat at this level. The first revision to RAP were first made in 2005, as a result of organizing by the people, and the new level was fixed at 264 feet AMSL. The main point of contention with this revision was the omission of certain people from the survey list. After the disaster though, it was officially acknowledge by the government that the flood had reached up to 271.4 AMSL. The task for the MMD was then to force the government to revise the RAP to update the level.

³⁵ While I am describing the pre and post-disaster as two phases of a movement, the term movement is used loosely. There was no formal organization or even the same group of activists and networks. These two stages can be classified as separate and distinct, at least in one critical way. The first movement was led by local *mautabar* or respected individuals like Wajah and Barkat—who were also involved in party politics at some stage of their career. While some of the key individuals that were active during the post-disaster phase as well, new individuals joined and new collaborations were forged. One of the key activist during this later stage was not a resident of the affected areas, but a local from a nearby UC which is part of Turbat tehsil and was flooded, but not due to the backwater from Mirani dam. He was also able to bring new innovations by working with residents to make documentaries, and write a report, collaborating with an NGO that trains grassroots organizers and reaching out and building on the networks of activists and sympathizers in Quetta, Lahore and Islamabad.

In order to achieve these goals, the locals adopted various strategies. In line with the local ways of ensuring access to state, local elites played an important role by utilizing their connection with political parties and government officials. This was particularly useful for those who were already deemed eligible for compensation. For them, the issue was primarily delays in payment.

As one activist noted:

244 is the level of reservoir. The payment for this was given before the construction of the dam. But even this only happened after the local people protested by setting up a hunger strike camp [outside the DC office] and staged a sit-in.

Why did it take so long for you to get compensated for?

When water came at our areas, at the 264 level, the money was already there [released by the PCP, via province in the DC account]. But they were not giving. People were saying that this money was being held in the account for the sake of interest. [Interview, Mir]

Others were not so lucky and they had to fight for getting their names in the list. But this was no simple task, as unlike the issue of payment which is in the hands of local district government, the survey lists had to be revised with approval from WAPDA and the Planning Commission in Lahore and Islamabad respectively. This put enormous burden on the members of the affected communities and local activists, who had to expend considerable resources, in terms of time, money, physical and emotional labor to approach and hold protests in Lahore and Islamabad (see section 6 for details). Sustained efforts by the MMD activists and their persistence over eight years have resulted in significant gains for affected people, but the movement had to engage in this particular *politics of compensation*. Their key strategies shifted somewhat in getting government officials to recognize their claims for compensation up to 271.4 feet AMSL.

Internal Dynamics and Conflicting Priorities

The power and influence of various external and structural factors were significant in shaping the demands of the MMD movement. The context of violence and repression, development imperative, and soft repression worked together to silence other grievances from being voiced. The focus on demanding compensation became the defining feature of the MMD movement, as the politics of compensation for private houses and date gardens became the most viable demand. But locals at various points did speak about other forms of loss. Some of these grievances were not articulated because of the power dynamics internal to the movement, as the conflicting priorities within the community also shaped articulation. The different priorities of local elites were visible in both stages of mobilization against the dam—both during the construction of the dam and after the disaster and the subsequent demands for compensation.

Local activists claim that the Mirani dam could not have been built or the design of the dam would have been changed if the local elites and politicians had supported the efforts of local activists and movement participants. To be clear, the lines between the inside and outside of MMD movement are not clearly delineated and many local elites, big landlords, and political elites also participated in different ways in the political contestation against the Dam. But by and large, the MMD movement drew most of its members and activists from the lower and middle strata of the local communities.

These activists identified the local political parties as part of the problem. There are two major political parties in Turbat: the National Party (NP) and the Balochistan National Party – Awami (BNP-A). When the dam was under construction BNP-A was in government and the Senator and Minister of Finance and Industry were from the Turbat tehsil. These were approached repeatedly by locals and activists, but they offered little support. This led to the strong belief that

the Mirani Dam project could not have gone ahead with the specific design had they support from their representatives.

This dam would not have been built if [local Senator and MNAs] had supported us. But they didn't. They said one thing to us and did another thing.

