

The (Un)Making of the Working Class in Karachi, 1980s-2010s

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Environmental Studies
York University
Toronto, Ontario

May 2020

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Abstract

This dissertation traces the evolution of working-class politics in Karachi (Pakistan) over the past four decades. I develop an integral and non-teleological approach to the study of class, state, and civil society by reconstructing the Marxist and postcolonial traditions, while also contributing to debates in human geography, development studies, sociology, and literary criticism. The dissertation demonstrates that the dialectic of the (un-)making of the working class is mediated by shifting modes of accumulation, dynamics of consent, coercion and *trasformismo*, and contours of the urban question. These shifts are theorised as two phases of passive revolution: the first from late 1970s through 1980s, and the second from late-2000s onwards. I argue that the first phase had the deepest, longest-lasting effects on the working class in Karachi. I demonstrate how the spatial and social faultlines that developed within the working class during this period facilitated pacification and ethno-spatial populisms. I provide a detailed historical account of the decline of the labour movement by examining trade union archives and interviewing workers and labour organisers. Through participatory observation with construction workers, home-based women workers, and food transport workers, I develop new ways to understand how the proliferation of “informality” in the second phase of (neoliberal) passive revolution is lived in spaces of production and reproduction. Finally, I use oral history and novels to trace shifts in the spatial “structure of feeling” with growing ethnic enclavisation. Together, I demonstrate how the rhythms of working-class politics in Karachi, and their enclosure within the circumscribed domains of subalternity, remain overdetermined by the social and organisational fragmentations of the first phase of passive revolution. In turn, I show that recurring crises of the ruling bloc, shifting articulations of the urban question, and contradictions within popular common sense offer openings for a renewed hegemonic praxis of the working class.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the product of many years of collective reflection and organising with and on the Left and working-class movement in Karachi. It is a great tragedy that a work as extensive as a doctoral dissertation aims to be is attributed ultimately to just the singular person. Neither the strengths of a work nor its shortcomings are the product merely of individuals: to pretend otherwise is, in the words of that great revolutionary-intellectual Walter Rodney, nothing but “sheer bourgeois subjectivism... [as] responsibility in matters of these sorts is always collective.” As such, it is apposite to acknowledge the many people whose inspiration, support, and intellectual input has gone into the making of this work. While limitations of space prevent me from listing by name the dozens of workers, comrades, friends, and family whose political, intellectual, and emotional assistance has contributed to this dissertation, it is imperative to mention at least some of them.

Firstly, thanks are in order to my close friends, Syed Azeem, Adnan Rafiq, and Ali Jan (all three now PhDs themselves). It is Azeem, Ali, and Adnan *bhai* who, at a crucial juncture many years ago, encouraged me to take up the social sciences for higher studies and facilitated my transition from the sciences. Over the years, their intellectual and political insights have been integral to almost all aspects of this work. My parents, brothers, and childhood friends in Karachi have also been extremely supportive throughout the long process of tribulations and frustrations that is a doctoral degree. Hassaan Mallick was especially helpful with contacts within the Alamgir Welfare Trust.

Many friends in all parts of the world have been like family, providing not only intellectual and political succour, but also much needed humour and perspective. In Toronto, I would particularly like to thank Arsalan Samdani, Alia Ali, Mustafa Bhutto, Azfar Zaheer, Noaman Ali,

Hadia Akhtar, Shozab Raza, Nabeel Ahmad, Sara Jafri, Kasim Tirmizey, Parastou Saberi, Murat Ucoglu, Ayesha Basit, Salman Haider, Hurmat Ali Shah, Waqas Butt, and Parmbir Gill. In Oxford and London, the denizens of Alexander Close, Cowley Road, and the IOE bar in SOAS deserve special mention: particularly, I would like to convey my gratitude to Nazish Gulzar, Junaid Aziz, Rafiullah Kakar, Habeel Khalid, Reema Omer, Rinchan Mirza, Ashlee Stetser, Nuzhat Abbas and Abbas Mohammed, Zain Iqbal, Moizza Sarwar, Ammara Maqsood, Adeel Malik, Nadir Cheema, Prof. Amin Mughal, Tayyab Safdar, and Shan Aman Rana.

In Pakistan, comrades and friends from all over the country have been close guides and interlocutors in shaping the arguments and helping source the material presented here. Colleagues at the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research in Karachi – particularly Karamat Ali, Aabida Ali, Mir Moladad Gabol, and Zaheer Abbas – were invaluable for navigating my way through trade union politics and labour movement archives. Nasir Mansoor and Mushtaq Ali Khan of the National Trade Union Federation and Zehra Khan and Saira Feroz of the Home-Based Women Workers’ Federation were key interlocutors for getting my political and intellectual bearings. Aslam Khwaja, Ramzan Memon, Shaheena Ramzan, Umar Din, Abdul Khaliq Zadrán, Jabbar Khattak, Akram Kaimkhani, Prof. Tariq Amin-Khan and many others were generous with sharing their time and contacts among the labour movement in Karachi. With his encyclopedic knowledge of left history in Sindh (and beyond) and immense good humour, Aslam Khwaja in particular was indispensable for navigating the maze of labour and left formations, parties, and alliances since the 1970s onwards. Similarly, Ali Arqam’s generosity, enthusiasm, and astoundingly rich knowledge of Karachi and its mosaic of ethnicities, *mohallas*, libraries, and cafes cannot be understated. The same may be said for Arif Hasan (the spiritual father of all Karachi researchers), Badar Alam of Herald/Dawn, and Haris

Gazdar of the Collective for Social Science Research. The seminars, discussions, and space provided by the Irtiqa Institute in Karachi were an indispensable refuge of intellectual and political succour: the tireless energy of Kaleem Durrani, Dr. Huma Ghaffar, Safia Bano, Anwaar Zaidi and others is both enviable and commendable.

A special thanks goes to comrades of the Awami Workers' Party and Progressive Students' Federation in Karachi and Hyderabad including Jahanzeb Soomro, Hajra Ahmad, Asad Ali, Waqas Alam, Laila Raza, Muzammil Afzal, Inayat Baig, Bakhshal Thalho, Alya Bakhshal, Marvi Latifi, Muneeba Hafeez, Ibrahim Buriro, Mukhtiar Rahu, Muhammad Babar, Younis Rahu, and Junaid Hanif. Husna Ali, Mehdi Hussain, Mumtaz Sajidi, Zafar Musyani, Feroz Jamali, Naghma Shaikh, Ajab Khan, and Hammal Baloch were also immense sources of support and friendship. At the Alamgir Welfare Trust, Irfan Husain and Nisar Ahmad were extremely accommodating to my (idiosyncratic) request of working in their establishment. At Habib University, I am grateful to my students and colleagues for providing an enabling and stimulating environment for teaching, research, and reflection. Noman Baig, Fahd Ali, Sarah Humayun, Hafeez Jamali, Shahram Azhar, Waleed Ziad, Craig Phelan, Asif Akhtar, and Mashail Malik were extremely generous with their time and support; the abodes of Noman and Sara-Fahd especially were like second homes.

In Islamabad, Ammar Rashid, Ismat Shahjahan, Alia Amirali, Qiyas Khan, Nusair, the late Prof. Yusuf Hasan, Shahab Saqib, and Prof. Aasim Sajjad Akhtar were key interlocutors and inspirations. Shahab Saqib especially has been a long-time intellectual and political fellow-traveller, and I am extremely grateful for his insights and perseverance through these years. In Lahore, Ammar Ali Jan, Tabitha Spence, Shaista Jan, and Khalid Javaid Jan have always welcomed me to their home like family. And none have provided more inspiration than

comrades associated with the Progressive Students' Collective and Haqooq-e-Khalq Movement, including Zahid Ali, Mohiba Ahmad, Haider Butt, Aisha Ahmad, Zaigham Abbas, Raza Gillani, Mudabbir Ali, Ammar Yasir, Sara Kazmi, Hashim Bin Rashid, Sher Ali, and Sarah Eleazar.

At York, I would like to thank Drs. Anna Zalik, Hira Singh, Himani Bannerji, Roger Keil, Justin Podur, Ilan Kapoor, Raju Das, and Greg Albo for being invaluable mentors throughout these years. Even if I would like to, I cannot possibly convey the debt of gratitude owed to Dr. Stefan Kipfer. Since the day I arrived at FES, Stefan has supervised me expertly and patiently through the maze of social theory and academia. He has provided the space to chart my own intellectual journey while offering challenging (and pertinent) advice at key moments, along with dedicated and close readings of innumerable drafts, papers, and ideas. I hope to continue benefitting from his mentorship and friendship in the coming years too. Moreover, I am extremely grateful to my partner Tayyaba Jiwani who (despite all the pressures of being a graduate student herself) has provided emotional, moral, and intellectual support at all stages of this project. From helping with interviews, proofreading, to taking up extra burdens of reproductive labour during the writing process, not a single sentence here would be possible without her.

Lastly, I would here like to remember my grandfather Aziz Mallick and our comrade Zabia Afzal. Zabia and *Dada jan*'s dedication to those damned by the machinations of state and capital energises me every day. They are not with us today, but will remain with us forever. It is to their memory that this dissertation is dedicated.

They are nothing. They must become everything.

- Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

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Glossary

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

BSO: Baloch Students' Organisation, a students' organisation initially affiliated with the pro-Moscow faction of CP. Later underwent multiple splinters, becoming associated with various Baloch nationalist formations.

CPP/CP: Communist Party of Pakistan. Banned by the state in 1954, it worked underground during most of its history through various fronts and splits.

DSF: Democratic Students' Federation. Left-wing student organisation at the forefront of student upsurges in the early 1950s. It was banned by the state in 1954 on the (false) basis of being the CPP's student wing. There was an attempt to revive the DSF in 1980. Its first President Nazir Abbasi was brutally murdered by the General Zia regime.

FATA: Federally Administered Tribal Areas, now merged into KP province.

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

GoP: Government of Pakistan

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

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

IJT: *Islami Jamiat-e-Tulba* (Islamic Society of Students), student wing of the JI. It was formed in 1947 initially as a missionary/evangelical organisation. Through the 1960s to 1980s, IJT became central to campus-based battles between left-wing, liberal, ethnic nationalist, and right-wing student groups.

IMF: International Monetary Fund

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

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

KNT: *Karachi Naujawan Tehrik* (Karachi Youth Movement). The LNT (see below) experiment was very popular and was replicated by youth and left-wing organisers in various localities of Karachi. These different civic organisations merged in 1980 to form KNT. Both LNT and KNT lost steam in late 1980s and 1990s due to the combined effect of urban militarism and CPP splits/degeneration after the fall of the Soviet Union.

KP: *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* Province (formerly NWFP)

LNT: *Lyari Naujawan Tehrik* (Lyari Youth Movement). Formed in 1976 in Chakiwara (Lyari), the LNT was a united front of youth associated with various left-wing formations (including the CPP). It focussed on confronting civic issues through building capacity and unity of working-class youth.

LOC: Labour Organising Committee, a radical labour front in Landhi-Korangi Industrial Area of Karachi in the 1970s.

MKP: *Mazdoor Kissan Party* (Workers and Peasants' Party). A Maoist party with major bases of support in South Punjab and KP (where it fought valiant battles against big landlords in the 1970s). MKP was affiliated with the pro-China faction of the CPP.

MMF: *Muttahida Mazdoor Federation* (United Workers' Federation), a radical labour front in SITE area of Karachi in the 1970s.

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: *Mohajir Qaumi Mahaz* (Mohajir National Movement). An ethnic populist/proto-fascistic party claiming to represent *Mohajirs* in urban Sindh. MQM has been centrally involved in rounds of urban militarism in Karachi and other parts of Sindh from the 1980s onwards. The party was renamed *Muttahida Qaumi Movement* (United National Movement) in 1997.

NAP: *National Awami Party* (National Peoples Party). A united front of ethnic nationalist and communist political workers from the 1950s to mid-1970s. As with the world-wide communist movement, the NAP also split along pro-Peking and pro-Moscow lines in the 1960s.

NGOs: Non-governmental Organisations

NLF: National Labour Federation, labour wing of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* formed in 1969. It is among the largest trade union federations in Pakistan today.

NSF: National Students' Federation, left-wing student organisation. NSF underwent a split in late-1965 into pro-China (NSF-Rasheed) and pro-Soviet groups (NSF-Kazmi). The pro-China faction was substantially larger, and itself underwent splits later over questions around the 1971 war and supporting Bhutto/PPP.

NTUF: National Trade Union Federation. A medium-sized trade union federation dominated by left-wing organisers.

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

PIA: Pakistan International Airlines. The PIA had a very active and one of the largest left-wing unions in Pakistan through the 1960s and 1970s. Later came to be dominated by unions affiliated with mainstream and/or right-wing political parties.

PkSF: Pakhtunkhwa Students' Federation, a students' organisation initially affiliated with the pro-Moscow CP, but later became associated with Pashtun nationalist formations.

PML: Pakistan Muslim League. Founding party of Pakistan, later went through multiple splits and iterations, and has been resurrected periodically by various military rulers over the years. Its biggest (Nawaz) faction is the largest opposition party currently. Draws its social base from big capital and petty bourgeoisie in Punjab.

PPP: Pakistan People's Party. Started off as a left populist party in the late 1960s under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the pressure of the mass movement. Has since transformed into a centrist/(neo-)liberal party dominated by landed interests and with links to big capital.

PSF: Peoples' Student Federation. Student-wing of the PPP, initially set up by Bhutto to both control the radical student movement and lure students away from the major left-wing organisation NSF.

PTI: *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf* (Pakistan Movement for Justice). Current ruling party of Pakistan with main social base in post-liberalisation fraction of professionalised petty bourgeoisie. Led by former cricket captain-turned-center-right populist Imran Khan.

PTUF: Pakistan Trade Union Federation. PTUF was initially the trade union arm of the CPP and was banned along with the latter in 1954. It is one of the smaller trade union federations in Pakistan today.

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

SNSF: Sindh National Students' Federation, a students' organisation affiliated with the pro-Moscow CP.

Tableeghi Jamaat (TJ): The *Tableeghi Jamaat* is a world-wide proselytising organisation with roots in Deobani Islam in India and Pakistan, but regular congregations and missions around the world.

Thekedar: Contractor

WB: World Bank

Timeline

A timeline of major events mentioned in the dissertation is presented below:

1947: Independence from British rule and Partition of India

1948: Karachi is declared federal territory, unrest over its separation from Sindh province.

1952-53: Bengali Language Movement in East Bengal led by students, followed by repression. Student Demands Day and repression of DSF in both East and West Pakistan.

1954-55: Dismissal of *Jugtu* (United) Front Government in East Bengal, and banning of DSF, CPP and communist trade unions. Pakistan joins US-sponsored SEATO and CENTO pacts. One Unit is imposed. Communists hereby work underground and through front formations.

1956: First Constitution is passed.

October 1958-onwards: Martial Law imposed with impending elections and political activities are suppressed. Basic Democracies scheme launched by Gen. Ayub Khan. Green Revolution policies and state-subsidised, private-sector led industrialisation pursued.

1961-62: Major wave of student protests in response to various issues (Universities Ordinance, solidarity with Third World anti-imperialists etc.), movement is centered in Karachi.

1963: Major labour strike wave in Karachi. Neighbourhood councils are temporarily formed in workers' colonies. New generation of radical labour leaders begins to emerge and student-labour alliances are formed.

1964-65: Ayub wins rigged Presidential elections, but loses in Karachi followed by “ethnic riots”. Ayub also shifts federal capital to newly-formed Islamabad city next to the military's General Head Quarters in Rawalpindi. 1965 war with India.

1968: Ayub regime celebrates “Decade of Development”. Student movement begins, with labour and peasants actively joining in all parts of the country. New generation of radical labour leaders and student-labour alliances are at the forefront.

1969: Gen Ayub resigns. Labour and student movements subside temporarily as Martial Law is imposed. IRO 1969 is passed and becomes basic framework for industrial relations.

1970: First general elections, (Bengali-dominated) Awami League gains majority overall, while PPP dominates in West Pakistan.

1971: Ruling bloc refuses to hand power to Awami League. A genocidal civil war follows in East Pakistan and India intervenes. Independence of Bangladesh. Pakistani army relinquishes power and is forced back to barracks. Bhutto and PPP attain power.

1972: Labour expectations are heightened with Bhutto ascendancy. Simultaneously, Language Bill is passed in Sindh leading to unrest and clashes in Karachi. Labour movement emerges again and self-directed actions by workers take place in Karachi and beyond - including factory takeovers and formation of neighbourhood management councils. Bhutto warns labour to back down. Military is brought back into Karachi to break strikes and factory takeovers. Repression of labour and left begins.

1973-77: New constitution is adopted. Left and radical labour formations are actively suppressed, while some concessions are made to organised labour. Bhutto introduces changes to civil service structure (including “urban” and “rural” quotas in Sindh). Economic crisis in Pakistan due to crop failures and OPEC oil crisis. Construction boom in Middle East and labour out-migration from Pakistan.

1976: Lyari Naujawan Tehrik (LNT) is formed in Chakiwara, Lyari (Karachi).

1977: Bhutto holds elections, but accusations of rigging spark a mass movement dominated by right-wing and petty-bourgeoisie elements.

July 1977: General Zia-ul-Haq imposes martial law.

1977-1988: Gen. Zia promises elections in ninety days but reneges. Bhutto is hanged and massive repression of democratic forces is carried out. Regressive laws with regards to women and minorities are accelerated, while right-wing/religio-political groups are systematically patronised.

1978: Colony Textile Mills massacre in Multan, estimated number of workers shot dead is 150 and above.

1978: All Pakistan Mohajir Students Organisation (APMSO) is formed, later morphs into Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM).

1979-onwards: Karachi becomes center of drugs and guns trade as American-Saudi sponsoring of *jihād* in Afghanistan shores up the Zia regime. War refugees from Afghanistan and earlier from Bangladesh (Biharis) add to major demographic changes in Karachi.

1980: LNT merges with other civic organisations to form KNT (Karachi Naujawan Tehrik).

1983-84: Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) begins and is extremely popular in Sindh. There is a military operation to quell insurgency in the province. Student unions are banned by the regime. Violence in campus politics accelerates, especially in Karachi.

1985-onwards: Bushra Zaidi incident. Karachi is engulfed in multiple rounds of violence along ethnic lines. The MQM gains strength.

1988: Gen Zia dies in a mysterious plane crash. Pakistan's first IMF structural program is signed before general elections. MQM emerges as dominant party in Karachi and forms alliance with PPP. But alliance soon sours, followed by repeated rounds of campus and city-wide violence.

Late 1980s - early 1990s: Splintering of the CPP, especially in wake of Soviet Union fall.

1990s: Several elections and presidential-military dismissals of governments follow in quick succession. Structural adjustment, economic liberalisation, and privatisation proceed in fits and starts. In Karachi, there are repeated rounds of para-military and military operations against “militants”, in addition to violence between different inter- and intra-ethnic formations.

1998-99: Pakistan and India become nuclear powers, followed by a limited war in Kashmir.

October 1998: Military coup by General Pervez Musharraf.

2001: Military regime of Gen. Musharraf is in dire straits, but is rescued by US largesse after 9/11. Pakistan becomes “frontline” state in so-called “War on Terror”.

2001-2007: Economy is liberalised rapidly, there is an import- and consumption-based economic boom. MQM is rehabilitated and “world-class city” regime ascends in Karachi. Ruling bloc’s alliance with religio-political formations comes under increasing stress due to War on Terror, and there is heightened fundamentalist/millennarian violence in different parts of Pakistan.

2007-08: Popular movement against Gen Musharraf results in return of formal democracy. Economic collapse (in wake of 2008 worldwide crisis) and further rounds of IMF-sponsored structural adjustment. Military operations in “peripheral” areas continue, agricultural depeasantisation, and “natural” disasters (such as floods and earthquakes) result in massive migration into Karachi.

2010: 18th Amendment to Constitution is passed institutionalising major devolution of powers to provinces (including subjects of labour and industrial relations).

2008-2013: Struggles over turf and governance jurisdictions lead to further rounds of intense ethnic violence in Karachi.

2012: Baldia factory fire in Karachi, more than 250 workers lose their lives – at the time, this is the worst factory fire in industrial history.

2013-onwards: Police and para-military operations in Karachi, especially targeting MQM. Ascending tactile repression of democratic and popular groups as military and intelligence agencies are increasingly challenged over their political-economic role, destructive military operations in “peripheral” areas, and dubious/shifting alliances with fundamentalist groups.

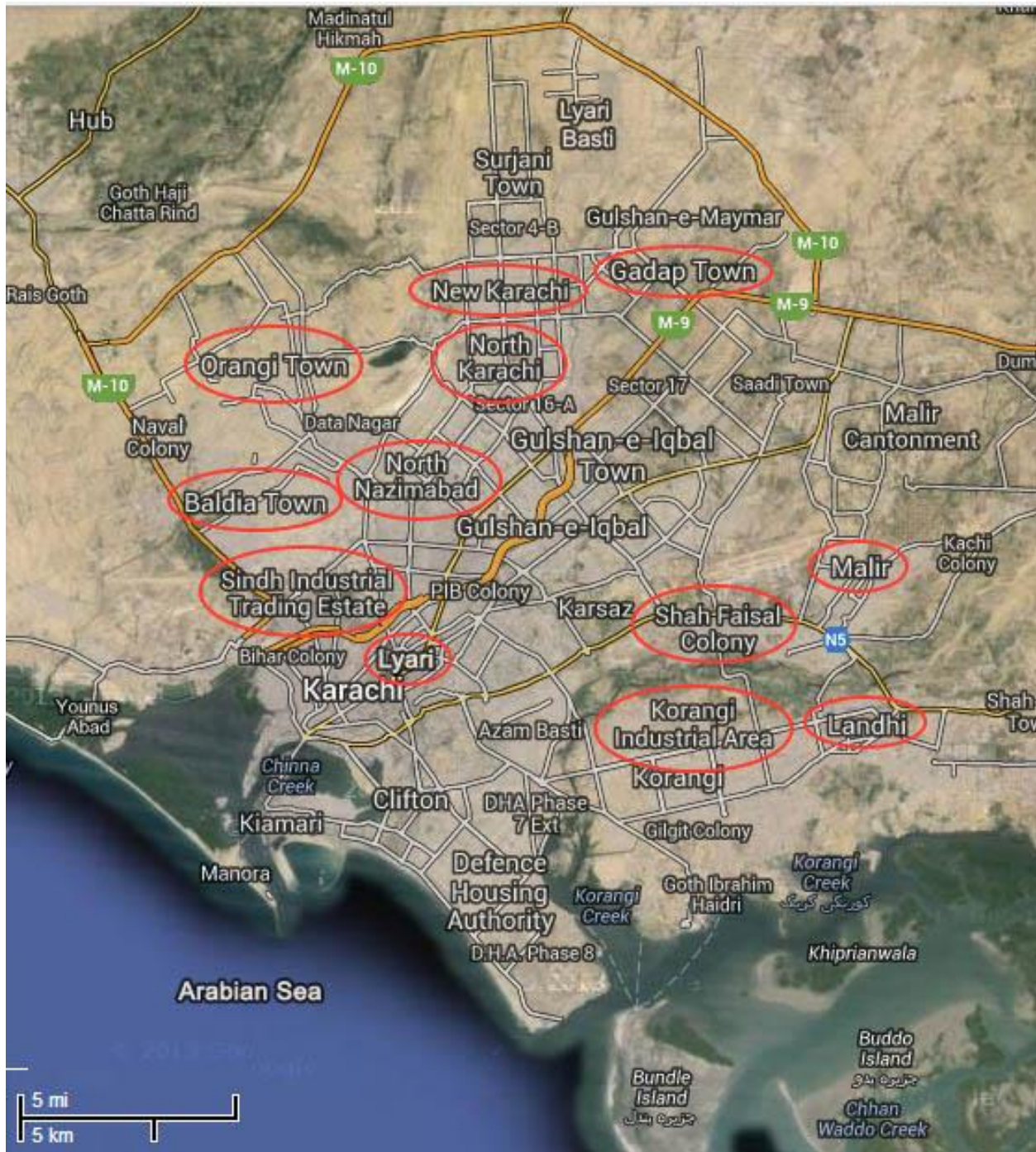
2018: Imran Khan-led PTI emerges as largest party in general elections and takes power at federal level. PPP retains power in Sindh province, while PTI wins major gains in Karachi as the MQM is weakened. Continuing IMF austerity and struggle over local-provincial-federal government tiers/jurisdictions, especially in Karachi.

