

# **Class Politics in the Era of Neoliberalism: The Case of Karachi, Pakistan**

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## **Acknowledgements**

This paper emerges out of my experiences growing up in Karachi and a desire to understand the city and its residents in a manner which contributes towards a long-term political project of substantive socio-economic transformation. As such, even though the fieldwork this is based upon was of a duration of two and a half months, the paper as a whole is the culmination of a long process of interactions and conversations with a large number of people. In this regard it is imperative to mention at least a few people without whose encouragement and patience, I would not have been able to complete this task and to whom I remain forever indebted.

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## Abstract

*In one of the fastest growing cities in the world, and the biggest city in Pakistan, Karachi, the question of political praxis has seldom been addressed in academic literature beyond the received wisdom of various 'primordial' identities. Politics in the city, which until at least the 1980s had a vibrant trade/labour union movement, has become increasingly fragmented along ethnic and religious sectarian identities. This paper examines the various contours of neoliberal urbanism as it manifests itself in the context of Karachi and the political praxis it generates. The approach draws upon a Gramscian spatial historicism to look at the constitution of 'historical situations as a confluence of multiple, spatially mediated temporal rhythms' (Kipfer, 2012: 86). In doing so, it will look at the combined effects of neoliberal praxis, formal neo-imperialism and Pakistan's continually evolving post-colonial state, on the emergence (or lack thereof) of working class politics in Karachi. Thus, the historically and geographically specific ensemble of forces at multiple scales (local, national and international) which act to impede and, in several cases, co-opt any forms of horizontal political praxis in the city will be elaborated upon. Light will also be shed upon the unresolved dialectic between residential and working spaces for Marxist praxis in urban areas. Thus, through local level analyses of the multi-scalar workings of state and capital, the paper argues that a dialectic of coercion and patronage animates - and restricts - the political choices made by Karachi's working class subjects. In doing so, the paper also advocates for an understanding of class (and the process of class formation) being as much an objective category as a subjective, lived phenomenon which operates over multiple spaces (i.e. both residential and working spaces) and is necessarily shaped by forces operating over multiple scales. The paper will draw upon the author's fieldwork in one residential and one industrial area of Karachi while combining insights from existing literature on class-based political praxis in other urban areas (especially in global South contexts) and current literature on Pakistan and its 'over-developing' state.*

## **Foreword: Relationship of Paper to the Plan of Study**

The Areas of Concentration in my Plan of Study are Urban Politics and Development Studies. This includes developing insights into the various theories which are used in characterising ongoing processes of change in developing countries, looking at the interplay of state and capital in shaping urban space and delineating the role of various movements in shaping the urban space and wider socio-political processes. The Learning Objectives outlined in the Plan of Study are as follows:

*Learning Objective 1.1: Study the various theories of development used in analysing and explaining processes of change in developing countries.*

*Learning Objective 1.2 Understand the literature on the post-colonial state in order to analyse the contemporary Pakistani state.*

*Learning Objective 2.1 Develop insights into the process by which state and capital combine to build infrastructure, promote industrialisation and provide services such as food and healthcare in urban areas.*

*Learning Objective 2.2 Develop a clear understanding of social movement politics in Third World urban areas.*

This research paper - with its aim to study the obstacles to and potential for developing a working politics in Karachi - fits well into both my Areas of Concentration. As the biggest city of Pakistan, Karachi provides a microcosm for looking at how the interplay of state and capital is shaping developmental processes in the country (Learning Objectives 1.1 and 2.1). Moreover, due to its being home to almost every ethnicity, religious and sectarian group which is present in

Pakistan, Karachi provides a good avenue for looking at how these communities and identities are formed and/or mobilise as a response to the interplay of state and capital (Learning Objective 1.1 and 2.2). My work also generates insights into how Pakistan's post-colonial state operates and reproduces itself through the local level actions of dominant and dominated classes (Learning Objective 1.2). In doing so, it attempts to build upon the literature on the Pakistani state from a Marxist perspective. The research with working class communities involved working with people of various ethnicities and religious groups and looking at the movements (or lack thereof) which spawn due to processes of capital accumulation and expansion in the urban space (Learning Objective 2.2). This lies almost perfectly at the intersection of urban politics and development studies as it explores the development of peoples' movements and progressive politics in response to the neoliberal onslaught and the concomitant boom in urbanism without 'growth' witnessed in numerous cities of the (so called) Third World.

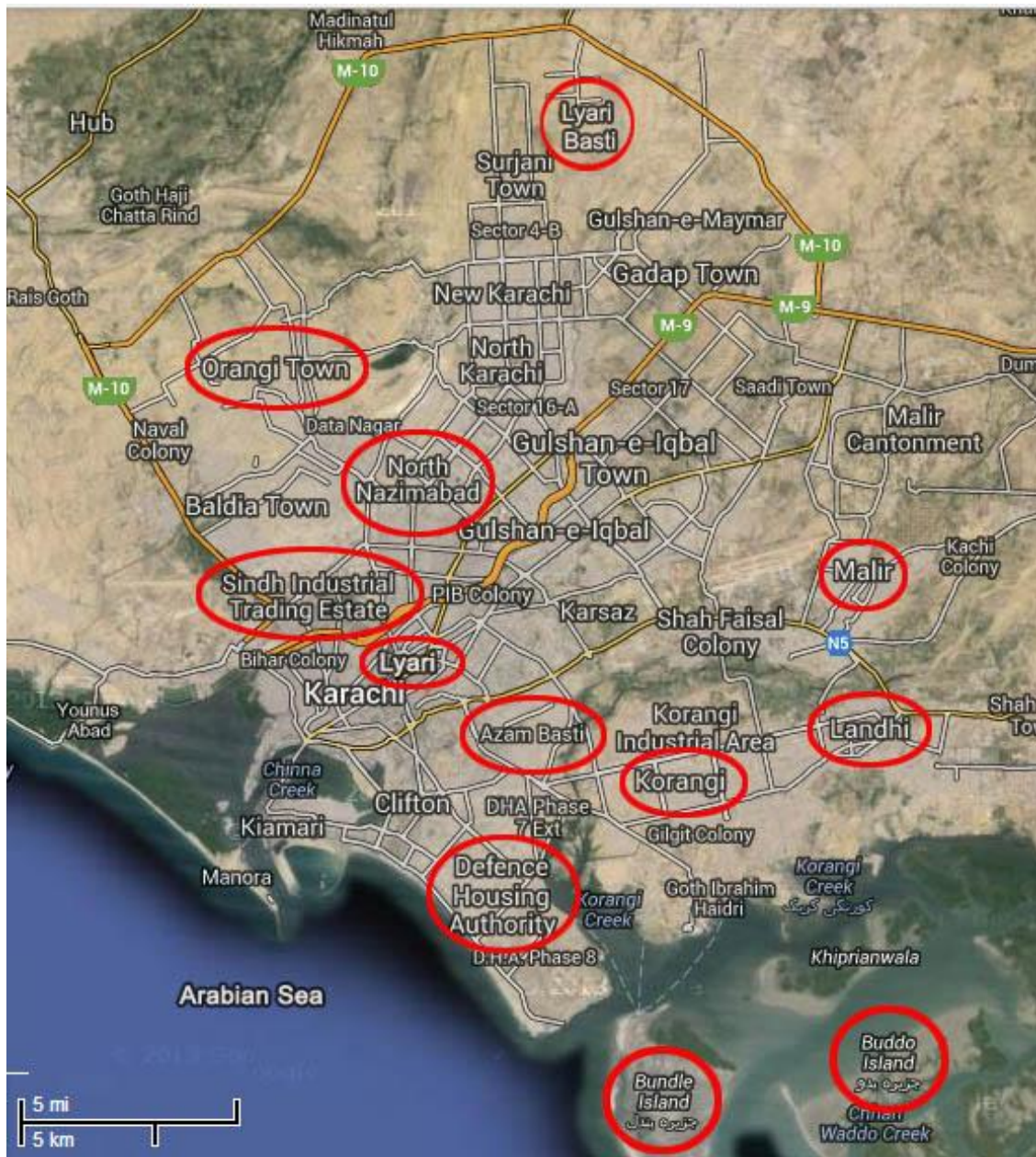
## Maps



Map of Pakistan, with provinces and neighbouring countries. Karachi Division is highlighted in red<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan\\_-\\_Sindh\\_-\\_Karachi\\_district.svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan_-_Sindh_-_Karachi_district.svg)





Map of Karachi. The localities and areas mentioned in the paper are circled in red<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Google Maps.

## Glossary

**AIML:** All India Muslim League

**ANP:** *Awami National Party* (People's National Party). The ANP was formed out of the remnants of the old NAP but is now an exclusively Pushtun party, rhetorically committed to Pushtun nationalism but in practice dominated by landed and capitalist Pushtun interests

**AWP:** *Awami Workers' Party* (People's Workers Party). A socialist party formed out of the merger of three left parties in November 2012.

**Bhatta:** Rent extracted by political parties often forcibly (through their local level militant gangs) from businessmen and shopkeepers. The rate of *bhatta* varies from locality to locality and depends on the size and turnover of the establishment.

**Chaudhry:** Generally a term used to indicate ancestral land ownership. However, in Karachi's vernacular '*Chaudhry*' is often used to denote someone who is a local influential or muscle-man of political parties.

**DSF:** Democratic Students Federation

**FATA:** Federally Administered Tribal Areas

**Gherao:** Literally meaning 'encirclement'. The term used for workers' picketing of factories during strikes and also for show of people's power in negotiations with police stations

**HBWWF:** Home Based Women Workers' Federation, a sub-group within the NTUF

**IFIs:** International Financial Institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank

**Imams:** Islamic Prayer leaders

**IMF:** International Monetary Fund

**JI:** *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Islamic Party, sister of organisation of Muslim Brotherhood)

**Katcheri:** Local court

**Katchi Abadi:** informal settlement, often not provided with basic amenities such as water and electricity which are then secured 'illegally' through links with the lower bureaucracy and/or local politicians

**KP:** *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* Province (formerly NWFP)

**MKP:** *Mazdoor Kissan Party* (Workers and Peasants' Party)

**Mohajirs:** Literally meaning 'migrants', the term is used to describe Partition migrants to Pakistan from India and their descendants. The term has roots in Islamic history and was used for migrants who accompanied the Prophet Muhammad to the city of Medina in 622AD to escape persecution in Makkah.

**MQM:** Muhajir Qaumi Mahaz (Mohajir National Movement). The MQM was renamed *Muttahida Qaumi Movement* (United National Movement) in 1997.

**NAP:** *National Awami Party* (National Peoples Party)

**NGOs:** Non-governmental Organisations

**NSF:** National Students Federation

**NTUF:** National Trade Union Federation

**NWFP:** North West Frontier Province (later renamed *Khyber Pakhtunkwa*)

**PML:** Pakistan Muslim League

**PPP:** Pakistan People's Party

**PTI:** *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf* (Pakistan Movement for Justice)

**Rashan:** Groceries

**Seraiki:** A language spoken in southern parts of Punjab. Also the ethnic identity of people who speak the language.

**SITE:** Sindh Industrial Trading Estate, Karachi's largest industrial area.

**Thana:** Police station

**Thekedar:** Contractor

**WB:** World Bank

**AITUC:** All-India Trade Union Congress

**APCOL:** All Pakistan Confederation of Labour

**IFL:** India Federation of Labour

**PTUF:** Pakistan Trade Union Federation

**CPP:** Communist Party of Pakistan

**GoP:** Government of Pakistan

**Eid-ul-Azha:** This is one of the main religious festivals celebrated by Muslims during the course of an Islamic year. Those with the means to do so sacrifice animals such as cows and goats to commemorate the prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham in the Bible) willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail for God.

**Zaati Mafaad:** Personal benefit

The great ones of this earth are unconcerned about the opinion that insignificant folk hold about them. Their eyes only see the ashes remaining from the holocaust that they themselves have caused, but not the fire that smoulders underneath. And the fire feeds on itself and waits.

- *Paraja*, Gopinath Mohanty

## Introduction

*Night of 10th May 2007.* The doorbell rings outside our home. As I walked to the door I had a fair idea who was on the other side. Police vans with their blaring sirens had already been patrolling our neighbourhood (P.E.C.H.S., an upper middle class locality in the very heart of Karachi) for the past five or so hours. I opened the door, a police-*wallah* gruffly asked me about my father. I told him I did not know where he is. They questioned me for a couple of minutes and after making sure that I was telling the truth (I was not), loaded themselves back into their van and went away, sirens hooting. The Lawyers' movement against the military dictator General Musharraf for the restoration of Pakistan's deposed Chief Justice was in full swing. The Chief Justice was supposed to be arriving in Karachi two days later on the 12th. The police and paramilitary Rangers were rounding up all the old anti-dictatorship activists. My father had guessed that the intelligence had been tapping our landline phone for the last two days. As 12th of May approached, he hid in the basement of our next door neighbours. As they say, hiding in plain sight.

My father is a curious case. He is a long time member and leader of the right wing, religious party *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI) and its student wing *Islami Jamiat Talba* (IJT). Even though the JI had historically been pro-military, my father had fallen out with the party over their support for Musharraf. In the 80s, he had been jailed for close to a year on trumped-up charges by Pakistan's last military saviour (and America's blue-eyed boy), General Zia ul Haq. In jail, he had developed a particular distaste for Pakistan's hegemonic military. In short, he was a bundle of contradictions: leading member of the pro-military JI in Karachi but himself against military rule; a committed Islamist but also a democrat.

12th May 2007. The Chief Justice arrives at the airport but is stopped from entering the city. Militant gangs of various parties, especially those of the pro-Musharraf *Muttahida Qaumi Movement* (MQM), have a field day. Close to fifty people are killed in one of the bloodiest days in Karachi's history. My father survived. He had turned back from *Gurumandir* roundabout where he had spotted a media station come under fire.

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My family were double migrants: first from (what is now) India in 1947 and then, from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Two of my maternal uncles lost their lives in the CIA and ISI-led global 'jihad' in Afghanistan. Some parts of my family are staunch Islamists. Some were liberals. A couple were communists. My father's dream was to make me a *Hafiz-e-Quran* (someone who has memorised the entire Quran in Arabic) even while I got the best 'modern' education. So in the morning, I went to Karachi's second oldest school St. Patrick's, established by Catholic missionaries in 1873. In the afternoon, I went to Karachi's biggest *madrassa* (religious seminary), *Jamia Binoria*, home to thousands of students from all over Pakistan and other Muslim countries, and soon to gain notoriety in the post-9/11 era as one of the main recruiting grounds for the regional 'jihad' franchise.

The area where I grew up was originally named *Gulbahar* (literally meaning 'spring flowers'), a middle class locality established after Partition as part of a wider process of migrants' re-settlement by the state. However, for most of the decade in which I grew up, the 1990s, the state military and para-military forces had been waging an operation against the MQM, verging on urban guerilla warfare. Every afternoon, after returning from the *madrassa*, I would play street cricket with boys in our neighbourhood. Every evening, as dusk fell and the sounds of the

*maghrib azaan* (sunset call for prayer) would echo in the locality, our mothers would hurriedly usher us into the house. And then the firing would start. Almost every day, for hours on end, MQM militants would fight with the Army and Rangers. In the night, it sometimes felt that the gunshots were just outside our house. I often prayed that no one would erase the cricket creases<sup>3</sup> my friends and I had painstakingly painted onto the road (complete with the symbol of the South African cricket team<sup>4</sup>).

Then in the morning as I got ready for school, the morning newspaper would give us the figures for the previous night. *Four militants were killed by law enforcement agencies in Liaquatabad. One militant was killed in retaliatory fire by the police in Orangi. Two bodies found in gunny bags in Al-Farooq ground in Nazimabad*<sup>5</sup>.

Our area had a British-era firing range due to which it also had an alternative name, *Golimar* (literally meaning 'fire the gun'). While I was growing up, we rarely ever heard the name *Gulbahar* except when I travelled on government buses whose old plates on the top still used the original names of the localities. For myself and everyone else around, it was *Golimar*. Not just people, but even names and geographies became militarised. The violence was unending.

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The Lawyers' Movement had its effects. I had just turned 18 and was about to go off to Oxford on a scholarship. Whether I knew it or not, politics had always been a part of my life. But the

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<sup>3</sup> Cricket's equivalent of football's goal lines, half-line etc.

<sup>4</sup> They had one of the best teams in world cricket.

<sup>5</sup> Al Farooq ground is where I first learned to play with a real cricket ball (made out of cork and leather, and known as a 'hard ball' in common parlance). Street cricket is usually played with a tennis ball covered in electric tape to make it go through the air faster.



10th of May, 2007 was the first time in conscious memory that it intruded into my home. I was curious and became involved. I went to the Karachi Press Club for protests and there the police would attack us with tear gas and batons. We would retreat into the press club to escape the gas and then, after a hiatus, would go back out again to chant anti-military slogans. Teargas. Retreat. The same routine would play out several times until some people got arrested and/or one or both sides got tired and decided to go home.

In July 2007, the Chief Justice was restored. In October, the long exiled leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Benazir Bhutto returned and was almost killed in a bomb blast. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2007, General Musharraf (now President) again dismissed the Supreme Court judges, abrogated the Constitution and declared Emergency. Almost all the country rose up in protest. I was in Oxford but followed events back home keenly. Every week, there used to be a protest outside the Pakistani Embassy in London. I joined a couple of times, when the workload permitted me to travel to London. Things were moving fast.

In December 2007, I was in Pakistan for winter vacations. On 27th December 2007, a few days before I was scheduled to come back to Oxford and a couple of weeks before the general elections, Benazir was assassinated in a suicide bomb attack in Rawalpindi (home to Pakistani military's headquarters) in the same place where Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan had been shot in 1951. I had no love lost for Benazir. She was derided in our family, quite justifiably I think, as a sell-out to the US and a corrupt politician to boot. But we were shocked. For all her ills, Benazir had been a woman of immense courage. She had endured the jails of Pakistan's own version of Augusto Pinochet, General Zia ul Haq, and the tribulations of a life in exile. Karachi descended into chaos. I had never seen such a collective outpouring of grief. People mourned in the streets. Cries went up that Sindh - the province where Benazir hailed from

and whose capital was Karachi - be separated from Pakistan. Those were some of the most traumatising days of my life. *Never again*, I (and I suspect many others) thought to myself, *never again should we have the men in khaki rule us*.

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In February of 2008, elections were held and democracy returned to Pakistan after almost a decade. Musharraf had taken off his military uniform and was now *merely* a civilian President. In a few months, he was eased out of power by the elected political parties. The army was - at least formally - back in the barracks. I thought things would get better. The civilian government was *elected*. Surely, it would stop the military operation in Balochistan (where a nationalist movement had been ongoing for the last five years and was being brutally crushed by the military). Surely, the Taliban – a joint creation of the Pakistani security establishment, the CIA and Saudi Arabia – would be contained. And surely, there would be no more grovelling in front of the IMF and World Bank. As it happened, none of the above materialised.

This got me thinking (even more). Why did things not change? Why was the IMF still setting Pakistan's economic priorities? Why couldn't the military and its inhuman practices be controlled? Far from producing despondency, such experiences only spurred me on to study and practice politics more seriously. Having already seen Islamist politics from the inside during my time at *Jamia Binoria*, and realised the ineffectiveness of the (almost exclusively) cultural critiques of modernity launched by proponents of political Islam, I found myself increasingly attracted towards progressive politics.

I met and learned from left activists both in Pakistan and the UK. I read Eqbal Ahmad, Hamza Alavi, Frantz Fanon and then Marx (whom I did not understand much). Structures - of

uneven development, imperialism and capitalism - started to reveal their importance. I had studied Biochemistry as an undergraduate. But now I wanted to seriously pursue my new interest. Eventually, I ended up at York University in Canada. The Marxian diagnosis of capitalism seemed so complex yet so easy to grasp once one saw the world one was living in. Why didn't people revolt? Why was Karachi beset by violence sometimes in the name of Sunni-Shia, sometimes in the name of ethnicity? I wanted to understand Karachi. I wanted to understand why people in Karachi did not revolt.

This paper then is my attempt at understanding Karachi and its marginalised. The question that animates the investigation is simple: Why in conditions of such obvious oppression, such glaring inequality, do the working poor of Karachi not unite and revolt? In short, what are the obstacles to building a working class politics in the industrial and residential areas of Karachi?

### *Methodology and Structure*

I divided my primary research question into two inter-related problems. First, what is the process through which members of Karachi's industrial working class organise and form socio-political affiliations in order to negotiate service delivery from state and capital? Secondly, what are the obstacles faced working class members face when trying to organize unions and form independent citizens' councils in residential areas? For my two-and-half-month-long fieldwork in Karachi, I was based mainly in two areas: one industrial area (the Sindh Industrial Trading Estate, SITE) and one residential area (Lyari Basti). Here, I worked with two leftist organisations: National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) in SITE and the *Mazdoor Kissan Party* (Workers' & Peasants' Party, MKP) in Lyari Basti. I also had the chance to interview members of the Home Based Women Workers' Federation (HBWWF) which is a subgroup within the NTUF.

SITE was a natural choice for fieldwork as it is Karachi's oldest industrial area. Lyari Basti was chosen as some MKP comrades were already living there and had attempted organising. I also draw upon work done by researchers in other localities and my own experiences in Karachi, in addition to insights from other Third World cities.

As a person from a middle class, Urdu-speaking background, in addition to coming from a First World university, working with labourers and workers often from a different ethnic/linguistic background, I had to be extremely aware of my own positionality. Taking inspiration from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) I tried to employ a Freireian, dialogic methodology which tries to break down the hierarchical teacher-student and, by extension, researcher-subject relationship. The aim is to develop a genuine relationship of humility supplemented by a mutual process of discovery, critical reflection and action upon prevailing material conditions. Thus, I tried as far as possible to employ a model of 'dialogical' research whereby as researcher - and in keeping with Freire's formulation of praxis (as a mutually informing combination of critical reflection and action) - I was not as much *studying* working class politics in Karachi but actually *working with and learning from* labour unions, student groups and left parties active in industrial and residential areas of the city.

In his paper on 'Recontextualizing Observation', Angrosino (2005) identifies three type of 'membership roles' during observation-based research. These include peripheral member researchers, active member researchers and complete member researchers. During the course of my fieldwork, I adopted the second role (i.e. active member researcher) as I was closely involved with the activities of the above groups without obtaining official membership/full affiliation of

any of them<sup>6</sup>. I attended monthly consultation sessions of the NTUF and HBWWF with workers from select industrial units and residential areas in which workers' elaborated upon workplace problems while also discussing issues with regards to organising. During these, I had the chance to talk informally with workers about everyday politics, working conditions and organising. The HBWWF sessions also provided me with the only chance of talking to women workers involved in informal, home-based work. Four formal, semi-structured interviews were conducted with NTUF organisers, including two with female organisers working with the HBWWF. I also had a chance to interview the upper management of a factory in the SITE area.

With the MKP, I attended their weekly meetings in Lyari Basti which served as a platform to discuss issues of local importance in the area<sup>7</sup>. Every second week, the meeting also doubled as a study circle in which we discussed Urdu translations of Marxist texts<sup>8</sup> while also discussing issues of party organising in Lyari Basti and beyond. My main contact with the local MKP unit was Rahim Ahmadani, a Seraiki labourer who had migrated to Karachi close to five years ago from south Punjab. Rahim runs a small auto-mobile repair shop in Lyari Basti<sup>9</sup> where I spent a lot of time with him and got a chance to interact with several residents who used to come to the shop not just for work but just to discuss everyday issues as Rahim is a known political activist in the area. In Lyari Basti, I conducted a formal, semi-structured interview with Rahim. However, most of my analysis here (in the chapter on residential area politics) is based on informal conversations with local residents and MKP activists especially during the weekly party

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<sup>6</sup> A list of interviewees is given towards the end of this paper.

<sup>7</sup> Although these meetings were officially open to anyone from the locality, in practice we had to be extremely discreet as mainstream parties did not take too kindly to alternative, especially left, formations 'encroaching' upon their territory. This will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on residential area politics.

<sup>8</sup> The study circle and party organisation part of the meeting preceded the segment discussing local issues and was confined just to party members or closely associated activists (like myself). There would be a lead discussant for each study circle and during my two and a half months' fieldwork, I lead the discussion in one of these study sessions.

<sup>9</sup> By the name of "Comrade Auto-shop"!

meetings. Some interesting (and instructive) events that I witnessed and others that were narrated to me are described in the said chapter in more detail. In addition, I interviewed two prominent researchers on Karachi, Haris Gazdar and Arif Hasan.