While some acknowledge the support of NP leaders, opinions remain divided. Some of the activists were directly affiliated with NP and garnered support from the party's local president as well as the Senator of the time and the current Chief Minister, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch.

Others were of the opinion that while NP had supported the cause, it had not done enough.³⁶

For instance, one local activist SR, notes:

These elites are the ones who we approved the dam. You'd probably know this that the same party was in power when the dam was being constructed and the Chief Minister of Balochistan [Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch] belongs to the same party [National Party]. In 2000, the district Nazim who approved the dam was part of this party – they call him Shaheed [a martyr: *the term here is used sarcastically*]. They wanted the dam to be built, because they were going to benefit financially in the command area, even though they would come and say that the dam has negative impact, but they still wanted to build the dam. [Sangat Rafiq]

Given the unequal landholding patterns, locals speak of differentiated and unequal expected benefits of the Mirani Dam project. Most of the land in the command area of the Dam was held by few large landowners, who were either themselves the class of elected representatives or closely affiliated with electoral politics. There was a huge incentive for the construction of Mirani dam, and resistance against the dam could put a dent in these plans. Several activists who opposed the Mirani Dam project also had land in the downstream areas, but had a principled support for the potential problems in the upstream areas. The situation is complicated because many large landowners owned land both in the downstream and the upstream areas.

³⁶ This view of lack of support becomes more prominent and more evident in the later phases of mobilization that are discussed in the next section.

The role of political and landholding elite was also significant in the post-disaster contestation around compensation. There are two ways in which this operated. First, instead of using an inclusive approach, local activists pointed out that some of the elites made claims that far exceeded the value of their properties. This caused significant delays as the government officials repeatedly conducted surveys in efforts to bring down the cost of paying compensation. Furthermore, activists had demanded that the issue of housing was significant for the deprived and poorer sections of the local communities, but the landlords were mostly concerned with getting compensation for their date trees.

The delays caused by these internal conflicting positioning also created a fear among the local community members that if they deviated from the demand of compensation and asked for other things, such as schools, hospitals, community centers, then they would not even get the money for houses.

In a way, these different priorities also point to the different and unequal ways in which disasters and displacement is experienced by different sections of society. The loss that is articulated by certain community members, such as the role of gift exchanges and the use of date trees for construction and ceremonial purposes is not a loss that is experienced by peoples of means are less vulnerable and are able to bounce back.

Those who own the date-palm trees, are the political elites. They get the vote. They get the contracts. All the social, political, and economic benefits are with them. They are not hindered by financial problems, by poverty. Not having food at home is not their concern. Not being able to build a single room is not their problem. Not being able to send their children to school or college is not an issue for them. They are doing well. They are affiliated with political parties. They are linked to all the economic elites. Politically and economically they are strong.

Furthermore, some activists also noted that the big landholders also benefited from the disaster. People who were displaced needed land, and this created demand for some of the land

that was previously of no value. Most of this land was held by large landlords and politically influential groups. The disaster then benefitted them in multiple ways. As one activist put it:

The elite own the land in the downstream command area, so they are benefitting from the dam, and they were involved in the building of the dam, indirectly. When they'd make public appearances they'd say it [that the dam was harmful and will have negative impact on local communities], but when they'd go to the offices [of government officials, bureaucracy] they'd tell them to build the dam because it would benefit them.

They have been compensation for their date-palm trees and land in the upstream areas. And when the houses and lives of the poor and lower classes were destroyed and they needed land to move to, it was the land of the elites that was sold to them. So the upper classes, the 2%, have benefitted from all sides. They were responsible for the construction of the dam – indirectly, because they knew they were going to benefit from the development of the command area.