Maps



Map of Pakistan, with provinces and neighbouring countries. Karachi Division is highlighted in red.

¹ Adapted from Wikimedia Commons. FATA is currently undergoing a merging process with KPK



Map of Karachi. The localities and areas mentioned in the dissertation are circled in red².

² Adapted from Google Maps.

Introduction: Everything That Concerns The People

“Darling Delio, I am feeling a little tired and can’t write much. But please write to me all the same and tell me everything at school that interests you. I think you must like history, as I liked it when I was your age, because it deals with living people, and everything that concerns people, as many people as possible, all people in the world, in so far as they unite together in society and work and struggle and make a bid for a better life.”

Antonio Gramsci, *Letter to Delio* (383-4)

“The peculiar difficulty of dialectical writing lies indeed in its holistic, “totalizing” character: as though you could not say any one thing until you had first said everything; as though with each new idea you were bound to recapitulate the entire system... There is no content, for dialectical thought, but total content.”

Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (306)

Four Scenes

Scene 1: On 24th October 1968, the Airways Union of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) held a seminar on the topic “Next is the Age of Socialism”. The seminar was held in The Theosophical Hall, in the heart of Karachi’s downtown Saddar area, and was attended by hundreds of workers. The chief guest was the Managing Director of the PIA, Shakir Ullah Durrani, and the Airways Union – one of the largest in the country – was led by Tufail Abbas, a prominent leader of the pro-China Left.

In his autobiographical account of the “Islamic Labour Movement”, veteran trade unionist Shafi Malik points to this seminar as a key moment whereby the idea to form an “alternative” trade union federation would be concretised (Malik, 2016: 77). While the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) –

a right wing, Islamist party and Pakistani counterpart to the Muslim Brotherhood – had been sporadically active among labour since the formation of Pakistan, the labour movement was dominated by Left- and communist-affiliated organisations. In the face of the “Red Storm’s extraordinary challenge” which preys upon “crisis and dispersion”, the aim of the new federation would be to “inculcate Islamic values” among workers and work towards “mutual agreement” between labour and capitalists in Pakistan (ibid: 78-81, 21). At a moment of great subaltern upsurge which had resulted in the toppling over of the dictatorship of General Ayub Khan, the JI’s National Labour Federation (NLF) held its first general meeting on 9th November 1969 at the Al-Noor Chambers on Preedy Street, Karachi. Shafi Malik was elected President and the NLF would eventually go on to become one of the largest trade union federations in Pakistan.

Scene 2: It is the evening of September 11, 2012 and payday at the Ali Enterprises factory in Baldia Town, Karachi. Close to thirteen hundred workers are milling about inside and outside the factory building. A fire breaks out due to faulty electrical wiring and spreads quickly throughout the building. Out of four emergency exits, three are boarded up to prevent workers stealing merchandise or leaving earlier than they should. As workers rush towards the only open exit, the stairs and hallways are found blocked by large cartons of packaged goods. The fire spreads quickly through the building, fuelled by the chemicals inside and an illegal wooden mezzanine floor (no building in Karachi’s SITE area can legally have more than two stories; Ali Enterprises had four). The absence of any safety equipment (such as fire extinguishers and fire alarms) means that workers are trapped in the factory. Many jump through windows to serious injuries. More than 250 workers burn to death inside the blazing inferno. Close to half are between 16 and 22 years of age.

In response to the deadliest factory fire in recorded human history, politicians would offer perfunctory statements of condemnation, while the brow-beaten and defeated labour movement would hardly find space on the streets and the airwaves. No systematic change in implementation of labour standards would take place. The Ali Enterprises manufactured denim, knitted garments, and hosiery for the prominent German retailer KiK. Just twenty days before the inferno, the New York-based Social Accountability International (SAI) had awarded the SA-8000 safety certification to Ali Enterprises on recommendation of one of its (SAI's) outsourced associates. The subsequent court case against the owners of Ali Enterprise would be subject to constant delays due to pressures from organised business and political wrangling between different state institutions (Khan, 2014). Until even two years later, seventeen bodies were unburied due to the tardiness of DNA testing. In the end, these bodies were buried in temporary graves, marked by numbers rather than names.

A fitting epitaph perhaps to the social and political death of labour in Karachi and Pakistan.

Scene 3: It is December 2014. I meet up with Rahim Ahmadani in Saddar to drive to the home of Jamal Naqvi near Cantt station. Ahmadani is a long-time member of the Mazdoor Kissan Party (Workers' Peasants' Party), a once mighty organisation of the pro-China Left which had fought valiant battles against big landlords in north-western Pakistan. Jamal Naqvi, now desperately ill and rendered practically immobile, was secretary-general of the underground Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) during the Zia dictatorship in the late 1970s and 1980s. After his release from prison in the mid-1980s, Naqvi had visited the Soviet Union in the days of its eclipse. He had been part of the acrimonious break-ups of the CPP in the 1980s and 1990s, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union. A few months before our visit, Naqvi has released an autobiography

“Leaving the Left Behind” that had been the subject of much debate in Pakistan’s emaciated Left.

At Naqvi’s home, there is a small gathering of people, all men invariably in their late middle age, and most associated with left political thought in some way. A distinct air of despondency hangs in the air, as the most recent political events, the latest machinations of the Pakistani ruling bloc are discussed. At some point, the discussion veers towards the concepts of mass and vanguard parties in Marxist theory. A melancholia is discernable: most attendees express disappointment at the eclipse of “ideological politics” in the country. I also have my bit to say about what a new relation between discipline and creativity, between leadership and rank-and-file, might look like today. Jamal Naqvi, incapacitated and on a wheel chair, listens intently but says little. His interventions too express a bitter disappointment with the prospects of left politics in Pakistan, encapsulated in the epigraph of his autobiography: “An autobiographical tale of political disillusionment that took life’s momentum away from the myopic politics of Right and Left to the enlightened concept of Right and Wrong” (Naqvi and Ishtiaq, 2014). At 25, I am by far the youngest among the attendees and my interventions on the continuity vitality of Marxist theory and practice, the innovative thinking that has gone on within the tradition on a range of questions (including that of the party), surprise the participants. As we take our leave a couple of hours later, Naqvi holds my hand for just that little bit longer than usual.

This was to be my only meeting with this legendary, now lapsed, leader of the Pakistani Left. Semi-paralysed since his stint in General Zia’s prisons, Jamal Naqvi passed away on 3rd August 2017.

Scene 4: It is 8th March 2018, International Women's Day. We are marching with the left-wing National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) and the Home-Based Women Workers' Federation (HBWWF) (a sub-organisation of the NTUF). The march is scheduled to go from Nishat Cinema to the Karachi Press Club. Thousands of working women from all over Sindh province, ranging from agricultural labour to home-based labour (such as bangle-making), have gathered for the occasion. As we march through Zebunnisa Street, the heart of the Saddar business district, I find myself walking next to Usman Baloch, a leader of the labour upsurges of early 1970s Karachi. We discuss the massive mobilisation and the fact that the shopkeepers either side stared in surprise that thousands of women with red flags were marching through the center of the city. At one point, Baloch remarks that he cannot remember a bigger presence of workers in this area of Karachi since the heyday of the labour movement.

A short walk down the road, in the nearby Frere Hall gardens another massive gathering is taking place: the Aurat March [The Women's March]. Participants raise issues around domestic violence, reproductive labour, and gendered "honour" killings. Mostly dominated by middle and upper-middle class activists and students, this is the largest feminist gathering in Karachi since at least the 1980s. After the Press Club, large numbers of proletarian women from the NTUF-HBWWF also make their way to the Aurat March. In the digital and electronic media however, it is the latter march – centered around middle and upper class organisers – which dominates, and even a caricature at best of that: demands around equitable distribution of reproductive labour twisted and distorted into a moral panic over attacks on "culture" and "family".

It is emblematic of the state of labour and working women in the country today: fragmented, vilified, silenced, and invisibilised. But also, perhaps, the intimations of a renewal.

Meditations

The four events briefly narrated above form the arc of meditation for this dissertation: from the insurgent moment of the 1960s and 1970s, to the social and political death of labour, the ideological crisis within the Left and working class movement, to the fragmentation of the subject – i.e. of the working class itself – along differentiated social relations (such as gender and ethnicity). In this sense, the story of the labour movement in Pakistan is not unique. It dovetails with that greater “three-fold crisis” that confronted the Left with the fall of “actually existing socialisms”: “a theoretical crisis of Marxism, a strategic crisis of revolutionary thinking, and a social crisis of the subject of social emancipation” (Bensaid quoted by Traverso, 2016: 220). As such, this dissertation is as an attempt to elucidate the problematic of “class” in a way that grapples with the three-fold theoretical, strategic, and social crisis which confronted working class and Left politics in the post-Cold War era. The point here is neither to abandon the problematic of class to the “death” of the subject and for a fetish of local particularisms, nor to cling onto the undifferentiated proletariat whose abstract valourisation is more nostalgia than reckoning. On the contrary, we aim to return to Marx’s own more open and *practical* dialectics, which emphasise the “distinctions-within-unity” (and vice versa) of any given social category, process, and/or relation. It is this differentiated, practical, and strategic horizon of the problematic of “class” that will move us beyond polarities – such as between objectivist/subjectivist, economic/cultural understandings – which have contributed to the decline of “class” as a useful epistemological and methodological vantage point for social investigation.

While our understanding of class will be elaborated in detail in the coming sections and chapters, it is important to emphasise the theoretical and political valences of pursuing such a project in Karachi and Pakistan today. The worldwide crisis of Left and working class politics has already been briefly alluded to above. The response to the post-1970s crisis of capitalism and Thermidorean reaction of ruling classes has been accompanied by a decline in the prospects of organised working class politics worldwide. At the level of theory, this Thermidorean reaction has been registered in the pessimistic abandonment of the prospects of *making* history as the fevered dreams generated by so many discredited “meta-narratives” (Eagleton, 1996). To attempt to understand the social as a totality is thus a gesture towards totalitarianism, a project doomed to myopia and the annihilation of difference, a road to hell paved albeit with good intentions. Better to abandon the pursuit of totality and concentrate on the “language games” and “discursive complexes” through which the illusion of the subject plays itself out. Here, the totality of capital (and class) is abandoned to an advanced form of the fetishism that Marx so famously described in opening chapter of *Capital*: that recurring *jouissance* – nay, tyranny – of the present, whereby the whole and its historicity become unthinkable; a reified, alienated, and overbearing reality which walls the subject (and thought) within the realms of immediacy and particularism³.

A genuine reckoning with the disbursement of “class” via the (non-)strictures of post-structuralism – and the lineage of post-colonial studies which aligns with post-structuralism – cannot of course satisfy itself with merely a moral condemnation of the latter’s tendencies to

³ This is not to imply that the sphere of particulars and/or the experience of immediacy has no bearing on the investigation and lived experience of “class”. In fact, our return to the dialectical method of Marx (via figures such as Antonio Gramsci and Stuart Hall), will point to a conception of class where the universal or general, is not ontologically opposed to, but is *produced* through the mediation of the particular(s) and the specific. In this sense, a reformulated Marxism is not abstractly opposed to the post-structuralist/linguistic turn in social theory, but a dialectical sublation of the same i.e. cancelling *and* preserving the latter’s critique of “orthodox” or mechanical Marxism at a higher plane of synthesis. There will be more on this in a bit.

dispersal, with an obsessive assertion of the primacy of class as identity over difference. In fact, as Neil Larsen reminds us, “if one is to pose even the theoretical possibility that a Marxist criticism might, in Jamesonian fashion, make room for the putatively valid insights or discoveries of postcolonial studies [and, in a cognate manner, of post-structuralism] ... [it] will have to be traced back to the point of its own intellectual genesis” (Larsen, 2002: 205). Larsen accomplishes this by going back to Gayatri Spivak’s seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1988), and critiquing its purely lexical deconstruction of Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* at the expense of “the unity of Marx’s thinking” in the text and beyond (Larsen, 2002: 208). Crucially, Larsen places this “almost obsessive philologism” of deconstructionist post-colonialism as “the new form for an older, ‘third worldist’ and ‘essentialist’ desire” where the putative, unrepresentable figure of the “subaltern” as an “excess” or “outside” comes to trump Gramsci’s nuanced and multi-faceted mobilisation of the same (ibid: 214). My own intervention can be usefully placed as this act of “return” to Marx’s method, whereby the polarities – of class/difference, economy/culture, material/semiotic, universal/particular etc. – are sublated in a dialectical manner i.e. simultaneously cancelled, transformed, and preserved on a higher plane.

While we will be elaborating such a mobilisation of Marx’s method in much more detail in the next chapter, it will be apposite to briefly revisit – as advocated by Larsen above – one of the founding moments of the eclipse of class in contemporary social theory. Here, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s seminal text *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985/2001), serves as representative of the critique – and abandonment – of a Marxist problematic for a more discursive post-Marxist one⁴. Laclau and Mouffe eschew the “essentialism” of class as “a deconstructive limit” for the problematic of hegemony, through its [i.e. the concept of class’]

⁴ We will elaborate on the related departures – and pitfalls – of the Subaltern Studies lineage of post-colonial studies in greater detail in the next two chapters.

“naturalistic prejudice, which sees the economy as a homogenous space unified by necessary laws” (ibid: 69). The grounding of class and economy is therefore emblematic of an “essentialism” whereby the economy comes to possess “its laws of motion [which] must be *strictly endogenous* and exclude all indeterminacy resulting from political or other external interventions... Second, the unity and homogeneity of social agents, constituted at the economic level, must result from the very laws of this level (any fragmentation and dispersion of positions requiring an instance of recomposition external to the economy is excluded)” (ibid: 76, emphasis added). To liberate theory and practice from the tyranny of (homogenous and endogenous) “laws of motion”, Laclau and Mouffe carry out a “critique of the category of the unitary subject, and the recognition of the discursive dispersion within which every subject position is constituted” (ibid: 166). Armed with this multiplicity *qua* multiplicity, they advocate a “notion of radical and plural democracy” which is “radical only to the extent that each term of this plurality finds *within itself the principle of its own validity*”; the theoretical struggle is therefore one of affirming-operationalising “a maximum autonomisation of spheres on the basis of the generalisation of *the equivalential-egalitarian logic*” (ibid: 167, emphasis added).

The *double reductionist move* of this critique of the Marxist problematic can be clearly seen in the above. In the first move, the much more expansive Marxian concept of “relations of production” is here reduced to “the economy” as such. In a second and related move, “the economy” itself – now evacuated of all other moments of the social (such as the political, ideological etc.) – is reduced to a “strictly endogenous” and “homogenous” entity. The Marxist understanding of the economy and of the determinant role of relations of production – not withstanding its vulgarisation – is of course a much more *integral* one, one in which moments of politics, culture, and ideology inhere within the economic itself, even while maintaining their

own relative autonomy: in dialectical terms, the structure is not one of an “immediate unity” but of “distinctions-within-a-unity”. The “ontology” of class and economy itself is therefore not an ontology at all (at least not in the sense Laclau and Mouffe understand it): the “laws of motion” are “not laws in a naturalistic sense or that of speculative determinism, but in a ‘historicist’ sense” i.e. they are historically determinate and *tendential* laws⁵ “valid, that is, to the extent that there exists the ‘determined market’ or in other words an environment which is organically alive and interconnected in its movements of development” (Gramsci, 1971: 401). It is this *historical* imbrication of multiple, integrally related, moments which Gramsci terms the “historical bloc” (the unity of structure and superstructures) and which is the object of theoretical-practice for a Marxist problematic: in Lenin’s terms, “the concrete analysis of a concrete situation”.

With the “economy” and concomitantly, “class” itself autonomised, and other moments of the social externalised, Laclau and Mouffe are thus forced to take refuge in a discursive conception of the social. Here, all “identity” is auto-referential and “finds *within itself the principle of its own validity*”. Due to such synchronic – and ruptured – autoreferentiality, Laclau and Mouffe’s discursive model of articulation bases itself on the “equivalential-egalitarian logic” of all elements, moments, and identities. This logic of egalitarianism in a void, the abstract equivalence of all elements, the eschewal of their *historical* weightedness, the total randomisation (and even denial) of history and structure as a complex unity, cannot possibly contend with any serious reckoning of concrete conjunctures where – to speak with the famous pronouncement – the traditions of long dead generations really do weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living. The discursive dispersal of the social is of course the mirror image to the

⁵ cf Marx’s designation of the “Law of the *Tendency* of the Rate of Profit to Fall”, with the *struggle* between opposing dialectical tendencies (such as foreign trade, colonisation etc.) being the ultimate determinant of the direction of change in relations and forces of production: no auto-gestation of the economic or linear determination of the political will do here (Marx, 1894/1959: 153-186).

autonomisation of the economy which Laclau and Mouffe correctly critique, but extend from the idiosyncracies of vulgar Marxism to the Marxian method/problematic as a whole. Laclau and Mouffe, the cognate post-structuralist problematic and its eschewal of class, have thus treaded the well-worn journey from the strictures of mechanical/metaphysical materialism to the confusions of semiotic idealism.

Additionally, and crucially for our purposes, such a ruptured conception of the social is unable to grasp both “class” and its relation to other social relations of difference. Thus, where “class” is homogenised as product of an auto-gestating economy, “identity” is randomised as a function of its own auto-referentiality. It is exactly in such a mode of theorisation that a category “becomes ideological” which in its “exclusionist interpretive use can face us with an evacuating result”, divorced of all its social determinants, its historical and structural joints (Bannerji, 2011: 38). In such a mode of theorisation, both class and difference instead of being revelatory concepts through “an extrovertive use” for dis-covering the historical-structural sutures and contradictions of a totality, become exemplars of “abstract universalism and over-emphasised particularism” (ibid: 38-9). Understood as a sole phenomenon of the economy “and economy itself understood to be a self-sufficient sphere outside of the overall constitution of the social, ‘class’ serves as an ideological category”; conversely, the auto-referentiality or “isolationist” understanding of “difference” is ideological too, serving to surreptitiously smuggle in the (petty-)bourgeois interests of the occlusive deployer of such evacuative categories (ibid: 39). Devoid of their integral co-constitution, difference and class come to serve as two sides of the same coin of abstract universality and essentialised particularity, lending themselves to an “equivalential-egalitarian logic” of discursive articulation divorced from structural and historical

weightedness: “the night,” as Hegel once caustically remarked, “where all cows are black” (Hegel, 2018: 10).

As we will see in the coming chapters, our reconstitution and elaboration of the working class in Karachi will move through exactly this procedure of the recovery of a Marxist problematic via an immanent reckoning with the post-structuralist/post-colonial critique of the same. The emphasis on the production of generalities *through* particularities, on the spatially-inflected and integral pluri-temporality of conjunctures, the reconstitution of an open and dialectical Marxist problematic, thus serves to move us beyond sterile criticisms of the post-structuralist/post-colonial problematic, to – in the spirit of Larsen’s call above – a dialectical sublation of the same. In this journey, besides Marx himself, we will enlist the services of several others – from Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser to Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon. In this reckoning with the originary debates and intellectual genesis of the debates (and divergences) between Marxism, post-colonialism, and post-structuralism, an act of “return” is not a lexical involution or the recovery of a ‘pure’ Marxism: it is an act of return as a necessary point of departure and simultaneously as terrain for the refoundation of theory and practice.

This emphasis on a complex conception of the social whole, the continuing vitality of a Marxist problematic – with its dialectical and open conception of totality – gains a particular valence in its “translation” or “stretching” (in the Gramscian-Fanonist sense) to Pakistan. “Nothing”, as Ato Sekyi-Otu puts it in his reflections on an “Africa-centric left universalism”, “teaches the necessity of universalism [and its cognate: communism as ethical-political commitment] as getting back home” (Sekyi-Otu, 2019: 74). For where the working class, anti-colonial, and democratic movements in Pakistan faced a monumental defeat at the hands of ruling class reaction in the 1980s, its accompaniment has been the generalisation of a

theoretical-political pessimism which continues to weigh upon our current – almost characteristically – postcolonial nightmare.

As we will elaborate more in Chapter 5, the world-historical defeat of the Left and the ravages of dictatorship in Pakistan produced its own version of the “purgatorial procession” of those who by “a disingenuous agnosticism, have come to curse ‘the god that failed’ [i.e. socialism and Marxism]” (Sekyi-Otu, 2019: 135). Whether Marxism was deemed too mechanistic, socialism against “human nature”, and/or the End of History quietly accepted as a *deus ex machina*, the eclipse of a Marxist problematic within social science academia too has been palpable⁶. Much scholarship on Pakistan then has either accepted the truncated universality of liberal/pluralist perspectives (with its lineages partially in a mechanical and uncritically modernist Marxism) or, conversely, fell into that obsessive refrain with “micro-politics”, difference and alterity which, as described earlier, is merely the new form of an older, Third World-ist desire now reconstituted as civilizational difference and essentialised culturalism. It is in the face of this closure of political and theoretical horizons – both integrally and historically linked to each other – that recovery of the open and dialectical method of Marx (and others) gains its valence. Here too, the act of return is not merely lexical involution or the exegesis of a disinterested theoreticism. As I hope to illustrate in this work, such an act of return and recovery, to read the classics as *living tradition*, is indispensable not just – to echo the Moor again – for understanding and interpreting Pakistan today, but also for changing it.