With regards to workplace politics, my questions for workers attempted to ascertain the support groups/individuals they accessed during initial settling down in Karachi (in case of migrants) and the means for provision of employment. I also asked workers and organisers regarding working conditions, wages and issues around organisation in the workplace (both in formal/factory floor settings and in informal/home-based setting), such as role of ethnicity, police, political parties and second/third-party employment contractors. As general elections had only recently concluded in Pakistan (in May 2013), I also asked workers' and organisers' opinions about political parties and especially voting choices. The factory higher management were asked about their labour hiring policy and the labour union in the factory (regarding union activities, workers' benefits, ethnic composition of workforce etc.). I also probed them about the management's relations with local party machineries and state bureaucracy, and links with higher ups in the government machinery (such as the provincial Chief Minister). In Lyari Basti, my conversations with (and observations of) MKP activists and local residents hinged on issues of securing public services (such as healthcare and education for children) and the support groups involved. Here too questions regarding people's political choices generally and in the recently concluded elections specifically were posed. The interviews and conversations were done almost exclusively in Urdu. Interview responses were recorded in a notebook during the interview

itself<sup>10</sup>. At the end of each day, I also noted observations and informal conversations with activists and workers in my notebook.

In terms of structure, this paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter briefly charts the terrain of urban Marxism, especially its relevance to Third World urban areas. It draws upon scholarship in both global North and South contexts, and I attempt to lay it out in a manner which provides the relevant theoretical context for my work on Karachi. The second chapter situates Karachi and Pakistan, both theoretically and historically. The focus is on situating Karachi and Pakistan with reference to their positions in the global political economy in addition to looking at the terrain of class politics in the city as it evolved in the given historical context. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part looks at the various theories advanced to explain the Pakistani state (and polity) from Marxist points of view. The longer, second part is a historical overview of Karachi and the area which now constitutes Pakistan from British colonial times to the present day. The third chapter draws upon fieldwork in SITE and my interaction with workers and comrades of the NTUF and HBWWF to shed light on workplace politics and organising in Karachi. The fourth chapter draws upon fieldwork in Lyari Basti with the MKP, incorporating participant observation, interviews and conversations with local residents and my own experiences while working in the area. This chapter also substantially invokes work done by Haris Gazdar and his colleagues at the Collective for Social Science Research in Karachi. The last chapter briefly summarises the main arguments of the preceding chapters and situates the paper in a broader context of re-thinking Left praxis in Pakistan while pointing towards further areas for research.

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<sup>10</sup> Cited as (fieldwork notes, date) in the text.

In addition to this paper's other limitations, I would like to point out one which I feel is extremely crucial at the very outset. Being male and an 'outsider' within almost all the communities I was working in, I found it difficult to get access to women workers for my research. This was mostly due to the short duration of my fieldwork (two and a half months), which was not enough for me to gain the trust needed to talk freely with female family members of the many workers I met. Even though I did manage to interview some women associated with the HBWWF, on the whole, the lack of a gender perspective in this work remains a glaring absence and one which I am fully aware of. As I point out in the concluding chapter, this remains a major area for further research for myself and other colleagues working on Karachi and Pakistan.



## Marxist Urbanism and the Third World

### *Capital and Urban Space*

Urban space has been the subject of much debate in Marxist theory and practice. Both Marx and Engels touched upon the effects of - and links between - capital accumulation and urban space, especially in relation to the exclusion and displacement of marginalised communities and classes. For example, Engels (1892) saw the growth of industrial capitalism as intimately tied to the expansion of urban areas and a concomitant increase in the magnitude of the working class. In *The Housing Question*, Engels (1872) points out that 'the growth of big modern cities gives the land in certain areas an artificially and colossally increasing value'. As a result, buildings 'erected on these areas... are pulled down and replaced by others. This takes place above all with workers' houses' (p. 23). While Marx himself did not write directly about urban areas he fleetingly touched upon the role of capital accumulation which has 'created enormous cities, [and] has greatly increased the urban population compared with the rural' (Marx and Engels, 1848: 17). In *Capital Vol.1* (1867), Marx also touched upon the internal ordering of urban space by capital through redevelopment and concomitant exclusion by detailing how the accumulation of capital is accompanied by "'improvements" of towns... such as the demolition of the badly built districts, the erections of places to house banks, warehouses etc., the widening of streets for business traffic... [which] obviously drive the poor away into even worse and more crowded corners' (p. 452). Such transformations of urban space can be seen, with perhaps greater ferocity, in the latest phase of global capitalism in cities as different as New York, Mumbai and Karachi. More often than not, such a process not only has spatial implications but takes place along gendered and racialised lines, with the worst sufferers being already marginalised groups (see, for example, Schulmann 2012).

Marxist theorists such as David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre, in the vein of Engels himself, saw the urban as central not just for the accumulation of capital but also for the maturing of capital's myriad contradictions. Lefebvre, having been involved in the urban-based 1968 Paris uprising, saw the future of capital expansion and accumulation as intimately linked to the expansion of urban space itself. Lefebvre (1968) posited that the clear distinction between the urban and rural is slowly breaking down, with 'urban' phenomena under the unfolding phase of post-industrial capitalism overflowing the confines of the historical city. This is especially true in the case of 'developing countries' like India, China and Pakistan where the 'urban' now manifests itself not just in cities but in semi-rural Special Economic Zones and peri-urban real estate 'development' and 'reclamation'. In a related vein, Harvey (2008) sees urban space as central to capital's 'spatial fix' i.e. its tendency to overcome crises of over-accumulation and under-consumption by spreading its contradictions spatially. As such, the built environment of the city (such as roads, living and shopping complexes etc.) form an integral part of the spatial fix by providing a long-term 'sink' for capital through investment in infrastructure, real estate development etc. However, the metropolitan dialectic (Merrifield, 2002) is at play here too as the very spaces which provide temporal relief to capital's contradictions also result in agglomeration of the agents and means of resistance (such as labour, technologies of transport and communication etc.).

Critical urban theorists such as Friedmann, Swyngedouw and Zukin have taken the metropolitan dialectic further in their analyses of global and globalising cities in the context of post-1970s capitalist re-structuring and 're-scaling'. Swyngedouw (2004) has identified the latest stage of global capitalism as one where the economy has become more 'glocal' (global+local) in contrast to the nationally 'encaged', Fordist economies of the post WWII era. This 'glocalisation'

is a combination of upscaling of financial markets and flows to a global scale while many of the responsibilities of national governments have been increasingly devolved to local and municipal governments<sup>11</sup>. In keeping with this 'glocalisation' trend, global (and globalising) cities, driven by the FIRE sectors (finance, insurance and real estate) and the 'growth of a primary cluster of high-level business services', have emerged as 'command and control centers' of an increasingly dispersed production system (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982). Sassen (1996) identified these cities as nodes of informational flows embodying the latter part of the dialectic of dispersion (with regards to production) and concentration (with regards to control and management), which characterises the hyper-mobility of capital in the post-Bretton Woods era. Thus, these cities serve as nodes where de-territorialised flows of information and hyper-mobile financial capital literally 'hit the ground'.

However, this 'glocalisation' is far from a neutral process and intensifies gentrification of working class neighbourhoods and the mushrooming of vast swathes of deprivation amidst islands of opulence and plenty. Thus, global and globalising cities in the new international division of labour (NIDL) come to be characterised by what Friedmann and Wolff term a mutually-dependent and -defining dialectic of 'citadel' and the 'ghetto' (often inhabited by racialised, gendered bodies). The expansion of the central business district and rising real estate values is symbolised by a vertical 'landscape of power' which exists in a constant dialectical tension with the 'vernacular' of everyday life (Zukin, 1992).

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<sup>11</sup> See also Brenner (1998).

### *Class and Third World Urbanism*

In *Capital Vol. 3*, Marx also extended his ideas on the alienation resulting from capitalism to the development of a 'metabolic rift' between the labouring body, land and the environment (Foster, 1999). Such an estrangement of the body, and callous use of the environment solely according to its exchange value, also gave rise to the idea of an urban-rural rift whereby capitalism actively produces uneven development of the town *vis a vis* the country through the almost parasitic dependency of one on the other. In the *Manifesto*, Marx characterises the bourgeoisie as having 'subjected the country to the rule of the towns' (Marx and Engels, 1848: 17). This makes 'the country dependent on the towns' in much the same way as capitalism makes the 'barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones' (ibid.). Revolutionaries/theorists, especially in Third World contexts, such as Regis Debray, Mao and Castro have extended this idea of urban-rural rift to revolutionary praxis by, in many cases, espousing a noticeable anti-urban bias in their writings. For example, in *Revolution in the Revolution*, Debray (1967) quotes Castro as saying that 'the city is a cemetery of revolutionaries and resources' (p. 77-78).

The anti-colonial/anti-imperialist critique of urban parasitism was lent an added urgency in the (so-called) Third World due to the focus of then-existing colonialism on the countryside as sources for the extraction and appropriation of primary products (Davis, 2004b: 9). Conversely, the position of urban areas as repositories of colonial administrators, a comprador bourgeoisie and (relatively privileged) industrial proletariat is exactly what led Fanon to warn 'leading members of party to avoid the capital as if it had the plague... centralisation of all activity in the city ought to be avoided' (Fanon, 1961: 148)<sup>12</sup>. Bryan Roberts (1982) says that even while urban

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to imply that the revolution in colonised (and imperialised) countries could be achieved only in the countryside. For Fanon, the revolution would necessarily have to return and culminate in the urban areas but here, in

areas in colonised/post-colonial societies offer 'fertile means of organising', the invasion of foreign settlers and immigrant entrepreneurs lends the countryside an air of being 'the true repository of national values and national culture' (p. 370). Thus, according to Roberts, the relatively privileged position of urban-based white collar workers vis a vis the rural peasantry in colonial and post-colonial societies, might lead to a de-escalation in the importance of urban space as a site of revolutionary action in comparison to the countryside.

However, the urban question in Third World contexts, has become more pronounced with the rapid growth of urban populations in countries as diverse as Egypt, Pakistan and Mexico. This is especially important in view of the growth of cities without concurrent industrialisation but with the effects of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs): agricultural deregulation and depeasantisation (Goonewardena and Kipfer, 2006). In fact, while the colonial empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were predicated upon the enforced dependency and underdevelopment of the colonies through 'brutal engines for the extraction of rents, crops and minerals from tropical countrysides' (Davis, 2004b: 9), the character of post-1970s capitalist imperialism *vis a vis* the global South has taken on an increasingly urban form. Real estate speculation, SEZs and dispersion of manufacturing to the global South confer Third World urban areas with renewed importance in imperial circuits of capital accumulation and expansion. Moreover, the increasing corporatisation and depeasantisation of agriculture also manifests itself as a markedly urban phenomenon. Increasing rural-to-urban migration and lumpenisation mean that 'Mao's paradigmatic countryside no longer as much surrounds the city as implodes into it' (ibid.: 11). These new wretched of the earth, inhabiting a 'universe of urban slums and

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contradistinction to more orthodox Marxists, it would be led by the lumpen proletariat due to their linkages with the revolutionary peasantry of rural areas.

shantytowns' (ibid.), are at the forefront of, what Mike Davis has termed, 'the urbanisation of Empire'.

In fact this 'outcast proletariat', living in slums or peripheral shantytowns and predicted to reach close to three billion people by 2030 (Davis 2004b: 11), has often been characterised as the potential harbingers of substantive and radical transformations in state and polity. Thus, Asef Bayat (2013), in his study of ongoing uprisings in several Arab countries, characterises these 'social non-movements' of precarious inhabitants and workers as practising a 'silent, protracted but pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied, powerful, or the public, in order to survive and improve of their lives' (p. 46). While the 'collective consumption' of these communities is not officially sanctioned nor are they recognised or represented on official maps and statistics, they exist in a constant tension with state authorities through their creeping demands for full citizenship. This tension occasionally spills into direct confrontation with the state (as seen in the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement in Durban, South Africa) while at other times forcing movements to engage in tactical retreat in front of the coercive might of state and capital. It is this section of the urban working class and reserve army of labour, abandoned by the state and long ignored by traditional left politics as the reactionary lumpen, which dominates the contradictory urban landscape of the South and, for Bayat, will be at the center of any credible future challenge to the hegemonic machinations of neoliberal capitalism.

The location of transformative potential by Bayat in the aforementioned 'social non-movements' echoes, in large part, Partha Chatterjee's work (2001) on civil and political society in post-colonial democracies. Chatterjee describes a 'political society' which mediates on behalf of groups of people, such as associations of squatters and unauthorized users of utilities, to exert pressure on institutions of 'civil society' which are characterised by colonial roots, proscribed

laws and constitutionally-sanctioned relations between individual and state. This pressure from political society is exerted so as to procure collective rights from civil society through a language often couched in the (very modern) rhetoric of democratic rights. The domain of subalternity and informality inhabited by political society, which operates outside the formalised domain of (post)colonial constitutionalism, is seen by Chatterjee as an avenue for the subversion (and transformation) of bourgeois modernity. More pessimistically, Mike Davis too raises the question of whether this informal proletariat has the potential to 'possess that most potent of Marxist talismans: historical agency?' (Davis, 2004a: 28).

However, far from portraying slums and precarious/flexible labourers there-in as inhabiting a domain of extra-legal 'informality', authors such as Ajay Gandhi and Ananya Roy see such 'slums' as part of a practice and discourse of urban planning and governance predicated on spaces of 'informality' and deregulation. Thus, Gandhi (2012), in his study of squatter settlements in Old Delhi, characterises the precarious survival of these settlements and their inhabitants as based on an 'informal moral economy' whereby open-ended negotiations between community leaders and 'formal' institutional authorities function as 'a kind of gift economy' (p. 62). Such open-ended negotiations then characterise a mode of de-facto governance which exists both 'within and adjacent to formal institutions' (p. 63), thus blurring the often posed distinction between 'formal' and 'informal'. In a similar vein, Roy (2009), using the example of Calcutta, posits a distinction between *unregulated* systems/spaces and those that are *deregulated*, arguing that the latter 'involves purposive action and planning... [which] creates a logic of resource allocation, accumulation and authority' (p. 83). Seen thus, informality, resulting from post-1970s, SAP-induced economic deregulation and liberalisation, exists as 'a mode of discipline, power and regulation' which, far from being an "independent" domain of extra/il-legality, 'exists at the very

heart of the state and is an integral part of the territorial practices of state power' (p. 84). Even if one might disagree with Roy's characterisation of informal settlements simply as modes of disciplining and regulation, at the expense of the poor's own agency, the fundamental point to take away is that deregulation-induced informality and slums are in no way outside the domain of *class* power as embodied within and through the institutional apparatuses of the capitalist post-colonial state. Moreover, slum inhabitants' position in the socio-spatial division of labour and their entanglement in multi-scalar circuits of capital accumulation, necessitate the study of their (and other subaltern groups') political consciousness and praxis as mediated by and ensconced in spatially and temporally specific constellations of national and international forces.

While the political praxis engendered in residential areas of the urban poor certainly merits investigation, it cannot be divorced from an equally thorough and important investigation of the (for lack of a better word) 'traditional' arena of left/Marxist politics .i.e. the industrial and factory workers. Moreover, such an investigation of the arena of working spaces has to take into account shifts in the global political economy, characterised by liberalisation of markets and dispersion of manufacturing to the global South (Brown, 1982), which have given rise to new forms of dependency, immiseration and labour subsumption. Thus, Brown posits that, in the context of Third World countries, dependency is increasingly changing from a simple raw material-extracting phenomenon to a new international division of labour (NIDL), whereby foreign multinationals dominate production in the South, resulting in capital flow from the satellite to the metropole.

In addition, the informalisation and flexibilisation of labour is a trend increasingly seen as part of the neoliberal counter-revolution in both the global North and the South. Harvey (2005), talking in the context of advanced capitalist countries, describes changes in the form of labour



subsumption as producing 'individualised and relatively powerless worker[s]' (p. 169). These disposable workers, a disproportionate number of whom are women, then 'survive both socially and affectively in a world of flexible labour markets and short term contracts, chronic job insecurities, lost social protections, and often debilitating labour, amongst the wreckage of collective institutions that once gave them a modicum of dignity and support' (ibid, p. 170). In fact, the fragmentation of the working class brought about due to flexibilisation has been a cornerstone of the decline of labour movements in several places (for example, in South Korea, see Chun, 2009). In the case of the global South, the spatial re-location of manufacturing to (so-called) developing countries accompanying the NIDL, often takes advantage of and aggravates already existing patterns of labour informalisation and weak proletarian movements. This in turn results in (further) fracturing of the working class as production is increasingly carried out not in the 'formal' space of the factory floor but in workers' own homes. Consequently, as we will see in the case of Karachi, a focus on the *experience* of class - and attendant, the *process* of class formation - in *residential* areas, as opposed to a sole focus on the politics of the workplace, becomes increasingly important for any counter-hegemonic political praxis.

In fact, one might argue that it is specifically the failure at forming exactly *socio-spatial* alliances - i.e. those which hold and sustain themselves across the residential and working space divide - that have proved the bane of many a radical movement in urban areas of both the global South and the North. For example, commenting on the experience of class in urban US and attendant forms of politics, Katznelson (1982: 6) identifies the inability to grasp 'the radical separation in people's consciousness, speech and activity of the politics of work from the politics of community' as a major failure of left politics in the US. Bayat (2007) has identified six, overlapping, forms of political mobilisation in urban areas of various Middle Eastern countries.

These different forms of mobilisation range from spontaneous mass protests and traditional trade unionism to social Islamism and NGOs. However, a key point to note here is the failure of traditional avenues of left politics (such as trade and labour unions) to connect with social movements and mobilisation in working class residential areas. Similarly, in his discussion on urban governance and conflict in megacities of the global South, Beall (2007) critiques orthodox left praxis for ignoring issues of residential areas and popular local-level democracy as reflective of 'narrow and parochial interests resulting in the mischief of factions' (p. 112). Beall asserts that, in contrast to the traditional focus on formal trade unionism as the loci of transformative action, 'collective consumption action around housing or urban services are as likely to challenge the state' (ibid.).

In recent public engagements David Harvey has talked about the necessity of such socio-spatial alliances as the loci for an anti-capitalist politics though reclaiming the city not just in the global South but also in advanced capitalist societies. Harvey (November 2013) criticises traditional ways of thinking about class (and class politics) as solely confined to the factory floor, and draws attention towards other forms of class struggle especially those which occur over the 'right to the city'. These struggles over urban space outside the factory floor have become even more important as the traditional working class has fragmented under the assault by neoliberal capital and flexible accumulation. It is the failure to grasp - and act upon - this 'contradictory unity between what happens at the point of production and what happens in the living space' (ibid.) that Harvey asserts has been a major pitfall for left praxis in the contemporary era.

Such qualitatively new - or at least, different - forms of labour immiseration then have to be refracted through a study of class politics which sees class formation and consciousness as a *process*, an outcome of struggle and agency, rather than simply a fixed structural category in an

iron-clad societal division of labour. As E.P Thompson, in his magisterial study on the English working class, puts it:

'...class is not this or that part of the machine, but the way the machine works once it is set in motion – not this interest and that interest, but the friction of interests... *Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship with other classes;* and, ultimately, the definition can only be made in the medium of time – that is, action and reaction, change and conflict. When we speak of a class we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experiences, traditions and value-system, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways. *But class itself is not a thing, it is a happening'* (Thompson, 1968: 939, emphasis added).

Looking at class as a *relationship* alerts us to the active constitution of a class culture and consciousness among workers which is both collaborative (among themselves) and oppositional (with regards to capitalists). Class formation as *process* alerts us to the multiple ways through which the expression of class conflict can be refracted, especially in post-colonial societies. Thus, just as Marx and Engels alert us to class struggle 'carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight' (Marx and Engels, 1848: 14), Marxist urbanism has to carefully pry open the various seemingly ascriptive identities, such as caste, ethnicity and religion, through which 'hidden' class cleavages are articulated. Class, as Katznelson (1982: 207) reminds us, 'exists even where it is not signified; but how and why it is signified in particular ways in particular places and times is the study of class formation'.

In fact, the specific mechanism of accumulation in peripheral capitalist countries (such as Pakistan) can often lead to an entrenchment, as opposed to a breakdown, of such identities, which serve as the basis to build networks of residents for negotiation with state and capital (e.g. for public service delivery, securing of employment etc) (Chandravarkar, 1994). Therefore, a careful consideration of the politics of locality, caste, ethnicity and religious sectarian networks, and their imbrications with class and social relations of production and exchange, is crucial in gaining insights into the process of class formation and consciousness (or lack thereof) in cities such as Karachi. In short, it is important to study class as a *socio-spatial process* which encompasses multiple spaces and is often articulated after complex mediations - and due to particular patterns of capital accumulation and expansion in Third World areas - through (seemingly) ascriptive identities. Class then is *both* a structural category in a particular socio-spatial division of labour *and* a lived (and thus necessarily) subjective experience which involves negotiations and contestations over (and through) multiple spaces and identities.

As will be elaborated in the coming sections, one can see all the above enumerated theoretical propositions playing out, in a mutually constitutive manner, in the case of a working class politics in Karachi, Pakistan. Issues of informality as a means of class domination find themselves expressed in the 'over-developing' nature of the Pakistani state, itself ensconced in a complex, dialectical relationship with neoliberal capitalism and capitalist imperialism. The increasing informalisation of labour, spatial dispersion of production (even within cities) and lumpenisation combine with the Pakistani state's continuing entanglement with the American empire's incessant war machine to produce (literally) explosive results for any form of horizontal solidarity along class lines. The attempts at repackaging Karachi as a "world-class city" in accord with the imperatives of hyper-mobile (neoliberal) capital, from especially the Gulf countries,

actively and continually re-produce the dialectic of 'citadel' and 'ghetto' through major dispossession and land reclamation projects. Moreover, the disconnect in left praxis between residential and working spaces also emerges as a major issue which effects class consciousness and political praxis among the urban poor in Pakistan generally and Karachi specifically. This is then compounded by scalar shifts in capital accumulation in the post-Bretton Woods era ('glocalisation') which in the context of Karachi manifests itself as an intense localisation - and a consequent, paradoxical *de-politicisation* - of politics. Thus, in keeping with Antonio Gramsci's summons to 'spatial differentiation and temporal nuance' (Kipfer, 2012: 87), effects of structural and scalar shifts in the global political economy, uneven development, SAP-induced de-peasantisation and internal differentiation and re-structuring within the city, have to be considered while studying claims to urbanity and, concomitantly, potential projects of counter-hegemony. To put it succinctly then, an investigation of class politics in Karachi alerts us to the constitution of 'historical situations as a confluence of multiple, spatially mediated temporal rhythms' (Kipfer, 2012: 86).

## **Situating Karachi and Pakistan**

In the case of Pakistan, the question of class politics has rarely, if ever, been studied academically. A major reason for this has been the Pakistani state's intimate links to the Western capitalist imperial project almost from its inception. This has resulted in Pakistan being viewed, in most serious analyses, through a lens mired in Cold War era paradigms of strategic 'gains' and 'losses' against the (largely imagined) threat of Soviet-style socialism. In a related vein, other analyses of Pakistan have attempted to explain the state simply through an invocation of its association with the religion of Islam (in whose name Pakistan was supposedly created). In this narrative, once the 'original sin' thus explained, all of Pakistan's ills can be extrapolated through this link of the state with Islam.

Such a narrative has gained prominence after the First Afghan War in the 1980s when the Pakistani military (which was formally in power at the time) made itself, almost unconditionally, a part of the US-Saudi sponsored 'Jihad' against the 'infidel' forces of the Soviet Union. With U.S. occupation of Afghanistan after 9/11 and the simultaneous boost to the Islamist project within the region generally and in Pakistan specifically, the tendency to view Pakistan through the singular lens of Islam has often led to a complete flattening of the complexity which any country of almost 200 million people necessarily possesses. At most, popular analyses have treated the Pakistani polity as suffering incurably from the myopia of (so-called) traditional identities such as religion, caste and ethnicity, among others.

The imbrications of such seemingly ascriptive identities with social relations of production, exchange and distribution, combined with careful, historically and geographically grounded analyses of the effects of capitalist uneven development and imperialism have been given short

shrift. With such a flattening of time and space, it becomes hard to avoid the pitfalls of Orientalism and thus, to comprehend social change beyond the worn-out clichés of Islam and other 'primordial' identities. This chapter, therefore, aims to ground Pakistan and Karachi historically and geographically in the very midst of international circuits of capital accumulation, circulation and expansion. 'History', Marx had said, 'has long enough been merged in superstition, we now merge superstition into history' (Marx, 1844: 4).

### *Some Theoretical Perspectives on the Pakistani State and Polity*

The pioneering Marxist conception of the Pakistani state was put forward by Hamza Alavi in 1972 while advancing his general theory of the post-colonial state (Alavi, 1972). Emerging out of the famous Miliband-Poulantzas debate on the character of the capitalist state, Alavi adjudicated these as inadequate to the study of post-colonial states and social formations as they 'rule[d] out the capacity of contending *classes*, other than the "whole" bourgeoisie, to press their demands (with varying degrees of success) on the state' (Alavi, 1982b: 293, emphasis in original). Therefore, for Alavi, classical Marxist theories of the state do not address the 'problem of particular importance in peripheral capitalist societies where we may have more than one dominant class' (ibid)<sup>13</sup>. As the colonial state was not the organic product of an indigenously evolved capitalist class, the metropolitan bourgeoisie had to create a 'state apparatus through which it can exercise dominion over *all* the indigenous social classes in the colony' (Alavi, 1972: 61, emphasis in original). The "'superstructure" in the colony is "over-developed" in relation to the "structure" in the colony' (ibid.) and therefore, the post-colonial state is:

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<sup>13</sup> Poulantzas, at least, updated his theory of the state to contend with the role of competing or a hegemonic bloc of contending classes and/or class fractions in his later work. See, for example, Poulantzas (1980: 123-160).