The challenges faced by movement participants in confronting the state bureaucratic elites, the difficulty of making knowledge claims against the technical specifications of the dam design, and the difficulty in articulating complex losses were exaggerated when the most visible and prominent members of the local communities who had access to the corridors of power and influence did not support the wider claims of grievances, but rather were concerned with getting compensated for their own damaged property. Many activists claimed that the politicians and government officials also made several promises regarding restoring the collective and public goods, like rebuilding karezat, schools, and health facilities, but in meetings with officials these claims were never made or brought up. When some activists did raise the issue in some public meetings, they were shut down by others. These challenges also took toll on the activists, as the burden of articulating demands when multiple silencing processes were concurrently operating on them resulted in fatigue and a sense of hopelessness. Their articulations were shaped by these rationalities and emotions induced by the silencing operations.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

In the preceding sections of this paper, I have presented a detailed account of the grievances and demands of the communities and people affected by the Mirani dam movement. Most of my findings rely on the accounts presented by local activists and community members affiliated with the *Mutasareene Mirani Dam* (MMD) movement. Local challenges to Mirani dam began at first as an anti-dam struggle which sought to stop the construction of the dam and suggested several alternatives based on knowledge of local terrain and oral histories of the prior development plans. Most of these claims were silenced, and locals then shifted strategies and focused their energies on changing the design of the dam embankment and spillway in order to mitigate the harmful impact of the dam for upstream communities. More specifically, locals demanded a reduction in the maximum height of the dam and increase in the width of the spillway. These changes would ensure that the upstream areas will not face the risk of flooding due to the dam.

As I have demonstrated, the broader structural factors and internal schisms ensured that the dam was constructed as planned. The experiences from earlier phases of mobilization were carried forward in the post-disaster stage and impacted the nature of demands, even when the worst fears of the community had materialized with large-scale destruction of upstream communities. The combination of the repressive political climate with an active an ongoing conflict, and the broader imperatives of growth, economic development, and military occupation provided the context in which the movement activist had to come forward with a set of demands and non-violent direct action to achieve those demands. In so doing, the MMD movement has overcome tremendous odds and achieved a great degree of success in getting the government to acknowledge that the

destruction was caused by the Mirani Dam and compensation must be paid to the affected people. As of writing of this paper, budgetary allocations have been made to pay compensation for houses and date-trees though the affected people continue to wait for the actual payment of compensation.

Yet the movement has been “successful” if we consider the articulated demands. As I have demonstrated that the underlying grievances are wide-ranging, complex, and will not be addressed by the payment of compensation. In fact, given the permanent displacement of community members, the future use of the compensation money is likely to stabilize negative outcomes by making permanent the loss of public, communal, collective, and intangible goods. The community members are aware of this disjuncture between grievances and demands, and have attempted at different stages to articulate a wider set of grievances. But they are faced a number of ways in which power operates to silence their articulations.

The development imperative and the repressive nature of the Pakistani state constitute the two major factors impacting the political opportunity structure and the discursive realm of critique and contestation. Mirani dam was part of a broader set of “development” intervention in Balochistan, and was linked to the development of Gwadar sea port. Given the significance of this project, any change in the design would have led to serious implications for the future of Gwadar port, which would depend on the Mirani dam reservoir for water supply. These development imperatives is backed by the military might of the Pakistan army, and this has resulted in historical underdevelopment and ongoing dispossession in the region. The challenge then faced by movement participant was also to confront these structural constraints, which limits the possibilities of political action and articulations.

In terms of the relation between knowledge and power, the power of the state and development actors to decide what gets classified as “credible knowledge” has resulting in

silencing of local knowledge claims based on experience and oral histories. Consultants, engineers, and technocrats appeared adamant that their survey studies and surveys gave them sufficient knowledge to design the dam suitable to local conditions, while the locals contended that their knowledge was based on both prior feasibility studies by state officials, and an intimate and experiential knowledge of weather patterns, floods, and local geography. The 2007 backflow floods validated the local knowledge claims and proved the official technical designs and assessment as flawed, but unfortunately at great cost to the local communities.