⁶ For an illustrative example, see a recent two-part article on Antonio Gramsci in a major Pakistani magazine by one of the country’s leading historians (Kamran, 2020a and 2020b). A selection of pronouncements from the distinguished professor show the same rupturing of the social whole – and misreading of the Marxist and Gramscian problematic – encountered above in Laclau and Mouffe: “Gramsci accorded primacy to culture instead of economy”, “Gramsci inverted Marxian model and riveted his focus on ‘superstructure’ rather than the base”, and “Gramsci weaned away from economic determinism that Karl Marx had so emphatically advocated.” Such “culturalist” readings of Gramsci and hegemony of course have become a staple of the disciplinarily sequestered social sciences, especially after the so-called linguistic turn (Crehan, 2002).

As indicated above, the theoretical closure in Pakistan too has been integrally linked to the ravages of ruling class reaction⁷. Where organised politics of the working class has declined, the horizons of an alternative social order closed off, the given/“objective” coordinates of scholarship have also shifted towards a reckoning of (solidified) state structures, (reified) differences between civilian and military elites, and the (seemingly) “primordial” differences of ethnicity, religion etc. For example, much mainstream analysis has taken the country’s “strategic” role in the (so-called) War on Terror, the Pakistani military, and the linkages of state and society with Islam as a major entry point for analysis (and, concomitantly, policy making) (for example, see Fair, 2014). For too many authors, the persistence of clientelism in politics and the weak bases of formal democracy in the country has been due to the continuing salience of “primordial” solidarities of caste, tribe, and/or religion (for example, see Lieven, 2011).

However, an emerging vein of critical scholars has increasingly been engaging with earlier radical work on the Pakistani state and political economy and has critiqued the work of pioneers such as Hamza Alavi (1972) for discounting mechanisms whereby consent is generated for the prevailing hegemonic order from the subordinate classes. For example, Aasim Sajjad Akhtar (2018) has studied the changing power structure in Pakistan and has proposed the newly emergent intermediate classes – a product of 1960s Green Revolution, migrant remittances, and post-70s liberalisation – as crucial intermediaries in the politics of patronage and service delivery whereby a passive form of consent and molecular incorporation of subordinate classes has been achieved on behalf of the prevailing hegemonic bloc. In conjunction with Akhtar’s intervention there has been a recent upswing in work on the changing nature of the state and the dominant

⁷ To be sure, the decline of working class politics in Pakistan was not simply the result of a “top-down” conspiracy by the ruling bloc. In fact, as we will see through this dissertation, in Karachi at least, fractures and contradictions within the working class were integrally imbricated in the production (and reification) of difference “from below”, for example along lines of “ethnicity”.

classes in Pakistan (Amin-Khan, 2012; Javid, 2012; Armytage, 2020). However, this has generally not been complemented by similar analyses “from below” i.e. on the peasantry, urban working class etc. Where subordinate classes have been discussed this has focused on other parts of Pakistan and not dealt with the working class in Karachi (cf Malik, 2018; Ali, 2019; Maqsood, 2017).

As with mainstream analyses of Pakistan, studies on Karachi (Pakistan’s largest city) have taken the proliferation of ethnic and religious chauvinisms over the last three to four decades as a particularly privileged locus of analysis. For example, one of the ways for understanding the appeal and persistence of ethnicity has been through the instrumentalisation of “generative violence” and fractured masculinities (see, for example, Khan, 2010 and Verkaaik, 2003). In a similar vein, understandings of everyday life have also been approached through subjects’ negotiation of the city through a “hermeneutic of danger”, which maintains a sense of “ordered disorder” even in the midst of outbursts of violence (Gayer, 2014: 246). While useful and productive, there is a danger in these analyses of reifying difference (and/or violence) through severing its linkages to changing relations of production and reproduction, and to the shifting rhythms of socio-spatial hegemony in Karachi and beyond. A discounting of the mechanisms of class (re)production thus ends up as a (homeo-)static account of the contours of ethnicity, religion, violence etc. In fact, the last substantive work to take class as a central category of analysis for the investigation of social change in Karachi was done in the early 1970s by Zafar Shaheed⁸ (Shaheed, 2007). While analyses on urban planning, rural-to-urban migration, and ethnicity have tangentially touched upon class differentiation (see, for example, Gazdar and

⁸ Not incidentally, a student of the late Hamza Alavi.

Mallah, 2013), a study which posits class as a fundamental – though not simply monocausal or deterministic – category of analysis and investigation is sorely missing.

As indicated above, this absence is concretely linked to the political rhythms of working class politics and the concomitant general decline of class as a category of analysis in the social sciences. However, the intellectual void can also be attributed to the theoretical impasse generated by inadequate conceptualisations of class itself. Thus, an income-centric or economistic conception of class, can lead to conceptual blockages which make it difficult to understand/theorise class in its internal relations with other social relations (such as ethnicity and gender). Static conceptions of class as given or a purely objective category relating to the (narrowly defined) “economic base”, leads to non-processual understandings of class which are unable to theorise the co-production of class with other social relations and with other spheres of social life (such as politics, culture, ideological etc.). Similarly, an eschewal of the organic unity of social life, inadequate attention to everyday life and the lived experiences (and politics) of production and reproduction, can also lead to ruptured conceptions of the social whole whereby the production of social relations is divorced from the dynamics of class and/or seen as solely linked to violence and coercion (Bannerji, 2005). For the purposes of our investigation, classes will be primarily defined through relations of and in production, with these relations of production themselves being shot through with politics and struggle i.e. relations of production themselves are overdetermined by/integrally coordinated with other spheres and spaces of social reproduction (such as politics, culture, ideology etc.). As will be elaborated in the next chapter, and in keeping with an active and processual conception of class which takes seriously the “organic unity” of different spheres and spaces of social life, it is imperative to understand

classes as part of dynamic historical blocs with differing rhythms of hegemony, coercion, incorporation and exclusion (Gramsci, 1971: 431).

With the rise of politics organised ostensibly around ethnicity and religion in Karachi over the last three decades, it is imperative to understand the changing composition and political articulation of the working classes due to factors such as economic liberalisation, industrial restructuring and dispersion, rural-urban migration, and the War on Terror. As such, the aim of this dissertation is to investigate how the composition and articulation of the working class in Pakistan's largest city Karachi has changed since the late 1970s. This will help answer the question of how, after the high hopes of the 1960s and 1970s, organised working class politics in Karachi gave way to various forms of chauvinism, especially around the lines of ethnicity. A focus on the practice of everyday life will illuminate how multi-scalar processes and forces inhere in – and are reproduced through – situated social relations of class, ethnicity etc. We will elaborate how changing articulations of urban space and the concomitant re-structuring of the spheres and spaces of production and reproduction can help us understand the production of class in its imbrication with other social relations in the specific context of post-1970s Karachi.

The dissertation will therefore elaborate how the “regime of capital can work through differentiation and difference, rather than through similarity and identity” (Hall, 1986a: 437) and thus historicise the decline of class politics in Karachi over the given period through a focus on the “socially composite ground of class” (Bannerji, 1995: 144). In doing so, we will aim to uncover the institutions and practices which have served to differentially accommodate, incorporate and/or exclude subaltern social groups through the mechanisms of civil and political society in Karachi, without any assumptions towards either inherent passivity or irruption. As the dialectics of class formation cannot be divorced from their embeddedness within projects of state

and space formation, this also entails placing the lived experiences of class within multi-scalar processes of social-spatial restructuring and changing material-ideological hegemony in Pakistan. As indicated above, this project will address a substantial gap as questions of class and class formation over the last few decades have rarely been posed in the literature on Karachi specifically and Pakistan generally. Moreover, charting out the changing articulations of class will also help in specifying and elaborating the conceptual and political terrain for a renewed hegemonic praxis which foregrounds the subordinate classes in Karachi and beyond, while contributing to the academic literature on Pakistan specifically and the global South generally.

Methodology

The methodological thrust of this project comes from the social history tradition inspired by the work of Antonio Gramsci and pioneered by the likes of EP Thompson and CLR James. This was combined with the methodological-epistemological precepts of dialectical inquiry set out by Marx in texts such as the *Grundrisse*. In Notebook 25 of the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci sets out “methodological criteria” for the study of subaltern social groups which give us a glimpse of his *active* conception of subalternity⁹ (and attendant, the active conception of class referred to previously). It will be useful to reproduce these methodological criteria at length here:

“The subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a “State”: their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States. Hence it is necessary to study: 1. the objective formation of the subaltern social groups, by the developments and transformations occurring in the sphere of economic production; their quantitative diffusion and their origins in pre-existing social groups, whose mentality, ideology and

⁹ Gramsci himself does not use the term “subalternity”.

aims they conserve for a time; 2. their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations, their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own, and the consequences of these attempts in determining processes of decomposition, renovation or neo-formation; 3. the birth of new parties of the dominant groups, intended to conserve the assent of the subaltern groups and to maintain control over them; 4. the formations which the subaltern groups themselves produce, in order to press claims of a limited and partial character; 5. those new formations which assert the autonomy of the subaltern groups, but within the old framework; 6. those formations which assert the integral autonomy, . . . etc.”

(Gramsci, 1971: 52, emphasis added)

Gramsci thus delineates six broad stages through which subaltern social groups may evolve, ranging from their emergence on the terrain of the economy, to varying relationships with existing political formations, and finally to a state of “integral autonomy”. However, the progression through these “phases” is not linear or teleological. Gramsci points towards unevenness and cleavages within subaltern groups, while also emphasising that subaltern groups’ tendencies to autonomy are “always subject to the activity of ruling groups” (ibid: 55). Thus, Gramsci’s methodological precepts on studying the *active process* of subalternity return to his broader reflections on the problematic of hegemony. Explorations of subalternity as a process “of subjective development – of political subjectivation centred in the experience of subordination” must thus develop as a “subjective correlation” of the theorisation of hegemony (Modonesi, 2014: 36, 21)¹⁰.

¹⁰ We will explore Gramsci’s processual and relational conception of subalternity in greater detail in the first chapter.

Thus, an elaboration of the dynamic condition of subalternity cannot be divorced from its linkages to the articulation between civil and political society. While the condition of subalternity involves differential power relations and thus the documented history of subaltern groups “is necessarily fragmented and episodic”, there are always “inchoate and often discordant attempts [by subaltern social groups] to develop forms of self-representation” (Thomas, 2018: 873). For Gramsci, it is the task of the “integral historian” to recover and restore these oft-ignored articulations of subalternity (and tendencies to cleavage/autonomy) against the hegemonic narrative. Moreover, it is important to understand the various – formal and informal – institutions of civil and political society which serve to differentially incorporate-exclude subaltern social groups within a dynamic material-ideological hegemony. As such, while more “objective” economic criteria (such as measures of industrial/economic activity, percentage of labour in different sectors etc.) are certainly important, it is also important to look at forms of self-representation, and the institutions in civil and political society, which have attempted to give shape to the labour question (such as trade union organisations and informal kinship groups).

For our purposes, an investigation of political economy and formal political and economic organisations was supplemented by interviews with workers, labour organisers, and political workers, in order to chart out the lived experience of class in Karachi. Critical ethnography entailing life histories collected through detailed, open-ended, and semi-structured interviews served to shed light on the mediation of everyday life through the informal and formal institutions of civil and political society. Our deployment of Marx served to connect the semiotics-practices of cultural and social life elaborated during the interviews to their wider contexts, and as shaped by forces and processes inhering at multiple scales. As such, the task was

to ground multiple, often contradictory accounts and “different entry points into the social” in a relational terrain which is commonly – but not identically – inhabited, and is shaped by “wider or extra-local context of socioeconomic and cultural relations” (Bannerji, 2005: 146). A similar methodological operation was performed with narratives and accounts of working class life and organisation gleaned through autobiographical accounts and interviews of labour organisers and activists. As such, accounts of lived experience and narratives of workers and labour organisers served as the departure point (the “real-concrete”) which, through the process of abstraction and excavation delineated by Marx, we arrived at the – necessarily contingent – concrete-in-thought i.e. an open-ended account of the totality represented by the given spatio-temporal conjuncture of Karachi, especially as it relates to working class lives (Marx, 1973: 42).

Thus, it is through a recourse to the methodological-epistemological precepts delineated and demonstrated in the practical state by Marx and Gramsci, that we aimed to uncover the multi-scalar forces and processes which shape the formation and articulation of class in the conjuncture of post-1970s Karachi. The aim was to produce an integral account of class through its historicisation and embeddedness in the given material-ideological terrain and changing articulations of socio-spatial hegemony. For Marxism, as a praxis of social change and analysis, “the general concepts of history, politics and economics are interwoven in an organic unity” (Gramsci, 1971: 431). The lived experience and everyday practice of class, in its integral linkages to other spheres and spaces of social life (such as institutions of civil and political society), thus served to understand the decline of class as a coherent axis of social mobilisation and its linkages with other social relations (such as ethnicity) in the context of Karachi. In short, the aim was to produce an account of the evolution and articulation of class as a “differentiated unity” i.e. a “rich totality of many determinations and relations” (Marx, 1973: 42).

Methods: A mixed methods approach was followed entailing quantitative data (through primary and secondary sources), labour movement archives, life history interviews with workers and labour organisers, and ethnographic participant research in a food transport establishment. The main planks of the research techniques are as below (I have also briefly recapitulated these details at the beginning of relevant chapters).

1) Quantitative/Political-Economic Data: Primary sources were surveys, questionnaires, and reports generated by trade unions, federations, and non-governmental organisations with regards to workers and labour issues. Here, reports and surveys conducted by organisations such as the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education (PILER) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) were useful in obtaining quantitative data such as on changing union density and the distribution of labour in different sectors. Secondary sources such as monographs and articles on the political economy of Pakistan and Karachi by the likes of Arif Hasan, Akbar Zaidi, and Haris Gazdar were also helpful. These helped in quantitatively charting out the social and demographic changes in Karachi, and the evolution of economic and industrial policy, economic indicators etc.

The gathering of quantitative data was a minor plank of the research and served mainly to illuminate the context – especially of economic re-structuring and the changes in state policy – for our study of working class lives. This is necessarily a limited knowledge, not least because of the inescapable context effects in which it is gathered (Burawoy, 1998: 7). Thus, while state and state-like agencies aim to define objects for investigation (such as the “economy” and the GDP) and gather data accordingly, it must be kept in mind that survey research often serves to objectify/solidify dynamic social situations. Positivist models of

science – upon which survey mechanisms of enumeration and elaboration are often based – also suffer from limitations which upend their own stated aims of reliability, replicability, and representativeness (ibid: 10). Thus, data gathered through positive methods must be subordinated to research methods based on a more “reflexive” model of inquiry, which does not aim to subtract context but, on the contrary, takes context as “a point of departure” (ibid: 13).

To bring this in line with our integral understanding of class, the quantitative data was supplemented by the narratives of struggle and accommodation excavated through interviews and archival work. It is only through subordinating statistical data to a historicised account of changes within and outside production can we build a conception of class as process and *in making*. Thus, taking seriously knowledge production “from below”, and especially the narratives and understandings built by people while acting collectively during struggle and in their daily lives, offers an avenue out of the limitations presented by knowledge gathered through state-sanctioned and/or positivist methods (Sangster, 2013: 60). Therefore, the major planks of our methods were interviews, ethnographic research, and a study of documents relating to the labour movement in Karachi.

- 2) **PILER Archives:** This focussed on records of trade union federations and non-governmental organisations working on labour issues. Here, the labour movement archives at the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) were extensively consulted. PILER is a non-governmental organisation formed in 1982 by progressive activists and organisers who had been active in the labour movement. The organisation does research and advocacy work on labour issues and maintains close contacts with trade unions in Karachi both in public and

private sector. PILER headquarters in Karachi have archival records relating to Pakistan's labour movement.

In addition to the surveys and reports pointed to previously, the PILER archives contained a wide variety of documents relating to the labour movement. These include constitutions and congress reports of various trade union federations, correspondence between trade unionists, minutes of meetings, press releases, and records of tri-partite consultations between labour, business, and state representatives. Crucially, the PILER archives also contained several autobiographical accounts from labour organisers and from activists involved in working-class politics. These were an important resource in charting out the travails of the labour movement in the post-1970s era.

- 3) Interviews and Ethnographic Research:** Detailed interviews were conducted with trade unionists, labour organisers, and with workers in different sectors (such as construction, food transport, and home-based women workers). This entailed exploring knowledge production “from below”, taking seriously the narratives and understandings built by people while acting collectively during struggle and in their daily lives. Thus, life history interviews were conducted with a focus on not just workplace conditions and organisation, but also on everyday issues such as community and leisure. Interview questions ranged from the conditions and circumstances of migration to Karachi, avenues for securing employment, housing and public services, and the institutions and organisations through which the activities of daily life are partaken (such as community events and self-help groups). In light of emerging narratives, interviews would often revolve around significant moments in the socio-spatial landscape of Karachi over the last three to four decades. Examples of this would

be the labour upsurges of 1970s and the rise of ethnic politics (and concomitant violence) in mid-1980s and/or late-2000s.

Depending on the context, I took a non-directive approach whereby loosely structured interviews with individuals or small groups were carried out in an already established field setting such as roadside tea and lunch stalls, working class neighbourhoods and (the often male) gathering spaces therein (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, and either recorded (with an audio recorder) or transcribed (in a notebook) depending on the comfort level of the respondent. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and asked for verbal or written consent.

For three months between March and May 2018, I also worked part-time as a worker-cum-supervisor with the food distribution arm of the Alamgir Welfare Trust. This gave me a chance to conduct ethnographic research in an already established workplace setting. Being embedded within the process of production and distribution was an invaluable opportunity to observe and participate in the everyday processes of labour and interaction among workers and management in the rapidly expanding transport sector in Karachi. Relatedly, I also conducted detailed interviews with female workers involved in paid, home-based work which has become increasingly important with the fragmentation of key industries such as textiles and surgical instruments. My contacts in PILER, the National Trade Union Federation, and the Home-Based Women Workers' Foundation (HBWWF) were invaluable in gaining access to workers and trade unionists¹¹. Personal contacts such as through journalists, acquaintances, and friends also helped with access.

¹¹ The National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), formed in 1999, is one of the largest 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 activists who are/have been part of various left-wing political formations in Pakistan.

As critical ethnographers in different contexts have demonstrated, and especially in the case of politically fraught contexts (such as that of working class communities in Karachi), the importance of means of access when conducting research cannot be underestimated (for example, see Harrison, 1997). In this regard, my previous involvement with working class politics in Karachi, contacts with community figures, progressive NGOs and labour organisations, and previous experience of research and activism in working class communities was enormously useful. In oral and life history interviews, familiarity and comfort often “breed content” and thus integrally shape the knowledge produced (Wong, 2013: 97). Intervention in the lives of research subjects was thus not something to be shunned, but – when combined with an appropriate attitude of openness and humility – could serve as a virtue for “it is by mutual reaction that we discover the properties of the social order” (Burawoy, 1998: 14).

Practices and narratives taken as rooted in social life thus serve as departure points for understanding the social relations and processes pervading the interviewee’s world. Life histories and ethnographies allow one not only to approximate the causal mechanisms through which subjectivities are structured, but also about how these wider social processes and forces are interpreted/understood and acted upon by the subjects themselves. Thus, these interviews and the narratives gathered therein regarding everyday life and social organisation, served to illuminate the dynamic conditions of subalternity and subaltern consciousness, and the – formal and informal – mechanisms through which working classes are incorporated-excluded into shifting hegemonies.

The federation also has a dedicated wing aimed at organising home-based women workers called the Home-Based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF).

4) Published biographies, autobiographies, interviews, and novels: While these are few and far between, published accounts, biographies, and interviews of people who have been involved with working class politics in Karachi over the last three to four decades were also a useful avenue for exploring the “fragmented and episodic” traces of working class culture, organisation and consciousness. Similarly, I also deployed Urdu novels to chart out the shifting “structure of feeling” in a given spatio-temporal conjuncture i.e. the emergent values, perceptions, and ideas through which subjects understand and negotiate the socio-spatial relations in which they are imbricated (Williams, 1975). This deployment of fiction was extremely useful in understanding the shifts in consciousness and lived experience in Karachi of the 1980s, a time of great socio-political change (and violence) in the city.

The mixed methods approach allowed flexibility and exploration of different aspects of working class lived experiences. Thus, in case of limited success with one method, another avenue would be emphasised. For example, as we will see in the chapter on urban space, the lacunae in interviewees’ narratives with regards to the turbulent 1980s, gave me an opportunity to chart the shifts in consciousness and lived experience through novels set in Karachi. Similarly, a focus on the lived experience of class and the institutions which incorporate (or exclude) working classes, helps bring our project in line with the dynamic and differentiated conception of subalternity discussed in the previous section.

Concomitantly, when approaching interviews and ethnographic research, issues of positionality and hierarchy could not be minimised. My background as a middle class and Urdu-speaking person studying in a global North university introduced an element of hierarchy in relation to most working-class organisers and workers that I interacted with. This was especially important in a context where a large proportion of workers come from non-Urdu

speaking backgrounds and where Urdu-speakers have often historically been associated with decidedly middle-class and technocratic forms of politics. The elimination of this relationship of power is of course ultimately a function of social praxis (and transformation) beyond the scope and power of this project and/or one person. What had to be ensured however is to approach the subjects of research and praxis with the requisite humility and as active agents in struggling and shaping their material-ideological milieus even within conditions of subalternity. In this regard, my means of access through community figures and progressive organisations, and previous history of political work with the Left in Karachi, was helpful.

The aim was thus to forge a dialogical approach which rejects the positions of a disinterested or “objective” researcher, while recognising the position of hierarchy between researcher-subject. The knowledge thus produced remains necessarily partial and situated, and can only tend towards universality through a political praxis which changes the prevailing social-intellectual horizons of society. In many senses then, the pursuance of this project can be seen an attempt towards overcoming the “philistinism” of the “intellectual element [which] ‘knows’ but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel” (Gramsci, 1971: 418). As such, the ultimate aim must be to move towards “an organic cohesion [between intellectuals and people-nation] in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation” (Gramsci, 1971: 418). In order to do so “the educator must himself [sic] be educated” (Marx, 1845).

Argument, Structure, Future Directions

The dissertation argues that the evolution of the working class and decline of working class politics in post-1970s Karachi must be understood in the context of two phases of passive revolution in the given period. These phases of passive revolution – the first stretching from late 1970s to the 1980s and the second on-going from the late-2000s onwards – have been characterised by shifting articulations within the “integral state” (i.e. the differentiated unity of civil and political society) and, concomitantly, mechanisms of consent, *trasformismo*, and coercion. These iterations of passive revolution thus involved a dynamic dialectic of pacification and “enclosure” whereby independent politics of the working class was suppressed and incorporated into the hegemonic rhythms of a changing ruling bloc.