*"relatively autonomous and it mediates between the competing interests of the three propertied classes, namely the metropolitan bourgeoisies, the indigenous bourgeoisie and the landed classes, while at the same time acting on behalf of them all to preserve the social order in which their interests are embedded, namely the institution of private property and the capitalist mode as the dominant mode of production"* (ibid, p. 62, emphasis added).

Thus, due to under-developed nature of the bourgeoisie and the extensive and pervading mechanisms of control developed during the era of formal colonialism, the 'over-developed' state (composed primarily of the civil-military bureaucratic oligarchy) is soon able to assert itself. As such, the civil-military complex of the over-developed state emerged as the dominant social group in South Asian countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. Moreover, in addition to its mediating role, one of the defining features of the over-developed post-colonial state is that it 'directly appropriates a very large part of the economic surplus and deploys it in bureaucratically directed economic activity in the name of promoting development' (ibid.). The themes, related to the entrenchment and perpetuation of an immensely powerful civil-military oligarchy, will become clearer as we go through Pakistan's history.

Alavi's analysis of the post-colonial state, however, can be said to be overly focussed on the competing but ultimately non-antagonistic relations between the three propertied classes in Pakistan. Thus, in his characterisation of the Pakistani state as 'over-developed', Alavi can be critiqued for not paying sufficient attention to the contestation, legitimation and reproduction of the power structure 'from below' i.e. through the practices and struggles of subaltern and dominated groups such as the peasantry and the working classes. To put it succinctly, Alavi's theory of the 'over-developed' state suffers from an undue emphasis on *horizontal* class struggle



(.i.e. among the dominant classes) at the expense of *vertical* class struggle (.i.e. between the dominant and subordinated classes).

In recent years though, there has been a concerted effort, in light of contemporary changes in the global political economy, to rethink Alavi's formulation as a stepping stone towards rebuilding a radical praxis. Perhaps the best effort among these is represented by Aasim Sajjad Akhtar who has taken forward Alavi's original formulation of the 'over-developed' state and studied newly emergent social classes and groups involved in legitimising and, in several cases, challenging the power of the state 'from below'. In the post-Bhutto era of economic liberalisation, Akhtar (2008) posits the newly emergent intermediate classes and religio-political movements/clerics as the latest members of a Gramscian 'historical bloc' (p. 3), which has co-opted the politics of resistance waged by popular classes (including, but not limited to, urban working class and rural peasantry). Advancing Alavi, Akhtar characterises the Pakistani state as an 'over-developing' entity which has managed to contain a counter-hegemonic challenge through the institutionalisation of a cynical politics of patronage and coercion ('the politics of common sense'). Contrasting the currently dominant 'politics of common sense' to the 'politics of resistance' which had started emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, Akhtar describes that:

"the politics of resistance is associated with ideologies of change.... More specifically, the politics of resistance is based on mobilization along class and ethno-national lines to challenge oligarchic rule and demand change in the composition and nature of the state. On the other hand the politics of common sense is based on the acceptance of oligarchic rule and an *attempt to secure political and economic resources through direct or indirect access to the state*. In short the politics of common sense means to acquiesce to the patronage-based rules of the game whereas the politics of resistance means a rejection of

these patronage-based rules and the privileging of more expansive, horizontal solidarities"

(p. 203, emphasis added).

The defining feature of the 'politics of common sense' then is the institution of dynamic vertical networks of patronage (often, but not exclusively, mediated through caste, clan and/or religious sectarian identities) which have replaced horizontal, class-based mobilisations that had started emerging in late 1960s/early 1970s. Thus, Akhtar posits the prevailing conjuncture in Pakistan as the consequence of a geographically and historically specific alignment of national and international forces, whereby the Pakistani state and the historic bloc have, in a dialectical manner, responded to and been aided by the structural shift in global political economy. As we will see in the following sections, Akhtar's formulation of the 'over-developing' state and the 'politics of common sense' is the crucial prism through which a politics of class (or lack thereof) in Karachi can be understood.

Another major recent theoretical contribution that builds upon (and critiques) Alavi's conception of the Pakistani post-colonial state has been made by Tariq Amin-Khan. Amin-Khan (2012) disputes two of Alavi's formulations regarding peripheral capitalist societies: 1) there is 'a separation of economic (class) power from political (state) power', and that 2) there is no extra-economic coercion involved in surplus extraction and thus, there is only 'economic "coercion" of dispossessed producer' (Alavi, 1982a: 179). Amin-Khan divides post-colonial states into two types: the *capitalist* post-colonial state and the *proto-capitalist* post-colonial state (Amin-Khan, 2012: 103). The two types are distinguished by the fact that:

'In capitalist post-colonial states such as India, the bourgeoisie was emerging as an ascendant class at the time of the decolonisation so it could use its strength to consolidate its grip on power - *the causal primacy being the economic* (i.e. the economic power of the

Indian capitalist) to further their interests through the political framework of the state. In contrast, proto-capitalist states such as Pakistan have shown that the capture of political (state) power plays a crucial role in enabling access to economic opportunities. In proto-capitalist states, the *causal primacy is the political*, in direct opposition to capitalist post-colonial states' (ibid, p. 200, emphasis added).

Moreover, the 'separation of the economic and the political has little meaning in the case of the proto-capitalist post-colonial state' (p. 103). A key insight of Amin-Khan is that the proto-capitalist Pakistani state is 'extremely dependent on imperial powers and as such is very weak vis-a-vis external political or economic pressure, whereas internally it remains a "strong state" that is able to crush popular protests and overcome resistance' (p. 199). However, as will be seen later, while Amin-Khan's characterisation of the non-existent separation of economic and political power in Pakistan can be said to be true to a limited extent, his characterisation of the state and dominant classes suffers from the same pitfall as Alavi. Thus, Amin-Khan's formulation has little to say about the effect of *vertical* class struggle and its imbrications in the very fabric of the state and the power structure. Therefore, both Alavi's and Amin-Khan's formulations are insufficient in explaining, beyond a simple and undifferentiated resort to (physical) coercion and 'crushing' of popular dissent, how the dominant classes' (and concomitantly, the state's) hegemony is reproduced or challenged through the actions or inactions of the subordinate classes<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Of course, this is not to discount or diminish the importance of areas where the state and dominant classes' power is based almost exclusively on violence and physical coercion (such as the Balochistan province, where a separatist insurgency has been underway for almost a decade). My contention is only that this is not a claim which can be generalised to all of Pakistan's subordinate classes without careful differentiation of how hegemony works through, among other things, variegated geographical, ethnic and gendered spaces. The role of coercion in subverting a politics of class in Karachi is extremely important and will be elaborated upon in this paper.

### *Historical Overview of Karachi and Pakistan*

In 1843, at the time of the British annexation of Sindh province, accounts of Karachi describe it as a small trading center with a fort (Feldman, 1960: xi). The British had already installed a military garrison in the small town in 1839, which was eventually used as a launching pad for their later annexation of Sindh. Charles Napier, the first British governor of Sindh before it was merged with the Bombay Presidency in 1947, made Karachi the capital of Sindh. After the 1857 War of Independence in India, which the British managed to quell, Karachi assumed increasing importance due to two reasons. Firstly, the British sought to increase agricultural productivity and gain more local allies in the Punjab through the nurturing of a new landed elite. This was prompted by a distrust of Bengali soldiers who had hitherto been the main recruits in the East India Company Army and had been at the forefront of the 1857 rebellion. As a result, the British instituted one of the most ambitious projects of canal colonisation ever conceived through an extensive irrigation network in the Western part of Punjab (which now comprises the Pakistani Punjab). The settling of agricultural and non-agricultural castes in these newly irrigated areas served not only to create new allies for the British among the landed classes but also provided an alternative avenue for the recruitment of soldiers into the British India Army<sup>15</sup>. The concomitant increase in agricultural productivity contributed to Karachi's status as a growing commercial hub. Secondly, the American Civil War in 1861 and the accompanying scarcity of American cotton, resulted in a rise in demand for Indian cotton in the world market. This, along with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, significantly increased the importance of Karachi as a port city (Gadgil, 1972: 195).

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<sup>15</sup> After the 1857 War, control of India was taken away from the East India Company and placed directly under the Crown.

In the ensuing decades, Karachi's development as a port city continued and it became a major center for commerce. Thus, while not being a manufacturing hub, Karachi's upper class consisted of state employees and merchant capitalists drawn mainly from the Gujarati<sup>16</sup> and Memon<sup>17</sup> communities. Skilled workers, such as those associated with auxiliary sectors (e.g. transport), were mostly drawn from the Maharashtran community (these were mostly Hindus). The unskilled workers were mostly drawn from among the Makrani<sup>18</sup> and Sindhi communities. In 1930, the Karachi's first labour union, the Karachi Port Workers' Union, was formed by unskilled workers employed in the docks (Shaheed, 2007: 30). Thus, from the very beginning there was a definite link between occupational hierarchy, class and ethnicity in the city. Moreover, as has been illustrated above, Karachi's role as a strategic outpost/conduit of imperial military campaigns was central to its development.

Created out of the dying embers of British colonialism in 1947, Pakistan was born amidst widespread bloodshed and communal violence (one of the many unfortunate legacies of all-too-familiar colonial policies of divide and rule). The founding political party of Pakistan, the All India Muslim League, had its basis mostly in the landed and upper middle classes of North India and thus did not have roots in what came to constitute the two wings of Pakistan: West Pakistan, composed of Muslim-majority areas in the North-West of British India, and East Pakistan, composed of Muslim-majority East Bengal and separated from West Pakistan by more than a 1000 miles. East Pakistan managed, through an extremely bloody civil war in 1971, to secure independence to form Bangladesh, while West Pakistan came to constitute what is today known as Pakistan and contains Karachi. At the time of its inception, West Pakistan was largely an

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<sup>16</sup> The Gujarati-speaking community from neighbouring Gujarat province, centered in and around Bombay.

<sup>17</sup> The Katchi-speaking community centered around Kutch area of neighbouring Gujarat province.

<sup>18</sup> Descendants of African slaves brought to the area by Arab traders but naturalised as residents of Sindh and neighbouring Balochistan province.

industrial backwater of the British Raj in India, with the largest province, Punjab, serving as the 'bread-basket' of India through extensive cultivation of wheat and rice, bolstered by one of the most extensive systems of canal irrigation in the world. The extractive, primary products-based political economy engendered in the area was ensured by the entrenchment and succour provided by the British Raj to local landed elites, through legislative measures such as the Land Alienation Act 1791 and through investing among the landed elite of coercive power backed by the colonial state. North and central Punjab, along with the North West Frontier Province (recently renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, KP), also served as one of the main recruiting grounds of the British Indian army, a pattern which continues even today (Hashmi, 1983: 152).

Due to the lack of indigenous roots among the Muslim League elite (most of whom originated in what was now India), the ruling party increasingly sought to entrench its power by relying on the colonial civil-military bureaucracy and preventing even formal democratic mechanisms such as periodic elections and the universal franchise. In addition to the internal machinations of the ruling elite, the historical conjuncture was such that it pushed Pakistani state into the welcoming lap of US imperialism. Embroiled from its inception in a war with India over the disputed territory of Kashmir, the Pakistani ruling elite sought American military and financial support in a bid to counter India's increasing proximity to the Soviet Union (Jalal, 1990). Thus, on 25 May 1948, less than a year after independence, Pakistan signed its first international credit agreement with the United States. The loan of \$10 million came out of the US War Assets Administration and was specifically earmarked for Pakistan to buy military equipment from surplus American supplies (Rashid and Gardezi, 1983: 7). As the civil-military bureaucracy became more powerful, the Pakistani military started its own independent negotiations with the United States, culminating in a Mutual Defense Assistance agreement in

May 1954, followed by Pakistan joining US-backed regional alliances such as SEATO in September 1954 (South East Asia Treaty Organisation) and CENTO in 1955 (Central Treaty Organisation). These agreements marked the beginning of the relationship of dependency of Pakistan's ruling elite, and especially its military, on American largesse. This dependency continues even to this day.

Meanwhile, Karachi too had seen massive social and economic upheaval. Partition resulted in a migration of populations across the newly instituted India-Pakistan border 'on a scale unprecedented in history' (Arnold, 1955: 121). Most of the incoming Muslim migrants from North and Western India headed to already established urban centers in West Pakistan such as Hyderabad, Lyallpur<sup>19</sup> and Karachi. The extent of migration just to Karachi can be gauged from the fact that between 1941 and 1951, the population of Karachi increased from 387,000 to 1,068,000 (an increase of close to three times the original population) (ibid.). Moreover, most of the Hindu population, which comprised the skilled workers and middle classes of the city, left for India. Hindus, who had constituted 47.6 percent of the city's population in 1941, and other non-Muslims, who had constituted 10.4 percent of the total population, were reduced to 4 percent and 0.5 percent of the population respectively (Shaheed, 2007: 32). The place of the Hindu and non-Muslim middle classes was taken up by the incoming Urdu-speaking population from India (called *Mohajirs*) who were from mostly educated and urban backgrounds. Of the increase in population between 1941 and 1951, close to 80 percent was accounted for by Mohajirs (Arnold, 1955: 126). This sudden influx of population was the first of four major population upheavals that Karachi has experienced since Independence. As will be illustrated in

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<sup>19</sup> Later renamed Faisalabad.

the following paragraphs and sections, all these major influxes had significant implications on the city's class and ethnic demography, and, concomitantly, on its politics.

All through the 1950s, the unequal state structure and ruling elite, dominated as it was by landed-class Punjabis and urban-based Mohajirs, faced serious challenges mainly in the form of demands for provincial autonomy, recognition of other ethno-linguistic groups (such as Bengalis and Baloch) and elections based on universal suffrage. For example, as late as 1956, 93 percent of the top positions in the federal government and state bureaucracy were held by West Pakistanis, mostly Punjabis and Urdu-speaking migrants. Of these, Urdu-speaking migrants alone accounted for 21 percent of positions even while only being three percent of the total population (Waseem, 2002: 5). Egged on by the United States, the state banned the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) in 1954 after allegedly being involved in a plot to overtake the country through a Nasser-style military coup<sup>20</sup>. Two years later, on the back of a student uprising in Karachi (which was the federal capital at the time), the Democratic Students' Federation (DSF) was banned on the pretext of being the student wing of the banned CPP. These measures forced several leading lights of the left movement in Pakistan such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz<sup>21</sup> and Sajjad Zaheer<sup>22</sup> to go underground. Similar repression<sup>22</sup> was brought about by outlawing and, in many cases, violently repressing demands for provincial autonomy and recognition by other major language groups (such as Bengali). However, while socialists and communists were driven underground or forced to work through entry-ism in other parties, left-leaning intellectuals remained prominent in the cultural realm and exercised major influence in public discourse through organisations such as the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA).

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<sup>20</sup> This charge remains unsubstantiated to this day.

<sup>21</sup> Future recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize and one of the greatest Urdu poets of the twentieth century.

<sup>22</sup> A close friend of acclaimed Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand, with whom Zaheer founded the All India Progressive Writers' Association.



In October 1958, as demands for provincial autonomy increased and the first democratic elections were about to be held, the military staged a *coup d'état* and General Ayub Khan became Chief Martial Law Administrator while suspending the constitution. The Ayub era heralded a period of agricultural modernisation and state-subsidised industrialisation. Pakistan became a laboratory for the implementation of the 'modernisation' paradigm as advocated by theorists such as Walt Rostow and Samuel Huntington (for example, see Rostow, 1960) and 'development experts' were imported from Harvard University to formulate and implement the two Five Year Plans instituted during the Ayub regime. Gustav Papanek, head of the Harvard Advisory Group to Pakistan, affectionately called the state-sponsored bourgeoisie the 'robber barons' who, even in the face of rising socio-economic inequality, were pioneers of economic growth which would eventually trickle-down to subordinate classes (Ali, 1983: 69). The highly capital-intensive nature of agricultural reform combined with the lack of substantive land reforms resulted in massive rural-to-urban migration. The focus on state-subsidised, private capital-led industrialisation, combined with the suppression of independent, left-leaning trade unions, led to a downward pressure on wages which saw the share of wages in the manufacturing sector alone fall from 45% in 1954 to 25% in 1967 (Shaheed, 1983: 275). Moreover, due to the unrepresentative nature of the state elite, and in continuity with colonial practices, the capitalist elite, newly nurtured by state and imperialism, originated from certain ethnicities and regions of Pakistan (specifically, from North-Central Punjab and certain Urdu-speaking Mohajir groups). East Pakistan, a Bengali province with the majority of Pakistan's population, was forcibly kept in an economically servile position with the status of a backwater largely confined to exporting jute.

The state-subsidised growth of an indigenous capitalist class was centered in the city of Karachi<sup>23</sup>. Enormous state subsidies were provided to indigenous merchant capital (mainly owned by Gujaratis and Memons, along with the Chinioti community from Punjab) as incentives to convert to industrial capital. The extent of geographically uneven development can be gauged from the fact that of the \$1.9 billion invested in industrialisation in 1958, more than \$1 billion was invested in Karachi alone (Baig, 2008: 74). The Korean War (1950-1955) increased demand for Pakistan's raw materials and significantly contributed to the industrial and commercial boom in Karachi. Between 1958 and 1963 alone, industrial production in Pakistan grew by 72 percent (as compared to 55 percent in the rest of Asia) (Noman, 1990: 37). The Green Revolution in rural Pakistan, and especially in the Punjab and NWFP, contributed to the second major wave of post-Independence migration into Karachi. This provided cheap labour for Karachi's growing industry and there was a further demographic shift in the labour force as unskilled and manual labour positions were now increasingly taken over by Pukhtuns from north-western Pakistan.

The class, ethnic and geographical inequalities that resulted from uneven capitalist development, surplus extraction and resource distribution, combined to give rise to popular unrest against the military dictatorship in 1968, just as the regime was getting ready to celebrate a 'Decade of Progress'. The extent of inequality and concentration of wealth can be gauged by the fact that by the end of Ayub's 'Decade of Progress' a mere 22 families (almost all of them based in particular areas of West Pakistan) controlled 66% percent of the industrial assets, 80% of banking and 70% of the insurance sector (Mahbub ul Haq in Gardezi, 1991a: 31). As a consequence, the late 1960s were marked by a massive anti-dictatorship movement led by

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<sup>23</sup> Karachi remained Pakistan's capital until the late 1960s when, under General Ayub Khan, the federal capital was shifted to the newly-created city of Islamabad, next to the major garrison city of Rawalpindi. Karachi, though, would remain the provincial capital. Islamabad's close proximity to the military garrison in Rawalpindi has contributed to the operational ease with which subsequent military coups have been mounted in Pakistan.

students, urban working class activists and trade unionists in both wings of the country. The movement resulted in Ayub, who had by now crowned himself President and Field Marshall, stepping down in favour of his own army chief, General Yahya Khan, and Pakistan's first general election based on the universal adult franchise in 1970. The anti-Ayub Movement remains a high point in the history of Pakistan's Left: independent labour and student unions sprung up rapidly during the period (Akhtar, 2008: 197) and, spurred on by other victorious anti-imperialist revolutions in the Third World, articulated the vision of a non-aligned, progressive polity based on democratic norms, substantive redistribution of wealth and decentralisation of power to the provinces.

The anti-dictatorship movement saw Karachi, along with Lahore (capital of Punjab province, and Pakistan's second biggest city), emerge as the center of a vibrant student and labour movement. In a heavily rigged Presidential election in 1965, Karachi was one of only two major cities where Ayub lost to the opposition candidate Fatima Jinnah (sister of Pakistan's founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah) (Paracha, May 4, 2014). The SITE and Landhi/Korangi Industrial area, along with surrounding workers' colonies and living quarters, became major hubs of radical activism. Left-wing activists of the Mazdoor Kissan Party (MKP)<sup>24</sup> and National Awami Party (NAP)<sup>25</sup> along with left-leaning groups working within the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)<sup>26</sup> were active in these areas (Ali, 2005). Moreover, students groups such as the National

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<sup>24</sup> Translation: Peasants and Workers Party. A pro-Beijing, Maoist party involved in direct peasant action in northern parts of the country.

<sup>25</sup> Translation: National People's Party. A pro-Moscow, left-wing party which included left-liberals and ethno-nationalist elements. When the National Awami Party, a front for the CPP after its 1954 ban, split along pro-Beijing and pro-Soviet lines in the 1960s, the pro-Beijing group came to be concentrated in East Pakistan.

<sup>26</sup> When the National Awami Party, a front for the CPP after its 1954 ban, split along pro-Beijing and pro-Soviet lines in the 1960s, the pro-Beijing group in West Pakistan came to be concentrated in the PPP.

Students' Federation (NSF)<sup>27</sup> formed dynamic solidarity groups with the workers<sup>28</sup>. The period between 1969 and 1972 saw such an upsurge in labour activism, strikes and lock-outs that close to 45,000 workers were laid off under the martial law regime of General Yahya Khan in Karachi alone (Shaheed, 1983: 280). A major victory was won by the labour movement during this period in the form of the Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO) of 1969. The IRO of 1969, which (with minor modifications) remains the basic framework of labour law to this day, recognised for the first time labour's role as a legally-recognised bargaining party in negotiations with capitalists. However, the over-bearing role of the 'over-developed' state in the IRO and the concomitant formalisation and professionalisation of labour bargaining was to become a double-edged sword for the labour movement, as we will see in the next chapter. Thus, Karachi became one of the hubs of what Akhtar would later term the era of 'politics of resistance' in Pakistan (Akhtar, 2008: 153).

However, the results of the 1970 elections, according to which the Awami League<sup>29</sup> from East Pakistan had won the majority of seats, were not accepted by the military-dominated West Pakistani establishment. The ensuing military operation in East Pakistan led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Bengalis at the hands of the Pakistan army. It resulted in the separation of East Pakistan and the formation of the independent republic of Bangladesh. The 1971 civil war, which laid bare the military's claims to being 'guardian of the nation', also saw the second war between Pakistan and India within the span of seven years<sup>30</sup>. The 1971 war also marked the beginning of a concerted policy by the Pakistani military of using fundamentalist Islamist forces,

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<sup>27</sup> The NSF, formed by the state as an alternative to the communist-leaning DSF, was infiltrated by activists of the DSF after the DSF was banned. As a result, the NSF slowly became radicalised and was in the forefront of the left movement from the mid-1960s onwards.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Gul Rehman, National Trade Union Federation.

<sup>29</sup> Translation: People's League.

<sup>30</sup> Both countries had earlier fought a war in 1965.

in this case militant wings of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)<sup>31</sup>, to outsource violence. The humiliation of defeat forced General Yahya to step down and hand over power to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. A populist leader in the mold of Sukarno and Nasser, Bhutto headed a civilian government dominated by the nominally left-leaning, social democratic Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The Bhutto-led PPP delivered Pakistan its first democratic constitution in 1973 which, at least on paper, guaranteed universal education, healthcare and safeguards for labour along with provincial autonomy. However, in practice, the power of the civil-military bureaucracy remained undiminished and Bhutto's reliance on authoritarian measures, especially on issues of autonomy for smaller provinces like Balochistan, saw him increasingly rely on the very same forces against which popular unrest had agitated in the late 1960s. The PPP government instituted a half-hearted land reform and nationalisation campaign. The latter selectively expropriated industries but failed to institute a widespread program of public sector-led industrialisation (Alavi, 1983: 53). As a result, there was an increase (or at least perceived increase) in corruption and rent-seeking by bureaucrats now directly involved in running state-owned corporations. While the nationalisation policy made the nascent industrial bourgeoisie regard Bhutto with outright distaste, Bhutto also turned the elite Civil Service officers, a major plank of the dominant civil-military oligarchy, against the PPP government by instituting civil service reforms (Ahmad, 1983: 102). These reforms democratised the hitherto cloistered civil service through the induction of more geographically varied middle classes. Yet they set the entrenched bureaucratic elite, trained and schooled in the 'high' tradition of the British Raj, firmly against Bhutto and the PPP government.

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<sup>31</sup> Pakistani counterpart of the *Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen* (Muslim Brotherhood).

The international conjuncture also proved unfavourable to Bhutto. The 1970s worldwide economic downturn resulted in a decreased demand for Pakistan's major products: cotton and textile. Moreover, the OPEC oil crisis of 1973 saw the price of energy inputs skyrocket and thus curtailed investment in capital-intensive manufacture. The resultant construction boom in the Middle East was filled partly by migrant labourers from Karachi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and northern and central Punjab. The provision of cheap Pakistani labour to the rising Gulf economies also helped Bhutto in putting in motion a plan for a 'Third bloc' of Islamic countries as an alternative regional heavyweight to the US-led capitalist bloc and the Soviet bloc (which included India). Bhutto conceded ground to the religio-political right wing and initiated the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) which brought him close to the oil dictatorships of the Gulf states. The resultant inflow of remittances from migrants and the greater proximity with Saudi Arabia in particular resulted in a steady growth in mainstream discourse of an orthodox, more puritanical strain of Islam called Wahhabism or Salafism. For instance, in ten years between 1977 and 1987 more than US\$20 billion was remitted through official channels alone (Zaidi, 2005: 503). The Saudi funded promotion of Wahhabism was meant to counter Iranian influence in the region after the 1979 revolution there had, after overthrowing the US-backed Shah, brought a militantly Shia regime to power. Bhutto's plans to build an atomic bomb, as a counter-weight to India's recent entry into the nuclear club, were not received well by the United States<sup>32</sup>.