The movement and community also retains the memory of the earlier stages of silencing and these experiences impact their decisions about strategies and demands during later stages of mobilization. The climate of fear and hopelessness leads to restricted criticism of government projects, and demanding compensation presents itself as a safe and less radical option, even when its limits are acknowledged. The long delays and slow response from bureaucracy also creates concerns among local community members that demanding more could sabotage even the payment of compensation for houses and date gardens. Furthermore, at the level of local society, class differences prompted certain influential locals, big landlords, and politicians, to side with the government as long as interests were safeguarded. The dam promised development in the downstream areas, but the benefits were unevenly distributed. There was incentive for those with the means to develop land to support the construction of Mirani dam. The disaster also impacts different sections of society differently, which result in different priorities towards demanding rehabilitation measures. For the influential, the disaster did not impact the kind of reliance on subsistence and gift-exchange relations or the reliance on collective goods such as the karezat that were at the foundation of the lifeworld of the lower strata of society. They were also able to rehabilitate their agriculture through investment in tube-wells. However, others were unable to

revive their agricultural lands, were displaced which disrupted their connections with the land and community – a disruption that had multifaceted impact. The issue of displacement has been central to the grievances of the community, but this issue was not raised or addressed because of different priorities.

In the post disaster period, two other silencing operations were visible. The first is the assessment of what gets classified as loss in official damage and needs assessment in the post-disaster context in general. I sought to demonstrate that these assessment rely on enumerating certain kinds of loss, most of which can be monetized and mapped onto the public or private goods and possession. Several key aspects of individual and collective trauma and loss are not addressed. These assessments are also linked to the design of financial compensation schemes, which might shape demands given compensation provide a formal and legal way (at least in theory) for demanding something. The politics of compensation is, I contend, a new form of emergent politics which can potentially be a subject for future study. For this paper, I have sought to show that the politics of compensation is, on the one hand, an outcome of the silencing operation on grievances and tactics and, on the other hand, offers the enabling potential for meeting some demands. It structures the menu of demands that could be voiced and heard by the government officials.

Local activists also spoke about how they attempted to go beyond the politics of compensation, and attempted to mobilize around a more elaborate set of demands but faced resistance from certain community members. I argued noted that this form of schism is also induced by the broader factors, which creates a sense of hopelessness and anxieties among the locals who had been waiting for compensation for a very long period. Many among the affected population felt that demanding something more would jeopardize their chances of receiving even the compensation. In this sense, they were going for what they can get. But in going for what they

can get, and under all the silencing dynamics, MMD is forced to articulate a set of muted demands, that are not only disconnected with some of the underlying grievances and sense of loss, but are likely to stabilize negative outcome as well.

In concluding, I propose some preliminary ideas about the significance of this distinction between grievances and demands and the focus on silencing process for the broader study of social movement studies. First, by distinguishing between grievances and demands we can have a better evaluation of the movement outcomes. If movements are only to be evaluated on the basis of the articulated demands, then that limits the degree to which we can speak about the underlying grievances that may be at the root of collective action. The degree to which it is important to distinguish between the two will vary from case to case. I have sought to demonstrate that in cases of displacement and dispossession induced by development and disaster, the disjuncture can be significant. The approach can then inform the study of a large number of movements in the global South as well as environmental movements in the global North. Second, my claim isn't that the collective actors are "irrational" in articulating demands that are not consistent with their grievances. There's a link between the demands and grievances. What I have sought to show is that under certain cases where silencing operations shape articulations of demands to a significant degree, the agency is limited by the structural factors and historical experiences of the movement participants. In that, the experiences in the earlier stages of movement participants are carried forth and impact the articulation of demands in the later stages as well. Third, conceiving silencing as an operation of power allows for understanding how concepts such as hegemony or quiescence continue to operate on movement – beyond the simple issue of action and inaction, silencing has the power to shape articulation themselves. This gives a way to empirically study the operation of power. Fourth, I have argued for the need to study the silencing operations. While social movement

scholars, particularly from the framing perspective, have looked at the strategic choices and the external factors (media etc) and how these shape the demands of a movement – the overriding concern has been with explaining the impact of framing on mobilization, recruitment, or success. In some sense, my works seeks to both extend and challenge this approach. Instead of concerns with success or failure of demands in mobilizing, I have taken mobilization as a given – which is true for all forms of collective action. This avoids the pitfall of post-hoc explanations of the success of a “mobilizing frame”. And finally, the focus on the discursive and institutional factors, the “political opportunity” structures, also allows for a comparative study of movements to raise questions about the conditions and particular histories in which certain demands can be articulated more readily compared to other context. This final point is also of significance to scholars of social movements who wish to use their intellectual labor to provide ways of thinking about the strategies and tactics that activists can adopt. Given knowledge about the potential silencing operations, movement participants can have a better sense of the kinds of interventions that might be need to unsilenced certain silences.