Among these iterations of passive revolution, it is the first phase – that dominated by the dictatorship of General Zia but also preceding it – which had the deepest and most long-lasting effects on the working class in Karachi. The intensity of coercion and the concerted-ness of the mechanisms of *trasformismo* deployed during this phase were testament to the deep crisis of the ruling bloc and the heightened insurgency of subaltern social groups in the preceding years. The upsurge of peasants, labour, and student groups during the late 1960s and early 1970s heralded a deep, multi-level crisis of the ruling bloc in Pakistan, where questions of a new social order were put to the forefront – and indeed, substantively *lived* and *imagined* – by subaltern social groups (such as through self-directed actions of factory takeovers, land redistribution etc.). However, key fractures within the working-class movement at crucial moments were articulated to a ferocious reaction of the ruling bloc to herald the first phase of passive revolution. Spatial, social, and organisational mediations within the working-class milieu were severed and became key faultlines through which the labour movement was dissipated and eventually pacified-absorbed

within developing forms of ethno-spatial populism. Thus, for example, historically developed faultlines with regards to the urban question in Karachi (and Sindh), the “distinctions-within-unity” of Karachi’s multi-ethnic working class, the aborted dialectic between leaders and led, and the severing of spatial-social mediations of the working class with other key interlocutors (such as students and youth), became weaponised (pun intended) into (reified) difference and fractures.

The conjunctural punctuality of the first phase of passive revolution was emphasised by massive social and demographic change in Karachi due to the independence of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and the active intervention of US imperialism in the region (in the form of the Afghan-Soviet *jihad*). Combined with the onset of economic re-structuring, this led to major changes in norms of association and in the negotiation of urban space. These developing contradictions of the urban question in Karachi were then articulated to the production of “ethnicity” and, concomitantly, violent claims over and enclavisations of space. From a city whose large parts were the subject of proletarian takeovers in the heyday of the early 1970s, Karachi was reconfigured into an archipelago of ethnicised enclaves. A concerted melancholia, a seeming closure of horizons, came to define the now fragmented and dissipated working class.

The second phase of passive revolution began in the late-2000s with the crisis of the General Musharraf regime and an intensification of neoliberal globalisation. Here, shifting regimes of accumulation have entailed a dialectic of pacification (such as through coercive spatial restructuring for the “world-class” city) and attempts at *trasformismo* (such as through the commodity imperatives of late capitalism, and a reformulated complex of Islam and praetorianism via the so-called War on Terror). World-scale regimes of “global labour arbitrage” and super-exploitation have been registered in the increasing flexibilisation and

“informalisation” of labour. The concomitant spatial dispersion of labour has thus fed into “labour regimes” whereby the rhythms of hegemony are (re-)produced through relations *in* production. In many senses, the rhythms of working class politics and organisation in Karachi, its enclosure within the circumscribed domains of subalternity, remain overdetermined by the fragmentations and severed mediations of the first phase of passive revolution. However, even while mechanisms of coercion and *transformismo* remain operative, recurring crises of the ruling bloc, shifting articulations of the urban question, and contradictions within popular common sense offer openings for a renewed hegemonic praxis of the working class in Karachi.

The argument of the dissertation is elaborated over six chapters. The first chapter elucidates in detail the epistemological-methodological problematic of “class”. In addition to a host of other thinkers, I draw upon the dialectical method of Marx and Gramsci to elaborate an *active* conception of class which moves beyond polarities of subject-object. Such a conception of class as *process* and *relation* thus also helps us move beyond polarities of identity/difference and towards an *integral* conception of class. Here, class is a “differentiated unity”, a “unity-within-distinctions” produced via relations of/in production (and reproduction), but always embedded in projects of socio-spatial hegemony. The emphasis on studying class historically and in integral relation to situated hegemonic projects leads into our second chapter. Here, I elaborate on the Marxist-Gramscian problematic of state-civil society and “translate” this for post-colonial projects of state-making via Partha Chatterjee, Hamza Alavi, and (importantly) Frantz Fanon. The Gramscian concepts of “integral state” and “passive revolution”, read through Fanon, thus offer conceptual anchors to understand the shifting multi-level and multi-scalar articulations of state, civil society, accumulation, and subalternity in Pakistan.

The next four chapters elucidate the rhythms of working class politics in Karachi through the above-indicated differentiated conception of class and its embeddedness in passive revolutionary projects. For these chapters, I draw upon fieldwork done in Karachi during 2017-8 and upon my experiences/observations of left politics in Pakistan. The third chapter looks at trade union politics and the organised labour movement in Karachi, its insurgent moment through the crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and its pacification-incorporation via internal fractures and the dialectic of coercion-*transformismo* during the first phase of passive revolution. The fourth chapter explores the changing spaces and conditions of labour in the era of globalisation and “global labour arbitrage”. Here, I propose to move beyond the (state-centered) dichotomy of formal/informal towards a conception of “labour regimes” as an overdetermined unity of multiple processes (such as the labour process, reproduction of labour power etc.). The exploration of “labour regimes” in three different sectors allows for a differentiated understanding of varying rhythms of labour organisation, consciousness, and incorporation within and outside the workplace.

The fifth chapter looks at a social group – i.e. students – that has been integral to the rhythms of working class politics in Karachi and Pakistan’s history. The strategic placement of students within the ambit of the (post-colonial) integral state is clarified in order to elaborate upon the historically crucial role of mediations between the student and labour movements in Karachi. Here, attempts to build alternative visions/organisations (such as the *Lyari Naujawan Tehrik*) during the phases of passive revolution are briefly explored with reference to the (aborted) dialectic of students and youth with the Left. The increasing absorption of campus politics into the wider rhythms of urban space then segues into the sixth chapter which explores the urban question in Karachi. The post-Independence urban question and its articulation into the

violent ethnic politics of the 1980s and 1990s is discussed. Coming as it did on the heels of the coercive pacification and *trasformismo* of the labour movement, the intense violence of these decades entrenched the fragmentation-dissipation of working class organisation and politics in Karachi. The determinate effects on class consciousness of these violent socio-spatial demarcations and the melancholic silence of interlocutors is explored through three major Urdu novels set in Karachi which map shifts in the “structure of feeling”. The socio-spatial restructuring of the recent phase of neoliberal passive revolution, inflected via the so-called War on Terror, heralds a re-formulated urban question in Karachi. While this remains overdetermined by past fragmentations, emerging socio-spatial contradictions, “spontaneous” actions of the urban poor and youth, and a lingering melancholic utopia may yet form the nucleus of a renewed hegemonic praxis of the working class.

At the conceptual level, the dissertation may be seen as making two contributions/interventions. Firstly, I propose and develop a conception of “passive revolution” which, while maintaining its fidelity to Gramsci, distinguishes itself from the more famous (especially for postcolonial contexts) conceptualisation of Partha Chatterjee and the *Subaltern Studies* school. In moving beyond reified polarities of East/West and subaltern/elite, my conception of passive revolution operates as co-constitutive with concepts of “class” and the “integral state”. Thus, in our study – and as in Gramsci – “passive revolution”, “integral state”, and “subalternity” (in this case, via the cognate problematic of “class”) function “as dialectical counterpoints to each other, each complementing and extending the lines of research pursued under the headings of the others” (Thomas, 2018: 869). Such an immanent exploration of class and passive revolution also moves beyond reified differences – of civil/political society, East/West, and subaltern/elite – which characterised the mobilisation of these Gramscian

concepts by the Subalternists (this will be explored in greater detail in coming chapters). In this problematic, the production and *fragmentation* of “class” or subalternity is not external or marginal to the rhythms of the post-colonial “integral state”, but very much immanent to it, “a function of the process of material constitution of the modern state itself” (ibid: 864). Thus, while “class” is the entry-point for this study, its co-constitutive and immanent relation to “passive revolution” and the “integral state”, makes the conceptual triad a useful anchor, “complementing and extending lines of research” for more situated explorations of specific hegemonic projects.

In the case of Pakistan, an emphasis on the differentiated unity of the integral state and the myriad mechanisms of producing, pacifying, and incorporating class/subalternity via passive revolutionary projects also serves as a crucial advance on mainstream scholarship on the country. As indicated previously, much mainstream scholarship on Pakistan remains mired in the high politics of the state, the relation of state-society with Islam/secularism, and the oscillation between formal democracy and military rule. On the other hand, there is also a tendency, in contradistinction to the focus on high politics, to hone in on the situated and particularised micro-politics of place- and space-making. However, the multi-scalar and multi-level mobilisation of “passive revolution” and integral state presented here holds the promise to move beyond such polarities. Thus, a focus on the *active* production of passive revolutionary projects which move from the level of everyday life to the spheres of the integral state and global rhythms of accumulation, can shed light on the multi-scalar and multi-level mediation of politics, subjectivities, and hegemonic practice. For its part, this dissertation demonstrates the complexity and usefulness of such a mobilisation of passive revolution which can articulate the rhythms of everyday life (such as consciousness and lived experience) with “higher” levels of the social

totality (such as the urban question, the internal articulations of the integral state, and imperialism).

Relatedly, another conceptual contribution of the dissertation is the integral and *active* conception of class elaborated and operationalised here in understanding the travails of the working class in Karachi. As will be elaborated in greater detail in the next chapter, the conception of class proposed here moves beyond polarities of subjective/objective, economics/culture, being/consciousness, and material/discursive, through an emphasis on the practical co-constitution of these moments in determinate contexts. As such, class is defined in *practice* and as relationally produced in the determinate contexts of prevailing projects of space, state, and hegemony. Here, “forces of production” or the “economic” are not seen as technocratic and/or “objective” spheres emanating other levels of the totality (such as “culture” and “politics”) as moments of their own auto-gestation. “Politics” and “culture” inhere within the “economic”, the objective is mutually constituted by the subjective, and forces and relations of/in production are traversed by the rhythms and relations of reproduction. Through its focus on everyday life, the integral account of class also attempts to bring together two oft-separated strands of the Marxist theory of ideology: one developing Marx’s insights into reification and fetishism engendered by the commodity form (in *Capital Vol. I*), and the other on the mystifying conceptions of the world disseminated by reigning/ascendant historical blocs via hegemonic apparatuses (indicated, for example, in *The German Ideology*). The semiotic, symbolic, and discursive are therefore integral *moments* in the reproduction of social formations (and, therefore, the production of class). As such, these different levels (such as the economic, political, ideological etc.) are mutually constitutive moments, without either collapsing one into the other or rupturing the social whole into autonomous domains.

Such a processual and differentiated conception of class also lends useful openings towards theorising the production of difference (such as gender, ethnicity etc.) in integral relation to relations of production and reproduction. Thus, instead of seeing different social relations as originating in ontologically different logics and then “intersecting” *post-festum* in lived experience, here it is the common – but differentially inhabited – ground of the social from which varied relations emerge. In our case, it is this processual understanding of the “differentiated unity” of class which helps to understand how, for example, the production/entrenchment of ethnicity and gender in Karachi is integrally linked to the differentiated rhythms of the labour process, the uneven articulation of labour regimes with wider processes of accumulation, and/or the urban question. As such, this *processual* and differentiated conception of class offers a productive vantage point to grasp the totality of a social formation in all its distinction *and* unity, its multi-level complexity, as “a complex whole structured in dominance” (Althusser, 1965/69: 201).

It is this integral conception of class as a complex *totality* which also leads into the – perhaps productive – limitations of this dissertation. For every attempt to represent the totality in a class-structured society is bound to be a partial (and thus, political) one, only one of the several vantage points which may act as the Archimedean fulcrum for grasping the whole, and none of which exhaust the (always changing) social totality. It is this ultimate incommensurability of the whole to our conceptual schemas, the tendency of the social to overflow the abstract (but concrete) categories through which we attempt to grasp it, that gives the dialectical method its openness and vitality. Thus, to keep with our current study and to speak with Fredric Jameson, the concept of “social class is at one and the same time a sociological idea, a political concept, a historical conjuncture, an activist slogan, yet a definition in terms of any one of these

perspectives is bound to be unsatisfactory” (Jameson, 2014: 7) It is this ontological inability to pin down the concept, that makes class both such a promising and frustrating entry point into a totality which seems increasingly remote in our alienated-fragmented times. This is the incompleteness of a concept which, ultimately, “cannot be defined... [but] can only be provisionally approached in a kind of parallax”, as a kind of “absent center” of multiple approaches and avenues of investigation.

And so throughout this dissertation, I will always be grasping – and indeed, gasping – at narrating “class” which is always in *process*. It is this open totality, that incommensurability of the concept (the “concrete-in-thought”) to social reality (the “real-concrete”) that not only gives the concept its vitality, but also produces a constant temptation to scatter and then the urge to bring it all back together. For example, as I explore consciousness and (contradictory) common sense among workers, there will be what seem to be digressions on the reifications and fetishism of the commodity form. Where I discuss the new urban question in Karachi, the reflections on the ideological effects of space and the culture industry in late capitalism will seem to overflow our conceptual and empirical remit. Thus it is, as quoted in the epigraph to this Introduction, that Gramsci’s interest in History as “everything that concerns the people” coheres seamlessly with Jameson’s pronouncement of the “total content” of dialectical thought (Jameson, 1974: 306). It is this drive towards total content, this constitutive openness, this dialectical process whereby the social always overflows the concept and for the concept then to double-back on itself to become more complete (but incomplete at the same time), that makes this dissertation an account of the “making” *and* the “un-making” of the working class in Karachi at one and the same time. For the *making* of the working class as a sociological reality, the attempts at its instantiation as an activist slogan, is also and simultaneously its constant *unmaking* at the hands of ruling class

reaction, of the constitutive differentiation and fragmentation of capital itself, and of disaggregating subalternisation via the circumscribing rhythms of passive revolution. In fact, one may even locate the purpose of this investigation at the very (absent) center of these lacunae: between sociological reality, organising slogan, and disaggregated subalternity.

It is also this approach to class as in a kind of parallax, the constant tendency to converge and to scatter, that points us towards the limitations and future directions of this work. For it is this restlessness of the dialectic, the feeling of constantly falling short of what one sets out to do, that “you could not say one thing until you had first said everything”, that makes the subject matter at hand (i.e. the evolution of the working class and its politics) scarcely one that can be “dealt with” in a single, all-encompassing study. It is the virtue of the dialectical method that in resolving a particular knot of problems, it already points towards further questions to constantly concretise the initial set of questions. Several lines of inquiry are thus open to future researchers. Some of these are sketched out below.

With regards to the trade union movement, specific unions and labour federations have played an outsized role in the history of Pakistan’s labour movement, and can be fruitful avenues for further investigation. The brief incident narrated above with regards to Tufail Abbas’s Airways Union in the PIA is one indication of this: a highly militant union which gave way in later years to groups linked to right-wing organisations (such as the PIAC union of the JI’s National Labour Federation). The Muttahida Mazdoor Federation (United Worker’s Federation, MMF), the Landhi/Labour Organising Committee (LOC), and the Pakistan Trade Union Federation (PTUF) were all dominated by the Left and at the forefront of the labour movement in Pakistan at one point or another¹². Similarly, unions in strategic public enterprises such as

¹² We will be encountering some of these groups in our chapter on the trade union movement.

Railways and the Shipyards have also played an outsized role. All of the above are candidates for further inquiry. The changes in economic structure and labour relations can be further investigated through available records of case proceedings in Pakistan's Labour courts.

The heuristic of "labour regimes" proposed during the chapter on "informal" labour offers useful avenues to look at how different forms of labour subsumption have been integrated into the rhythms of the state and accumulation. While I have shed detailed light on labour regimes in three different sectors, the proliferation of "informal" modes of living in Karachi makes it a useful heuristic to extend to other sectors as well. These can include the public and private transport sector (a crucial absorbent of migrant labour in Karachi), domestic labour (the primary space of female gendered labour), security sector work, and the increasingly important gig economy such as ride-sharing and delivery work (a major avenue of full- or part-time income for young graduates and students). The focus on "labour regimes" and move away from the formal/informal dichotomy also provides useful openings for understanding the various forms of petty commodity production and small retailers in Karachi (such as hawkers, street traders etc.).

One avenue through which this study can be usefully extended is through a fuller integration of gendered perspectives into working class making and unmaking. In Karachi, working class subjectivity and materiality is (and has been) gendered in various ways, and throughout this dissertation, I have shed light on the gendered self-fashioning of workers and the links of these to wider processes of labour regimes. For example, I have elaborated on the gendered ways of living and articulating class such as in the case of food transport workers and home-based women workers (in Chapter 4). Moreover, forms of masculinist fracturing and self-fashioning are also evident in the development of urban ethno-spatial populisms in Karachi (in Chapter 6). However, a more detailed exposition of gender roles and social reproduction in

working class experience and subjectivity was hampered by limitations of access due to the social-cultural sensitivity of being a male researcher and “outsider” in most communities. It goes without saying that this remains a work in progress and a major avenue for future research. This is especially important with regards to the increasing entry of women into paid wage labour, especially in areas such as grooming/beauty, retail, and other service sectors. The differentiated conception of class proposed here (which considers *both* unity *and* difference integrally) and the heuristic of labour regimes (which integrates the rhythms of production *and* reproduction) offer productive conceptual anchors for studying the co-constitutive rhythms of class and gender¹³.

Another avenue through which this study could be usefully extended are the mechanisms of *trasformismo* elucidated throughout its course. For the most part, I have focussed on the institutional, molecular, and “material” processes of absorption with respect to the working classes. These have ranged from the legal changes to the structure of trade unionism, material “corruption”, the institutional apparatuses of various labour regimes, and the spatial demarcations of ethnic populism. However, future investigations can focus more explicitly on the “ideological”/directly ideational aspects of absorption into a changing historical bloc. Existing scholarly work has usefully explored the changing articulations of Islam and/or nationalism with regards to middle classes in Pakistan (cf Maqsood, 2017). However, how (and if) the shifting ideological terrain of Islam and nationalism articulates/produces subalternised working class subjects may also be a fruitful area of investigation. In this regard, I have offered some brief remarks on commodification, Islam, and the culture industry in Chapter 6. Celebrity figures such as the televangelist Amir Liaquat Hussain offer possible starting points for

¹³ The implications of reproductive labour, and its integrality to capitalism, is of course a long-standing concern of Marxist feminist theory. The escalating crisis of reproduction in the neoliberal era, multi-scalar/multi-spatial – including transnational – networks of social reproduction has also triggered renewed theoretical and political interest in the differentiated (and gendered) production of class, and the integral linkages of production and reproduction therein (cf Bhattacharya and Vogel eds, 2017).

investigation as “realisers” and transmitters of the neoliberal passive revolution. This would also be a useful opening towards concretely charting out the domains of traditional and organic intellectuality (and individuals therein) with regards to the working class and which serve the function of inter- and intra-class uptake, circulation, and *mediation* of proto-hegemonic ideological complexes.

In this regard, the investigation of fiction written in and about Karachi offers a useful avenue to explore consciousness and lived experience. Novels and short stories can provide invaluable clues in charting out socio-spatial shifts in lived experience and the structure of feeling. In Chapter 6, I have briefly elaborated upon an epistemological-methodological problematic to understand space and its “concrete abstraction” as constitutive – as opposed to simply thematic – to literary creations (and lived experience). This problematic, which brings together the insights of Henri Lefebvre and Fredric Jameson, can be productively extended to other creative accounts of Karachi and Pakistan, especially with regards to subaltern classes¹⁴. For example, the short stories of contemporary writers such as Julien Columeau may be a useful starting point, as they deal in detail with the various lumpen and underclass groups in urban Pakistan, ranging from prison populations to sex workers and low-level musicians (for example, see Columeau, 2013a and 2013b). Bilal Tanweer’s collection of (linked) short stories set in Karachi also lend themselves usefully to a productive account of spatial experience in conditions of late, postcolonial capitalism (Tanweer, 2013).

With regards to the institutional avenues of working class politics and subalternity, the labour wings of major political parties can also be explored. Limitations of time prevented this

¹⁴ In addition to the theorisations of class and passive revolution detailed above as major conceptual contributions, the heuristic developed with regards to “labour regimes” (Chapter 4) and spatially-inflected literary criticism via Lefebvre and Jameson (Chapter 6) may be considered minor contributions/interventions emerging from this work.

avenue of research from being realised during my fieldwork. For example, besides NLF of JI, the People's Labour Bureau of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the United Worker's Front of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) have been active labour units of mainstream political parties. Moreover, while we know that the US footprint on Pakistan's development planning has been immense, ranging from direct intervention via the Harvard group to indirect influence via the IMF and World Bank, it will be interesting to explore imperial influence directly in labour relations. Thus, while state-sponsored, anti-communist unions were set up during the 1950s and 1960s (Shaheed, 1983), the direct influence (if any) of the US – or other Cold War-era organisations – in the development of circumscribed trade unionism, and especially the legal apparatus of labour relations, can shed greater light on mechanisms of labour absorption and dispersion. As evidenced in labour movement archives, trade unionism in Pakistan has had integral linkages – via financial assistance, circulation of personnel and expertise etc. – with international organisations (such as the ILO) and unions in social-democratic countries (in Western Europe and Scandinavia). However, these linkages need to be explored more systematically. These can offer fruitful entry points for investigation of working class evolution when placed in the Gramscian schema of subalternity and passive revolutionary *trasformismo*.

A particularly fruitful line of inquiry would also involve shedding detailed light on the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP). The CPP, its linkages with various groups (such as among youth and labour), the ideological-strategic splits within: all these are addressed to some degree at various points in this work. After a long hiatus, work has also begun on the travails of the communist Left with regards to peasant organising (see Ali, 2019). However, much work remains to be done to concretely chart the linkages of the party with the labour movement, with

various front organisations, the debates around tactics and strategy at crucial conjunctures, and even aspects such as linkages with the Soviet Union, China, and Afghanistan.

Many lines of inquiry are therefore open to future researchers. All aspects of working class life – from literature, cinema, and politics, to everyday life and (formal and informal) organisations – are of relevance: each deserving of a monograph (or few) on its own. It is in this spirit that I provide the following account and framework for understanding the (un)making of the working class in Karachi not as final pronouncement, but as a humble point of departure for future students of Pakistan, Karachi, and of its once mighty proletariat.

1. Class Without Guarantees

“We do not set out from what men [sic] say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process... This method of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract), or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists.”

Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (9)

“[In] the philosophy of praxis... the general concepts of history, politics, and economics are interwoven in an organic unity.”

Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* (431)

The concept of class has been a source of intractable debate in social theory¹⁵. This debate has ranged at several levels, ranging from epistemology (i.e. the suitability of class as a vantage point to study society), to methodology (i.e. how to study class), and ontology (i.e. what is the definition and, concomitantly, potential of class). From classical theorists such as Durkheim, Weber and Marx, down to the post-structuralist moment of the past few decades, class has been central to theoretical debates, even if by its very absence in several strands of social theory. In

¹⁵ The title (and major arguments) of this chapter and subsequent mobilisation of class owes much to Stuart Hall’s pioneering – non-reductionist but integral – conceptualisations of class, politics, and consciousness (see Hall, 1986b).

the Marxist tradition, the concept has been even more of an issue for debate due to its centering of the *problematic* of class in its explanation of social phenomena and, relatedly, as a guide to political practice. In many senses, the debate around class and politics has also been also been a segue into a more general Marxist interest in delineating the relationship between different spheres of social life (such as between economics, politics, culture, consciousness etc.). As such the problematic of class has often provided a glimpse into different theorists' conceptions of the totality of society. As other social relations – such as that of gender, race and caste – have increasingly come to occupy a central role in social theory, the relationship of these with class has provided yet another area of rich theoretical and empirical studies.

In this chapter, we will carry out a review of theorisations of class in the Marxist tradition, with a particular focus on the relation of class to politics. In this effort, we will draw upon major thinkers ranging from Marx, Gramsci, and EP Thompson, down to more recent theorisations by Stuart Hall, Michael Burawoy, and the Subaltern Studies group. Instead of merely listing the various contributions of these thinkers, we will incorporate their ideas through various themes with regards to the definition and study of class.

The argument of the chapter will proceed through six sections. We will commence with recovering Marx's own conceptualisations regarding class as object and/or subject. Marx's critique of idealism and metaphysical materialism, along with his historical and methodological reflections in texts such as *The Grundrisse* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, will point to his synchronic-diachronic materialist method. The dialectical relation (and resolution) of class as subject and object will then be taken forward in the next section reviewing conceptualisations of class and subalternity through the works of Gramsci, EP Thompson and the Subaltern Studies (SS) Collective. A critique of the SS will lead us into a discussion on class and its relation

to/reproduction with difference (such as social relations of ethnicity, caste, race etc.). A processual and differentiated conceptualisation of class will then be related to debates around urban informality, especially in Global South contexts. This is particularly relevant for our study of Karachi, as theorisations of informality have been the main entry point for Subaltern Studies in urban contexts in South Asia. The relational and active conceptualisation of class emerging therein will then lead into our next section on studying classes through relations *in* production. Finally, we will conclude by laying out our relational and active conceptualisation of class defined through relations of and in production, with these relations of/in production themselves being shot through with politics and struggle.

In doing so, we hope to arrive at a conception of class which can deal with complex linkages and interdependencies between different spheres of social life. Taking its cue from Marx, we will advocate for a conception which does not (mis-)represent the social whole through divisions into ontologically discrete spheres such as that of “culture”, “economy”, “politics” etc. Thus, we will consider seriously the *integral* role of ideology and political hegemony in the formation of classes, and move away from uni-directional models of “base-superstructure” which reduce the “economy” to techno-centric conceptions of “forces of production” while portraying ideology and consciousness as mere reflections of the economic “base” (defined narrowly). As with Marx himself, our theorisation of class and subsequent concrete studies will move on *both* the synchronic and diachronic axes i.e. taking both structure *and* history seriously and integrally, through the mediation of class struggle – without assuming any *inherent* tendencies towards either irruption or passivity. In the spirit of the late Stuart Hall, we will advocate, therefore, for a conception of class without guarantees.

Class as Object and/or Subject

Marx's classic statement on the objectivity and/or subjectivity of class comes from texts such as *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, and has given rise to much debate along the lines of "class-in-itself" versus "class-for-itself" (for example, see Cohen, 1980). In such an interpretation, Marx made a distinction between class defined "objectively" through its position in the relations of production and the common situations of life engendered therein (class-in-itself), versus a "subjective" level whereby the aggregation and articulation of political interests leads to the formation of "a class as against capital" (class-for-itself) (Marx, 1847: 79). However, a closer reading of the relevant passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* reveals Marx's emphasis on the "subjective" and representational element even when the said class (in this case, the peasantry) is not organised *independently*. As such, Marx emphasises that the mid-nineteenth century French peasantry is "incapable of asserting their class interest *in their own name*" and therefore "must be represented" through the dictatorial figure of Louis Bonaparte and his bloated state machinery (Marx, 1852: 15, emphasis added). Later in the same text, Marx also indicates that such displaced representation is not a function of the *complete* passivity of the peasantry, but in fact articulates their contradictory consciousness and interests in a particular social-political project (ibid: 63). Thus, for Marx, classes always exist concretely within dynamic social-political projects entailing a combination of incorporation, exclusion, and resistance, and cannot be studied in isolation from such. Moreover, Marx also moves beyond the subject-object dichotomy through an emphasis on political practice and the differentiated-circumscribed forms of agency, incorporation and exclusion effected by different classes in the same.

In fact, such a manner of mediating between objectivity and subjectivity through practice is not limited to the historical works, and draws directly on Marx and Engel's "settling of accounts"

with their “erstwhile philosophical consciousness” [i.e. their break with the speculative epistemology of classical German philosophy] (Marx, 1859: 4). Breaking away from the idealism of German classical philosophy and Feuerbach’s metaphysical materialism, Marx criticised both for ignoring the historicity of thought in practice. While Hegelian thought posited the Spirit/Idea as motor and genesis of all History, Feuerbach emphasised “man” [sic] in his alienated essence as the subject of history. In both, human society itself was resolved into a flat totality with *a speculative and single essence*. As such, while Hegelian idealism emphasised the aspect of change and dynamism – even if in a speculative manner – Feuerbachian materialism fell prey to its own form of metaphysics: one of an “essential man” and therefore, an unchanging and non-dynamic conception of human beings *as such*. Being and thought, and by extension reality and its consciousness were ruptured in much the same way as in Hegelian thought, but this time (so to speak) *from the other side*.

Marx, however, was not only concerned with standing Hegelian thought “on its feet” i.e. bringing it down to the “profane” level of human activity, but also in overcoming “the chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism... that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively” (Marx, 1845: 1). Marx critiqued Feuerbach’s metaphysical materialism as placing itself outside of society as such, and therefore falling prey to an essentially static and *external* view of the world. The adoption of an epistemological viewpoint *outside* of society itself, ignored the historicity of thought *in practice*. As such, the reality of the external world and the “dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking *that is isolated from practice*” is seen by Marx as “a purely scholastic question” (ibid, emphasis added). Human beings appropriate and think about reality in a distinctive manner, which is conditioned and determined by the

historical-social ensemble of material-ideological development. Therefore, Marx sees consciousness through the mediation of practice as an integral part of social being, and by dint of its being *social* and thus, *historical* does not think of “reality” as in an *external* relation to thought, which is the main pitfall of both idealism and metaphysical materialism (albeit from opposite sides).

With this emphasis on the historicity of thought and practice, Marx critiqued the ahistorical abstractions of classical political economy. With its reduction of the concepts of “labour” and “production-in-general” to their lowest common denominator, classical political economy does not grasp that “so-called general preconditions of all production are *nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped*” (Marx, 1973: 30, emphasis added). As such, all production in history is “appropriation of an individual *within and through a specific form of society*” (ibid, emphasis added). Similarly, with the focus on the “individual”, an ahistorical abstraction is performed whereby “bourgeois relations are then quietly smuggled in as the inviolable natural laws on which society in the abstract is founded” (ibid: 28). General categories have to be seen in their historical specificity where “elements which are not general and common, must be separated from the determinations valid for production [or any other activity/category] as such, *so that in their unity... their essential difference is not forgotten*” (ibid: 27, emphasis added). As such, in keeping with his *active* and historically specific conception of “objectivity” and thought, for Marx *general* concepts and categories “*differentiate* in the very moment that they reveal hidden connections” (Hall, 2003: 118, emphasis in original). As such, Marx argues for a conception whereby generalities are produced, not abstractly, but through the particularity i.e. through the specificity of social and political practice in a given conjuncture.

Along with elaborating what may be termed the “historical premise”, Marx also posits a “structural premise” for his method. In response to ahistorical conceptions of production and the determining function ascribed to distribution and exchange by vulgar political economy, Marx sees production, distribution, exchange and circulation as “members of a [single] totality, *distinctions within a unity*” (Marx, 1973: 40, emphasis added). However, here he does not fall into a free-floating pluralism but posits production as the moment which “predominates... over the other moments” (ibid: 41). Thus, in the whole circuit of economic production, it is production which is posited as the determinant moment, but not simply or monocausally as “*in its one-sided form, production is itself determined by other moments*” (ibid, emphasis added). Thus, while one moment of the circuit predominates over the others, this is by no means meant to reduce the whole circuit to a single essence. The other moments retain their own identity, and the whole circuit is seen as a *differentiated unity*.

Therefore, any concept (including class) must be grounded in the specificity of structural and historical context, without reducing one to the other. While a “historical epistemology” is essential to grasp the temporal transience of specific relations, this has to be at the same time a “*structural history*” which “interrupts the linear trajectory of an evolutionary progression, and re-organises our conception of historical time in terms of the succession of modes of production, defined by the internal relations of dominance and subordination between the different relations which constitute them” (Hall, 2003: 133). Therefore, Marx's method moves on *both synchronic and diachronic axes*, taking into account the complex structure of relations within a specific conjuncture, while also investigating and keeping in sight their historical transience and temporal specificity.

These insights regarding differentiated unities and historic-structural specificity have been taken forward by theorists such as Gramsci and Althusser. In fact, Gramsci's delineation of the different levels of "relations of force" may be said to draw directly on the Marxian analysis of the integral relation-cum-relative autonomy of different moments of a totality. During his *Prison Notebooks* project, Gramsci often referred to Marx's synthesis of the materialist conception of history in the famous 1859 Preface: "no social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.... Mankind [sic] thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve" (Marx, 1859: 2). While recognising the dangers inherent in any straightforward reading of this passage, Gramsci argued that these "two fundamental principles of political science... must first be developed critically in all their implications, and purged of every residue of mechanicism and fatalism" (Gramsci, 1971: 107).

As a "critical corollary" to these principles, and to avoid the impasse between economism and "ideologism", Gramsci proposed – not unlike Lenin and Althusser's definition of Marxism as "concrete analysis of concrete situations" – methodological criteria whereby three fundamental levels/moments of force are delineated in the "examination of concrete historical facts" (ibid: 179-83):

- 1) The relation of social forces. This is linked to the "level of development of the material forces of production which provides a basis for the emergence of social classes, each one of which represents a function and has a specific position within production itself".

- 2) The relation of political forces i.e. "an evaluation of the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness and organisation attained by the various social classes".

3) The relation of military forces “which from time to time is directly decisive”.

Among these, Gramsci emphasises that “the greatest possible stress [should be put] on the second moment (equilibrium of political forces)” (ibid: 107). It is here in the second moment of the balance of forces in any conjuncture, that Gramsci introduces the concept of hegemony, as the moment when a social group or class transcends its purely “economic-corporate” interests to being “coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate group” and thus forming an “intellectual and moral unity” (ibid: 181-2). Thus, the problematic of hegemony incorporates within it the problems of consciousness and ideology. While the economic is the “terrain” on which social forces develop, Gramsci emphasises the contingency of the political by stating that an “analysis of the balance of forces – at all levels – can only culminate in the sphere of hegemony and ethico-political relations” (ibid: 167). Therefore, any attempt to read off politics and/or ideology as “an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism” (ibid: 407). The economic can, at best, “reveal the points of least resistance” (ibid: 185) or, as Stuart Hall puts it, “the tendential lines of force [that] define only the givenness of the historical terrain” (Hall, 1986b: 42). Ultimately, it is the “force of will”, in other words, the *practice of politics* – i.e. the organisation, coherence, and consciousness of social-political forces emerging on the terrain of the economic – which ultimately determines the resolution of social contradictions and the direction of history.

Gramsci introduces the concept of a “historical bloc” in order to demonstrate the complex unity of all spheres of social life which are only methodologically distinct instead of there being an ontological separation between “culture”, “economy”, “consciousness” etc. A historical bloc is the particular material-ideological ensemble of forces that are hegemonic in a given spatio-temporal conjuncture. Hegemony is realised only insofar as “it creates a new ideological terrain,

determines a reform of consciousness and of methods knowledge... structures *and* superstructures form an ‘historical bloc’” (Gramsci, 1971: 365-6, emphasis added). Moreover, Gramsci also stresses – in the context of a discussion on ideas and material forces [to be taken up in the following sections] – that the difference between superstructure and structure has “purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable without form and ideologies would be individual fancies without material forces” (ibid: 377).

Class (and class analysis) therefore cannot be divorced from its historically and structurally specific imbrication in the ensemble of material-ideological hegemonic projects. Class can neither be understood by referral to the economic “base” (narrowly defined) alone, nor simply by referring to subjects’ own understanding/self-assigned meaning. In fact, what is required is a complex and concrete conception of classes which uncovers the integral relations between consciousness and being through the mediation of practice. Class is thus a “boundary-traversing” concept, an ensemble of the relatively autonomous levels of the social formation (such as the economic, political, ideological etc.), even while being articulated to the different spheres of civil and political society. It is in a similar vein, that Gramsci terms Marx as “the author of concrete political and historical works” (Gramsci, 1971: 407). Thus, both Marx and Gramsci move away from a simple subject-object dichotomy when it comes to studying class (and other social phenomena), through an emphasis on the active/dialectical relation between the two. Class is both object and subject at the same time, with its concrete production and expression determined by political practice and the “boundary-traversing” relations of civil-political society in a particular conjuncture¹⁶. It is with this active conception that we will turn to the next section to further elaborate on a relational and processual conceptualisation of class.

¹⁶ As demonstrated by Marx in the case of the peasantry and Bonapartism in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.

Class as Process and Relation

An integral re-conceptualisation of the object-subject relation and, relatedly, the “base-superstructure” relation also informs EP Thompson’s theorisation of class. Thus, in his magisterial study *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson (1968) defines class as a *historical* category that is always in the *process* of being formed through the (conscious and unconscious) practices of protagonists. For Thompson, relations of production relations exert a “field-of-force”, whereby “class eventuates as men and women *live* their productive relations, and as they *experience* their determinate situations, within ‘the *ensemble* of social relations’” (Thompson, 1978: 150, emphasis added). It is in the medium of experience, itself sorted out in *class ways*, that *dispositions* to act as a class are located¹⁷. As such, Thompson’s understanding of class places great importance on the integral role of “social and cultural phenomena [which] do not trail after the economic at some remote remove: they are, at their source, immersed in the same nexus of relationship” (Thompson, 1965: 356). Changes in the relations of production and productive forces are experienced in social and cultural life through struggles over livelihood and relatedly, over meanings of norms, beliefs and practices. Classes are formed and attain consciousness *historically* through living their class experiences, and their subsequent interpretation and organisation both discursively and concretely in the form of working class institutions.

¹⁷ While Thomson’s emphasis on struggle, dispositions, and common life situations might seem to bear a family resemblance with Pierre Bourdieu’s analyses of class habitus and fields, Thompson’s (and the Marxist tradition’s generally) definition of classes through relations of production offers a more productive vantage point. A market/exchange-based definition of classes, lends a certain ahistoricity to Bourdieu (and Weber’s) conceptualisation of “capital”. In the Marxist tradition, and unlike Bourdieu’s (neo-Weberian) definition of class through the sphere of exchange, an emphasis on production (and its integral linkages to other spheres) brings focus onto the internal – rather than merely incidental – role of relational struggle over multiple spheres in the definition and constitution of classes. See Weber (2004: 176, 183) and Bourdieu (1979).

As a *historical* category therefore, class cannot be studied adequately merely through quantitative and/or static cross-sectional analysis of a social formation. Class is *both a process and a relation*, “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... *class itself is not a thing, it is a happening*” (Thompson, 1968: 939, emphasis added). Thus, Thompson emphasises the struggle and historical aspect of social formations, which is given its structural/synchronic specificity by the field-of-force exerted by relations of production which sort out social experiences, norms and practices in class-specific ways. Class *struggle* then exists *prior* to class-consciousness which is “always the last, not the first, stage in the real historical process” (Thompson, 1978: 149). Class experiences and dispositions are concretised through their organisation as *relations of mutual solidarity* (within members of the same class) *and antagonism* (against members of a different class). Class, as Ira Katznelson 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” (Katznelson, 1982: 207)

Antonio Gramsci’s reflections in *The Prison Notebooks* may be usefully seen as pre-figuring and shaping the work of Thompson and others in the dissident Historians’ group of the Communist Party of Great Britain (such as Eric Hobsbawm and Christopher Hill). In fact, the first English translations of Gramsci began appearing around the same time as the height of the Historian group’s activity. As an active revolutionary, and much like his above-mentioned comments on social totality, Gramsci’s comments on class are almost always in the context of thinking about the project of an alternative, proletarian hegemony. In light of his upbringing in

the peripheral region of Sardinia and his experiences during the Turin workers' strikes in 1919-20, Gramsci always thought of the working class and its politics in the context of (hegemonic) alliances and coordination of interests with other subordinate groups (i.e. the formation of a "historical bloc"). As such, Gramsci employed the concept of "subaltern classes" when thinking through the problems of building an alternative to bourgeois hegemony.

The centrality of subaltern social groups to Gramsci's project can be gauged from the fact that he devotes a whole thematic notebook to the question of subaltern social groups. In Notebook 25, Gramsci sets out "methodological criteria" for the study of subaltern social groups which lay out his *active* conception of subalternity¹⁸. He delineates six broad stages through which subaltern social groups move, ranging from their emergence on the terrain of the economy, to their varying relationships to existing dominant political formations, and finally to a state of "integral autonomy" (Gramsci, 1971: 52). However, Gramsci does not see the progression through these "phases" to be a linear or teleological one. In fact, not only are the subalterns' tendencies towards "cleavage" and autonomy "always subject to the activity of ruling groups," but development *within* the subaltern social groups themselves is also uneven (ibid: 55). It often comes to pass that among the subaltern groups, "one will exercise or tend to exercise a certain hegemony through the mediation of a party" (ibid: 53).

While Gramsci's discussion of subaltern social groups returns once more to the problematic of hegemony – and through it, to the problem of consciousness – care should be taken to not fix subalternity as an unmediated or static condition of domination. Subaltern social groups are neither unmistakably destitute nor irredeemably excluded from the rhythms of hegemony. In contrast, the *production* of subalternity is "integrally and immanently related" to

¹⁸ I have directly quoted the relevant note in the Methodology section of the Introduction.

the organising and disorganising logics of the bourgeois “integral state”, “fundamentally transformed and reconstituted by its [the integral state’s] expansive logic” (Thomas, 2018: 871, 868)¹⁹. It is exactly at this juncture that the Subaltern Studies collective’s influential mobilisations of hegemony and subalternity, can be distinguished from Gramsci’s own conceptualisations. The starting assumption for the Subalternists was one of a “*structural dichotomy*” between elite and subaltern domains, with “the *politics of the people*... [being] an *autonomous* domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter” (Guha, 1981: 3, emphasis in original). This autonomy in turn was based on “the *failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation*,” and thus the proliferation of domains of “subalternity common to all the social constituents of this domain” (ibid: 4-6, emphasis in original).

However, while this framework bore more than a family resemblance to Gramsci’s preoccupations with hegemony, subaltern social groups, and common sense, the Subalternists’ conceptualisation was marred by their assumption of an *independent and fixed condition* of subalternity. Gramsci’s own *active* concept of subalternity develops in relation to and “along the theory of hegemony, like its subjective correlation,” while eschewing any attempt to fix subalternity as an unmediated, independent or static condition of domination” (Modonesi, 2014: 21). Born on the terrain of the economy, subaltern social groups have to tend towards cleavage from the dominant classes in order to “become a State”, which will be the ultimate guarantor of their unity and “integral autonomy” from the dominant classes. As such, and in contrast to the Subalternists, subalternity for Gramsci is *both a condition and process* “of subjective development – of political subjectivation centred in the experience of subordination – that

¹⁹ We will discuss Gramsci’s conception of the “integral state” in more detail in the next chapter.

includes *combinations* of relative acceptance and resistance, of spontaneity and consciousness” (ibid: 36, emphasis added). Therefore, subalternity is always an uneven and non-teleological process, whereby different phases are overlain in *combinations* of passivity, antagonism and cleavage, which in turn are themselves overdetermined by developments within the other levels of a social formation.

While prominent Subalternists like Guha and Chatterjee explicitly invoked Gramsci (especially in their earlier work), their work may be said to be marred by *a double dualism* i.e. between East-West and elite-subaltern, with India and postcolonial social formations generally distinguished by the ruling classes’ “domination without hegemony” (for example, see Chatterjee, 1986). Leading on from this, the Subalternists have been critiqued for essentialising the Gramscian conception of subalternity (Modonesi, 2014), ignoring the geographical variation and material grounding of different rhythms of subalternity (Singh, 2002), and – in contrast to EP Thompson (another intellectual interlocutor of the Subalternists) – a neglect of the state due to their insistence on the “autonomy” of the popular domain (Chandravarkar, 1994)²⁰. The assumption of fixed and ontologically discrete spheres is a thread running through major subalternists’ work, which also mars their handling of the production of difference i.e. the production class along with other social relations such as ethnicity, gender, caste etc. (for example, see Bannerji, 2000). It is this question of difference that we will turn to in the next section through reference to the Subalternists and others.

²⁰ The pitfalls of the paradigmatic statements of the SS collective did not, of course, prevent them from producing invaluable works of historical investigation and excavation. In fact, the best of the Subalternists’ work not only took seriously the social grounding of subalternity, but also issues such as subaltern engagement with the institutions of the state and with ruling classes. Shahid Amin’s work on the circulation of stories and imaginings regarding Gandhi, and his detailed, multi-variate account of the infamous Chauri Chaura incident are particularly elegant examples of the Subalternists’ overcoming of their conceptual defects in practice (Amin, 1984 and Amin, 1995).

Class and Difference

The dialectics of class, dependency, and its linkages with social relations of difference in the case of colonised (and post-colonial) countries have posed unique problems for the Marxist tradition. Compared to analyses of advanced capitalist countries, a whole host of issues impress upon the need for Marxist analysis to be “slightly stretched” in the context of colonised and post-colonial countries (Fanon, 1967/2001: 31). These include the character of the colonial and post-colonial state, the specific articulations and transitions between pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production, the nature of dependency and linkages with the mother country, and the search for a “revolutionary” class considering the specific articulations of capital and state power in the colonial context with caste, ethnicity, and gender.