However, what ultimately damaged Bhutto and the PPP was its suppression of the very peasantry, student and labour movement which had formed the backbone of their rise in the late 1960s. Once in power, in a bid to get industrial units back to work in the face of heightened

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<sup>32</sup> US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, is said to have warned Bhutto to stop plans for nuclear development otherwise a 'horrible example' would be made of him (Ali, 2008: 110).

labour activism, Bhutto resorted to authoritarian methods. Within 40 days of coming to power, the PPP government started arresting workers (Shaheed, 1983: 282). In a public address Bhutto ominously warned that if the labour movement did not back down, 'the strength of the street would be met by the strength of the State' (Ali, 2005: 83). In fact, the start of this campaign of suppression of the labour movement has been traced to a single incident in the SITE industrial area of Karachi where the *gherao*<sup>33</sup> of a textile mill on 7 June 1972 was fired upon and resulted in the death of at least three workers. The next day, the police fired on the funeral procession and killed at least ten people, including an infant. In response, thousands of industrial units in Landhi and SITE area went on strike and ultimately the army, discredited and humiliated less than two years ago, had to be brought out to force workers back to work. Concomitantly with the suppression of the labor movement, Bhutto not only started purging his party's internal (mostly Maoist) left-wing but also ordered military operations against the ethno-nationalist movement in Balochistan province (ibid., p. 95). The subsequent purging of progressives saw Bhutto increasingly rely on the religio-political Right<sup>34</sup> and the civil-military apparatus. The military was back on center stage. The politics of resistance was floundering; the over-developed state was striking back.

Following a controversy over election rigging, the military, under General Zia-ul-Haq, stepped in again with support from the religious Right, landed classes and the indigenous bourgeoisie who had obviously felt threatened by Bhutto's (even just nominal) land reforms and nationalisation policy. Considering the continuing, close association of the US with Pakistan's military, it has often been speculated that the *coup d'état* and Bhutto's subsequent hanging by the

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<sup>33</sup> Literally meaning 'encirclement', entailing picket lining of factories and management

<sup>34</sup> In addition to the economic and geopolitical interests described, this was also part of the reason Bhutto increasingly sought greater support from the Gulf oil dictatorships, especially the Wahhabi monarchy of Saudi Arabia.

military regime in 1979 (on trumped up charges of the murder of a political opponent) had the silent blessing of the Pakistani state's imperial guarantors<sup>35</sup>. The remittance inflow (from the Gulf) accompanied by the reprivatisation of recently nationalised state assets and the increasing economic liberalisation by General Zia ul Haq also helped create an upwardly mobile middle class and a boom in small towns. In this emerging middle class, increasingly uprooted from its rural origins and other ties such as caste and clan, the orthodox version of Islam, which looked down upon the syncretic and heterodox religious practices of popular classes, found willing adherents (Gardezi, 1991b). Moreover, such a cultural invasion of puritanical Wahhabism was aided and perpetuated by the praetorian regime's wholesale entry into the US-Saudi-led 'jihad' against Soviet troops in next door Afghanistan in 1979. As part of this imperial war, the Zia regime, backed and supported by right-wing Islamist forces such as the JI, received almost \$3.2 billion in aid from the Reagan administration, in addition to White House and 10 Downing Street's moral and diplomatic support for a brutal and fascistic dictatorship (Haqqani, 2005: 187).

The entry into the anti-Soviet jihad had a brutalising effect on Pakistani society at large and on the Left project specifically. The Zia regime, with the help of right-wing Islamist parties such as the aforementioned JI, launched a program of 'Islamisation' of society which mobilised Islam as the lynchpin of a hegemonic, mobilising ideology in defense of the military specifically and the ruling classes generally. A totalitarian nationalism based on an 'overwhelmingly exclusive polity and symbolic apparatus' (Bannerji, 2011: 103) was instituted in order to legitimise the regime and its machinations. The Zia regime, much like the previous US-backed dictator General Ayub Khan, also instituted a facile program of local 'democracy' and decentralisation which,

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<sup>35</sup> The drama around the military coup and Bhutto's sham trial is captured most memorably in Tariq Ali's novel-play *The Leopard and the Fox* (London: Seagull Books, 2006). The play, commissioned by the BBC in 1982, was not aired at the time due to Thatcher's support to General Zia as an ally in the 1980s anti-Soviet 'Jihad'.



while concentrating key powers in the center, led to the creation of a political culture which prevents substantive politics to this day. This was a crucial development which will be analysed in more detail in the chapter on residential area politics. The patronage of right-wing Islamist groups extended to student politics. Progressive student unions were brutally suppressed, campus politics was banned except for reactionary groups (like the *Islami Jamiat Talba*, IJT)<sup>36</sup>, who were actively supported in a bid to defang the pro-democratic and left student cadre.

The era also saw an unbridled growth in the power of the military and its intelligence agencies such as the much-feared Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI). The sheer amount of money coming in aid from the US and Saudi Arabia combined with the easy money to be made through gun and drug smuggling across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border made millionaires out of many a general<sup>37</sup>. Zia introduced a 'lateral-entry' policy in the bureaucracy through which military officers could gain entry into the civil bureaucracy without going through any of the formal exams that aspiring civilian bureaucrats had to go through (Ahmad, 1983: 102). Military expenditures, already on the rise during the Bhutto era, sky-rocketed to 9% of the GNP under Zia-ul-Haq (Noman, 1990: 180)<sup>38</sup>. The era also saw an unprecedented penetration of the Pakistani military into the economic life of the country. The strategy of allotting state land to military officers was a practice instituted by the British as a reward for the native officers' loyalty. It gained such pace that by the end of the Zia regime, the Pakistani military was the biggest institutional landowner in the country, along with having stakes in almost every sector of the economy imaginable. These include (among others) banking, insurance, private security,

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<sup>36</sup> IJT is the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).

<sup>37</sup> Captured perhaps most poignantly in Mohammed Hanif's highly acclaimed novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Note that this figure does not include the pension fund and other (substantial) perks for retired military officers. These are accounted under the head of pensions generally. This also does not include the aid received from USA and Saudi Arabia.

fertiliser manufacturing, urea manufacturing, cereal manufacturing, corporate farming, urban real estate, construction and transport. The military's economic clout (which, in many ways, underpins its political power), especially its interests in real estate, play a crucial role in gentrification in Karachi. Ayesha Siddiqa has provocatively dubbed this veritable economic empire "Military Incorporated" (2007). The 'over-developed' state was fast morphing into a praetorian state (Gardezi and Rashid, 1983).

As the only sea port, Karachi's role as a central conduit in the circuit of guns and drugs was cemented, a role which continues to have devastating effects for politics in the city today. Heroin addiction, a by-product of the vast amounts of poppy (grown in Afghanistan) passing through the port, went from being virtually unknown before 1979 to over 600,000 addicts within ten years of the start of the 'jihad', while Karachi became the world center of the heroin trade (Levi and Dwyne, 2005: 38). The war in Afghanistan also resulted in large-scale displacement with almost a million refugees coming to Karachi alone (Yusuf, 2012: 15). This was the third major wave of post-Partition migration into Karachi and one almost exclusively along ethnic (Pashtun) lines. In contrast to the rising military budget, the annual budget for development (including public health and education) rose at only 3% per annum (Baig, 2008: 86). Karachi was worst affected as the expenditure on the city's civic amenities increased at a miserly 1.2% per year during these years (ibid.).

The deterioration in civic amenities, the rapid change in the city's ethnic demography and the suppression of progressive political groups, contributed to the formation of the Mohajir Qaumi Mahaz (MQM)<sup>39</sup> in 1984. An exclusivist, ethnic Mohajir party, the MQM formed to give

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<sup>39</sup> Translation: Mohajir National Movement. In 1997, MQM changed its name to Muttahida Qaumi Movement (United National Movement) in a bid to broaden its appeal and de-emphasise its Mohajir ethnic roots. As will be seen

voice to promote the Mohajir's community for the purpose of accessing state resources, jobs and university quotas etc. As a result of the general weaponisation of political culture in the city, the JI and MQM soon took up arms and were followed in the arms race and turf war by similarly exclusivist parties and alliances such as the Pakhtun-Punjabi Ittehad and the Sindhi-Punjabi Ittehad (Baig, 2008: 108). These parties, and especially the MQM, emulated the example of other fascist parties around the world by forming quasi-independent militias, giving expression to the frustration of youth and establishing highly hierarchical and state-like organisations down to the neighbourhood level focussed on local dispute resolution and policing. In fact, progressive activists involved in politics at the time maintain that the military and its intelligence agencies were, at least initially, instrumental in promoting the MQM and its student wing All Pakistan Mohajir Students' Association (APMSO) as a 'secular' alternative to the state-patronised JI. This was again part of a concerted campaign to undercut support of class-based and progressive student groups and political parties. Ethnic conflict in the city started in earnest, with frequent mob riots and killings. Between April 1985 and May 1988 alone, there were over 2500 riots in the city leading to the death of 358 civilians with more than 1350 injured (ibid, p. 94). In Karachi, the politics of resistance was giving way to the politics of exclusion.

The unexpected death of General Zia ul Haq in a plane crash August 1988 was followed by a return of formal democracy. However, just a day before the national elections in November 1988, the caretaker government (mostly dominated by interests representing the civil-military oligarchy) signed Pakistan's first Structural Adjustment Facility with the International Monetary

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in the next sections, this move has been largely unsuccessful. For a detailed account of the evolution of the MQM see (Baig, 2008).

Fund (IMF): a loan of US \$516 million (Hussain, 2014, April)<sup>40</sup>. This heralded an era of accelerated economic liberalisation and divestment of state-owned enterprises which crucially affected politics not just in Karachi but in all of Pakistan. Throughout the late 80s and 90s, the civilian governments, while ceding ground to the still powerful military establishment, proved themselves to be more interested in rent-seeking. The military establishment's policy of using militant Islamists nurtured during the US-sponsored Soviet Jihad, continued unabated. With the state receding from welfare functions, many of these organisations also moved in to (nominally) fill the void in the domain of civil society. Moreover, the fall of the Soviet Union, saw a whole generation of formerly left activists become part of the NGO boom. By the start of the 2000s, the number of NGOs in Pakistan was 12,000 (Shah, April 2014). Under pressure from the state and geopolitical exigencies, the left withered and is yet to regain the prominence it had acquired during the 1960s, 70s and 80s as a pro-democracy, progressive counterpoint to mainstream parties dominated by the bourgeoisie and landowning interests.

The continuing power of the military and intelligence agencies resulted in a series of weak civilian and (formally) democratic governments in the 1990s. The fact that the ruling parties had little to no representation from the working class or peasantry and were dominated by the rent-seeking bourgeoisie and landed interests, proved to be their ultimate downfall as the entrenched security establishment easily played off their weaknesses resulting in the formation and dismissal of four governments in a span of ten years (Bhutto, January 2001). With tensions between the civilian and military establishments rising after the unsuccessful Kargil war with India in summer 1999, the military under General Pervez Musharraf deposed the sitting government and

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<sup>40</sup> In a recent conference paper presented at Sarah Lawrence College, Khurram Hussain narrated the story of how the amount of this first IMF Facility mirrored almost exactly the amount of debt which the Pakistani military had acquired through its 'hidden' expenses on military equipment.

took power again on the 12th of October 1999. General Musharraf's twelve-year rule, from 1999 to 2008, heralded the beginning of the neoliberal counter-revolution in Pakistan in earnest. The post-9/11 conjuncture saw the General become a favourite of the George Bush regime, an indispensable ally in the so-called War on Terror. In the seven post-9/11 years during which General Musharraf was in power, American military aid alone amounted to \$10 billion ("Musharraf US Aid", 14 September 2009). The Musharraf regime also signed a series of deals with the IMF which were to have a decisive impact on class politics in Karachi. It is against this backdrop that I will be looking at the current conjuncture of class politics in the city.

## **Politics in the Workplace: W(h)ither the Working Class?**

### *Background to the Labour Movement in Pakistan*

The tradition of labour activism in (what is now) Pakistan dates back to the 1920s. During this decade, with the maturing of the self-rule and anti-colonial movement against the British, a proliferation of trade unions took place with the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and the India Federation of Labour (IFL) taking on decisively militant roles under the leadership of communists such as M.N. Roy<sup>41</sup> (Shaheed, 1983: 270-71). In Karachi too, the first official labour union, the Karachi Port Workers' Union, was formed during this time in 1930 (Shaheed, 2007: 30). The colonial government sought to control the trade and labour union movement through a series of laws from the 1920s onwards aiming to institutionalise a tripartite mechanism of labour dispute resolution which ensured government presence and regulation of labour relations at each state of industrial conflict (Shaheed, 1983: 271). Labour laws, such as the Trade Unions Act of 1926, allowed the formation of rival labour unions within an establishment and proved a useful tool in the hands of the state labour bureaucracy to divide the labour movement on the factory floor (ibid.). Moreover, rival trade union federations sympathetic to the state and imperialism were also fostered as typified by the post-Partition formation of the All Pakistan Confederation of Labour (APCOL) in 1950 by Dr. A. M. Malik<sup>42</sup> (ibid.: p. 272-73).

As the area constituting Pakistan had generally been an industrial backwater at the time of independence, the largest and most militant trade unions were found in the infrastructure-related sectors such as ports and railways. The militancy of the Pakistan Trade Union Federation (PTUF), the trade union arm of the CPP, was based in large part on the West Pakistan Railway

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<sup>41</sup> Roy was one of the founders of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1920 and an Indian delegate to the Third International.

<sup>42</sup> At the time, Malik was Labour Minister in the Central Government. He would later serve as the Governor of East Pakistan during the fateful days of the 1971 war and independence of Bangladesh.

workers and, along with the CPP, it was banned by the state in 1954 (ibid.: p. 273). The state-sponsored industrialisation during the 1950s and 1960s also led to a proliferation in trade union activity culminating, as described in the last chapter, in the massive upheaval of labourers, peasants and students in the late 1960s which led to the downfall of General Ayub Khan's regime. Factory-floor activism in Pakistan peaked during the mid-1970s. In 1973 alone, for example, almost 1.2 million industrial disputes were recorded by the Ministry of Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis (Candland, 2007: 43). The upsurge in labour militancy resulted in the military government of General Yahya Khan passing the Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO) 1969 which remains, with minor amendments, the basic framework of labour laws in Pakistan today. The IRO 1969 lifted many of the curbs on trade union activity imposed by the previous military regime. It also institutionalised the tri-partite mechanism of labour dispute resolution with workers in each establishment allowed to elect a Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) to represent them on a committee comprising government/state officials and employers/capitalists (Ahmed, 2009: 69). Talking in the context of advanced industrialist countries after World War I, Robert Cox has described tripartism as an extension of ruling class hegemony with the state taking a hand 'in shaping these [employer-worker] settlements and bringing about more cooperative labour-management relations' (Cox, 1987: 74). In Pakistan, the IRO 1969 institutionalised the role of the state at each level of industrial disputes with strikes to be used as a last resort in any on-going negotiations with state and applications/notifications of strikes to be filed with labour department well in advance of the action<sup>43</sup>. The curbs placed by

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<sup>43</sup> The negative role of such deep-level state penetration into the labour movement will be discussed in one of the coming sections.

IRO 1969 on unionisation in 'essential sectors' (such as state airlines, agricultural workers) is, by and large, in place even today<sup>44</sup>.

Labour unions in Pakistan are organized mostly at the level of each establishment with unions being a legal requirement in any establishment of ten or more workers (LO/FTF Council, 2013: 7). Workers in some large sectors, such as railways and mining, also have sectoral unions. These are affiliated with one among a variety of trade union federations, with there being a total of 25 trade union federations in the whole of Pakistan (ibid.: 3). The influence of the state and political parties in these trade union federations is substantial, and accounts in part for the large number of trade union federations (Ahmed, 2009: 71). For example, one of the bigger trade union federations National Labour Federation (NLF), with more than a hundred affiliated trade unions, is closely linked to the Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) (LO/FTF Council: 3). A few of these trade union federations are formally independent and retain a base of left/Marxist activists. In the current era unionisation efforts by independent trade unionists face multiple difficulties (which will be elaborated upon in the next sections of this chapter) and not more than three percent of the active labour force of 63 million in Pakistan is unionised (LO/FTF Council, 2013: 3).

Some unions in the state sector, such as those in PTCL (Pakistan Telecommunications Limited) and KESC (Karachi Electric Supply Corporation), still retain a mass base with membership running into tens of thousands and have put up heroic resistances in the face of privatisation and downsizing (Ahmed, 2009: 72). However, the combined might of state and capital along with penetration of patronage politics (through the state, political parties and

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<sup>44</sup> Labour legislation was devolved to the provinces in a major constitutional amendment in 2010 aimed at devolution of power. Accordingly, the Sindh provincial government has recently passed a law legitimising unionisation of agricultural workers and the first trade union of *Haris* (peasants) was formed just recently in affiliation with the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF).



intermediate classes) has meant that labour has largely ended up on the losing side in these battles. On the other hand, employers and capitalists are extremely well organised and have close links to the state bureaucracy and political parties. For example, the industrialists in the SITE area where I was based are organised in the form of the SITE Association of Industries. This is then linked to the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce which itself has close relations to all echelons of the government and military (Y Darbari, personal interview, July 14, 2013).

Since the upsurge in labour militancy of the late 1960s and 1970s however, the labour movement, especially in Karachi, has succumbed to the combined power of state and capital. In the next sections of this chapter, I will look at the various factors which, in the current conjuncture, inhibit a sustained labour movement in the workplace, especially in the industrial areas of Karachi. The chosen locality for fieldwork was the Sindh Industrial Trading Estate (SITE) which is the biggest industrial area of Karachi and generates between Rs. 4 to 5 billion of revenue daily (Khan, 2014 May 03). Here most of the interviews were done with activists of the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), which is one of the larger independent trade union federations in Karachi with close to hundred affiliated unions in a variety of sectors such as textiles, ship-breaking and electronics. The NTUF is involved in organising both formal and informal labourers and is dominated by communist activists who were previously part of the Labour Party Pakistan which in November 2012 merged with two other left parties to form the socialist Awami Workers' Party (AWP). The federation also has a dedicated wing aimed at organising home-based women workers called the Home Based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF). As described in the section on methodology, during my fieldwork, I had a chance to attend NTUF and HBWWF's consultation sessions with workers, visit some workplaces and in one case even talk to the management and HR persons of an establishment.

The research results make it clear that a variety of factors, operating over multiple scales (local, national and international), come together in particular conjunctures to inhibit horizontal class-based solidarity on the factory floor and in the workplace. To be clear, the fact that said factors have been elaborated upon here individually is not to imply that they exist in isolation to each other and that their effects on a possible politics of class in Karachi are simply additive. On the contrary, all these myriad factors are mutually constitutive in effectively subverting and, often, co-opting horizontal, class-based solidarities. To put it simply, they are *internal relations* in the totality which constitutes actually existing capitalism in the particular spatio-temporal context of Karachi. In fact, in keeping with Antonio Gramsci's summons, particular conjunctures of class struggle have to be seen as inherently multi-scalar processes where the national-international are co-constitutive and respond to each other in a dialectical manner:

'This [Gramsci's study of the Italian Risorgimento] entailed analysing organic and conjunctural historical movements that were dealt with by the same concepts, so that "relations within society" (involving the development of productive forces, the level of coercion, or relations between political parties) that constitute "hegemonic systems within the state", were inextricably linked to "relations between international forces" (involving requisites of great powers, sovereignty and independence) that constitute "the combinations of states in hegemonic systems". *The "close play of the class struggle" was analysed, then, by linking both the "development of international relations between states" and the "relations between various groups that form a class within a nation"* (Gramsci quoted by Morton, 2007: 67; emphasis added).

### *Structural Adjustment, Informalisation and the Intermediate Classes*

In recent years, the Pakistani state and ruling classes have undertaken a program of economic liberalisation, privatisation and de-regulation at the behest of IMF-peddled Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). Since Pakistan signed its first SAP facility in 1988, close to 160 state enterprises have been privatised. However, of these privatised entities, 130 have collapsed leading to the laying off of millions of workers (Akhtar, 2005). Considering the fact that public sector unions, such as the Railway Workers' Union, were major nodes of resistance and labour activism up to the 1980s, it is clear that privatisation and retrenchment are class projects predicated on breaking the resistance of the organised working class. While privatisation has been marketed as a means to get rid of 'inefficient' entities causing losses to the state exchequer, most of the entities singled out for privatisation are actually those which are turning up a profit (such as state-owned gas and oil refineries) (Khan, 17 February 2014)! Under the military government of General Musharraf, a former Vice-President of Citibank was appointed Finance Minister (he was later promoted to Prime Minister) while a World Bank official was appointed provincial Finance and Planning Minister for Sindh (he was later made federal minister for Privatisation and Investment).

Two of the main sectors which were liberalised and privatised were telecommunications and banking. In both cases, the move backfired with the state actually losing money to private interests and none of the purported benefits of the move materialising. In case of the state-owned Pakistan Telecommunications Company Limited (PTCL), the amount which Etisalat, a Gulf-owned conglomerate, paid to the government for acquiring managing shares has been eclipsed by the amount the state has paid back to Etisalat as parts of hidden agreements on guaranteed profits, stable margins etc. (Munir and Khalid, 2012). Similarly, while the reason given for

banking sector liberalisation was that private banks would increase lending to productive sectors (such as manufacturing and agriculture) and decrease investments in unproductive (but highly profitable) state bonds, exactly the opposite has come about with lending to manufacturing and agriculture actually decreasing after liberalisation (Munir and Naqvi, 2013). As will be illustrated in the coming paragraphs, the rent-seeking tendencies of the Pakistani bourgeoisie and landed classes have been increased with increasing dependency on international capital in the form of military and economic aid.

In fact, what has been one of the most marked effect of the neoliberal reforms is the increasing informalisation of the Pakistani economy and labour force, combined with a major structural shift away from agriculture and manufacturing towards the service sector. By official estimates, the service sector accounts for close to half of the GDP and approximately 40% of the total labour force is employed there (GoP, 2007). Figures on the extent of economic activity which takes place outside of the formal economy are hard to come by, however most estimates put it close to, if not more than, the size of the formal economy (Kemal and Qasim, 2012, November)<sup>45</sup>. Considering that in neighbouring India, 80% of the economic activity is based in the informal sector (Harris-White, 2003: 4), 50% of total economy being informal in Pakistan may even be an underestimation. Considering that most economic activity in the informal sector is based on labour-intensive techniques, it is safe to say that an overwhelming majority of labour in the country is based in the informal sector. In Karachi alone, 75% of the working population is employed in the informal sector, and up to 3 million people are daily wage earners (Yusuf, 2012:

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<sup>45</sup> Kemal and Qasim (2012) define informal economy as 'all those sectors of economy, which are not documented either by getting actual data or by prediction in the formal GDP in the National Accounts'. Akhtar (2011: 160), takes his cue from the International Labour Organization (2002), and defines informal workers as those 'who do not enjoy legal recognition and entitlements, often work without written contracts, and, with exceptions, are not collectively organized. Examples include self-employed vendors, landless wage laborers in rural areas, and subcontracted workers'. These definitions are also congruent with International Labour Organization (2004).

26). In the SITE area where fieldwork was conducted, up to 70% of workers work for daily wages (ibid).

The vast informal economy is also the site for the operation of an extremely personalised capitalism, which makes precarious and dispersed labour dependent on what Aasim Akhtar (2008) calls the 'intermediate classes': a petty bourgeoisie straddling the urban-rural divide and organically linked to the state, which has greatly increased in number and influence due to combined effects of, among other factors, post-1980s economic liberalisation and previously described massive remittance inflows from primarily the Gulf countries. According to Akhtar, the co-option of the intermediate classes into the Gramscian 'historical bloc'<sup>46</sup> has been the main plank through which the overdeveloping state has subverted the 'politics of resistance' along horizontal, class lines which had emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. To talk of co-option into the state in this sense is *not* to ascribe a rationality (or lack thereof) to the state as an *intentional and coherent subject* which then stands in a relation of *externality* to the social formation. Instead what is being argued is that dominant classes in Pakistan (or the historic bloc), the balance between whom is reflected and refracted through the institutional structure and practices of the state, have responded to the dynamics of capital penetration into the political economy of Pakistan in the post-liberalisation era. Thus, as the newest member of the historic bloc, the intermediate classes 'derive their political influence from their access to the state, while their economic power owes itself to the deepening of capitalism' (Akhtar, 2008: 171).