APPENDIX A – DNA NOTES

Source: World Bank. 2007. *Pakistan - Cyclone and floods 2007 : preliminary damage and needs assessment - Balochistan and Sindh*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2007/10/16449395/pakistan-cyclone-floods-2007-preliminary-damage-needs-assessment--brbalochistan-sindh>

Housing damage: “71,596 housing units were completely destroyed which include 41,718 and 29,878 respectively in Balochistan and Sindh, and represent 6% each of the total housing stock in the affected districts of Balochistan and Sindh. Approximately 85% of the houses ... located in areas classified under the 1998 census as rural. The total value (replacement cost, not depreciated) of the housing lost in the affected areas is US\$76.4million, based on a typical building plan and unit material and labor costs.” (p11)

Livelihood: “a total of around 0.5 million jobs are estimated to be lost, which amount to be nearly 30 percent of total employment before the cyclone and flooding hit the areas. This, in turn, implies that the population affected by employment losses of household members is at least 1.7 million. The employment losses are highly concentrated in the agricultural sector which constitutes about 80 percent of total employment losses.”

Agriculture: “The direct damages to agriculture sector, which include losses of harvested and standing crops, perished animals, partially or fully destroyed irrigation infrastructure and other assets are estimated at Rs. 13.2 billion, of which 76% occurred in Balochistan and 24% in Sindh. The crop sub-sector suffered most with Rs. 6.0 billion of losses (45.3% of total agriculture losses), followed by irrigation (34.3%), livestock (19.2%), and fisheries (1.2%). The indirect losses representing the lost incomes of future crop, livestock, and fisheries productions due to disruptions caused by flood and cyclone are estimated at Rs. 5.7 billion, 77.0% of which occurred in Balochistan and 23.0% in Sindh.” (13)

“Psychological shock and trauma: The shock and trauma of a natural calamity is likely to affect a considerable number of people, particularly children (especially single parent children and orphans), pregnant women and elderly. They would require counseling and emotional support to overcome the shock and trauma. ” (p17)

“Impact on water resources: The floods have caused significant damages to water resources in general. Most of the water systems, including surface and ground water, were damaged to varying levels thus impairing their use both for drinking and irrigation purposes.” (p18)

The space provided in the Annexes is also telling. Here’s the list

Annex -1: Economic Assessment (11 pages)

Annex-2: Livelihood (9 pages)

Annex-3: Governance (7 pages)

Annex-4: Hazard Risk Management (10 pages)

Annex-5: Social Impact (4 pages, out of which one page is a checklist/questionnaire, page 66-67; this interestingly lists some of the elements that I am referring to)

Annex-6: Environmental impact (3 pages)

A further 40-50 pages are dedicated to different sectors – “social impacts” and “environment” are not discussed.

The annex on social impact begins by stating that there is little data for assessing impact on vulnerable groups, and the impact assessment is based on “anecdotal evidence and post-disaster experience of similar nature.”

It then goes on to talk about “security for women and girls”, noting issues of privacy and mobility of women, even in relief camps; “unattended children,” which is not seen as a big issue

due to low numbers; “single-headed households”, which recommends collecting more district-level data; “shock and trauma”, which is:

“Psychological Shock and Trauma: The shock and trauma of a natural calamity of this magnitude is likely to affect a significant number of people, especially children, pregnant women and elderly. They would require counseling and emotional support to overcome their shock and trauma. It is important to pay special attention to the emotional and psychological well-being of these vulnerable groups so that they may fully recover from the trauma. ”

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