Recently, in the context the rise of Hindutva in India and associated counter-struggles, there has been an increasing recognition at the levels of both political and academic praxis, of the integral relations between class and caste (for example, see Teltumbde, 2016 in EPW’s issue on caste and class). Of course, the project of conceptualising class, caste and subalternity in the Indian context builds upon a much older history which includes the Subaltern Studies school of historiography. In this regard, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincialising Europe* has had an influential role in the understanding of capital and difference in India and other post-colonial contexts generally. Chakrabarty’s (admirable) aim is one of puncturing the universalising pretensions of Eurocentric accounts of capitalism, as a way of initiating a “project of alliance between the dominant metropolitan histories and the subaltern peripheral pasts” (Chakrabarty, 2000: 42). However, here too the Subalternist tendency to think in terms of discrete spheres lends a fundamental weakness to his theorisation. Differences are encountered as *external* to – and in a discrete sphere in relation to – capital and thus are made functional to accumulation

through a “subsumption” model of capital’s operation (ibid: 48). Such an external relation between capital and other social relations, leads Chakrabarty to posit two (submerged) Histories of capital in Marx: History 1 (H1) which is “capital’s antecedent ‘posited by itself’”, and History 2 (H2) which is also antecedent to capital but “not as forms of its own life-process” (ibid: 63). As such, the sources of opposition to capital are placed not just within capital, but also in the processes of H2 which “constantly interrupts the totalising thrusts of History 1” (ibid: 66).

While Chakrabarty is at pains to point out that “difference, in this account, is not something external to capital”, his actually-elaborated understanding of the relationship between capital, class, and social relations of difference differs in key ways from Marx and his *internal/integral* conceptualisation of difference in a social formation (Chakrabarty, 2000: 66). Marx’s methodological point in the *Grundrisse* regarding the production of generalities *through* particularities suggests a different model of linkages and articulation between capital and other social relations. Thus, instead of there being two ontologically distinct spheres – H1 and H2, one abstract-universal and the other local-particular, one of capital/class and the other of difference – Marx reminds us that no category or concept works in a “pure” or “abstract” manner when looked at concretely in a given spatio-temporal conjuncture. In fact, general categories should be seen in their historical-geographical specificity where “elements which are not general and common, must be separated from the determinations valid for production [or class] as such, *so that in their unity... their essential difference is not forgotten*” (ibid: 27, emphasis added). As such, neither a simply functional or a subsumption model of the relation of class and difference can be asserted or deduced in abstraction from the situated workings of varied social relations in particular contexts.

Relatedly, Marx's insights into the relative autonomy of different levels and moments of a social formation also lead us to such a non-reductive and non-functionalist account of the dialectics of class and difference. The point is neither to collapse social relations such as race, caste or ethnicity into class, nor to effect a complete rupture between them (Chakrabarty, in fact, seems to oscillate between these two poles, while tending towards the latter). Relations such as gender, ethnicity, and race have to be seen as *moments* through which the social totality reproduces itself, as integral "members of a [single] totality, *distinctions within a unity*" (Marx, 1973: 40, emphasis added). While one moment or social relation often comes to predominate over the others, this is by no means meant to reduce the whole social totality to a single essence. In fact, the dominance of a particular relation in a given context is itself a matter of political practice and concrete social investigation²¹. The other moments retain their own identity, and the whole totality is thus a *differentiated unity* or a "complex whole structured in dominance" (Althusser, 1965/69: 201).

Several examples can be illustrated with regards to such a non-reductive and integral conception of difference in relation to class. In the case of colonial southern Africa, Mahmood Mamdani alerts us to the social and spatial technologies of rule through which "ethnicity" and "race" were mobilised for the institution of a bifurcated regime. A racialised regime of civil rights in the towns and a "tribalised" Native Authority in the country gave rise to a "Janus-faced" state based on urban-rural cleavage and whose distinctive feature was a "racial dualism... anchored in a politically enforced ethnic pluralism" (Mamdani, 1996: 7). Relatedly, in his analysis of the specificity of socio-spatial modalities of rule and accumulation in apartheid South Africa, Stuart Hall alerts us to how social relations of difference – such as "race" – became "the

²¹ For example, see Hall (1980) for a nuanced mobilisation of the Marxian problematic for understanding the articulations of race and class in apartheid South Africa.

modality in which class is ‘lived’, the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and ‘fought through’” (Hall, 1980: 341). Hira Singh in his account of the caste and class dynamics of the 1857 revolt, stresses the methodological point of investigating the spatially specific, dynamic and processual character of caste-class relations, and the variegated responses – of resistance and accommodation – within India to British colonialism (Singh, 2013). Similarly, Sharad Chari provides an extremely useful account of the dialectics of caste and class in South India, with a particular focus on the garment knitwear industry and processes of agrarian transition (Chari, 2004). Chari’s historical account of the (originally agrarian) Gounder caste’s dominance in Tiruppur’s garment industry shows how such a material-ideological project draws upon historical traces of class compromise and moral economy²², even while attempting a “molecular absorption” of certain social groups. Such an hegemony – and, concomitant class formation – operates through the differentiated mobilisation/absorption of other social relations, such as caste and gender in the case of Tiruppur. These in turn are articulated to regimes of accumulation and power at different scales. Therefore, an emphasis on the complex unity of a social formation reproduced through and with difference, can serve us well for the study of class with other social relations as well. Such an emphasis on the *achieved* and processual nature of hegemony and class formation alerts us to how different social relations are articulated in the reproduction of a given social formation.

Gramsci too alerts us to the differentiated incorporation of ethnicity – through the problematic of uneven development – into the Italian social formation during the Risorgimento, compared to the reformulation of sexuality and gender to consumption/reproduction practices of

²² “Moral Economy” is defined by E.P. Thompson as a “notion of legitimation” 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” (Thompson, 1971: 78-9). As Thompson demonstrates in the case of the capitalist transition in England, moral economies can also be a source of resistance against imposed social change.

the “new man” under the Fordist passive revolution in the US. Sensitised by his experiences of uneven development, his *active* and processual conception of social totalities, and his studies of phenomena such as Fordism, Gramsci also saw the attendant processes and condition of subalternity “as an intersectionality of the variations of class, gender, culture, religion, nationalism, and colonialism functioning within an ensemble of socio-political and economic relations” (Green, 2011: 400). The contexts of uneven development at multiple scales and vis-à-vis different spheres of social life often lend a particular salience to processes of class formation whereby a “non-homogenous class subject” is produced (Hall, 1986a: 437). Thus, much like Gramsci’s processual understanding of hegemony itself, subalternity (and class) are not seen as merely a condition, but as a processual condensation of multiple, internally related moments of domination – “a confluence of multiple, spatially mediated temporal rhythms” (Kipfer, 2013: 86).

Relatedly, Stuart Hall’s deployment of Althusser and Gramsci to the idea of an “articulated historical bloc” can also be usefully deployed to think through dynamic hegemonies and incorporation of social relations of class, ethnicity, and gender in (post-)colonial contexts such as Pakistan and India (Hall, 1980). Consideration of different social relations along with class, and of hegemony as an “articulated historical bloc”, alters us to the idea that “within an ensemble of social relations there are different subjective positions, and that these are reflected in the ethico-political dimensions of an ensemble’s common sense... [thus] hegemony might be differentiated across an ensemble of social relations” (Short, 2013: 201). As such, we move towards a historically and spatially specific conception of class, with a focus on how historical patterns and practices of difference, class, and state power are articulated in the reproduction/hegemony of more contemporary historical blocs. The aim is neither to abandon the unity of a social formation

for a fetish of local particularisms, nor to fail to take into account Marx's insights on the working of generalities *through* particularities. Class then becomes not just a vantage point for the study of social formations, but also a point of arrival: "a rich totality of many determinations and relations... the concentration of many determinations, hence the unity of the diverse" (Marx, 1973: 41).

Class and Informality

Another source of debate and inflection of the class question, especially in urban Third World contexts, has been through debates over "informality". With the ravages of Structural Adjustment, agricultural depeasantisation, and the increasing importance of the built environment for capital's "spatial fix", urban growth in Third World cities like Karachi has been decoupled from concurrent industrialisation. In this context, increasing rural-to-urban migration and lumpenisation have meant that "Mao's paradigmatic countryside no longer as much surrounds the city as implodes into it" (Davis, 2004a: 11). This new wretched of the earth, inhabiting a "universe of urban slums and shantytowns" are at the forefront of "the urbanisation of Empire" (ibid). The question has also been posed if this "outcast proletariat" has the potential to "possess that most potent of Marxist talismans: historical agency?" (Davis, 2004b: 28). Most famously, Frantz Fanon, in his analysis of city-country relations and revolutionary organisation under colonialism in Algeria, designated the *lumpen proletariat* straddling the outskirts of towns, "that horde of starving men, uprooted from their tribe and from their class... [as] one of the most spontaneous and most radically revolutionary forces of a colonised people" (Fanon, 1967: 103). This of course is in contrast to others such as Regis Debray who in *Revolution in the Revolution* quotes Castro as declaring the city as "a cemetery of revolutionaries and resources" (Debray,

1967: 77-78). As such, a vast political and academic literature has emerging on issues such as the relation of informality to capitalism, its relation to the state, and the political potential(s) inhering therein²³.

In the South Asian context, undoubtedly the most influential understanding of the structural and historical position of informality has been provided by Partha Chatterjee and Kalyan Sanyal's cognate conceptions of "political society" and the "need economy", respectively. Chatterjee, one of the founding members of the Subaltern Studies collective, deploys the Gramscian concepts of passive revolution, political society, and civil society, albeit in a way quite removed from the Sardinian. In Chatterjee's schema, "civil society" is the domain characterised by colonial roots, proscribed laws and constitutionally sanctioned relations between individual and state based on "those characteristic institutions of modern associational life originating in Western societies" (Chatterjee, 2001: 172). However in India, civil society is "used by only by a small section of its 'citizens'" and is thus the marker of a "non-Western modernity as an always incomplete project of 'modernization'" (ibid). The demands of electoral

²³ Questions around "informality" have long been debated in various disciplines including, importantly, in the mainstream development literature. The latter has mostly been articulated around the need for absorbing or promoting the "informal *sector*" – i.e. sectors of the economy which develop outside ostensible state regulation – vis a vis the "formal" or "properly" capitalist sector (cf Hart, 1973). Thus, in the Pakistani context, 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".

For our purposes, and as will be elaborated in this section and the coming chapters, what is of interest is the link of informality with historical rhythms of accumulation (such as colonial and neo-imperial structures) and concomitant effects on working class politics and the urban poor. This involves investigating myriad forms of informality – such as in the spheres of production and reproduction – in their concrete linkages with multi-scalar rhythms of accumulation and projects of socio-spatial hegemony. As will be demonstrated in due course, the "formal/informal" distinction occludes much more than it reveals about different modes of accumulation, absorption-exclusion, and organising.

For a review of the different understandings of informality in the Latin American, African, and Middle Eastern literatures, see Bayat (2000) and Roy (2009). For a succinct account of the evolution of the concept of "informality" in mainstream development literature and organisations, see Sanyal (2007).

democracy and the need for some ameliorative measures in the face of neoliberal onslaught has led to the expansion of a state-centered “set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large sections of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of ‘policy’” (ibid: 173).

On other hand, “political society” comes to define the terrain of the “informal”, characterised by conjunctural practices of collective action/“community” and contestation whereby pressure is exerted so as to procure collective rights from civil society through a language often couched in the (very modern) rhetoric of democratic rights. Political society works through formulation of mostly “illegal” demands and results in constant negotiation and procuring of concessions from the institutions of “lawfully constituted civil society” which deal with these mobilisations “not as bodies of citizens belonging to a lawfully constituted civil society, but as population groups deserving welfare [along lines of caste, religion, ethnicity etc.]” (Chatterjee, 2001: 177). In a re-working of the Subalternists’ earlier duality of elite-subaltern domains, civil and political society come to be defined by different conceptions of time, community, and culture. Where the former operates in a domain characterised by abstract seriality and individualised citizenship, the latter is linked to the sphere of postcolonial governmentality which divides and deals with population through classifications of community, caste, ethnicity, religion etc. Put simply, there is “an antinomy between the homogenous national and heterogeneous social” (Chatterjee, 2004: 36).

Where Chatterjee characterises the relationship between “formal” civil society and “informal” political society as a modality of rule in the post-colonial context, Kalyan Sanyal elaborates on the political-economy of this linkage. Sanyal’s purpose in *Rethinking Capitalist Development* is to theorise the “internal heterogeneity” of post-colonial capitalism through an understanding which moves beyond the characterisation of the “pre/non-capitalist” spaces as

being either functional to or in transition towards “full-blown” capitalism (Sanyal, 2007: 41). Capitalism in the peripheries undertakes a program of dispossession and primitive accumulation. However, the resulting alienated/displaced labour is then actively *re-constituted* by capital as “non-capital” in the sphere of the informal economy due to the political/ideological imperatives of absorbing labour power which cannot be absorbed by the “accumulation economy” (Sanyal’s term for the “properly” capitalist sector). Consequently, “non-capital” is constituted as an “internal ‘Other’ of capital”, with transition to full capitalism posited as an impossibility (ibid: 39). The institution of the market is the space of articulation between the “need economy” and the “accumulation economy”; the “complex hegemony” of capital ensuring that, through the market, it is the imperative of accumulation and growth which is posited as the “master nodal point” (ibid: 217).

Sanyal traces the historical genesis of this “complex hegemony” through an analysis of changes in development discourse from one based around modernization theories (with basic imperative of capital formation and full capitalist transition from “traditional/backward” to “modern” sectors), to one where alleviation/management of poverty are posited as central to development. Not being co-terminus with the economic logic of capitalism, development is a tool for governance and specifically for the furtherance of political and ideological hegemony of capitalism. The development of discourse around the “informal sector” constitutes an integral – and the latest – phase in the reformulation of development in its linkage to the regime of accumulation. With the recognition of “non-wage labour” productive activities by bodies such as the IMF, ILO and the UN, comes a recognition of the “informal sector” as a separate and dynamic sphere of commodity production which is geared towards consumption (and thus, not accumulation). Sanyal terms this the “need economy... a system of petty commodity

production... [which] is an effect of capital, its inescapable outcome” (Sanyal, 2007: 209). A “re-uniting” of dispossessed/displaced labourers with means of production in the space of the “informal sector”, through a reverse flow of resources from the “accumulation economy”, is thus a key task of developmental governmentality in the era of globalisation.

In this account, the hegemony of capital moves from one based around simple domination and monism (the discourse of inevitable transition from “traditional” to “modern” economy”), to one based around difference and the recognition, incorporation and promotion of heterogeneity. As such, post-colonial capitalism is characterised by “two distinct economies... each with an internal logic of its own” (Sanyal, 2007: 212). This “internal dualism”, with distinct “nodal points” around accumulation and need, is then articulated around a “master nodal point” provided by the capitalist market which ensures the “complex hegemony” of the capitalist accumulation economy (ibid: 217). A “dual process of creation and destruction, of conservation and dissolution” takes place, whereby IFIs, MNCs, developmental organisations and governmentality become different aspects of the emergent structure of global capitalism (ibid: 219, 236). The “informal economy”, while operating around the axis of “need”, is thus produced as a “moment” within the complex hegemony which is characteristic of post-colonial capitalism.

While both Sanyal and Chatterjee focus our attention on important aspects of the neoliberal regime in post-colonial contexts, their theorisation of “informality” suffers from complementary pitfalls. Chatterjee keeps the basic dualistic framework of elite-subaltern intact, mapping it onto the domains of the formal/informal and civil society/political society. Subaltern and elite domains, civil and political society, remain ontologically and functionally discrete with only incidental, conjunctural relations between the two. The fixing of these boundaries and the merely conjunctural negotiations between the twain, lends Chatterjee's analysis “a static - if not

homeostatic – character” (Hart, 2015: 45). Therefore, in contrast to Gramsci, Chatterjee’s schema of civil-political society, is unable to handle the integral linkages between the two domains – and concomitant, “boundary-traversing” hegemonic projects – which are of fundamental importance for understanding the evolution, expression, and incorporation of class(es) within the ambit of the “integral state” (for example, in case of the Hindutva project of RSS-BJP combine which articulates social forces from across these domains, even while modifying the boundaries of the “formal”-“informal”²⁴).

Sanyal, on the other hand, operates with a highly formalistic conception of “capital”, defined (narrowly) through “wage labour”. This highly restrictive definition of “capital”, if taken to its logical conclusion, would exclude all kinds of labour processes (for example, self-employed professional classes and reproductive labour in the household) which depend integrally on the social and economic logic of capitalism (Jan, 2013). Consequently, Sanyal is forced to relegate all forms of “non-capitalist” labour processes to the ontologically distinct “need economy”. Relatedly, Sanyal is unable to account for the wide variety of different regimes of labour control, from plantation slavery to petty commodity production, which have come to characterise capitalism in its concrete, historical existence²⁵. The persistence of “informality”, petty commodity and/or different regimes of labour control in varying contexts is thus not to be understood with regards to a general recourse to a distinct “need economy” but through specific and concrete investigation of the particular modes of capitalist control and accumulation in particular sectors and social formations. In effect, “informality” must be understood through the

²⁴ See Whitehead (2015).

²⁵ For example, see Harriss-White (2005) and Banaji (2011).

specific and uneven condensations of different modalities of class (and state) power, rather than a space which is “outside” of (narrowly defined) capital²⁶.

Sanyal’s theorisation therefore suffers from a conflation of “vantage points” in his study of capitalism, which is a crucial plank of the Marxian analysis (Ollman, 2003). Marx’s *Capital* is written mostly from the vantage point of capital, whereby labour and its reproduction is considered only insofar as it enters calculations of capital, its productivity and efficiency. In this regard, Michael Lebowitz makes a crucial addition to Marx’s critique of political economy, by noticing how capitalism’s study from the vantage point of labour (and of the reproduction of labour power) remained – due to limitations of time and human mortality – an unfulfilled part of the Marxian project (Lebowitz, 2003). To bring this insight to bear on Sanyal’s terms, the “need economy” and “accumulation economy” need not be seen as operating according to two different logics articulated *post-festum* in the sphere of the market, but instead as manifestations of the same process of production/reproduction (i.e. reproduction/expansion of capital and labour power) seen from different vantage points. What is the “accumulation economy” from the vantage point of capital, is then a “need economy” from the vantage point of social groups who, alienated from the means of production, have nothing to sell but their labour power.

In fact, the adoption of the vantage point of labour in the study of capitalism can also further our investigation of informality. Thus, if we start our account of capitalism from the alienation/dispossession of labour, a narrowly defined “capital-wage labour” relation in the sphere of production cannot be taken as the only possible parameter for defining the existence of

²⁶ In fact, Sanyal’s narrow definition of capital, also leads him to suggest that the need economy/informal sector “does not speak the language of class” because the former is based around concept of “exclusion” while the latter (politics of class) is based around concept of “exploitation” (Sanyal, 2007: 259-60). This, of course, is an error which flows from his narrow definition of capital and the ensuing separation of two spheres of the economy. This is also a problem of “vantage point”, which we will discuss in the coming paragraph.

capitalism. Capitalism as a concrete, lived totality encompasses a variety of forms of labour control – from “formal” subsumption (labour processes contiguous with pre-capitalist forms) to “real” subsumption (labour processes actively controlled and transformed by capital) - and privileging of wage labour obscures the diversity of these forms. As Michael Denning puts it: “a critical account of living and making a living under capitalism must, I believe, begin not from the accumulation of capital but from its other side, the accumulation of labour” (Denning, 2010: 80).

A focus on “the accumulation of labour” also brings into sight the mechanisms through which proletarianised and (potential) wage labour is produced through specific ensembles of property relations, accumulation regimes, and state projects. Thus, for example, Philip McMichael has charted shifts in the world economy with regards to the changing relations between labour and the state in the post-WWII era (McMichael, 1999). Through a critical engagement with Karl Polanyi, McMichael brings attention to the post-War institutionalisation of US hegemony through an “ideology of developmentalism... modelled on an idealised combination of Western state-building and industrialisation” (ibid: 21). Emerging ex-colonial nation-states were incorporated in the world market via a developmentalist framework wherein “stabilis[ation] of the wage relation took place as a predominantly national construct” (ibid: 22). However, in the post-Bretton Woods era and in the aftermath of the worldwide capitalist crisis of the 1970s, a new “global property regime” has been institutionalised through the increased power of financial institutions, a decomposition of the national scale as container for the wage relation, and a resulting decomposition and “crisis of global wage labour” itself (ibid: 31-34). The hyper-mobility of capital feeds into labour substitutionism bringing all forms of labour into direct competitive relation, flexible access of capital to a global labour force, and “a unity in the diversity of [different] forms of labour” (ibid: 36).

McMichael's account serves as an important corrective to Sanyal on the informal/"need" economy and as valuable addition to Denning's focus on "the accumulation of labour". Specifically, Sanyal's reformulation of capitalist hegemony – and the place of the need economy therein – in a Foucauldian register eschews the concrete rhythms of state and class formation. In a curious echo of Foucault himself, Sanyal's reformulation of hegemony as a "discursive formation", moves from developmental discourse/organisations – without any mediation by the concrete rhythms of state, class, and/or other social relations – to the terrain of policy implementation, formulation, and technocratic intervention. It goes without saying that this lends a certain analytical "thinness" to Sanyal's empirical account of the changing character of development in post-colonial India. On the other hand, a focus on the accumulation of labour and McMichael's emphasis on the nexus of labour arrangements, state projects, and their embeddedness in/linkages with global rhythms of accumulation brings attention onto the complex multi-scalar dynamics through which changing forms of labour subsumption must be understood.

Adoption of the vantage point of labour, thus impresses upon us a more differentiated view of production relations, than a simple resort to "informality", "political society" or the "need economy" affords us. Instead of defining "informality" against the state, Denning contends that this may be more appropriately described as a particular modality of class power, with the Marxian concepts of "relative surplus population" and "virtual pauper" (to describe the worker) being more appropriate characterisations of the precarious state of labour under capitalism (Denning, 2010: 97). As such, while "informality" resides within the ambit of capitalism, unlike Sanyal (or Chatterjee), this cannot be seen as operating through a fundamentally different logic to the (so-called) "accumulation economy" or "civil society". The fundamental contradiction

then is not between the spaces of “formal-informal”, civil-political society, or the “accumulation” versus “need economy”, but between capital and labour.

Of course, this is not to say that the labour-capital contradiction plays out evenly in all circumstances, that its relation to the modalities of state power is constant, or that the formal-informal divide cannot be salient in specific political circumstances (it often is). With McMichael, such a differentiated view would consider the specific institutional arrangements and property regimes through which labour is proletarianised and/or incorporated into different sectors. Thus, “informality” can no longer be seen as an ontologically distinct sphere (“need economy”) articulated with capital (or the “accumulation economy”) only in a *post-festum* manner. In fact, “informality” itself can be seen as a differentiated space already incorporated unevenly with the power of state and capital, and subject to wider rhythms of the development of space, state, and civil society. As such, much like our dynamic conception of class, we will have to operate with a differentiated and non-ontological conception of “informality”, with varied relations of/in production and with a particular focus on the different kinds of political projects that it can be (and has been) linked to. It is exactly this differentiated incorporation of class into relations of and in production, and the varying rhythms of class struggle inhering therein, that is the focus of our next section.