During my fieldwork, I encountered *thekedars* (contractors) firmly ensconced in the informal economy and with organic linkages to state and big capital. Production is often

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<sup>46</sup> Which according to Alavi (1972) is comprised of the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the indigenous bourgeoisie and the landed elite.

outsourced and divided into various fragmented labour processes supervised by the *thekedar*. In textiles, for example, it was observed that stitching and coloring were sub-contracted to workers in different localities. This work was then carried out on piece rates with sub-contractors operating at multiple levels. In a few instances, even the male head of the household acted as a sub-contractor and then used his social capital to employ other women in the house along with women from the immediate kinship group in nearby houses. Not only does piece-work employment contribute to super-exploitation of the workers involved, but the multiple levels of sub-contracting involved also decrease the remuneration received by workers. Patriarchal notions of male superiority are also leveraged in order to suppress wages for female workers and thus, increase profits/rent for the sub-contractor. Thus, in the *zardozi* (colouring) business, women labourers revealed that they were paid between Rs. 250 and Rs. 300 for a single suit compared to a male worker being paid Rs. 450 for the same job (Zareena, home-based worker, personal communication, June 25, 2013)<sup>47</sup>. Similarly, cotton pickers from outside of Karachi told me that for equivalent amounts of cotton picked, the remuneration for men was one a half times that for women (Abida, cotton picker from Thatta, personal communication, June 25, 2013)<sup>48</sup>.

Organising these informal workers is extremely difficult mainly due to the spatially dispersed nature of their work. Patriarchal conceptions, which deem women unfit to engage in *sustained* political movements especially in *leadership* positions, also makes organisation extremely difficult. The hindrances to women in leadership positions become especially important in light of the fact that more than sixty percent of informal home-based workers<sup>49</sup> are

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<sup>47</sup> During NTUF/HBWWF monthly consultation session.

<sup>48</sup> Same as above.

<sup>49</sup> This is an estimate given by female activists working to organise women through the Home Based Women Workers' Federation (HBWWF). Definitive statistics and figures on the percentage of women in the sector are difficult to come by due to the largely undocumented nature of work. Organisers also estimate that close to 20% of the workers are legally underage.

women and thus any sustained organisation/movement naturally would require women in leadership positions (Z. A. Khan, personal interview, July 7, 2013). Moreover, while Pakistan is a signatory to a number of ILO agreements which oblige the state to legally recognise these informal workers, the basic framework of Pakistani labour laws is still based on the aforementioned Industrial Relation Ordinance of 1969, which does not recognise any workplace which is not owned or leased by the capitalist himself (Azhar, 2014 April 27). Thus, home-based and informal labourers remain even outside the formal ambit of the state as 'workers'. This presents serious legal obstacles to unionisation drives.

In addition to informal labour in the underground economy, labour organisation on the factory floor has not fared much better since the assault of state and capital from the mid to late 1970s onwards. Among the 'formal' labour force operating in the manufacturing units of Karachi, the rate of unionisation is at best a meagre three percent (LO/FTF Council, 2013). This is mainly due to the existence of informality even in the 'formal' space of registered factory floors. This type of informality exists due to the flexibilisation of labour which is fast becoming a norm in the manufacturing sector. Here too labour is hired through individual contractors and increasingly through recruitment agencies which in turn employ labour on temporary contracts. Temporary and flexible contracts then save the management the extra cost and hassle of depositing benefit funds such as for health insurance and EOBI (Employment Old Age Benefits Institution)<sup>50</sup>. In fact, in Pakistan's biggest province, Punjab, the provincial government actually enacted laws to create a 'business-friendly environment' which effectively abolished labour inspections for a whole decade from 2003 onwards (Ali, 2014 May 01). Until last year, the

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<sup>50</sup> The EOBI provides old age, disability and survivor pensions for private employees in firms of five or more workers. The employee pays 1% and the employer contributes 5% of the minimum wage to the scheme. Due to the high incidence of informality and leakages, it is estimated that (at best) only 14% of the employed labour force in Pakistan benefits from the system (LO/FTF Council, 2013: 15).

provincial government of Sindh had similar legislation, which was responsible for the Baldia Town disaster in 2012 where close to 300 workers were burnt alive in a textile factory which was locked from the outside.

In several factories, it was observed that employers had informal arrangements with lower level labour department bureaucrats whereby part of the amount designated for the benefits fund was given to the bureaucrat as a bribe while the other was kept by the employers and/or higher management themselves. In another factory, production and HR managers quite openly revealed that they deliberately hired some labour on permanent contracts while others were hired on temporary contracts, often for daily wages (T Aslam, personal interview, July 14, 2013). These temporary workers were then given at least one month off every three years as labour laws in Pakistan require that no worker can be employed on a temporary basis for more than three years! The ostensible result of this was to create a wedge between permanent and non-permanent employees, often also different in occupational hierarchy, and thus prevent any concerted factory floor activism. 'Informality' then in this case is symptomatic of a concerted form of *class* power rather than an *absence* of the state (or legislation) per se. The fact that the management of this factory paid periodic bribes to inspectors from the labour department also attests to the fact of 'informality' as a concerted mode of state discipline and class domination.

To be clear, the subordinate classes, ensconced as they often are in a cynical patron-client relation, should not be taken to suffer from some sort of false consciousness which makes labour regard their patron - variously the *thekedar*, land broker or lower-level bureaucrat - as magnanimous benefactors. Conversations with informal labourers make it abundantly clear that they see the relationship with the *thekedar* as a fundamentally exploitative one to which they are wedded out of structural necessity. In an environment of massive reserves of surplus labour and



little productive, long-term investment by state and capital, the patronage of such a contractor ensures a steady, even if super-exploitative, source of income for the labourers. A moral economy operates whereby the contractor is obliged to provide for the workers in return for their labour power<sup>51</sup>. On his part, the contractor through his<sup>52</sup> cultivated links with the state and other fractions of capital ensures steady employment for the labourer. Thus, while informal labourers do coalesce fleetingly to demand their (highly unequal) share on the basis of such a moral economy, a concerted move towards the formation of a *class-for-itself*, which would necessarily entail socio-spatial alliances with other dispersed fractions of labour, is lacking.

### *The Over-developing State and Labour Unions*

Historically the Pakistani state and dominant classes have also worked in nefarious ways to co-opt the labour movement and progressive student unions. Often this has taken the form of propping up alternative, pro-state and pro-imperialism labour union federations, such as formation of the state-sponsored All Pakistan Confederation of Labour in 1950 (Shaheed, 1983: 272). However, Pakistan's over-developing state and ruling classes have also co-opted the labour movement through devising pervasive mechanisms of control at almost *every* level of labour activism. For example, strikes can only be legally called after all negotiations with employers in the tri-partite structure break down and at least a week's prior notice has to be given to the Federal or Provincial government and to the employers. The government can then prohibit the strike at any time within the next thirty days if it is deemed as causing 'serious hardship to the

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<sup>51</sup> 'Moral Economy' is defined by E.P. Thompson (1971) as a 'notion of legitimation' (p. 78) arrived at through an (informal) popular consensus and 'grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community' (p. 79). As Thompson demonstrates in the case of the transition in England, moral economies can also be a source of resistance against imposed social change.

<sup>52</sup> Contractors are invariably male.

community' or as 'prejudicial to the national interest' (Section 35, GoP 2011)<sup>53</sup>. As Hamza Alavi has described in his discussion of the labour movement:

'..industrial disputes are mediated by an elaborate institutional structure that enables the state bureaucracy to be directly involved at every stage in the management and manipulation of industrial relations. That affects working class organisations, inasmuch it establishes within them a role for those who are conversant with the law and bureaucratic procedures, and who act on behalf of the workers before industrial agencies and courts. This elaborate structure, designed to control, limit and manipulate working class militancy, is a legacy of the "over-developed" colonial state; the post-colonial state has sought to extend it rather than to limit it' (Alavi, 1983: 56-7).

Such deep-level penetration of the state in the sphere of industrial relations has resulted in what one activist termed 'a massive jungle of laws and rules' (N. Mansoor, personal interview, July 22, 2013). A labour leader I spoke to explained how one case against retrenchment and undelivered compensation in which he was the plaintiff had dragged on for over 30 years! (G. Rehman, personal interview, May 29, 2013). The resulting hierarchies within the labour movement have ensured that only those who are educated and well-versed in the complex labour laws and concomitant mode of operation of labour arbitration courts are able to rise to the top and take leading roles in negotiations with state and capital.

Left activists often pinpointed being caught up in the 'jungle of laws' as a legacy of the suppression of the labour movement. Many recalled how during the 1970s high of labour militancy workers' first instinct would be to take direct action (such as through strikes and lock-outs) rather than getting embroiled in long (and mostly fruitless) litigation. The narrative of

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<sup>53</sup> GoP: Government of Pakistan

educated labour unionists having 'sold out' the labour movement is quite a prevalent one and workers often talked derogatively about compromising labour leaders and lawyers. The very fact that, in conversation with rank and file workers, labour leaders and lawyers were often talked about in the same breath gives one an indication as to the role of the bureaucratic machinations of the post-colonial state, and its ensuing complex of litigation, in subverting horizontal solidarities among the workers. Crucially, such hierarchies within the labour movement, often reinforced by ethnic segmentations due to geographically uneven development and patterns of education achievement, have manifested themselves, often at moments of high labour activism, as divisions between the union leadership and the rank and file. I will discuss this problem further in the following section.

### *Ethnicity, Religion and Class*

As mentioned in the last section, Left activism and politics in Pakistan have a long history of taking up issues of provincial autonomy and, by extension, the rights of the various ethnic minorities residing in the country. Much of this has been a response to the centralising tendency of the post-colonial state and the geographically uneven development which has been a particular hallmark of dependent, peripheral capitalism in Pakistan. However, in terms of class-based and labour organising in Karachi, I observed that issues of ethnicity play different roles depending on the type of employment relations and labour process at play, for example whether work is done on 'formal' factory floors or in informal, home-based workplaces.

On the factory floor, workers' ethnicities and geographical origins do not pose any major obstacles in labour organising. Similarly, while talking to workers and union leaders there was no mention of religious or sectarian affiliations (such as Shia, Sunni etc.) playing any role in

labour organising. However, several veteran unionists expressed fears that religion and ethnicity were just starting to play an increased role in the organisation of labour on the factory floor. When probed about the reason for this, union leaders pointed to the role of ethnicity in the politics of service delivery and patronage mainly in the workers' residential areas<sup>54</sup>. In fact, the disconnection between the politics of the workplace and residential areas kept emerging as a constant theme in discussions about labour organising and class consciousness among workers.

The fact that ethnicity played a minimal role in organising on the factory floor should not be taken to mean that ethnicity has absolutely no role in the labour movement. In many factories, I observed that occupational hierarchies were organized roughly according to the workers' geographical area of origin. Manual jobs were overwhelmingly populated by Pushtuns while non-manual, technical jobs were dominated by non-Pushtuns. While this is not a major hindrance in everyday labour organising, in times of high militancy such ethnic distinctions have often led to divisions between the union leadership and rank and file workers. In his paper on the iconic strike of July 1972 in Landhi and SITE industrial areas of Karachi, Kamran Asdar Ali (2005: 93) narrates a very interesting moment. During an *awaami adalat* (peoples' hearing), labour leaders - mostly from *Mohajir* Urdu-speaking, formally educated backgrounds - were absolutely unable to pacify workers in the face of a compromise offer from the government after police had fired on the funeral procession of fallen comrades. It was only when a rank-and-file Pushtun worker named Bawar Khan stood up and implored other workers to take the government offer seriously that ordinary workers decided to end the month-long strike action. While even today, occupational hierarchies and ethnicity largely overlap on the factory floor, unions were observed to be most successful in gaining decent wages and benefits in factories where the leadership was

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<sup>54</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter on the politics of residential areas.

heterogeneous in terms of geographical origin (Y Darbari and T Aslam, personal interviews, July 14, 2013). Thus, where historically it has been at the high points of militancy that ethnicity has come to play a role in labour organising, successful unions in the case of Karachi are often those which have ethnically heterogeneous forms of leadership.

As mentioned before, religion too plays a minimal role in organising on the factory floor. There was also no observable overlap between religious and/or sectarian identity on the one hand and occupational hierarchy on the other. However, in one case that was narrated to me there was an attempt made by a factory owner to leverage religious sectarianism (N Mansoor, personal interview, July 22, 2013; G. Rehman, personal interview, May 29, 2013). The owner, who had close links to the Islamist group Jamaat ud Dawa (JuD)<sup>55</sup>, tried to use the group to divide workers along Sunni-Shia lines during a lock-out. However, this attempt was unsuccessful and eventually police was deployed to be used to break up the strike. Such use of religion to break up strikes and lock outs at moments of labour upsurge is of course not a new tactic and has been used by state functionaries and capitalists since colonial times<sup>56</sup>.

In the informal sector, however, identities such as ethnicity can often play a crucial role in organising. The intermediate classes especially, and indigenous capitalists in Karachi more generally, often actively exploit and *produce* what is popularly called 'ethnicity' through the provision of jobs and service delivery along the lines of such 'ascriptive' identities. The home-based nature of much informal work has meant that labour organising in this sphere is more often

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<sup>55</sup> JuD is the political and charity arm of the militant Islamist group Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT). The LeT is officially 'banned' but is said to retain close links to the Pakistani military establishment and is accused of being the mastermind group behind the Mumbai attacks in 2008.

<sup>56</sup> For a particularly vivid description of the use of religion by capitalists and contractors to break up labour organising in colonial times, see Mulk Raj Anand's account of a textile workers' strike in his excellent novel *Coolie* (London: Bodley Head, 1972). Here, during a mass meeting of workers, a rumour is spread of Muslim workers having set on Hindus in the workers' locality. The rumour mill culminates in a whole night of rioting in Bombay, mass communal killings. Ultimately, the fleeting, cross-religious unity that workers had forged during the strike breaks down.

than not subject to the vagaries of residential area politics (to be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter). This then ties right into the politics of service delivery in addition to state practices which, in the form of class-biased urban planning, have rendered migrant cohorts from particular geographical areas as the main clients (and victims) of patronage-based politics. In fact, as Barbara Harris-White has described in her work on caste and capitalism in India:

'Capital is far from dissolving or destroying caste. While it might appear that caste is neither occupationally determining nor an entry barrier, in actual fact, control over the biggest local capitals is restricted to a narrow band of castes.... At best caste is being reworked as an economic force (sometimes as capital, sometimes cross class but rather rarely as labour) while at worst caste is a more powerful social stratifier than class' (Harris-White, 2005: 114).

In Karachi too, a role similar to that of caste in India as described by Harris-White above - in terms of access to capital, employment etc. - may be seen to be played by ethnicity. Historical and often colonial-era trends have ensured that the big bourgeoisie usually has specific geographical origins (e.g. Gujratis, Memons and Chiniotis) while the occupational hierarchy of labour also corresponds to regional distinctions (Ahmed, 1996). With the structural shift in the Pakistani economy towards the service sector, this has undergone modification with an emerging Pushtun bourgeoisie in Karachi generally linked to the transport sector. A symptomatic example of this trend is Shahi Syed, the Sindh provincial president of the Awami National Party (ANP) which claims to represent the interests of the Pushtun community in Karachi and in Pakistan. Hailing from the landowning, middle peasantry in his native village in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, Syed rose through the ranks of the service sector-based Pushtun intermediate classes in Karachi, while leveraging his links to the state through the ANP, to become one of the

biggest transport contractors in Karachi and concomitantly one of the city's most influential political figures. In fact, it is pertinent to note that the Syeds are a land-owning caste in the Mardan area of KP where Shahi Syed hails from. The social capital which accompanies membership in such landed castes is often something which extends across the urban-rural divide and often places members of these castes in prime positions as dispensers of patronage through provision of - often temporary - jobs to subordinate classes (and castes). Thus, historical hierarchies of the region's political economy can be seen to actively inform and *produce* 'ethnic' enclaves within labour and capital. Moreover, as symbolised by the rise of Shahi Syed, while membership of the historic bloc has indeed changed through inclusion of actors which straddle the 'formal-informal' divide, the everyday reality of workers is even more precarious and exploitative.

### *Pocket Unions and Coercive Power*

There are two other main strategies used by factory owners, in collusion with the state, to prevent effective solidarity of labourers in the workplace: the use of 'pocket unions' and, if all else fails, outright coercion. Both of these strategies are predicated upon the deep links of factory owners to members of the state bureaucracy and militant groups which, while ostensibly 'independent', are themselves organically linked to the state in various ways. Thus, as in the case of the co-optation of the labour union leaders, the over-developing state is intimately involved as a non-neutral and class-biased arbiter. However, as we will see, the hegemony of the state and, by extension, the historic bloc (in this case, capitalists and upper level production managers), is not ensured through straightforward action of 'formal' state actors.

Pocket unions are often employed by owners as a way to get around laws regarding labour unions and bargaining in registered factories. At least on paper, Pakistani labour laws require any working establishment with 10 or more workers to have a registered labour union with regular elections and a designated Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA). However, many owners, with active help from bureaucrats in the labour department, often register fake unions in order to circumvent any meaningful democratic process on the factory floor. These fake unions often have the owners' personal driver and body guards in the leadership positions and have no input from rank and file workers. With the increasing use of flexible labour to divide workers on the factory floor, it is easy for owners to take a select few labourers in confidence along with the *thekedar* and labour department in order to register the 'pocket union'. The pocket union mechanism then shields the employer from any backlash as they pay small fees (essentially a bribe) to the labour department in order to forgo the legally mandated health and pension insurance amounts of the employed workers. Fighting against a pocket union, and registering a genuine union in its stead, also requires contacts in the labour department as the 'registration' documents of these unions are required in order to hold a genuine election. As in the politics of service delivery in residential areas (to be discussed in next section), access to the state becomes a crucial factor in forming genuine labour unions and thus, effectively introduces a hierarchy even before any kind of meaningful horizontal solidarity has begun on the factory floor.

In the sporadic cases where lockouts and strikes occur, coercive force in the form of formal state actors (such as the police) or informal actors (such as militant gangs) was quickly deployed to quell any discontent. In fact, while political parties such as the MQM and ANP fought street battles against each other in residential areas and postured against each other in parliament and on the media, they invariably united when it came to quelling labour activism on the factory



floor. They unleashed militant gangs loosely tied to the parties to rough up labour leaders. This came out most clearly in the story of a power loom union which was narrated to me by activists (N. Mansoor, personal interview, July 22, 2013). In March 2012, workers in this establishment, a subsidiary of Al Karam Textiles<sup>57</sup>, attempted to form a union after enduring working hours of more than twelve hours per day and the owners' stealing of electricity from labourers' residential areas. The owner used his links with the ANP to first get the union leaders arrested by the para-military Pakistan Rangers. The workers were kept in the Rangers' torture chamber for close to 30 hours. The Rangers attempted to force them into confessing to extorting close to a million rupees from the owners. When the union leaders refused, they were handed over to the police where a case was registered<sup>58</sup> with the help of the MQM. The workers were accused under the Anti-Terrorist Act enacted by the Pakistani state as part of its campaign in the US-led War on Terror (see GoP, 2005).

In the case of a pharmaceutical company, the Islamist militant group Jamaat ud Dawa (JuD) was used in conjunction with the police to break a strike and round up labour leaders (G. Rehman, personal interview, May 29, 2013). Activists involved in the case told me that the owner of the factory had close links both to a section of the army and to the JuD. He was reported to give special bonuses to workers who kept a beard or wore a hijab in accordance with certain interpretations of Islamic personal law. Initially workers were said to be extremely impressed by his piety, however in early 2012, with the workers trying to get a union registered, the veneer of respectability came off. Police were first used to arrest the union leaders. In response, factory workers, which included a substantial proportion of women, blocked the main

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<sup>57</sup> Al Karam is one of the biggest textile conglomerates in Pakistan with interests in various other related industries.

<sup>58</sup> In Pakistan, an investigation into a case and subsequent prosecution can only begin once an FIR (First Information Report) is registered by the aggrieved party naming or pointing towards possible perpetrators.

artery passing through the SITE area. The leaders were released but the owners suspended close to a hundred workers while several were booked by the police under criminal cases. In this case, four union leaders were booked under the Anti-Terrorist Act (N. Mansoor, personal interview, July 22, 2013). The still employed workers staged a sit-in strike on the factory floor to protest against the unjust arrest and charging of their comrades. However the owner brought in militant goons of the JuD who entered the factory with guns and terrorised the workers. Eventually, the workers were forced back into production and the arrested union leaders, while eventually released on bail, are still fighting the case in court (ibid.).

Several themes emerge from the aforementioned cases. Firstly, as alluded to before and confirmed by the pharmaceutical factory case, unions are in the best bargaining position where the leadership is heterogeneous in terms of geographical origin. In the case of Macter Pharma, the union leadership was mixed with a roughly 50-50 representation of Pashto- and Urdu-speakers. Moreover, unity on the factory floor in this case was helped by the fact that almost all of the close to 750 workers in the factory were on permanent contracts with a very low percentage of flexible labour. Secondly, the Pakistani ruling classes frequently leverage imperialism to employ laws instituted under the pretext of the so-called War on Terror (WoT) to prevent workplace activism. In fact, the use of anti-terrorism laws to inhibit working-class action in Karachi is not an isolated phenomenon, as we know from the Faisalabad Loom Workers' Strike during 2010-11 (Memon, 2010). In the Faisalabad case, the special Anti-Terrorism court handed down a combined sentence of 594 years in prison to six labour leaders. The threat of harsh sentences, including extremely long prison sentences and even the death penalty, is effectively used to quell labour activism. Thus, Pakistani ruling classes effectively use geopolitical developments at subcontinental and global scales to keep a lid on class

contradictions in the workplace. The role of imperialism in subverting class-based political action is even more pronounced in Karachi's residential areas and will be elaborated upon in the next chapter. The third theme which emerges from these cases is the use of direct coercion to suppress working class activism, either in the form of formal state actors (such as the police) or in the form of informal, non-state actors (such as the political parties' militant wings). Labour activism in the workplace is thus effectively caught between a dialectic of coercion and patronage, which is itself predicated upon the multi-scalar determination of Pakistan's - and Karachi's - political economy.

Considering the long history of the Pakistani state, and especially its military establishment, outsourcing violence to (so-called) 'informal' actors and the continuing, organic linkages of groups like the JuD to state institutions, I would contend that it is incorrect to term these 'informal' groups as 'non-state'. Instead, these groups should be seen as part of the overdeveloping state, which, while representing a possible fragmentation of hegemony, nonetheless ultimately works to enforce and maintain the historic bloc's - and thus the dominant *classes*' - hegemony. The axes of studying post-colonial societies then should be those of *class* and *social relations* of production and exchange, refracted through and imbricated in other identities such as ethnicity, caste and gender, which cut across the divide between 'formal' and 'informal' economies<sup>59</sup>. After all, both ruling and subordinate classes span the formal-informal/civil-political society divide and leverage actors on both sides of the (apparent) divide in order to gain an upper hand in the various open and hidden contradictions which characterise their mutual relations.

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<sup>59</sup> Or, for that matter, Chatterjee's distinction between civil and political society. See page 30-1.

### *The Dialectic Between Workplace and Residential Space*

As can be seen in the previous sub-sections, factory workers in Karachi often form class-based, horizontal solidarities. Given the severely restrictive objective workplace conditions, these solidarities usually prove ephemeral and short-lived. The dominant classes employ multiple modes of economic, social and political discipline in order to subvert and/or co-opt any stirrings of working class militancy. To put it simply, at least in the workplace, class struggle *from above* clearly prevails against class struggle from below through a complex combination of factors at multiple scales. In fact, in addition to its role in forming the structural and institutional matrix for the balance of power and organising the relationship between dominant classes and class fractions, the state actively *divides* and *disorganises* the subordinate classes (Poulantzas, 1980: 141-2).

Class struggle from above and the concomitant lack of class formation/consciousness among workers is complemented by an additional *spatial* dimension. During fieldwork, one of the major and most frequent laments of labour activists and organisers was the lack of progressive groups' penetration in working-class residential spaces. In fact, as one labour organiser told me:

'In the factory, the worker is a worker. However, as soon as he [sic] goes out of the factory [and into their residential areas], he becomes a Muhajir, a Pathan and a Baloch' (N. Mansoor, personal interview, July 22, 2013).

This lack of left-wing footing in working class residential areas was often contrasted to the situation during the 1960s and 70s era of 'politics of resistance' when labour strikes and lockouts would be coordinated with action in colonies. As one labour leader recalled:

'Previously [in the 1970s], when the police came to get us we used to hide in Pathan colony<sup>60</sup> [a labour colony within the SITE area] and other workers' colonies. Now there are MONSTERS sitting there [in residential areas] and we are helpless' (G. Rehman, personal interview, May 29, 2013).

This disconnect between the politics of the work-place and residential spaces is one of the main reasons hindering a sustained working-class politics in Karachi today.

A close study of the high point of labour militancy in the 1960s and 70s makes it abundantly clear that socio-*spatial* alliances held the key to the spectacular success of the labour movement. The iconic strikes in Karachi between 1969 and 1972 were 'coordinated largely by a coalition of militant federation leaders and workplace leaders, who cooperated both in the struggle in the industrial area, and in the struggle in the community... It was only through this politicisation of the worker in his community that the movement against Ayub Khan developed such grassroots support among the industrial workers of Karachi' (Shaheed, 1979: 191). In fact, during the June 1972 strike, there is evidence of the constitution of highly organised, soviet-style committees which coordinated labour militancy in the two industrial areas of Karachi (SITE and Landhi) along with the adjacent labour colonies (Shaheed, 1979: 198-9). These were suppressed and destroyed in the short-term through police and military action.