Class in Production

As discussed in the preceding sections, one of the distinguishing features of the Marxist tradition has been an emphasis on the relations of production as a determining moment in the constitution of classes. A study of the capitalist labour process itself and the impetus (or limitations) it provides for the scope and intensity of class struggles is a vital area of investigation. Thus, a

focus on the historicity and sociality of the “economic”, can shed light on how objective and subjective aspects are imbricated in the very processes of production and the constitution of class.

For example, in his discussion of monopoly capitalism in the US and its socialisation through a regime of high wages, technologically-advanced production techniques (Taylorism and the assembly-line) and the constitution of a new type of (gendered) social subject, Gramsci declares that “hegemony here is born in the factory... to elaborate a new type of man [sic] suited to the new type of work and productive process” (Gramsci, 1971: 285-6)²⁷. More generally, where capitalism has often been thought of as effecting a separation between the “economic” and the “political”, others such as Ellen Meiksins Wood have argued that this should in effect be understood as a paradoxical “privatisation” of political power (Wood, 1981). The thorough integration of production and appropriation under capitalism demands an unprecedented degree of control and discipline within the labour process itself. Capitalism thus entails “a transformation of the political sphere” which is, on the one hand, “the ultimate ‘privatisation’ of politics” and on the other, “the *expulsion* of politics from a sphere in which it has always been directly implication [for example, under feudalism]” (ibid: 92, emphasis in original). Thus, within the very structure of capitalist production itself there is a tendency of struggles towards economism, and therefore to differentiate militancy from political consciousness (ibid: 94).

That Marx himself was well aware of the political nature of the spaces of production is amply demonstrated in his extensive discussion in *Capital Vol. 1* on struggles over the working

²⁷ It is pertinent to note that Gramsci’s account of working class culture and habituation in “Americanism and Fordism” draws in a wide range of spheres (politics, culture, economics, ideology etc.) and spaces (of production, reproduction, gender relations, world-scale accumulation etc.). As we will see in the coming paragraphs (and in subsequent chapters), this is a useful segue into Burawoy’s elaboration of an integral account of class formation and labour politics. In subsequent chapters, such an integral conceptualisation of class will also lend itself to our ethnographic elaboration of different “informal” labour regimes – and varying rhythms of organisation and consciousness therein – in Karachi.

day, the introduction of co-operation and manufacture, and the transition from “formal” to “real” subsumption of labour through introduction of machinery and transformation of the labour process (Marx, 1906: Parts III and IV). As such, a focus on the relations of and in production can lead us to a nuanced view of the constitutive role of struggle in the formation of classes, and the modulation of class by wider rhythms of the state, space, and capital. Apart from Marx himself, perhaps the seminal account of the labour process from within the Marxist tradition is given by Harry Braverman in *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (1974). Braverman sheds light on the increasing fragmentation and alienation of labour inherent within capitalism, which is most prominently manifested in the incessant separation enacted between execution and conception within the labour process itself (ibid: 165). He details the increasing rationalisation and deskilling of the labour process under monopoly capitalism, which proceeds paradoxically with an expanding and increasingly social division of labour. Thus, even as new arenas and spheres of social life are commodified, there is a concomitant move towards de-skilling of labour through the continuous separation between conception and execution enacted for the control of labour process.

However, apart from sporadic comments on the middle class, Braverman enacts a subject-object distinction which makes it difficult for him to contend with the role of politics within the labour process itself. As he clearly states, “no attempt will be made to deal with the modern working class on the level of its consciousness, organisation or activities” and there is a focus on the working class “*as it exists*, as the shape given to the working population by the capital accumulation process” (Braverman, 1974: 18-9, emphasis added). Consciousness and subjectivity are banished from the sphere of the labour process itself, resulting in an un-dialectical conception whereby the development of capitalism and the working class is seen

solely from the point of view of the “object” only i.e. (a teleological conception of) “capital”. The opposition between subjective and objective contents of class leads to a non-relational conception of “capital” and a capitalism which proceeds by its own internal volition to a progressive colonisation and degradation of the labour process. Thus, there is an overlooking of the *struggle within the labour process* which is so integral to Marx’s account of the transition between formal and real subsumption.

In contrast, Michael Burawoy (1985) develops his conception of “the politics of production” and “factory regimes” through a dialogue with and critique of Braverman. Burawoy contends that mechanisms of “obscuring and securing surplus value” are common to all forms of the capitalist labour process and therefore the reproduction of relations *in* production (the particular organisation of work and relations therein) cannot be taken for granted. Relatedly, the “so-called economic realm is inseparable from its political and ideological effects” and therefore the organisation of workplaces in their relation to other moments and spheres of social reproduction is essential to understand the rhythms of class struggle (ibid: 39). Through a detailed study of labour processes across various spatio-temporal conjunctures, Burawoy posits that “the period in which capitalism begins to consolidate itself in a given social formation determines the relative timing of struggle, in particular of unionisation and mechanisation... [which] in turn governs the development of the labour process” (ibid: 66).

Burawoy introduces the concept of “factory regimes” which are a combination of the labour process and the political apparatuses of production (the institutions which regulate and shape struggles in the workplace). In lieu of the differentiated insertion of social formations into – and articulation with – world capitalism, he delineates four factors whose overdetermined unity shapes different types of factory regimes: the labour process, market competition between firms,

the reproduction of labour (especially in relation to the level of proletarianisation/alienation from “traditional” subsistence methods), and state intervention (ibid: 87-8). Through a detailed analysis of these factors, Burawoy contends that both Marx’s accounts of eighteenth century England and Braverman’s detailing of the fragmentation and alienation of labour, are products of (spatio-temporally) specific types of factory regimes, whose generalisation must (at best) be carefully qualified i.e. regimes of market despotism (specific to the transition to industrial capitalism in England) and hegemonic despotism (related to monopoly capitalism and full proletarianisation in the US), respectively.

In keeping with his emphasis on the politics of production, Burawoy investigates different cases to understand how labour processes and struggles are shaped. For example, the levels of subsumption of labour, state interventions/fusion with the apparatuses of production and means for reproduction of labour power (itself related to differing intensities of city-country relations) in different parts of Czarist Russia are seen to decisively impact the subsequent culmination of the Russian Revolution (Burawoy, 1985: 102-111). Similarly, in the case of Zambia, Burawoy illustrates how the colonial state’s articulation between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production, decisively affected factory regimes and concomitant social struggles (ibid: 214). Thus, where the spaces of production were relatively independent from the state, a “company state” type of factory regime based on totalitarian control and surveillance of labour both on and off the workplace was instituted, which resembled the nineteenth-century market despotic factory regimes of England with one crucial difference. The “colonial despotic” regime was based on “an overt and explicit racism as the organising principle” with – in the case of Zambia

(Burawoy's case study) – arbitrary power wielded by the Bawana (white boss) both inside and outside of work (ibid: 226)²⁸.

The totalitarian methods and close spatial organisation of both production and reproduction (in “labour compounds”) encouraged the development of class consciousness and labour militancy in industry and the mines. Moreover, increasing proletarianisation and market penetration in rural areas, led to greater labour militancy forcing the colonial state towards attempts to incorporate the urban middle class (through electoralism) and exacerbation of rift between resident and migrant workers (Burawoy, 1985: 231). With formal decolonisation and the concomitant transition towards extended reproduction of capitalism, the “company state” factory regime gave way as “compound life was being absorbed into a wider urban environment” (ibid). A policy of de-racialisation of civil society was instituted through “Africanisation” of mining companies in top management. Closer integration of state and production politics came about as the post-colonial state became more dependent on mine revenues. Structures of dependency (mainly through multinational capital involved in extractive activities) were maintained and thus “cemented the growing coincidence of interests between international mining companies and the Zambian state” (ibid: 245). A new and much closer relationship was established between state and production politics than in the colonial era with crises of the state now directly resonating in the spheres of production (and class struggle therein), and vice versa. As such, the specific forms of production politics and their articulation with state power and the world-economy, shape the forms of class struggle from below and above.

²⁸ An echo, of course, of Frantz Fanon's famous pronouncement that in the colonial context, “what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race... you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich” (Fanon, 1967: 30-1). And thus the need for Marxist analysis to “always be slightly stretched” in (post-)colonial contexts. Our discussions of class and difference above, and upcoming elaboration of the “unity-in-difference” of working class formation in Karachi, aim to “stretch” the Marxist problematic in similarly useful and productive ways.

Such multi-scalar and pluri-temporal determinations of class struggle can also be seen in Sharad Chari's description of the knitwear industry and Gounder caste hegemony in Tiruppur, South India. Gounder hegemony in urban contexts was grounded in articulation of pre-existing, colonial-era arrangements of caste labour with a moral economy of (male) fraternity within specific parts of the knitwear production process (Chari, 2004: 226). Subsequently, the onset of globalisation and intensifying class struggles led to a re-structuring, whereby workers' self-fashioning in the idiom of skill and family mediates shifts in the basis of incorporation "from egalitarian masculinity to dependent femininity" (ibid: 254). Meanwhile, the self-projection of Gounder exporters also underwent a shift from the self-made "seeds of the earth" to one which asserted "a cosmopolitan masculinity" that (at least rhetorically) claimed to be beyond caste (ibid: 265). Therefore, the spaces and temporal rhythms of transition between colonial agrarian economy, post-colonial developmentalism, and globalisation, decisively shaped the modes of struggle, hegemony, and incorporation within and outside the production.

As such, we see how the dynamic linkages – with their changing modalities in different periods – between (post-)colonial countries and multi-scalar rhythms of the world economy are reflected in the changing articulations of class, race/caste, politics and the specific spatiality of power. In fact, within the new international division of labour of neo-liberal globalisation, post-colonial countries often combine elements of the old periphery (such as extractive industries) with new export processing zones, creation of consumer goods for domestic production, and extended networks of outsourcing and subcontracting with core countries/multi-national corporations (Nielson, 2007: 107-8). As a result, different types of production regimes for different sectors often lead to further disarticulation of the "national" economy, playing a decisive role in the modalities of struggle and (attempted) hegemonic

projects in the periphery. It is thus imperative to understand the constitution of class and class struggle within the production process, especially in its integral linkages to wider spaces and spheres of social reproduction, the state, and the world-economy.

Studying Class Historically and Integrally

In preceding sections, we have attempted to elaborate the problematic of class in the Marxist tradition, especially in its links to political action, hegemony and resistance (or lack thereof). In doing so, we shed light on how epistemological, ontological, and methodological aspects of class have been understood by various theorists within the Marxist tradition. Drawing upon Marx, we saw that his method developed through an integral critique of German classical philosophy and classical political economy. In debate with the former, Marx's epistemological break moved beyond the polarities of subjectivity versus objectivity, through an emphasis on human practice and concomitantly, its social-historical character. With this emphasis on historicity, Marx critiqued both classical and vulgar political economy by emphasising the social-historical character of production, and through bringing together production with other spheres of social life, as "members of a [single] totality, *distinctions within a unity*" (Marx, 1973: 40, emphasis added). Marx's method emphasised both the synchronic and diachronic aspects of a social formation, with integral but uneven relations between different spheres of social life, mediated above all through an emphasis on practice. As such, the foundation is laid for an open Marxism which mediates between structure and history through an emphasis on political practice.

The emphasis on practice and its social-historical embeddedness was also seen in the active and integral conceptualisations of class developed in Gramsci and EP Thompson. Where Thompson emphasised the historical and processual nature of class, Gramsci alerted us to the

integral role of political projects of hegemony, incorporation and exclusion in determining the concrete expression and existence of classes. Relatedly, an emphasis on historicity and the determining (though not monocausal) role of relations of and in production, alerts us to the integral – as opposed to merely contingent – role of *relational struggle* in the constitution and definition of classes. Unlike the polarities of the Subaltern Studies collective, different arenas of social practice are brought together in an open Marxism and a relational understanding of class. Thus, the symbolic, semiotic and/or cultural orders are dynamic and integral *moments* in the reproduction of social formations (and relatedly, the constitution of classes). Classes are primarily defined through relations of and in production, with these relations of production themselves being shot through with politics and struggle i.e. relations of production themselves are overdetermined by other spheres and spaces of social reproduction.

Building upon Marx, later theorists such as Gramsci, Althusser, and Hall, conceptualised the social formation as integrally shaped by (historical and social) relations of production, even while attempting to maintain other “levels” or domains of social life as “distinctions within a unity”. This provided useful openings towards understanding the imbrication of class with other social relations in an “articulated historical bloc” and thus, the production of class *through* difference (and vice versa). Drawing attention to the rhythms of uneven development both spatially and between different levels of social totality (for example, “contradictory consciousness”), Gramsci emphasises how classes are incorporated into historical blocs in a processual and dynamic hegemony which often works through differential articulation of varied social relations, such as race, caste and gender. Similarly, the political and economic conceptualisations of “informality” as a distinct domain of capitalism, were problematised through critiques of Partha Chatterjee and Kalyan Sanyal. Here, a shift in vantage point and a

Gramscian reading of subalternity alerted us to the production of “informality” as a complex and differentiated space of state and class power, with varied articulation in different sectors of the economy.

The emphasis on the specificity of relations of/in production thus gleaned led us to explore the overdetermination of production relations by varied rhythms of space, state, and the world economy. The spaces of production conceived as historically and socially shaped through factors such as uneven development and rural-urban linkages were seen to decisively affect the rhythms of class formation and politics. Burawoy introduced historical and spatial specificity to the role of production politics in shaping labour processes, class formation and politics by emphasising the role of multiple factors, including state intervention, proletarianisation, and the timing/mode of a social formation’s insertion into world capitalism. The role of class struggle in changing the organisation and politics of production itself can be seen in the outcomes of labour militancy (for example, in the case of colonial and postcolonial Zambia). The “frayed edges of hegemony” and contradictory consciousness of subaltern social groups can, in each case, form the basis of alternative historical blocs and projects of hegemony. As such, an emphasis on process, struggle and difference, alerts us to how workers’ self-definition both within and outside the spaces of production contribute to their incorporation into projects of hegemony and development of the “non-homogenous character of the ‘class subject’” (Hall, 1986a: 437).

The emphasis on process, political practice and projects of hegemony are of course no semantic points. They are integral to a conception which prioritises the concrete study of classes and their incorporation into a dynamic social totality. Static conceptions of class as given or a purely objective category relating to the (narrowly defined) “economic base”, leads to a non-processual understanding which is unable to theorise the co-production of class with other

social relations and with other spheres of social life (such as politics, culture, ideology etc.). The methodological guidelines of structural and historical specificity alert us to how generalities are produced neither abstractly nor automatically, but through particularities and specificities of human practice. The aim is neither the abstract valorisation of an undifferentiated proletariat, nor the free-floating particularisms of post-modernism; but to maintain the (productive) tension between – and attempt to move beyond – the polarities of object/subject, universal/local and generality/particularity. This can only be achieved through a Marxist analysis which combines synchronic-diachronic axes with spatial nuance i.e. “the concrete analysis of concrete situations”.

As such, we move towards a conception of “class without guarantees”: classes are defined *relationally* and *historically* through relations of production, as social groups whose activity is often circumscribed by the projects of hegemony they are incorporated in. Within such historical blocs, there is always the *potential* for subaltern social groups and classes to move towards projects of an alternative hegemony through the specificity of a political practice which works through difference and contradictory consciousness, falling neither into the Scylla of fatalism nor the Charybdis of excess ideologism. Thus, the rupturing (and “mystification”) of the social whole performed by bourgeois ideologists and mechanical materialism, is resolved in human practice – the open-endedness of which we have shown through our readings of Marx, Gramsci and others. As part of our integral conception of class which takes seriously the “organic unity” of different spheres and spaces of social life, it is imperative to understand classes as part of dynamic historical blocs with differing rhythms of hegemony, coercion, incorporation and exclusion (Gramsci, 1971: 431). Therefore, to set the stage for our integral elaboration of class in Karachi’s context, we will now turn our attention to the wider project of state, space and hegemony in Pakistan.

2. Passive Revolutions: Situating Karachi and Pakistan

“For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality.”

Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (21)

“In reality, the internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination which is “original” and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness if one wishes to dominate them and direct them. To be sure, the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is “national”—and it is from this point of departure that one must begin. Yet the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise. Consequently, it is necessary to study accurately the combination of national forces which the international class [the proletariat] will have to lead and develop, in accordance with the international perspective and directives.”

Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* (240)

This chapter aims to set the context for the coming exposition of working class evolution and politics in Karachi since the 1970s. As discussed previously, the concrete study of class cannot be divorced from the wider rhythms of state, space, and hegemony in which it is embedded. As such, any account of class and class struggle in Karachi must begin by delineating the said social and political terrain. In keeping with our historical and processual conception of class, such a delineation of the terrain will have to incorporate the conjuncture as one in movement i.e. a mode of political analysis which sheds light on the “related but distinct contradictions, moving

according to very different tempos, whose condensation, in any particular historical moment... defines a conjuncture” (Hall, 1979: 14). This chapter will aim to elaborate exactly such an account of conjuncture(s) through an account of the multi-level and multi-scalar contradictions concretised as a series of “passive revolutions” in post-1970s Pakistan²⁹.

The argument of the chapter will be worked out in three sections. In the first section, I will briefly map Marx and Gramsci’s conceptions of the capitalist state and civil society. A reading of Marx and Engels demonstrates their understanding that separation of the “political” and “economic” under capitalism is predicated on the development of increasingly complex linkages between the political state and civil society, including attempted “ethical-moral” projects which incorporate subordinate classes. With Gramsci, the focus is on hegemony as “a new consensual political practice” which traverses the boundaries of civil and political society, and organises the material-ideological imperatives of a dynamic historical bloc within the “integral state”. Particularly, the Gramscian concept of “passive revolution” will serve as a strategic and comparative-historical “criterion of interpretation” for elaborating the multi-scalar constitution of post-colonial social formations and “boundary-traversing” hegemonic projects.

The second section will further elaborate on the multi-scalar and strategic nature of “passive revolution” through consideration of three major theorists of postcolonial social formations: Partha Chatterjee, Hamza Alavi, and Frantz Fanon. I propose to move beyond conceptions of postcolonial states and societies as characterised by “dominance without hegemony” in favour of the Gramscian schema of “passive revolution”. Such an understanding will help transcend the dualisms of “East-West” and elite-subaltern domains, and demonstrate how the “nation” remains a crucial “node” for the crystallisation of multi-scalar—and unstable—

²⁹ The major arguments presented in this chapter will draw upon a previously published article in *Studies in Political Economy* (see Mallick, 2017).

hegemonic projects undergirded by domination and coercion. Passive revolution as such becomes a key to understanding the formation of state, space and nation within the multi-scalar and unevenly developing territoriality of capitalism.

The last section will bring together these insights in an interrogation of the changing historical bloc and the attendant articulations of state-civil society in Pakistan since the 1970s. Concomitant social, economic and political changes in the specific context of Karachi will also be elaborated upon. I historicise the different hegemonic formations in post-1970s Pakistan by periodising them into *two waves of passive revolution*. It will be argued that these phases of passive revolution, each preceded by serious crises of the ruling alliance, have entailed a restructuring of the reigning historical bloc alongside changing articulations of material-ideological hegemony. Passive revolution and “boundary-traversing” hegemony will serve as conceptual tools to understand the incorporation of subordinate classes and the articulation of multi-scalar forces (such as the increasing penetration of Chinese capital and the emergence of professional fractions of the middle class) in “nodal” projects of “national-popular” hegemony. Specifically, re-articulations of nationalism around Islam, development, and praetorianism have provided the material and ideological thrust behind new (and often unstable) hegemonic projects. In short, this chapter attempts to delineate the problematic of state and civil society set out by Marx and Gramsci in its theoretical-conjunctural validity, as it relates to postcolonial social formations and especially post-1971 Pakistan. This will then set the historical-geographical context of our study of working class politics in Karachi.

Marx and Gramsci: A Problematic for the Study of State and Civil Society

Marx's theorisation of the state evolved out of his critique of Hegelian idealism. Marx criticised Hegel for taking the Idea (and conversely, the State as Idea) as the supposition of society and human subjects rather than the other way around. In contrast to the Hegelian opposition between state and civil society, Marx saw the individualism of bourgeois civil society as an essential pre-supposition of the political state: whereas in civil society "real man [sic] is recognised only in shape of the egoistic individual... [in political society] true man is recognised only in the shape of the abstract citizen" (Marx, 1844: 15). Aiming to undertake a radical historicisation of the state and civil society by grounding these in social relations of production, Marx and Engels saw the development of a division of labour and private property as the real basis for the emergence of the state (Marx and Engels, 1846: 15). Whereas the feudal state's concentration of political and economic power meant a modicum of homology between the community and private property, bourgeois revolutions had radically altered this relation. There had been a redefinition – and even the production of – formally "independent" spheres of politics and (bourgeois) civil society itself. Thus, the formal separation of the "political" and "economic" moments of class domination had resulted in the state becoming "a separate entity, beside and outside civil society"; however, this was "nothing more than the form of organisation which the bourgeoisie necessarily adopt both for internal and external purposes, for the mutual guarantee of their property and interests" (Marx and Engels, 1846: 31).

In contrast to Hegel's speculative transition between (bourgeois) civil society and the (Idea) State, Marx historicised their development as mutual pre-suppositions whose – real and "illusory" – separation was based in the imperatives of class power and the developing division of labour/productive forces. While the ultimate guarantee of class power was concentration and

control of the means of coercion in the state, any aspiring ruling class must also “in order to carry through its aim... represent its interest as the common interest of all members of society... [and] give its ideas the form of universality... [whereby] its victory therefore, benefits also many individuals of the other classes which are not winning a dominant position” (Marx and Engels, 1846: 21-22). The evolution of the bourgeois state form, and its formal separation of the “political” and “economic”, is thus predicated on the development of increasingly complex linkages between the political state and civil society. These linkages in turn are based not merely on the coercive instruments of the state but also some kind of ethical-moral project which incorporates subordinate classes while portraying the ruling class(es) as representing the “universal interests” of society. An elaboration of the “short-circuits whereby the bourgeois state achieved a false transition between civil society and its strictly ‘political’ State”³⁰ would thus define the Marxian problematic of the state and civil society³¹ (Thomas, 2009: 186).

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci combined Marx’s emphasis on the critical role of praxis (in *Theses on Feuerbach*) with insights on transitions within and/or between modes of production (in Preface to the *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*), to undertake a close study of state formation and revolution. While writing in and for a different spatio-temporal conjuncture, Gramsci’s work can be usefully seen as building upon the Marxian problematic of elucidating the “short-circuits” and transitions between state and civil society.

³⁰ This in turn would point towards potentially more “organic” transitions between civil society and the political state based on democratic control of social life and crucially the means of production and reproduction.

³¹ In later historical works such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx would give practical demonstration of the application and elaboration of his problematic for studying the evolving articulations between the state and civil society in a non-speculative manner (i.e. as grounded in the multi-scalar geography of capitalism). In his notes for *Capital* (eventually published as the *Grundrisse*), Marx also indicated that a volume detailing the process of “concentration of bourgeois society in the form of the state” was part of his plans. Unfortunately, this was a project which could not come to pass due to limitations of time and human mortality (see Marx, 1973: 49).