A study of mass responses to capitalism and globalisation in other urban contexts - both in the global South and the North - makes the necessity of such socio-*spatial* alliances abundantly clear. For example, Ira Katznelson (1982) has demonstrated how migration patterns and state/ruling class practices during the early phase of American industrialisation resulted in a distinctive pattern of class formation in the urban US. As a result, class 'has been lived and

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<sup>60</sup> In Urdu, the word "colony" is often used to denote a neighbourhood or a settlement.

fought as a *series of partial* relationships' (p. 19, emphasis in text) due to which American workers have often acted 'on the basis of the shared solidarities of class at work, but on that of ethnic and territorial affinities in their residential communities' (ibid.). For Katznelson, insufficient attention to this 'split in the practical consciousness of American workers between the language and practice of a politics of work and those of a politics of a community' (p. 194) has been to the detriment of the radical urban movements of the 1960s and 70s. Similarly, in the global South, as described in the first chapter, the gap between labour activism in the workplace and community organising has been the detriment of left movements in cities as diverse as Porto Alegre in Brazil (see Baierle, 2007) and Mumbai in India (see Patel, 1995). In cities such as Mumbai and - it would seem - Karachi, this has resulted in right-wing, often fascist groups (literally) encroaching upon the socio-political space (pun intended). As Patel describes in the case of Mumbai of the 1980s:

'The Shiv Sena substituted the communist unions at the place of residence, in the slums, organising access to space and to some measure of services and then protecting the populace from evictions' (Patel, 1995: xxviii).

Moreover, given the fact that due to increasing home-based and informal labour it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the place of work and home, researching and engaging the politics of residential areas has become even more important.

The larger point that follows from the failure of left movements to connect the workplace with the residential space in Southern and Northern urban contexts is that class is always and everywhere a *social* phenomenon. That is to say, the process of class formation and consciousness cannot be confined to the point of production only. In fact, the Marxian

conception of capital itself is on three, mutually constitutive planks: 1) Capital as a *thing*, 2) Capital as a *relation*, and 3) Capital as *process* of circulation whereby value is produced, distributed and expanded. The three aspects of capital (thing, relation and process) are then dialectically constitutive of the totality known as the capitalist mode of production. Similarly, class too needs to be seen in such a manner: 1) as a *thing* which assumes concrete form in the persona, belongings and social existence of various actors, 2) as a *relation*, between competing and contradictory groups (such as labourers/capitalist, feudal lord/serf etc), and 3) as a *process*, whose 'definition can only be made in the medium of time' (Thompson, 1968: 939) and which therefore necessarily encompasses multiple spaces. The conception of class as a *process* immediately alerts us to its constitution *in space*, through networks that connect multiple social spaces from the point of value production to the point of *social reproduction* .i.e. the home and the neighbourhood<sup>61</sup>. Thus, class is at the same time both an objective *and* subjective phenomenon: a structural category in a given social(-spatial) division of labour *and* lived experience whose constitution is inseparably tied to the production and negotiation of space(s). Class and class consciousness then cannot be reduced to purely an economic phenomenon to be defined/produced at the point of surplus production or appropriation alone, but is a socio-*spatial* process and has to be studied as such.

For the purposes of our current investigation, the need is one of careful study of the 'now hidden, now open fight' among classes in their imbrications with other (seemingly) ascriptive identities and the politics of Karachi's lower class residential areas. The question is this: with the sporadic and ephemeral, even if often subverted, sparks of class consciousness in industrial areas such as SITE, what is happening in the workers' residential areas to deflect and refract these

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<sup>61</sup> A focus on social reproduction also alerts us to the role and imbrications of gender in class formation and consciousness.

struggles along lines of (mainly) ethnicity and religion? In a city which for moments in the 1960 and 70s seemed on the verge of a proletarian takeover, what has led to the dramatic rise of the xenophobic politics of the MQM and other right wing groups in the past three and a half decades? Therefore, just as Marx in his quest for the source of surplus value, 'accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labour-power... [takes] leave for a time of this noisy sphere [of the market], where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production' (Marx, 1867: 121), we enter the hidden abode of social *re*-production. It is to the politics of residential areas that we now turn.



## **Politics in Residential Areas: A Post-Ideological Moment?**

Residential area politics in urban Pakistan, and especially in Karachi, is the site of intense contestation among a myriad number of actors including political parties, 'apolitical' religious movements, militant gangs and even non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Since its inception and especially since the formation of Pakistan, Karachi has been an attractive destination for migrants. As a result of this migration from various parts of Pakistan, areas of Karachi often become the site of intense turf wars among rival groups in a bid to secure local hegemony and ingratiate themselves with the local political economy of patronage and rent extraction. In this section, I will look at the various, multi-scalar factors which, in the current conjuncture, inhibit sustained class-based political mobilisation and organisation in the residential areas of Karachi. As described in the last chapter, the factors elaborated upon here individually do not of course exist in isolation from each other and their effects are not simply additive. On the contrary, all these myriad factors are mutually constitutive and come together in the concrete spatio-temporal conjuncture of Karachi through complex mediations. In this way, they subvert sustained political mobilisation and organising along class lines.

The chosen locality for fieldwork was the Lyari Basti, a lower-class residential area on the north-western outskirts of the city which was also a point of arrival for various incoming, ethnically heterogeneous migrant cohorts. For at least the past two to three years, comrades from the Mazdoor Kissan Party (MKP) have attempted to form some kind of class-based organisation in this area as an alternative to the established groups operating often along ethnic and religious lines. As described in the section on methodology, I was closely involved with MKP activities in the area during my fieldwork as part of weekly meetings (regarding local issues and party organisation) and study groups. During this time, while I conducted a formal interview with the

senior MKP activist in the area (Rahim Ahmadani) most of my fieldwork entailed observations of everyday politics to gain insights into the operation of mainstream political parties and the obstacles faced by left wing groups. This entailed informal conversations with local residents (some of whom were loosely tied to the MKP) with regards to their trepidations and experiences with local functionaries of the state and mainstream political parties. Often these conversations centered on the access (or lack thereof) of residents to public services (such as health and education) and coercive institutions/groups (both state and 'non-state', such as police, militant gangs etc.). With these conversations, along with attendance at MKP meetings and some of my own experiences (which will be detailed later), I was able to gain an insight into the local political economy of patronage and coercion which conditions the working poor's organisational ability and attendant political choices in a locality like Lyari Basti. In addition to observations in Lyari Basti, this chapter also draws upon work done by other authors on processes of spatial restructuring and class-biased urban planning in different areas of Karachi.

### *Neoliberal Urbanism and the Politics of Forgetting*

Since the last census in 1998, Karachi's population has increased from almost 10 million to what are estimated to be more than 20 million in the last fifteen years alone (Hasan et al, 2013). After the trauma of Partition, when Karachi experienced an almost three-to-four fold population increase in a span of a few years, this is almost certainly the most dramatic increase in population in the city's history. This massive influx has come about due to a number of reasons. Land ownership patterns in rural areas of Pakistan remain highly unequal. 64% of the total number of agricultural holdings measure less than five acres each but their total area accounts for only 19% of the national farm area (Mustafa, 2013 November 20). On the other hand, large farms (over 100 acres) which are owned mainly by the 'feudal' elite make up for less than 1% of the total

number of private farms but account for 14% of farm area. Compounding the difficulty of landless and small landholding peasants is the increasing penetration of local and foreign corporations into the rural economy (especially in the South Punjab). They are taking over increasing areas of land while, more importantly, also establishing control over agricultural inputs and other means of production. As a result large-scale agricultural depeasantisation has led to a massive migration of farmers and peasants to urban areas in the last three decades. This is amply evidenced in Karachi by the massive influx of Seraiki and Pushtun migrants.

Coupled with corporate penetration into agriculture and the infiltration of a neoliberal ethos with regards to public services and the labour market, there has also been a marked shift in the discourse and practice of urban planning. In 1999, the military government of General Musharraf came into power through a *coup d'état* and accelerated a process of economic liberalisation and privatisation. In the preceding decade - since Pakistan's first IMF facility in 1988 – this process had proceeded in fits and starts. Shoukat Aziz, a Chief Executive of Citibank, was appointed Finance Minister and later promoted to Prime Minister of the country in 2004. Moreover, General Musharraf appointed a very senior economist of the World Bank as the Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan while another important World Bank official was appointed the federal Minister for Privatisation and Investment in 2002 (Hasan, 2012, March). Concomitantly, the military government passed the Sindh Local Government Ordinance 2001 which gave considerable power to the newly elected Nazim (Mayor) of Karachi. Thus, a strong neoliberal lobby, the devolution of considerable 'development' authority to local government along with a centralisation of power at the top in the hands of the general, heralded an era of 'glocal' neoliberalisation in Pakistan.

With the entrenchment of the neoliberal orthodoxy in Pakistan, new words entered the lexicon of urban planning in Karachi: 'world class city', 'investment-friendly infrastructure' and 'public private partnerships'. International capital, especially from the Gulf countries, penetrated Karachi's booming real estate market and large tracts of land were allocated to Dubai-based, multi-billion dollar companies (including the world's largest real estate company, Emaar) for development and 'reclamation'. For example in 2006, the whole of Karachi's 27km long coastline was singled out for development of high rise luxury apartments and private beaches. In addition, Emaar also planned to construct a new city (called 'Diamond Bar City'), this time on the Bundal and Buddoo islands just off the coast of Karachi. The plan was to take over 4800 hectares of the land and construct, among other things, a port terminal and a tax-free trading zone with an investment of \$43 billion dollars over 13 years (Hassan et al., 2013: 54). Moreover, this new 'Diamond Bar City' would be connected via a 1.5km bridge to the military owned DHA's Phase VIII where golf clubs and 1500 luxury housing units were to be constructed. The Bundal and Buddoo islands (on which this city was to be constructed) contain part of one of the biggest mangrove forests in the world which not only provide protection from sea storms and tsunamis but also the breeding ground for various species of fish and shrimp. The delicate habitat of these two islands is extremely important for Karachi's protection and also provides a source of livelihood to indigenous fishing communities who have been living here for hundreds of years and are the original inhabitants of the city (ibid., p. 55-6).

The three projects combined cover almost all of Karachi's 27km coastline and constituted a concerted attempt at class-biased spatial re-structuring at the hands of global capital in alliance with Pakistan's neoliberal security state. While these memorandums were being signed by Pakistan's Prime Minister, the Karachi Strategic Development Plan (KSDP) 2020 was being

developed by the local government in consultation with a number of social activists and progressive urban planners (Hasan, 2012, March). However, while the KSDP 2020 included adequate protection of endangered coastal ecosystems and consultation with a citizens' committee for all future development projects, this had limited applicability for the above three projects as most of the aforementioned coastal land fell under the jurisdiction of the country's powerful military (ibid.). As mentioned earlier, the Pakistani military is the largest institutional landowner in the country with considerable interests in real estate and agriculture, among various other sectors (Siddiq, 2007).

The ensuing movement against these land grab projects combined issues of indignity, class and environmentalism and was led by the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF). The presence of progressive urban planners and middle class activists with links to the state meant that, at least in the short term, the movement against coastal encroachment was halted. However, in subsequent years, the state and real estate developers have maintained a low-level violence campaign against the indigenous people of these islands through 'informal' militant gangs (Al Jazeera English, 2011 Aug 05). This slow but steady eviction drive against the residents, while attracting small news snippets from time to time, has so far failed to evoke a concerted response from the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum. Co-option by apolitical, international NGOs has been a problem. One left activist bemoaned main figures of the PFF, who often spend more time abroad at international conferences than with the organisation which brought them into such prominent positions in the first place. Meanwhile newspaper reports have suggested that real estate tycoon Thomas Kramer, of Florida Beach fame, has expressed interest in taking over the project of coastal 'development' in conjunction with local real estate company Bahria Town (The News, 2013, March 12). Bahria Town (BT) is the largest private land developer in Pakistan. It has close

links to all power centres and especially the military. According to several news reports, a number of retired military generals serve on BT's board of directors and the Testimonials section on its website even displays testimonials from the General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army!<sup>62</sup> Thus, international capital, in conjunction with local elites, has unleashed a campaign of rapacious dispossession which often takes place at the margins of Karachi, both geographically and politically.

Another trend witnessed in the last decade or so of neoliberal glocalisation has been the proliferation of high profile infrastructure projects which result in mass displacement of marginalised communities. The glitz and glamour of these high profile infrastructure projects - ranging from high-rise luxury apartments to smooth, six-lane speedways - is promoted by the city authorities as emblems of Karachi's 'arrival' on the world stage. In fact, the sheer size and grandeur of such projects represent the most obvious manifestations of modernity and 'progress', as it is consumed by the upper and middle classes, who are exposed to permanent entertainment produced by an increasingly globalised media universe. Leela Fernandes (2004), writing on the case of Mumbai in India, has described how the process of state restructuring in its role from (nominal) welfare distribution to active - and often coercive - market facilitation, has gone hand in hand with a dynamic 'politics of forgetting' and 'spatial purification' instituted in urban space. Such spatial purification has entailed 'a political-discursive process in which specific groups are rendered invisible and forgotten within the dominant national political culture' (Fernandes, 2004: 2416).

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<sup>62</sup> See: [http://www.bahriatown.com/?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=13&Itemid=99](http://www.bahriatown.com/?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=13&Itemid=99). Accessed 18th July 2014.

In Karachi too, these political processes of spatial purification, combined with the glamorous 'mega-projects' described, have been instrumental in producing the vision of an 'exclusionary form of cultural citizenship' (Fernandes, 2004: 2416). In popular upper and middle-class imaginaries, such a notion of citizenship is based on a wholesale de-politicisation of individuals and social groups which in actuality are personifications of very material stratifications based on class, ethnicity, gender and/or ethnicity. The 'citizen', in the last instance, is an (individualised) empty vessel invested solely in the neoliberal dream of meritocracy and technocratic management. Thus, she/he is an ideal subject to partake in the state/historic bloc's 'modernising' mega-projects while concomitantly partaking in the exclusion of those (such as the urban poor, and marginalised ethnicities and genders) who do not fit into the mould of this ideal, 'modern' citizen. In the case of Karachi, due to historical trends of uneven development and occupational-spatial hierarchies along lines of geographical origin, these processes of spatial purification have often led to the marginalisation of certain 'ethnic' communities and thus, the co-production of 'ethnicity' and class.

In Lyari Basti, the lower-class locality where I conducted my fieldwork, almost all of these trends converge. In 2002, work started in Karachi on the Lyari Expressway (LEW), a 16km, 8-lane expressway which would divert traffic going out of the city from the port in order to reduce traffic in the inner city areas. Moreover, the project was also intended to create 1.8 million square yards<sup>63</sup> of highly lucrative real estate along the expressway (Ahmed, 2014, February 16). Under the auspices of the MQM-led city government, a discourse of criminalisation and 'chaos' was employed in conjunction with a publicised will to 'clear up' informal settlements built over 'precious land' in order to make way for this latest mega-project (Gazdar and Mallah, 2011: 10).

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<sup>63</sup> Close to 1.5 million square metres.

Between 2002 and 2009, this project led to the displacement of close to 77,000 families from Karachi's oldest locality, Lyari, with only about 30,000 families given any kind of compensation. The 'compensation' given by the state to each family consisted of Rs. 50,000 (approx. \$500) and an 80 square yard plot in the extreme north-western outskirts of the city (Arif Hasan, personal interview, June 3, 2013). Due to the sheer remoteness of the new settlement from the old city where Lyari had been located, the displaced families had to rebuild their entire lives and, according to prominent researcher Arif Hasan, 80% of the people became even poorer after the shift due to lack of jobs and distance from the main city (ibid.). The area came to be known as Lyari Basti as the displaced sought to keep at least some semblance of continuity from their previous lives. An overwhelming majority of the displaced people are non-Urdu speaking. The process of spatial displacement thus took place along class and ethnic lines.

A crucial fact, which has been missed in almost all accounts of this project, has been the historical importance of Lyari in a politics of resistance in Karachi. As one of Karachi's oldest and most underdeveloped areas, Lyari has been a hotbed of oppositional, and even radical, activism since the days of the anti-Ayub movement in the late 1960s. Moreover, due its historical links with the indigenous population of Sindh province living outside of Karachi, Lyari was also a center of opposition to the military regime of General Zia when the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) broke out in interior Sindh in the mid-1980s (Balouch, 2013, October 31). In interior Sindh, the MRD movement was crushed through a massive military operation in which hundreds of radical, ethno-nationalist and pro-democracy activists were killed. In Lyari, the movement was co-opted through the institution of patronage networks which regularised some of the informal settlements within the area through the Sindh Katchi Abadis Act 1987 (Gazdar and Mallah, 2013: 3105). Keeping in mind this historical context of oppositional and



pro-democracy politics, it is no surprise that a large part of the citizenry of Lyari became a target of spatial displacement under the guise of mega-projects such as the Lyari Expressway. Thus, as can be seen in the case of Lyari Expressway and Lyari Basti, the socio-spatial politics of marginalisation and forgetting has been a crucial element in the Pakistani neoliberal security state's strategy in subverting and (literally) displacing any semblance of oppositional politics.

### *Urban Planning, Class and Ethnicity*<sup>64</sup>

As discussed in the last chapter, historical trends have ensured that a considerable overlap exists between occupational hierarchies within the workplace and the geographical origin of workers. Exemplified by 'ethnic' segmentations of labour and capital, class overlaps with ethnicity in mutually co-determining ways. However, this phenomenon is not limited to the politics of the workplace only and can also be seen in class-biased urban planning policies. In the last section, we have already seen how the developmentalist fetish of mega projects in Karachi disproportionately affects certain economically and linguistically marginalised communities. A study of the state response to housing demand in Karachi and concomitant urban planning practices also shows that such practices often *produce* 'ethnicity' in confluence with class. This has given rise to discontinuities between modes of political praxis between planned and unplanned areas, and has provided fertile ground for oppositional (and often violent) political mobilisation. However, due to a number of reasons, including structural factors and outdated thinking, left political praxis has been unable to capitalise on these sporadic outbreaks of discontent.

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<sup>64</sup> This section draws extensively on work done by Haris Gazdar and his colleagues at the Collective for Social Science Research, Karachi.

Karachi has always been a prime destination for migrants from all over the country. Since Partition, Karachi has seen several major influxes of migration. These corresponded to periods of conflict in pre-Partition India (late 1940s), the era of the Green Revolution (in the 1960s), and the years of civil war in various parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan (since the 1980s). The most recent wave of migration into the city commenced in the aftermath of 2005 earthquake in northern Pakistan and received a boost due to ongoing civil and intensified Taliban insurgency in northwestern Pakistan since 2008 and the ethno-nationalist insurgency in Balochistan raging since the last decade. Combined with increasing corporatisation of agriculture and forced depeasantisation (due to inequities in land ownership) in South Punjab, the population of Karachi has more than doubled in the last decade and a half. Such a growth in population, from just below 10 million in 1998 (the last time a census was conducted) to an estimated 22 million currently, is surely something unique among other megacities of the world<sup>65</sup>.

Historically, the different migrant cohorts' experiences with urban planning practices has led to differentiation in class (Gazdar and Mallah, 2013). Compared to the later migrant cohorts, Partition migrants to Karachi (from the late 1940s to the 1950s) - mostly Urdu speaking *Mohajirs* hailing from western and northern India - were accommodated through formal mechanisms entailing state-sanctioned land designation and urban development. For example, in the 1950s, state subsidised conversion of agricultural to urban land in the northern areas of the city created stable, planned middle-class localities (Hasan, 1999). These are known today as the Nazimabad and North Nazimabad areas in Districts Central and East. As many of the (mostly Urdu-speaking) Partition migrants included government servants serving in the civil-military

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<sup>65</sup> Indeed, according to *Forbes* magazine Karachi is the fastest growing megacity in the world of the last decade (see Kotkin and Cox, 2013, April 08). A megacity is defined as 'defined as areas of continuous urban development of over 10 million people'.

bureaucracy, these were allotted houses in areas which British civil servants or upper middle Hindu merchant families had just vacated in central areas (near the commercial and administrative hub of the city). The poorer sections among the Partition migrants, who had initially loitered in makeshift camps, were eventually provided with residential plots on the eastern and western fringes of the city such as Malir, Korangi and Orangi (ibid.).

In contrast, the experience of post-Partition migrants to Karachi - overwhelmingly non-Urdu speaking and hailing from other areas of Pakistan - with regards to housing and urban planning has been distinctly different. The influx of migrants from Punjab and northwestern KP province in the 1960s was absorbed in the various, mostly unplanned labour colonies which had grown up around industrial areas such as SITE where state-subsidised, private capital-led industrialisation was in full swing. In the 1980s, refugees fleeing the Afghan 'jihad' from northwestern Pakistan and Afghanistan mostly settled in emerging informal settlements at the outskirts of the city in areas such as Sohrab Goth or along inner city crevices which had been designated as public land. These migrant cohorts were precariously absorbed into the services sector (such as the transport industry) or in the burgeoning underground economy which had started emerging during the 1980s. The most recent influx of migrants has resulted in an increase in densification in the inner areas of the city while also giving rise to new unplanned and semi-planned settlements on the fringes of the city (the locality of my fieldwork, Lyari Basti, is just one example of the latter). Thus, the number of *Katchi Abadis* (informal settlements) in Karachi, which stood at 483 in 1984, has now grown to over 4,700. They now house close to 55 percent of the city's population (Rind, 2013, November 15).

Different migrant cohorts to Karachi have come from different parts of Pakistan. Partition migrants were overwhelmingly Urdu-speaking, migrants in the 60s were mostly Punjabis and

Pakhtuns (from KP), 80s migrants were overwhelmingly Pukhtuns from northwestern Pakistan and Afghanistan, while the most recent influx has been a mix of Pukhtuns and Seraikis (from South Punjab). This has been coupled with a steady influx of Sindhi-speaking and Balochi-speaking migrants as emerging middle classes from these groups and areas are attracted towards Karachi due to better employment and educational opportunities (The News, 2014, April 20). Considering the differing experience of these groups with regards to state-led housing initiatives (or lack thereof), it is not unreasonable to state that the relationship between 'migrant cohorts's interaction with planning and informality was not incidental, but may have contributed to the construction of ethnic identities' (Gazdar and Mallah, 2013: 3103). Thus, urban planning practices have colluded to co-constitute ethnicity in conjunction with class.

As alluded to earlier, it should however be noted that unplanned areas in Karachi do not always exist in geographical isolation from planned areas. In fact, most informal settlements are located in ostensibly middle and upper class localities where they exist as islands of mal-development within a general landscape of privilege and opulence. These informal settlements occupy a significant place in the political economy of upper class areas (such as the Azam Basti settlement within military-run Defense Housing Authority in Karachi). Much of the domestic and casual labour that elite residents employ actually comes from these localities. Similarly, in a Union Council<sup>66</sup> level analysis of development indicators (such as literacy and availability of portable water), Gazdar (2011, September 23) has shown that 'localities with different levels of development... need not be at opposite ends of the city' (p. 11) and thus, even within (seemingly) homogenous, middle and upper middle class areas there are islands of deprivation which provide fertile grounds for political mobilisation around issues of regularisation and service delivery. A

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<sup>66</sup> The Union Council is the lowest electoral unit at which local elections were held in accordance with the Sindh Local Governance Ordinance (SLGO) 2001.

proto-typical example of such a katchi abadi, Kausar Niazi Colony is an ethnically heterogenous colony (with less than 5% Urdu-speaking residents) situated within the larger Hyderi area, which is pre-dominantly Mohajir. The KNC lags behind the rest of Hyderi in literacy and accounts for 36 percent of the Hyderi population while only occupying 15 percent of the total area (Gazdar and Mallah, 2011). This is in keeping with the generally lopsided residential land distribution in Karachi where 2 percent of houses occupy 21 percent of the area (A. Hasan, personal interview, June 3, 2013). This has led to enormous densification of the city with the number of people per hectare rising from 400 in 1999 to 4400 currently (ibid.).

While katchi abadis such as Azam Basti might seem out of order in a locality such as Defense, it is their very positionality and the accompanying dialectical tensions that define both in opposition to each other: one as a haven of civility, achievement and modernity; the other as a den of criminality, moral laxity/laziness and backwardness. In fact, a close look would reveal that these starkly different but spatially proximate areas are not so 'out of place' after all and are often tied to each other through very real linkages of the local political economy of cheap, domestic labour, whereby the affluence of one is ensured by the systematic underdevelopment of the other. The different regimes of urban planning (or lack thereof) also give rise to distinctive types of political organisation in Karachi. So in Mohajir-dominated, planned areas of the city, the rise of the MQM Sector<sup>67</sup> as a 'non-state yet non-kinship-based institution for enforcement and arbitration [of contracts]' (Gazdar and Mallah, 2013: 3111) during the 1980s saw the consolidation of (inverted) forms of "dual power", which are rigidly hierarchical and state-like in their organisation and mode of operation<sup>68</sup>. In turn, inhabitants of unplanned settlements always

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<sup>67</sup> The local level unit of organisation of the MQM.

<sup>68</sup> Use of the term "dual power" here is different from Lenin's concept (1917). For Lenin, dual power is an 'incipient' government which 'consists of the proletariat and the peasants' and emerges alongside the 'government of

exist in a state of tension with the authorities due to lack of tenure security. They actively seek out patrons who can provide links to the state and help regularise land or provide public services. In contrast to planned settlements, politics in the informal settlements is thus characterised by 'seemingly chaotic multiple nodes of collective action and negotiation along-side greater political openness' (ibid.: 3112). These discontinuities in the politics of planned and unplanned/formal and informal settlements, translated along class and linguistic/ethnic lines, is also reflected in the different political actors/parties dominant in these areas. For example, Gazdar and Mallah have shown, using data from polling stations, that in the 2008 general elections 82% of the vote from planned and semi-planned areas went to the MQM, while in the unplanned areas close to 60% of the vote was secured by the PPP (ibid.: 3108).

My observations would suggest that the lack of attention the left has paid to informal settlements has contributed to a general loss of influence for the left in Karachi. In some ways, this has been due to an overly narrow conception of class and class struggle (as taking place only at the point of surplus production) and due to limited focus on organising only the industrial working class in public or private sector industrial units. However, the lack of inventive thinking and practice has not been the only reason keeping the left back in this regard. Even in areas where they have tried to organise, left activists have experienced setbacks due to not being able to compete in the politics of service delivery or coercion which are practiced by other more entrenched parties in Karachi's working class neighbourhoods. It is to the influence of these factors that we will turn in the next two sections of this chapter.

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bourgeoisie'. In the case of MQM in Karachi, even though 'dual power' is used in the sense of the emergence of alternative state-like structures, this is in no way based on an emancipatory alliance of the proletariat and/or peasants. Thus, while the MQM, like all fascist movements, fed on class discontent, it maintained and reproduced class hierarchies in its everyday form and practices (along with other hierarchies along lines of gender and ethnicity).

### *Localisation, Territory and the Politics of Service Delivery*

In the last two to three decades, various parts of Pakistan have seen a general trend towards a 'localisation of politics'. This localisation of politics has gone hand in hand with the post-1970s rise of political entrepreneurs from within the intermediate classes. These political entrepreneurs have in turn been instrumental in institutionalising the patronage-heavy 'politics of common sense' developed by the Pakistani ruling classes during the military regime of General Zia to counter the more substantive, class-based 'politics of resistance' which had started to emerge during the late 1960s and 1970s. Aasim Sajjad Akhtar describes the politics of common sense as being based on 'acquiescence to the patronage-based rules of the game' in order to 'secure political or economic resources *through direct or indirect access to the state*' (Akhtar, 2008: 203, emphasis added). In fact, as Kennedy (2006) has described in his work on military rule in Pakistan, the creation of political entrepreneurs through the institutionalisation of vertical patronage networks (often mediated through seemingly ascriptive but produced identities of ethnicity, clan etc.) has been a major avenue for the Pakistani state and ruling classes to shore up their oligarchic rule. Repeated, non-party based local elections by all of Pakistan's military dictators through the 1960s, 80s and then in the 2000s, have helped create a new political elite which is organically linked to the state and thus can win over the acquiescence of the subordinated classes through dispensation of patronage along lines of caste, religion, sect and so on.

In this institutionalisation of local level political entrepreneurs, the ruling classes have responded to the structural-scalar shifts in the global political economy termed 'glocalisation' by Swyngedouw (2004). One of the main features of neoliberal glocalisation is the restructuring of state-market relationship as "the interventionism of the state in the economy is equally rescaled,

either downwards to the level of the city or the region, where public/private partnerships... engage in an intensified process of inter-urban competition or upwards' (Swyngedouw, 2004: 41). In Pakistan, as hyper-mobile fractions of capital have sought out new avenues for exploration and territorialisation, the devolution of considerable powers down to local government level has increased the intermediate classes' ability to dispense patronage (through building contracts, jobs and selected public service delivery) along vertical networks and thus, to co-opt or subvert any stirrings of discontent along horizontal, class-based solidarities. In fact, one can see the multi-scalar logic of such 'glocalisation' quite evidently in the case of General Musharraf's military coup in Pakistan in October 1999. On 17 October 1999, just five days after taking power and with a caretaker cabinet including technocrats from the World Bank and Citibank, General Musharraf announced that one of the military regime's top priorities was 'devolution of power to local government' (Kennedy, 2006: 113). Such IFI-peddled programs of devolution<sup>69</sup> have then dovetailed nicely with the search for new avenues of investment by international capital.

Ostensible class issues like access to clean water and electricity in the locality, are solved not through social mobilisation along class lines but through the invocation of ties - such as that of ethnicity, religious sect etc. - with local level patrons. As one left activist told me:

"The peoples' problems [in residential areas] might not be due to ethnicity but they will definitely be solved through ethnicity" (N Mansoor, personal interview, July 22, 2013).

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<sup>69</sup> Pressure from the World Bank on Pakistan to institute a program of decentralisation and local government had become increasingly pronounced during the late 1990s. See, for example, World Bank (1996) and (1998). The military regime, not bound by even formal democratic limitations, pushed through these programs at the behest of IFIs.



In his account of a recent election in Punjab province, Javed (2012: 28) has described how *dharas* (factions) 'built around individuals, families, kinship/*biraderi* ties, and relations of economic dependence and reciprocity' form the backbone of the electoral and political machinery in particular constituencies. This is then manifested through socio-political mobilisations that focus mainly on securing local level delivery of services (such as employment guarantees, road and sewerage construction) and are only minimally concerned with macro-level issues (such as foreign policy, national-level social welfare). Commenting on a similar localisation of politics in the face of defeat of the labour movement in Kolkata, Nandini Gooptu narrates:

"In recent decades, an emphasis on democratic decentralisation has facilitated devolution of financial and administrative powers to urban local bodies, with a mandate to mobilise the involvement of local populations. Participatory development initiatives have been implemented in the locality with overseas funding..... Ironically, all this has served to boost patronage based politics centered on municipal councils and councillors, and on the officials who implement participatory development programmes" (Gooptu, 2007: 1931).

The crucial importance of access to the state in the determination of socio-political loyalties was driven home to me by two events: one which I experienced myself and another which was mentioned to me by a comrade. During the course of one of my meetings with MKP activists in the area, one of the attendees, Abdur Razzaq, received a call about his expecting wife having developed complications which required urgent medical attention (fieldwork notes, June 12, 2013). Instead of calling for an ambulance, we quickly put her into my car and rushed to the nearest government hospital. After administering urgent treatment, the doctor on duty told us that the patient had to be admitted overnight to the hospital but that there were no available beds to accommodate her. After having talked to several administrative staff in the hospital and being

flatly refused any help, one of the nurses kindly pointed us in the direction of a man sitting quietly in the corner of the main reception. It was through this man, who turned out to be a local level representative of the MQM bigwig in the area, that we were finally able to get an overnight bed for Mrs. Abdur Razzaq despite the earlier protestations of the staff regarding limited space!

In another case, comrade Rahim Ahmadani, who used to be a rickshaw driver and now runs a small automobile repair shop in Lyari Basti, narrated to me his efforts to form a rickshaw drivers' union in Lyari Basti in 2012. In two months he was successful in organising about thirty daily wage rickshaw drivers. However, things took a turn for the worse when a close relative of one of the rickshaw drivers was picked up by the local police *thana* (police station) on charge of a petty crime. The driver came to Rahim for help in securing his nephew's release but without the requisite access to capital or influence with the police, Rahim was unable to do anything. Eventually the union member had to reach out to a local MQM influential who took Rs. 20,000 to secure his release from the police. Close to Rs. 5,000 was used to bribe the police while the rest was kept by the local broker as gratuity. When other union members came to know of this affair, they eventually started drifting away ostensibly due to the union's lack of influence with the state and over affairs of *thana-katcheri*<sup>70</sup> (R Ahmadani, personal interview, July 19, 2013). In my experience with left organising in Karachi, I observed that patronage networks were often used by local level machineries of mainstream parties (in conjunction with the police) in order to delegitimise and frustrate class-based organising by exposing our inability to 'get things done'.

The above incidents encapsulate two of the greatest obstacles faced by left parties and horizontal, class-based political mobilisation in residential areas of Karachi: the inability to

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<sup>70</sup> *Thana*: Police station; *Katcheri*: Local court. This is a popular term used to describe the nexus between police and local courts.

dispense patronage (and ensure access to the state and public services) and a lack of footing in politics of *thana-katcheri*. As Rahim and several other left activists indicated, a moral economy<sup>71</sup> encapsulated by the concept of *ihsan* operates in these areas which makes residents dependent on local intermediaries in order to escape the everyday trepidations of state and capital. While a direct translation of '*ihsan*' in Urdu is 'reward' or 'doing someone a favour', in everyday parlance the word means a deep indebtedness to the local intermediary/party worker who had solved a particular person's or their group/family's issues with regards to securing jobs, solving problems with the police etc. Similarly, securing influence with the police or the lower level bureaucracy, who often target the working poor on the smallest of whims, is crucial in securing residents' loyalties. As Rahim said to me: "The state is basically the *thana*. Whoever can control the *thana*, is king" (R Ahmadani, personal interview, July 19, 2013). Thus, access to the state - both in terms of securing services and influencing coercive institutions - emerged as a central plank of the 'politics of common sense'<sup>72</sup> (Akhtar, 2008). This hinders any substantive left footing in residential areas (to the extent that left parties have actually taken to organising there).

Crucially, with the emergence of petty-bourgeois and intermediate class political entrepreneurs since the Zia era, a central plank of this politics of patronage and common sense are *individuals* with access and links to the state rather than the individuals' party affiliations. An example of this trend is Abdul Hakeem Baloch, the Member National Assembly (MNA) of the constituency where Lyari Basti is situated. Baloch, who in the recent elections of May 2013, was elected on a ticket from the Pakistan Muslim Nawaz (PML-N)<sup>73</sup> party had in earlier times been a key member of the PPP in the area. Conversations with residents revealed that Baloch is a

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<sup>71</sup> The concept of 'moral economy' is taken from Thompson (1971). See footnote 51.

<sup>72</sup> A definition of Akhtar's use of 'politics of common sense' is given in the section detailing theories of the Pakistani state and polity. See page 41-42.

<sup>73</sup> The PMLN won handsome majorities in the 2013 elections at the national and Punjab level. It is now in power in the Punjab and in the center.

medium-sized landowner with fruit farms just outside Karachi. He used his capital and membership of the PPP to build links with the lower bureaucracy in and around the Lyari Basti area and is intimately involved in the political economy of land encroachment and 'informal' property dealings in the area. In fact, Baloch is a perfect example of what Arif Hasan calls the 'developer-politician-bureaucrat nexus' which has thrived in the context of the booming 'informal' property market (A. Hasan, personal interview, June 3 2013). The most recent wave of migration into Karachi has created a demand of 80,000 housing units per year. However, the formal sector only has the capacity to provide 20,000 units per year and the shortfall is met mostly through the 'informal' nexus of developers, politicians and bureaucrats.

The housing crisis in Karachi, due to which almost 55 percent of the city's population now live in informal settlements (Rind, 2013, November 15), has coincided with two crucial events: Musharraf-era financialisation and the liberalisation of the banking sector in Pakistan as well as the 9/11 attacks and rising Islamophobia in the USA. Expatriate Pakistanis, fearful of a freeze on their assets in the US, transferred capital back to the home country and often parked it in high turnover sectors such as in the stock exchange and the real estate market (Akhtar, 2011: 170). As a result, in the case of Karachi alone, the cost of land per square meter has undergone more than a 50-fold increase in the last two decades. Figures such as Hakeem Baloch, with organic linkages to the local bureaucracy and the police are in prime position to capitalise on these multi-scalar changes in political economy and become major dispensers of patronage in the area through access to jobs and building contracts.

Considering the windfall profits to be made through control over land, it is no surprise then that fights over territory in these newly developing areas are intense and multi-sided. Militant gangs linked to political parties (such as the MQM, ANP and PPP) and, increasingly, the Taliban

fight over territory neighbourhood by neighbourhood and street by street in order to gain control over local streams of *bhatta* (rent) from petty traders/producers and land. In informal conversations, residents revealed how fighting among rival gangs had often broken out over the smallest of disputes such as the overnight replacement of one party's flag on an electric pole with another party's flag (in these cases, flags indicate which party is in a position to monopolise rent in an area). Another avenue of marking out territorial control, especially among armed religious groups, are the local mosques, which are centers of a vast underground network of rent. Religious groups vie with each other to erect charity camps and banners outside mosques while also lobbying the mosque committee or local authorities for the purpose of appointing *imams* (prayer leaders) from their particular organisation<sup>74</sup>. For example, small shopkeepers in Lyari Basti mentioned how the MQM, previously the dominant force in *bhatta* collection in the area, was losing power with the influx of Pushtuns (who migrated due to military operations in KP province and tribal areas in the North). Thus, new political actors and thus competitors for rent - such as the ANP and Taliban - emerged in the area to challenge the MQM. The true test for MQM's hegemony, shopkeepers said, would be the *Eid-ul-Azha*<sup>75</sup> (still three months away at the time) when the competition over collecting animal hides establishes who is really ascendant in the local political economy (fieldwork notes, June 8 2013)<sup>76</sup>.

Moreover, it is not just the political or religious parties which vie with each other over access to territory in Karachi. 'Formal' state actors such as the police, army and the paramilitary

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<sup>74</sup> For a highly realistic account of various political parties and militant gangs' jostling over territory and, especially, neighbourhood mosques in Karachi, see Omar Shahid Hamid's thrilling debut novel *The Prisoner* (Oxford: Pan-Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> *Eid-ul-Azha* is one of the two main religious festivals celebrated by Muslims during the course of an Islamic year. Those with the means to do so, sacrifice animals such as cows and goats to commemorate the prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail for God.

<sup>76</sup> Collecting animal hides, later sold to various industries such as leather and shoemaking, is a massive business in Karachi and often the source of conflict between various competing parties.

Rangers are also firmly ensconced in the politics of rent-seeking. The role of the Pakistani military in the politics of land grabbing and real estate development has already been addressed earlier in this chapter. The police, as we have seen in this section, are deeply involved in the political economy of rent-seeking which revolves around each and every police station of the city. Not to miss out on the game of loot, plunder and coercion, the paramilitary Rangers have also have marked out territories in Karachi where they control access to space for car parking and petty traders. A recent report of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) describes how paramilitary officers got away with the crime of murdering the brother of a news reporter who was gathering information about the Rangers' rent-seeking activities in Karachi (Rubin, 2013)<sup>77</sup>.

An acquiescence to the politics of common sense often leads to despondency among left activists in Karachi, many of whom complained to me of politics having degenerated to being a mere vehicle for '*zaati mafaad*' (personal benefit) (R. Ahmadani, personal interview, July 19, 2013). I would however argue that most workers and residents are very much aware of their own position as being marginalised subjects in a situation of structural inequality and a political economy which offers little chance of survival except through enmeshment in aforementioned networks of patronage and *ihsan*. The decline of vibrant labour movements giving rise to a hollow politics of locality - a *seemingly* post-ideological terrain mediated by vertical patronage networks - is not unique to Karachi or Pakistan. In the case of Kolkata, for example, Gooptu narrates how:

'Workers' disillusionment with political struggles.. have in turn bred political cynicism and a view of democratic institutional politics merely as a source of patronage and benefits... If

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<sup>77</sup> For several years now, Pakistan has been on the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) list of most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, with reporters often caught between the powerful (and corrupt) military establishment on the one hand and heavily armed militant groups (both 'secular' and 'religious') on the other.

workers thus embroil themselves in local party and representative politics, from their perspective, does not signal their democratic engagement, but rather its opposite... [it is] a desperate strategy to grapple with their increasing everyday material difficulties' (Gooptu, 2007: 1927).

I contend that the politics of common sense as it manifests itself in Karachi is *post-ideological* in the sense that political choices and practices of the working poor - and their patrons (such as members of intermediate classes) - are at least, on the surface, by and large devoid of any macro-ideological considerations (such as questions regarding overall direction of the state, foreign policy and questions of universal social welfare etc.). Political choices and affiliations are decided upon short-term considerations of ensconcement in and/or gaining benefit from the local political economy of patronage and coercion, rather than the professed ideological leanings of various 'liberal', 'secular' or 'religious' parties. In fact, as mentioned above, the regular traffic among mainstream parties of different individuals according to the vagaries of power, is indicative of such a post-ideological localisation of politics whereby politics - at least for certain classes - is less an avenue for larger, structural transformations of the state and social relations, and more about access to higher echelons of state and capital. However, as I hope to have shown in this paper, a deeper look at the *apparently* post-ideological terrain of this politics, would in fact reveal it to be a deeply ideological affair. As Erik Swyngedouw in his work on 'glocalisation' has described:

"The double rearticulation of political scales (downward to the regional/local level; upward to the EU, NAFTA, GATT, etc.; and outward to private capital) leads to political exclusion, a narrowing of democratic control and, consequently, a redefinition (or rather a limitation) of citizenship. In short, the 'glocalisation' or territorial rescaling of institutional forms leads to

more autocratic, undemocratic and authoritarian (quasi-)state apparatuses" (Swyngedouw, 2004: 41).

Thus, the localisation of politics is *deeply ideological* in that it insulates the historic bloc from any substantive counter-hegemonic challenge by, at least on the surface, reducing questions of change to various groups' and classes' access to the state. Moreover, in the context of a state with direct antecedents in colonial rule, such an insulation of the historic bloc adds to its authoritarianism as demonstrated by the constant recourse to physical coercion not just in Karachi but in the rest of Pakistan too especially in peripheral areas such as Balochistan and FATA<sup>78</sup>. Thus, the poverty of praxis and - most crucially - in political imagination bred by such a cynical 'common sense' politics, in fact reveals the conjuncture as a highly ideological one.

Of course, this is not say that acts of resistance do not take place in Karachi or elsewhere. The very fact that the historic bloc is forced to constantly resort to coercion in places such as Balochistan and FATA, demonstrate that its hegemony is not as impenetrable as it might appear at first glance. In Karachi too, silent acts of resistance do take place. This is evidenced by women voting massively in favour of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the recent general

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<sup>78</sup> FATA = Federally Administered Tribal Areas, neighbouring Afghanistan.

For the past decade, Balochistan province has been the site of the fifth separatist insurgency since Pakistan's independence in 1947. As with the previous instances, this has been met with a brutal campaign of military bombardment, mass displacement of local populations (often in the name of 'development' and 'mega-projects') and enforced disappearances of students, teachers, professors, lawyers and political activists.

Similarly, the Pakistani historic bloc and imperialism have colluded over the last thirty years to reduce FATA to a launching pad for the global 'jihad' franchise. Since 9/11 the area has been used as a strategic 'backwater' by fundamentalist militants escaping from the American occupation in Afghanistan and by the Pakistani security establishment's project of nurturing 'jihadi' groups for its regional aims. The people of FATA, caught between an oppressive triumvirate of violence - made up by US drone bombardment, the Pakistani military and the Taliban and other assorted fundamentalists - have been facing a sixth military operation by the Pakistani military in the last ten years. While the operation is being marketed as a "decisive" action against Islamist militants apparently holed up in FATA, on-the-ground accounts indicate that the security establishment's old policy of protecting its 'favourite' militants continues, as does the careless bombardment of ordinary people's homes and livelihoods. Meanwhile, to use geographer Don Mitchell's words (2005), 'Bureaucrats of Empire' - both liberals and conservatives - have given their full support to the US-sponsored, neo-colonial Pakistani military in (re)conquering its own people.



elections in 2013<sup>79</sup>. Working class subjects constantly negotiate with different (potential) patrons in their respective areas. And on occasions when some form of primordial class consciousness does start to emerge (as in the case of the rickshaw drivers' union), the politics of common sense kicks in to subvert such attempts. Thus, as in the workplace, in the residential areas too Karachi's lower classes are caught in a dialectic of patronage and coercion which subverts class-based solidarities and channels politics along vertical networks of caste, ethnicity and locality. The role of imperialism - both in its territorial form (the US/NATO presence in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region) and its economic form (unequal economic agreements with the IMF, World Bank etc.) - is of seminal importance in the maintenance and reproduction of this dialectic in Karachi. Thus, the last section of this paper will provide an investigation of imperialism and its imbrications with the political economy of patronage and coercion in areas such as Lyari Basti.

### *Imperialism and Militarisation*

As is evident in the formulation of class politics in Karachi being caught between a dialectic of coercion and patronage, the role of physical coercion in preventing the emergence of any meaningful, alternative politics is not to be underestimated. In a city like Karachi, with a high concentration of the working poor from all of Pakistan's various ethnicities/sub-nationalities, any sparks of organised resistance along class lines are quickly suppressed through coercion and/or diverted along lines of ethnicity or religion. Thus, where ties of patronage are not sufficient to bind working class subjects to the established political parties, coercion in the form of shootings

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<sup>79</sup> The PTI is a relatively recent entrant to the Pakistani political scene and ran the elections on a populist, right-of-center platform focussed on eliminating 'corruption' (similar to the BJP and AAP phenomenon next door in India). It formed the provincial government in KP and emerged as the second largest party (in terms of votes polled) nationwide. Several women I met through the HBWWF narrated how they had silently voted for the PTI as the only option which they 'had not yet tried' even in the face of coercive force by MQM workers at polling stations. The MQM eventually won a majority of the seats from Karachi, but allegations of widespread rigging have dogged it since (see: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1048499>, accessed 18 July 2014).

or just beatings by local party militants quickly kicks in to instill fear. Just as the nominally present left parties in residential areas are unable to compete in the local economy of service delivery and patronage, our lack of access to coercive power often prevents any meaningful organisation to develop.

This was amply demonstrated to me while working with the MKP in Lyari Basti. A Left challenge to the politics of *thana-katcheri* in other parts of Pakistan has often involved *gherao* (mass encirclement) and sit-ins outside the *thana* in order to secure the release of locked up colleagues/comrades (R Ahmadani, personal interview, July 19, 2013). Of course, for any repeat of such a strategy in Karachi, one needs to have a critical mass of residents in a locality sympathetic to one's cause and willing to take on the police (and its assorted patrons) in unity with other residents. While helping with organisation in Lyari Basti last summer through study circles and corner meetings, I along with other colleagues who had been working there for much longer, managed to gather close to thirty members and sympathisers<sup>80</sup>. Just as a critical mass was building up, one day we received news that a member of our study group, Samad<sup>81</sup>, who joined relatively recently, had been picked up by local members of a mainstream party (fieldwork notes, July 8, 2013). After almost a whole day of solitary confinement and a substantial beating, Samad was dropped home in the night and told to deliver a warning to other party members to stop activities in the area. On their way back, the militants fired aerial shots outside the house of our leading member and a small red flag erected outside was also torn and left there. Despite our best efforts, news of this incident quickly got around<sup>82</sup> and over the next two weeks we lost a substantial number of our regular attendees. Even though residents had been extremely receptive

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<sup>80</sup> These were mostly middle-aged males. Access to women was difficult for me due to the limited time I was in Karachi for fieldwork.

<sup>81</sup> Name has been changed to protect identity.

<sup>82</sup> It was probably popularised by the militant thugs themselves.

to our discussion and study groups (and we were told privately that they still agreed with our message), coercion and thuggery had put paid to our effort to build a critical mass in the area which would have then helped us institute a people-centred alternative to the politics of patronage and service delivery.

The infiltration of guns and violence into Karachi's politics is not a new phenomenon and is linked directly to the city's role as a central conduit of arms for capitalist imperialism. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, Karachi's role as a lynchpin in imperialism's geo-strategic machinations in the South Asian region is nothing new and was instrumental in its very inception as a base for the British conquest of Sindh in the 1840s. The latest trend in the weaponisation of politics in Karachi can be traced back to the first Afghan 'jihad' during the 1980s and the Pakistani military and ruling classes' wholesale entry into the American-led project of turning Afghanistan into the Soviet Union's very own version of Vietnam. General Zia's praetorian regime used the diplomatic support received from the White House and 10 Downing Street as a smokescreen to crush the country's vibrant labour movement and inject religious radicalism into society at large. A central plank of this strategy was the weaponisation of right wing student groups such as Islami Jamiat Talba (IJT)<sup>83</sup> as a counter-weight to progressive groups such as the National Students' Federation. Karachi became the hub of the regional drugs and guns trade through the combined influx of heroin (from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas) and guns and other weapons (as part of the American war effort). The massive influx of guns and heroine wreaked havoc with a whole generation of Karachi's residents and had disastrous effects for left politics. For example, heroin addiction went up from being virtually unknown before 1979<sup>84</sup> to

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<sup>83</sup> The IJT is the student wing of the Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). The JI was supporting the Zia regime in its Afghan Jihad and is the sister organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>84</sup> The year Soviet Union troops came into Afghanistan.

over 600,000 addicts within ten years of the start of the 'jihad' while Karachi became the world center of the heroin trade (Levi and Duyne, 2005: 38). Similarly, between 1986 and 1989 prices of guns went down by almost 50% in Karachi and 'firearms became a fetish for a whole generation' (Gayer, 2007: 530). In a city where political violence had previously remained 'angry, disorganised and local, it [was] now cold-blooded and immaculately planned and executed' (Baig, 2008: 116).

In fact, Karachi's position as a central node of the regional (if not global) guns and drugs trade has been cemented as a result of the city's geo-strategic position in the American imperium's ever-expanding war machine in the ongoing War on Terror era. Close to half of the heroin produced in Afghanistan - which produces almost 90% of the world's heroin - transits through Karachi and the city is host to close to 1.2 million drug addicts (mostly heroin users) (Khan, 2013, September 03). A cursory walk through Karachi's (not so underground) black markets can give one an idea as to the sheer volume of sophisticated military hardware which finds its way from NATO supplies docked in Karachi port to the city's markets. Two years ago, in a Supreme Court hearing on target killings in Karachi, the police chief revealed that almost 15,000 NATO tankers carrying weapons, ammunition and supplies have disappeared in Pakistan en route to troops in Afghanistan (Siddiqi, 2012, May 23). Moreover, direct American aid to the Pakistani military since the start of the WoT, amounting to \$11 billion in Coalition Support Funds (CSF) alone, has added massively to the militarisation of Pakistani society (Brohi, 2014, May 22). While claims of 15,000 disappeared tankers are most certainly exaggerated and the global circuit of drugs and guns is certainly not the only source of weaponisation in Karachi, it does give us an indication of the explosive situation created in the city by such easy availability of arms.

In addition to formal imperialism (in the form of US/NATO troops in the region), economic imperialism signified by IMF-dictated Structural Adjustment has also played its part in increasing political violence in Karachi and thus, hindering an alternative politics of class. The receding of the state in almost all Third World countries has left space open for various non-governmental organisations, religious groups and other non-state actors to fill the void as best they can. As the state recedes from welfare, the concomitant lumpenisation, increasing inequality, lack of gainful employment and limited access to public service delivery gives rise to increasing incentives for violence among the unfortunate (and substantial) casualties of neoliberal capital. However, the urban restructuring and fortification of the elite also forces the state to increasingly resort to repressive apparatuses of the modern nation state in order to pacify such discontents of modernity. Thus, while neoliberal urbanism in the Third World is characterised by a shrinking of the state when it comes to welfare, there is a paradoxical expansion of the coercive arm of the state. This is a trend seen in cities as diverse as Gayaquil and Rio de Janeiro (Moser, 2007; Gay, 2007). In Karachi and Pakistan's case the problem of an expanding coercive arm of the state is rendered more complex by the historical tendency of the Pakistani state (and its principal actor: the military) to outsource violence to what are, at least on the surface, non-state actors. In fact, while the Pakistani state at least in this regard mirrors the tendencies of its imperial guarantor (the US)<sup>85</sup>, in the peripheral areas of Karachi the outsourcing of violence has reached its zenith with the proliferation of gangs and violence-inclined mafias. Seen in the context of most of the violent groups in Karachi being either a product of the state itself or receivers of its patronage at one point of time or another, these groups are less 'non-state' and more expressions of the overdeveloping state's own fragmented hegemony.

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<sup>85</sup> For an excellent account of US imperialism's concerted strategy of outsourcing violence as a means to counter popular governments in the global South, see Mamdani (2004).

In Lyari Basti, for example, residents told me how the four government-run schools in the area had shut down in 2008 (Mushtaq, Lyari Basti resident, personal communication, June 5th, 2013) - in the direct aftermath of a reduction in the federal government's education budget and the approval of a \$7.6 billion Structural Adjustment Facility from the International Monetary Fund (I-SAPS, 2010 March; IMF Survey Online, 2008, November 24)<sup>86</sup>. The children and young adults who were now without meaningful educational opportunity went into four different avenues. For those whose parents could afford it, there was the option of two small, low-cost schools run in the area by an NGO The Citizens' Foundation (TCF). NGOs, both of the religious and non-religious type, have been active firefighters in the face of the ravages of neoliberalism. Having seen a particular rise due to massive injection of foreign aid into Pakistan in the aftermath of US invasion of Afghanistan, the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP) estimates that there is at least one NGO for every 2,000 people in the country<sup>87</sup>. Combined, they receive close to Rs. 70 billion (app. \$0.7 billion) each year in charity alone (Shah, 2014 April). Many of the old Left have also been incorporated into the neoliberal NGO project which has led to a professionalisation of oppositional (anti)politics. In fact, as Akhtar (2006) has pointed out, many of the biggest NGOs, due to their access to foreign funding, governmental influence and jobs, have themselves become vehicles for patronage and the politics of common sense.

Another avenue for the children of Lyari Basti who were now out of government schools were the increasing number of *madrassas* (religious seminaries) in the area. The *madrassas* are mostly focussed on basic literacy and religious education (such as reading and learning the Quran) but also act as vital nodes in the local political economy of patronage. The trend towards

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<sup>86</sup> After an initial \$3.1 billion disbursement, the loan was later cancelled as the Pakistani government was unable to fulfill all of IMF's reform criteria necessary to release subsequent installations. The recently elected PML-N government however has agreed on a \$12 billion loan from the World Bank to be disbursed over the next five years.

<sup>87</sup> Close to 150, 000 in total.

madrassas in Pakistan received a massive boost through ISI and CIA support in the 1980s as centers for recruitment of foot soldiers in the wake of the Afghanistan 'jihad'. Even today, madrassas in various parts of Pakistan receive generous funding from the Gulf countries. For example, a Wikileaks cable estimated that close to \$100 million annually from Saudi Arabia and UAE makes its way into madrassas in South Punjab alone (WikiLeaks, 2008 November 13). My own experience of studying in Karachi's biggest madrassa, Jamia Binoria, for seven years suggests that while these establishments receive significant (covert and overt) state support<sup>88</sup> and do provide foot soldiers for the global franchise of jihad, the reasons parents send their children to these establishments are usually much more mundane. For example, one parent in Lyari Basti told me that the reason he sends his child to the madrassa is that 'at least they will provide *rashan* (groceries) for Ramzan<sup>89</sup>'. Thus, while madrassas do provide token relief from the ravages of neoliberalism, their links to the global franchise of jihad and their position in the Pakistani military establishment's disastrous policy of nurturing violent Islamist organisations for strategic gains in the region, makes them completely useless for any kind of alternative, class-based politics.

The other two avenues available for the youth of the area were either to learn some skill (as an apprentice with a local shop owner, mechanic etc.) or just loiter about. Considering the general precarity of employment in the area<sup>90</sup>, it is more appropriate to consider both these groups of youth as part of the floating lumpen. In light of the general culture of weaponisation and their precarious status, it is extremely easy for these young adults (including those studying

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<sup>88</sup> Heads of violent extremist organisations such as the Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), with known links to the Pakistani intelligence and military establishment, were a regular fixture at Jamia Binoria.

<sup>89</sup> Muslim holy month of fasting which is followed by the festival of *Eid-ul-Fitr*.

<sup>90</sup> Daily labourers residing in Lyari Basti told me that they earn, at most, Rs. 400 for a day's work. This amounts to a maximum of about Rs. 9500 per month (app. \$95) if allowance is made for continuous employment for 6 days a week (an unlikely scenario in any case). In comparison, Pakistan's minimum wage at the time of my fieldwork was Rs. 10000 (app. \$100), which has been increased to Rs. 12,000 (app. \$120) recently.

in madrassas) to be attracted to violence and militant gangs run by political parties. In fact, the precarity engendered by neoliberalism and the sheer alienation bred in these conditions has been capitalised upon by various exclusivist organisations to mobilise the urban poor. For example, in the case of Mumbai, the fascist group Shiv Sena employed a 'strategy of organising the populace at their point of residence' by ingratiating itself with the key players in the local political economy of land and providing a sense of emotional support to young males in a city 'largely populated by alienated individuals packed densely in slums and subjected to a sense of cultural angst and dislocation' (Patel, 2003: 23-4). The Sena's culture of *dada*<sup>91</sup> and brotherhood along with its promotion of the 'spectacle' of religio-cultural festivals created a sense of identity and belonging among the precarious population.

Similarly, madrassas and violent political and religious groups such as the Taliban and the MQM not only become intermediaries in the local economy of patronage and common sense, but also provide a sense of belonging and empowerment to residents in lower class neighbourhoods such as Lyari Basti. Oskar Verkaaik, in his work on the MQM and its appeal in Karachi and Hyderabad, has noted that the party promoted a form of militancy which 'managed to successfully weave this latently subversive urban youth culture, with its aspects of gender, leisure, and global youth culture, into an ethnic-religious ideology of protest and revolt' (Verkaaik, 2004: 8). Thus, the MQM manages to create a 'politics of fun' centered on a 'culture of street humour, physicality, and competitive masculinity' (p. 181). In my conversations with residents of Lyari Basti it became clear just how much the fact of precarity and alienation contributes towards youth becoming subjects of militant groups (both religious and non-religious). For example, the parent of a young boy who had recently joined the local Taliban told

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<sup>91</sup> Literally meaning 'Big brother'.



me that now 'he [his son] walks about the neighbourhood like a *Chaudhry*<sup>92</sup>. No one can touch him, he can eat where he likes, sit where he likes, demand money from whomever he wishes' (Mushtaq, Lyari Basti resident, personal communication, June 5th, 2013).

To be clear, the above account of the rise of right-wing groups and their role in the local political economy of militarisation and service delivery (which is sustained by capitalist imperialism) is not meant to reduce the various proto-fascisms that abound in Karachi to a problem produced and sustained by the urban poor. The role of the intermediate classes in abetting extremist religious groups through material support is well documented and so is the role of imperialism (and its clients, the Pakistani state and ruling classes) in actively promoting both 'secular' and 'religious' militancy. Moreover, entities such as the Taliban (to the extent that they represent a coherent whole), due to their historical roots in imperial machinations in the South Asian region and beyond, are necessarily a transnational phenomena and thus feed off issues, personnel and capital flows from other countries. However, a detailed exposition of the various factors feeding into the phenomenon of fundamentalism and militancy in Pakistan is beyond the scope of this work.

The only point of the above account - grounded, as I hope it is, in the local-level political economy of various right wing groups - is to militate against idealist and liberal conceptions of Islamist/secular militancy as being the product of some kind of 'ideological war' sustained due to lack of (correct) 'education' or 'enlightenment'. Thus, while the ideological succour provided by the Pakistani state to exclusivist narratives of religion and nationhood is undeniable<sup>93</sup>, the rise of organisations such as the MQM and Taliban remain, at the end of the day, phenomena predicated

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<sup>92</sup> *Chaudhry* is generally a term used to indicate ancestral land ownership. However, in Karachi's vernacular the word is often used to denote someone who is a local influential or muscle-man of political parties.

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Nayyar and Salim (2003).

on the immanent and multi-scalar materiality of neoliberal capitalism and capitalist imperialism. The sheer empowerment provided by a gun in one's hand for those who have been consigned to anonymity and marginalisation by the ravages of capital and state should not be underestimated. After all, it is 'not the consciousness of men [sic] that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness' (Marx, 1859: 4).

For those committed to a left project in Karachi then, the question remains: where do we go from here? In an environment of material and ideological suppression and the nefarious ways in which state and capital have worked to ingratiate the politics of common sense in Karachi and elsewhere, what will it take to resuscitate a genuinely oppositional politics along the lines of class? In short, what is to be done? This is the question for the next, concluding chapter of this paper.

## Conclusion: What Hope is Left?

As described above, a (potential) politics of the working class in Karachi and concomitantly any hegemonic challenge to the prevailing historic bloc has withered at the hands of forces at multiple scales. The co-constitutive, dialectically integrated effects of neoliberal capitalism, capitalist imperialism and Pakistan's dynamic 'overdeveloping' post-colonial state have rendered any horizontal mobilisation along class lines subject to the vagaries of the localised political economy of patronage and coercion which animates - and restricts - the political choices of Karachi's working class subjects. A close study of said political choices by the urban poor also reveals how *class* is as much an objective category as a subjective, *lived* phenomenon which operates over multiple spaces (i.e. both residential and working spaces) and is necessarily shaped by forces operating over multiple scales. In fact, in the case of Karachi and Pakistan, like several other post-colonial countries, historical patterns of geographic uneven development and state/historic bloc practices often actively *produce* (seemingly) ascriptive identities - such as ethnicity - *in confluence with* class. Thus, it is of seminal importance for our social investigation and political praxis to take into account such complex and multi-layered patterns of class formation and articulation as opposed to mechanistic, deterministic and/or merely additive views of class, ethnicity and other identities.

Moreover, for those of us on the Left in Pakistan, it is also imperative to see the current conjuncture of apparently *post*-ideological politics as not just predicated on the multi-scalar and immanent materiality of capitalism in Karachi (and Pakistan), but also as a *deeply* ideological mode of restrictive political practice and imaginaries. As a mode of social investigation (i.e. as social *science*), Marxian dialectical materialism is first and foremost a tool to pierce the fetishism engendered by capitalism to reveal capital as always and everywhere 'dripping from head to foot,

from every pore, with [the] blood and dirt' of the working masses (Marx, 1867: 532). *Science*, after all, is nothing if not a tool to delineate *content* from *form*. Thus, to pierce the veil over seemingly restrictive forms of political practices (and imaginaries) through dynamic and incisive analysis and praxis - which places socio-spatial relations of class, in their imbrications with other identities such as ethnicity, gender and religion, at the forefront - is a seminal challenge for any emancipatory project in Pakistan.

As described in earlier chapters, the influence of the Left on Pakistan's political milieu saw its peak during the high era of Third World nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s. With the entrenchment of the neoliberal order and the retreat of the Left from the political scene in Pakistan, traditional issues of the Left (such as welfare, social justice and anti-imperialism) have become, though in a hollowed-out form, the preserve of populist, right-wing and liberal groups. Thus, while the discourse of social justice and welfare for the poor is strong, mainstream parties have managed to reduce it to a matter of (individual) charity or, at best, what can only be described as 'neoliberal welfarism' .i.e. IFI-approved, targeted welfare handouts (such as the Benazir Income Support Program) operated by a state retreating from *collective* welfare. Similarly, while anti-imperialist discourse still finds deep resonance with people who once arose in solidarity with their sisters and brothers in Vietnam and Cuba, right wing and liberal parties have reduced it to a crass anti-Americanism focussed more on a regressive (and manufactured) cultural nationalism rather than any substantive critique of the dependency and political economy engendered by capitalist imperialism. However, the very fact that calls for social justice and welfarism still find deep resonance in society should alert us to the fact that, at the very least, the influence of the Left on Pakistan's cultural milieu has historically been substantial and something

to be built upon. Even today, among large sections of the rural and urban poor, memories of the 60s and 70s and the struggle waged by parties such as the MKP remains quite vivid.

However, as shown in the preceding chapters, our task in Karachi (and elsewhere in Pakistan) is to rethink our practice in light of contemporary conditions such as informalisation, the localisation of politics and the changing nature of imperialism in Pakistan and beyond. I would contend therefore that serious and committed social investigation into the class structure and the various forces which make up the social formation and polity of Pakistan has to be at the center of any alternative, radical political project. For too long now have we left the field of social investigation to establishment intellectuals in bed with American imperialism, the Pakistani ruling classes or both. The varying mixtures of liberalism, imperialist intervention and technocratic reformism offered to us by such establishment scholarship have often clouded our view of problems such as religious fundamentalism and (the oft touted) dichotomy between liberal democracy and military dictatorship. Thus, the need of the hour is for a socially informed practice and scholarship which, instead of copying its recipes for revolution from Czarist Russia or mid-twentieth century China, is grounded in the actually existing, spatio-temporal contexts of Karachi and other parts of Pakistan.

Rethinking our theory (and therefore our practice) might allow us to address several blind spots, past and present. In this regard I would like to point out four, inter-related avenues of research and political practice. Firstly, there is the question of imperialism and its centrality to Pakistan. As in most countries of the global South, imperialism - whether in its military or economic form - yields great influence on the Pakistani state and polity. While US imperialism's historical collusion with the neo-colonial Pakistani military is well documented, detailed analyses of imperialism's role in Pakistan beyond its mere territorial logic are conspicuous by

their absence. For example, while sporadic articles have been written on the role of NGOs in the fragmentation of politics into 'issue-based' campaigns<sup>94</sup>, systematic studies and analyses on the myriad other aspects of imperialism, such as the influence through 'civil society', media and think tanks, is sorely missing. In fact, fresh analyses are even more imperative in the current national and international context, where US imperialism, which once allied itself squarely with religious fundamentalist groups in various Muslim countries, has now - at least on the surface - given its backing to 'secularism' (a traditional plank of left strategy in Pakistan). Simultaneously, there is also a need to broaden our lens with regards to imperialism and look at the influence of emerging capitalist powers such as China and the Gulf countries in Pakistan. The Pakistani military, for example, has long provided training and personnel for the American-supported oil dictatorships in the Gulf in order to insulate them from their own populations<sup>95</sup>. However, an analysis is also needed as to how dependency, in terms of capital and labour flows, works not just in North-South context but also between Southern countries (as in the case of Saudi Arabian influence over Pakistan).

One of the most important questions, and one which is a major blind spot in this thesis too, is the gender question in Pakistan, especially among the Left. Traditionally, the Pakistani Left, even though committed (at least in rhetoric) to the emancipation and participation of women, has not been as gender-friendly a space for politics as it should have been. Generally, this has been tied to a wider absence - barring a few notable examples - of women in the public sphere including in academia and politics. More specifically, this has also been due to a failure of thinking through how exploitation and the reproduction of capitalism in Pakistan is co-

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<sup>94</sup> For example, Akhtar (2006) on NGOs.

<sup>95</sup> Most recently, ex-Pakistani service men were reinducted and sent to Bahrain to crush anti-regime protests which had erupted in the context of uprisings in Egypt, Syria etc.

constituted by and works through gender and patriarchy. Neoliberal capitalism in several countries of the global South has been characterised by a marked feminisation of poverty as more and more women are sucked into the (waged) labour force and thus exposed to the vagaries of the market. Crucially in Pakistan, it is important for us on the Left to recognise that avenues such as foreign funded NGOs and private media, for all their pitfalls, have actually provided opportunities for upward social mobility and more equitable labour conditions to a substantial number of women. Of course, this is not to suggest that all classes of women have benefited equally from the NGO boom or that NGO liberalism can feed into any political program which is based on *substantive* equality for all genders. It does however remind us to be more proactive with regards to organising women and, crucially, inflecting our studies of capital and class through considerations of gender and patriarchy.

Another question which needs to be tackled with clarity and nuance is that of the various sub-nationalisms which abound in a multi-ethnic (multi-national?) polity such as Pakistan. As alluded to in earlier chapters, historical and continuing patterns of uneven and dependent development in Pakistan have given rise to movements for self-determination and autonomy along regional and linguistic lines. While in the Cold War era these movements couched their discourse and struggle in explicitly Marxist and/or Third Worldist terms, in the current era of US hegemony many of these movements often (implicitly) look towards Western imperial powers for support and/or legitimacy. Of course, this is not to deny the fact of national (and class) oppression which has been inflicted upon regions such as Balochistan by the post-colonial Pakistani state and military. It is however a matter of serious investigation and debate for the Left in Pakistan (often itself heavily dominated by Punjabi and Urdu speaking petty-bourgeois

intellectuals<sup>96</sup>) to articulate a position on the national question which stands firmly and resolutely against the brutality which the Pakistani security apparatus has brought to bear upon smaller nationalities even while maintaining its vision of uniting *all* of the country's oppressed peoples on an anti-imperialist, pro-people platform.

The fourth major question which we need to tackle is that of new forms of class struggle which can be tapped into and which can form nodes of an alternative politics along the lines of class. This includes not just the gender and national question as discussed above but also alternative spaces of theory and practice which move beyond or - perhaps more appropriately - build upon 'traditional' avenues of class struggle such as the factory floor. Struggles over community and residence are as much issues of class as those regarding minimum wage or the working day. And as shown in this thesis, issues of informal settlements, regularisation, community building and youth empowerment are crucial avenues where mainstream political and religious groups have capitalised in Karachi. On the left, we ignore these other forms of class struggle at our own peril.

This brief discussion of the major issues facing us in Pakistan today is not to suggest that nothing is happening on these fronts. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the long evening of the 1990s, Left ideas and praxis the world over are in a state of resurgence. Discussions about inequality and, crucially, capitalism are back in the mainstream discourse. From Syriza in Greece to the PSUV in Venezuela, there are serious and collective efforts underway to make socialism relevant to the 21st century not least by owning and recognising our mistakes in the past century. Of course, this is not to discount the simultaneous rise of reactionary forces worldwide and in the region as typified by the ascent to power of Narendra Modi in India and the British National

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<sup>96</sup> Like myself!



Party's success in recent European elections in Britain. In Pakistan too, after the Cold War generation lost faith in universal ideals of social justice and equality or degenerated into frankly irrelevant squabbles between Bolshevism, Maoism, Trotskyism etc., a new generation is emerging which has minimal or non-existent memory of past feuds and is looking to rethink our praxis in the current context.

For the last decade, a popular and militant nationalist struggle has been waged in the province of Balochistan by a coalition of various pro-independence groups. While previous nationalist insurgencies in the province have been dogged by accusations of being led by tribal Sardars<sup>97</sup>, the most recent iteration of the movement is led in large part by students, intellectuals and, most importantly, Baloch women. There is a militant struggle not just against the brutality of the Pakistani state but also a vigorous internal debate within the movement about imperialism, alliances with traditional power brokers such as Sardars (or the lack thereof) and learning from other pro-people struggles such as those raging in India and Nepal. After almost two decades of hibernation, the National Students' Federation (NSF) was revived in the aftermath of the 2007-08 Lawyers' Movement as a new generation of political activists came of age during the pro-democracy agitations. In recent months, a vigorous and continuing popular movement waged by slum dwellers and led by the socialist Awami Workers' Party (AWP) in the very heart of the Pakistani capital Islamabad has amply demonstrated not just the mobilising potential of these other, non-'traditional' forms of class struggle but also, and perhaps crucially, a willingness on the part of those on the Left to rethink and devise new modes for our praxis. This thesis too does not exist in isolation. Of the four questions identified above, I have tried to investigate at least three (imperialism, ethnicity/sub-nationalism and new forms of struggle) in their imbrications

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<sup>97</sup> Large landowners whose authority and material power had been cemented by the British colonialists. See, for example, Ahmad (1973).

with class and through a locally grounded analysis of workplace and residential area politics in Karachi. Other friends and comrades are focussing on other spaces and avenues for investigation in Pakistan through a critical and praxis-oriented engagement with one or more of the issues outlined above.

In the face of daily bombs, violence and militarisation, we in Pakistan might well be living through times of reaction brought about by the now hidden, now open trepidations of state and capital. As much as 'there is great chaos under heaven - the situation', as Mao said, 'is excellent'. We harbour no illusions about the arduousness of our project. Our struggle will be long, bloody and protracted. It will require perseverance, courage, humility and, most importantly, ruthless self-critique. But just as surely as day follows night, just as surely as the spring which follows the long winter, hope and resistance emerge often from the unlikeliest of corners. Perhaps it is fitting then to end with these lines from one of the great Urdu poets of the last century and recipient of the 1963 Lenin Peace Prize Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

*Yehi junoon ka yehi taaq-o-daar ka mausam*

*Yehi hai jabr, yehi ikhtiyaar ka mausam*

*Qafas hai bas mein tumhaare, tumhaare bus mein nahin*

*Chaman mein aatish-e-gul ke nikhaar ka mausam*

*Bala se hum ne na dekha tou aur dekhen ge*

*Farogh-e-gulshan-o-saut-e-hazar ka mausam*

'Tis the season of passion, yet also of the handcuff and the noose

'Tis the season of repression, yet also of agency and resistance

The prison and cage may be in your control, but you have no power over

The season when the fiery rose blossoms in the garden

So what if we do not live to see it? There will be others who witness

The season of the flowering garden, of the nightingale's song<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> I have borrowed Saadia Toor's translation of these couplets in her book, *The State of Islam* (2010).

## **List of Formal Interviewees**

Nasir Mansoor (Deputy Secretary General, NTUF; Labour Secretary, AWP), 22nd July 2013

Gul Rehman (NTUF), 29th May 2013

Zehra Akbar Khan (HBWWF and NTUF), 7th July 2013

Shehla Rizwan (HBWWF and NTUF), 7th July 2013

Rahim Ahmadani (MKP), 19th July 2013

Tanvir Aslam (Production Manager, Pakistan Cables), 14th July 2013

Yusuf Darbari (Manager HR & Factory Labour, Pakistan Cables), 14th July 2013

Haris Gazdar (Collective for Social Science Research, Karachi), 18th July 2013

Arif Hasan (Chairperson, Urban Resource Center Karachi; Member, UN Advisory Group on Forced Evictions), 3rd June 2013

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