While Marx's writings are marked by having lived through the age of the emergence of the capitalist state in Western Europe, Gramsci lived through the reaction and ever-deepening sophistication of bourgeois rule in the face of the Russian Revolution and associated upsurges. As such, Gramsci was centrally concerned with specifying the specific modalities whereby bourgeois rule had been concretised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by pre-empting, incorporating or pacifying subaltern upsurges (such as through Fascist rule in Italy and Fordist accumulation regime in the US).

Gramsci saw the state as constituted not just narrowly by the juridical state apparatuses but as an expansive "integral state" characterised by the dialectical unity of civil and political society. In fact, the distinction between civil society and political society is a methodological rather than "organic" distinction, while the "unity-in-distinction" of civil and political society within the differentiated terrain of the "integral state" is determined by the changing rhythms of class struggle (Gramsci, 1971: 160; Thomas, 2009: 137). With the onset of the French Revolution, the bourgeoisie with its bases in the sphere of production was able – through material-ideological concessions – to forge an "ethical-political" hegemony and become "coordinated concretely to general interests of the subordinate groups" (Gramsci, 1971: 182). Civil society – integrally coordinated with but distinct from the sphere of production – came to be a moment of "organic passage" where hegemony emerged as "a new consensual political practice" within the differentiated, but organically united, integral state. Political society itself is seen not as a spatially/ontologically discrete sphere but more in a functional sense: a "condensation... or institutional organisation of the social forces in civil society" [such as through political parties and organic intellectuals], while hegemony in civil society is only concretised in the last instance through the coercive power of the juridical state (Thomas, 2009:

193). Therefore, civil and political hegemony, consent and coercion, are conceived as dynamic and “continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria” within the differentiated unity of the integral state i.e. “hegemony protected by the armour of coercion” (Gramsci, 1971: 182, 263).

The elaboration of the *practice* of “hegemony”, situated within a historicised conception of the “integral state”, may be seen as Gramsci's attempt to delineate the specificity of the political in capitalist society and thus elaborate the Marxian problematic of state-civil society. Politics and the forging of hegemony are “a practice ‘traversing’ the boundaries between them [i.e. between structure-superstructures, civil and political society]” and is therefore the – conjunctural and necessarily contested – concretisation of the differentiated unity of the integral state (Thomas, 2009: 194). State and civil society are identical and different at the same time (thus the concept of “unity-in-distinction”), with the distance/identity between them determined by the rhythms of class struggle and “boundary-traversing” hegemony. Contra Althusser, the point is not to subsume all social practice under the state, nor to present the state as an omnipresent entity with no internal differentiation or unevenness between different spheres and spaces³². Rather, the concept of the “internally differentiated” integral state and “boundary-traversing” hegemony state puts the accent on the transitions between political society and civil society which concretise a particular hegemonic project within the ambit of the integral state. As the practice of hegemony is integrally tied to elaborating certain “conceptions of the world”, it also involves “shaping intersubjective forms of consciousness” (Morton, 2007: 93). As discussed in the last chapter, where the practice of hegemony is embedded in a socio-spatial terrain characterised by uneven development, and racial, ethnic and gendered forms of exploitation, Gramsci's

³² Cf. Althusser's famous essay on “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” and Stuart Hall's critique of Althusser and Foucault's conception of the “Gulag State” (Althusser, 1971; Hall, 1985)

theorisation also provides useful openings for dealing with the question of difference within a unified and contradictory social formation.

The Gramscian elaboration of the “integral state” and *the practice* of hegemony may be seen as further advancement of the Marxian problematic of the study of state and civil society. In historical texts such as the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx elaborated a multi-level conceptualisation of bourgeois rule, ranging from the concretisation of peasant consciousness to the various contradictions and dislocations of class and fractional struggle within the very institutions of the state. As such, all levels of the social totality – from specific groups and individuals’ subjectivities to the institutions of the state – are wracked by contradictions and produced/stabilised through the determinants of class struggle. Gramsci’s conception of the practice of hegemony and the “distinction-in-unity” of the integral state, alerts us to exactly such a multi-level and pluri-spatial conception of practice, struggle and contradiction. Relatedly, Gramsci developed the concept of “passive revolution” exactly as a theorisation of the multi-scalar and spatial imperatives of bourgeois rule and hegemony. As a decidedly *international and strategic* concept, “passive revolution” also provides useful openings to understand the transition to capitalist modernity (and beyond) in postcolonial contexts such as Pakistan. It is to this elaboration of the multi-scalar and differentiated imperatives of hegemony and “passive revolution” that we will turn to in the next section.

State, Civil Society, and Passive Revolution(s) in the Post-Colony

The evolution of Gramsci’s concept of “passive revolution” was informed by his historical-comparative study of the Russian Revolution and different modalities of transitions to modernity in Europe and beyond. As Peter Thomas has demonstrated in a philological exegesis of

Gramsci's concept, the development of "passive revolution" in the *Prison Notebooks* is "defined [from the very outset] by the consistent, 'punctual' presentation of a fundamentally internationalist orientation" (Thomas, 2020: 125). Moreover, this multi-scalarity of passive revolution was tied to a fundamentally strategic orientation, whereby Gramsci's reflections on passive revolution are always in conjunction with its dialectical counterpoint, its "vigorous antithesis" i.e. the theme (and possibility) of "revolution in permanence"³³ (Gramsci, 1971: 114; Thomas, 2020: 135). It is in this context that Gramsci reflected on the particular transition to capitalist modernity and nation-state formation/national unification in Italy as a process of "‘revolution’ without a ‘revolution’, or as ‘passive revolution’" (Gramsci, 1971: 59).

This conception of "revolution-restoration" and "passive revolution" soon evolved into a general "historical-political criterion" for investigation of social change, and as a strategic modality of bourgeois hegemony in "vigorous anti-thesis" to existing or developing subaltern upsurges. Passive revolution was thus a mode of social change where the "unstable equilibrium" between consent-coercion tipped towards the latter and subordinate classes were absorbed/incorporated into a tenuous civil-political hegemony through *trasformismo* i.e. molecular absorption of individuals and organisations from subaltern social groups often through the State itself taking on a Bonapartist-type role, due to the weakness of dominant classes and/or

³³ Gramsci's conceptualisation differs from Trotsky's better-known formulation of "permanent revolution". For Gramsci, the Trotskyist formulation erred on the latter side of the national-international dialectic, and thus ignored the significance of the practical elaboration of "national-popular" hegemony during and after the Soviet Revolution as an expansion-transcendence of the "Forty-Eightist formula of the 'Permanent Revolution'" (see Gramsci, 1971: 240-1, 243).

Differences over the national-international dialectic between Gramsci and Trotsky were also linked to their disagreements over the concrete mechanics of the United Front strategy around the time of the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. Relatedly, Gramsci also saw Trotsky's formulation of "permanent revolution" as misreading the evolution of the bourgeoisie "integral state" and thus amounting to championing a (one-sided) "war of manoeuvre" – rather than a hegemonic practice combining wars of position and manoeuvre (Gramsci, 1971: 236-7). To complicate matters, differences between the two revolutionaries were also overdetermined by their personal antipathy (cf Thomas, 2009: 210-220)

their paralysis by inter-class and fractional struggles. In keeping with the internationalist orientation, and far from positing an ontological-geographical distinction between “East” and “West”³⁴, Gramsci deployed passive revolution to elucidate the continuities and differences between the different transitions to capitalism (and its various “epochs”) within the countries of Western Europe and beyond³⁵. Passive revolution was “the pacifying and incorporating nature assumed by bourgeois hegemony in the epoch of imperialism... the [general] logic of (a certain type of) modernity... a melancholy tale in which the mass of humanity is reduced to mere spectators” (Thomas, 2006: 73).

Gramsci’s keen sense of the international ramifications of national-level rhythms of class struggle informed his understanding of the spatiality of “passive revolution”. Theorisation of internal fragmentations within Europe, and the spatially expansive tendencies of the Fordism in the US, as differentiated instantiations of passive revolution hint at his appreciation of “the articulation of capitalism through multi-scalar relations” (Morton, 2007: 148). Passive revolution thus becomes a criterion to conceptualise the “spatiality of uneven development” with political space seen as both embedded in *and* overflowing the bounds of state territoriality (ibid: 138, 122). As Gramsci himself puts it: “the point of departure is ‘national’... yet the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise” (Gramsci, 1971: 240). The national scale thus becomes a crucial “node” whereby multi-scalar relations and the expanding-differentiating geography of capitalism is crystallised (Morton, 2007: 148). It is with this appreciation of the “node” or scale of the “nation” that Gramsci sees projects of hegemony – even at the moment of their outward/upwards spatial-scalar expansion – as always and everywhere translated and articulated through “national-popular” projects of forging “collective wills”.

³⁴ cf Anderson (1976).

³⁵ This point will become increasingly relevant in our overview of Chatterjee’s mobilisation of passive revolution in the coming paragraphs.

It is exactly in *the multi-scalar and strategic* conception of passive revolution, and the concomitant “nodal” conception of “nation” and state-formation, that pitfalls of the more influential mobilisations of passive revolution in post-colonial contexts can be glimpsed. A foremost example of this can be seen in the mobilisation of passive revolution by Partha Chatterjee of the Subaltern Studies collective. As discussed in the last chapter, the assumption of fixed and ontologically discrete elite-subaltern spheres is a thread running through Chatterjee’s work. In his early work, Chatterjee (1986) deployed the Gramscian concepts of passive revolution, war of position, and war of movement to shed light on the failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to forge an expansive hegemony in the postcolonial era. Terming nationalism a “derivative discourse” Chatterjee goes over the political manoeuvres of major figures in Indian nationalist historiography – such as Bankim Chattopadhyay, Gandhi, and Nehru – to locate the failure of the bourgeoisie in its inability to grow out of the (indelibly contaminating) discursive terrain established after the Enlightenment. As such, passive revolution is seen as “the *general* form of transition from colonial to post-colonial national states in the 20th century” and contrasted to the more “organic” transitions to modernity in the advanced capitalist countries (ibid: 50, emphasis in original). Thus, not only does the transition to modernity – or its “blocked dialectic” – differ fundamentally in the colonies compared to the “Western countries”, this blocked dialectic also serves to maintain the (reified and) “autonomous” domain of subalternity beyond the reaches of bourgeois hegemony (or lack thereof) in the post-colony. Chatterjee’s argument therefore moves through *a double dualism* (between East-West and elite-subaltern), with India and postcolonial social formations generally distinguished by the ruling classes’ “domination without hegemony”³⁶.

³⁶ The formulation “dominance without hegemony” is of course the title of Ranajit Guha’s highly influential work on colonial rule in British India (Guha, 1997). Here however I focus on Chatterjee’s

Chatterjee's second mobilisation of passive revolution is in context of his "inverted" deployment of civil and political society (Chatterjee, 2001 and Chatterjee, 2004). As discussed in the last chapter, here too the double dualism of the earlier elite-subaltern schema is kept intact, but now transposed onto the civil-political society divide. While civil society operates in a domain characterised by abstract seriality and individualised citizenship, political society is linked to the sphere of (uniquely) postcolonial governmentality which deals with population through classifications of community, caste, ethnicity, religion etc.: there is "an antinomy between the homogenous national and heterogeneous social" (Chatterjee, 2004: 36). It is in this context that the second iteration of "passive revolution" becomes relevant as the particular modality of negotiation with, and pacification of, political society by the elite domain of civil society. Electoral democracy and "an entire substructure of paralegal arrangements, created or at least recognised by the governmental authorities" thus become the mechanisms through which passive revolution – characterised by constant processes of mediation, contestation and concessions carried out between the two domains – takes place (ibid: 24). Where previously passive revolution had signified the discursive failure of postcolonial nationalism, it now comes to denote the *trasformismo*-like effects of electoral democracy, especially in the era of neoliberal primitive accumulation and the post-Mandal upsurge of a variety of subordinate groups in India.

mobilisation of Gramsci for a couple of reasons. Firstly, while Guha works with "hegemony" and "domination" as his central concepts when approaching colonial rule in India, it is Chatterjee who (among the Subalternists) accords "passive revolution" a central position as the particular modality of capitalist rule/transition in (post)colonies. Secondly, as we will see in the coming paragraphs, my approach which centers passive revolution and the transitions/short-circuits between civil and political society in post-colonial social formations, brings me in close conversation with Chatterjee's later mobilisation of these concepts. As such, while Guha's *Dominance without Hegemony* is "perhaps the single most striking work ever inspired by Gramsci" (Anderson, 2016: 86), it is Chatterjee's innovative—if idiosyncratic—mobilisation of Gramscian concepts with regards to the totality of postcolonial social formations which is of greater relevance for the arguments presented here.

Over the two iterations of passive revolution, Chatterjee keeps the basic dualistic framework of his argument intact. In the first iteration, passive revolution had come to denote the (discursive) failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to universalise itself. Passive revolution here is the particular modality of modernity (or lack thereof) as one characterised by a lack of hegemony and contrasted to the “West”. Instead of seeing both postcolonial and advanced capitalist social formations as differentiated unities within the relational and multi-scalar historical geography of capitalism, passive revolution comes to denote a geographically-bound “blocked dialectic” of modernity in the non-West i.e. a “domination without hegemony”. Disembedded from the developing multi-scalar geography of colonial capitalism which radically changed social and spatial relations, along with notions of space, public/private etc., Chatterjee’s narrowly discursive reading of nationalism as “derivative discourse” set up a reified dualism between “Western” and “non-Western” forms of bourgeois class rule (Goswami, 2004: 22-3).

In the second moment, passive revolution along with – compared to Marx and Gramsci – an “inverted” deployment of civil and political society, again bolsters the double duality pointed to earlier in Chatterjee’s work. Subaltern and elite, civil and political society, remain ontologically and functionally discrete. This leads ultimately to non-relational and fixed conceptions of “subalternity”/“political society”, and a lack of appreciation of (different modalities of) hegemony as a “boundary-traversing” project which in all cases is characterised by some kind of “national-popular” project and “an unstable equilibrium” within the differentiated unity of the integral state. The integrally-linked subaltern-elite domains and civil-political society themselves are made and re-made by “boundary-traversing” hegemonic projects working through the conjunctural balance of forces. On the other hand, the fixing of subaltern-elite and civil-political society domains, and the merely incidental negotiations

between them, lends Chatterjee's analysis “a static – if not homeostatic – character” (Hart, 2015: 45). In its lack of appreciation of “hegemony” and passive revolution as multi-scalar and “boundary-traversing” projects, the schema is inadequate in coming to grips with phenomena such as RSS-BJP fascism and Maoist movements in India, both of which aim to build exactly such a “national-popular” project through a “boundary-traversing” hegemony (Whitehead, 2015).

While differing from Chatterjee in key respects, the widely influential Pakistani Marxist scholar Hamza Alavi shares with him the basic problematic of passive revolution³⁷. In contrast to Chatterjee, Alavi does not relate/displace the difference of postcolonial or (in his terms) “peripheral capitalist” social formations to the narrowly discursive and cultural terrains. Peripheral social formations for Alavi differ from advanced capitalist formations due to both the circuit of generalised commodity production and the extended reproduction of capital being “satisfied only by virtue of the link with the metropolis” (Alavi, 1982a: 181). As a result, peripheral formations are characterised by labour-intensive forms of exploitation, underdevelopment of productive forces, and lack of internal linkages between different sectors of the economy.

Alavi focusses on the colonial impact on highly stratified “feudal” societies (such as pre-colonial India) and he posits these societies as characterised by a “plurality of fundamental classes” (Alavi, 1982b: 298). Specifically, in Alavi’s view, the colonial impact resulted in the emergence of three dominant classes—the indigenous bourgeoisie, the landowning classes, and the metropolitan bourgeoisie—with none of these having unequivocal control over the postcolonial state. In contrast to more “organically” developing bourgeoisies of the advanced

³⁷ Alavi himself never explicitly deploys Gramscian concepts such as passive revolution and the integral state. However, as we will see in the coming paragraphs, he works within a similar problematic but with key weaknesses.

capitalist countries, there is no fundamental contradiction between these different classes as they are “not located in antagonistic modes of production” but within the singular peripheral capitalist mode (ibid: 298). Due to the “alien” nature of the colonial state and the weaknesses of the indigenous propertied classes, the former itself takes on an “over-developed”, quasi-Bonapartist role where “rival interests [of the three dominant classes] are mediated by the state” (ibid: 302). As a result, the over-developed postcolonial state assumes a relative autonomy as institutions and managers of the state (such as bureaucrats, the military etc.) acquire the capacity to appropriate an increased share of the surplus, while acting to reproduce the disarticulated, peripheral capitalist social formation with its dependence on the metropolis.

Though highly influential, Alavi’s theorisations have been critiqued for assuming a generalisation of capitalist production relations in peripheral social formations, lack of differentiation in the modalities of rule in different postcolonial societies, and overlooking the spatially variegated impact of colonialism within British India (Elsenhans, 1996: 131; Ahmad, 1980: 128; Singh, 1998: 48). As a result, inadequate attention is given to the variegated dialectic of resistance and accommodation, in accordance with considerations of caste, class and hegemony. More specifically in the case of Pakistan, Aijaz Ahmad sees the bourgeoisie as having been unable “to universalise itself as the ruling class of the whole social formation” (Ahmad, 1983: 146).

In effect, much like Chatterjee—but this time in a more “materialist” register grounded in the multi-scalar political economy of colonial capitalism—Alavi too sees the three dominant classes as exercising a “domination without hegemony”, though he does not explicitly employ Gramscian concepts. In keeping with our problematic, Alavi’s formulation may be usefully characterised as grounded in the multi-scalar territoriality of passive revolution, while ignoring

its *strategic* aspect. As a result, there is a scant account of how subaltern social groups, movements and energies are incorporated into and/or modulate the formation-function of the “overdeveloped” state. In effect, Alavi focusses almost exclusively on *horizontal* class struggle (between dominant classes), while ignoring *vertical* class struggle (between dominant and subordinate social groups). Such a lack of attention to the variegated dialectic of incorporation-exclusion of subordinate classes leads to almost non-existent account of the mechanisms of hegemony within peripheral capitalist social formations (barring a simple recourse to coercion), and a lopsided formulation of the “overdeveloped” state (with its unstated corollary of an “underdeveloped” society). Where Alavi does take projects of ethical-moral hegemony into consideration, these are confined to the ideological mobilisations of Islam by the state-centered upper-middle class *salariat* during and after the Pakistan Movement³⁸. However, discounting of “boundary traversing” practices of hegemony and the concrete linkages between civil and political society within the differentiated unity of the integral state, leads Alavi back to the dualistic schema of passive revolution employed by Chatterjee i.e. one of “domination without hegemony”³⁹.

A corrective to the one-sided schema of passive revolution in Chatterjee and Alavi may be obtained through the anti-colonial revolutionary Frantz Fanon. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon – while working within the Marxist problematic – impresses upon the need for Marxist analysis to be “slightly stretched” in the context of colonised and post-colonial countries (Fanon, 1967/2001: 31). Fanon’s “activistic materialism” and emphasis on national experience has obvious parallels with Gramsci in seeing the practice of politics and its evolution through a “dialectic of experience” as “Marxism’s Archimedean point” (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 119; Thomas,

³⁸ See, for example, Alavi (1986) and Alavi (1989a).

³⁹ In the next section, we will explore these silences in Alavi in more detail, through an interrogation of the changing historical bloc in post-1970s Pakistan.

2006: 67). Here, he attempts to pinpoint the degenerative tendencies within national liberation movements, even while attempting to find the contradictions and actors with the potential to pursue an alternate resolution to the impasse of postcolonial societies. Fanon's account of national liberation movements in several African countries places the Manichean racial dualism of the first phase of liberation movements in relation to the objective conditions and experiences of colonial space. However, "true decolonisation" requires a political practice that is at once "national, revolutionary, and social", which can counteract the descent into "primitive tribalism" (Fanon, 1967: 117). It is here that Fanon sheds light on the subversive role of the national bourgeoisie and the colonised proletariat as siblings of comprador privilege due to being beneficiaries of "the hypertrophy of distributive injustice" in the colonial political economy (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 146).

Fanon departs from what Sekyi-Otu calls "nativist" genealogies of class relations as a "triadic principle of internal origin, reciprocal determination and mutual gestation" (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 132). In the colonised countries, first two conditions of the nativist triadic principle are subverted i.e. internal origin and reciprocal determination. The national bourgeoisie in (post-)colonial social formations is condemned to "congenital deformation" due to a "life cycle of underdevelopment", and aims to imitate its Western counterpart as it enters its late phase i.e. having skipped the creative, industrious phase, the national bourgeoisie comes into its own in the decadent, conspicuous consumption phase of its Western counterpart. Unable to overcome the socio-spatial divides produced and/or exacerbated under direct colonialism, this "lumpen bourgeoisie" resorts to a "rapturous communitarianism" in the name of the nation, invoking memories of the national liberation struggle (often through the charisma of a leader), and normalizing the pacification-domination of the one-party state (ibid: 106, 144). The merely

“economic-corporate” orientation of the bourgeoisie, its comprador nature, and dependent linkages to the metropole provide “*a materialist explanation of its own idealism*” (ibid: 130, emphasis in original).

In the absence of expansive material-ideological mediations and an organic, boundary-traversing hegemony, a “false” decolonisation takes place with the party-state and charismatic leader taking on a Bonapartist role (Fanon, 1967: 137). A passive revolution takes place. It centers on the *transformismo*-type effects of the party machine and the mediation of conflicts through the institution of vertical patronage networks consolidating themselves within the state itself. Mechanisms of “straddling” develop whereby the distinction (if at all) between business and party-bureaucratic elites are increasingly blurred (Bayart, 2009: 98). Within the ambit of civil society, the political state exerts itself through a “rhizome”-like enmeshment working through a range of intermediaries including political entrepreneurs, “big men” representing (often conjunctural) “ethnic” factions, and religious institutions. A tenuous and unstable historical bloc institutionalises a highly charismatic and personalised form of politics with “vertical networks of sociability translating into the political sphere” (ibid: 219).

As an alternative to the racial and tribal parochialisms of postcolonial elites, true decolonisation can only take place through the forging of a “national culture” which is “the hybrid offspring of historical necessity and collective will” (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 121). As opposed to racial Manichaeism, this is an authentic project of particularity and “is not nationalism” (Fanon, 1967: 199). It is an open and “critical negotiation of social and political ends from the vortex of contending claims” (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 153). It is here that the radical intelligentsia can perform the role of a “critical interlocution” whereby the relation between intellectuals and people is “provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and

thus knowledge” (Gramsci, 1971: 418). In the forging of such a national culture and, by extension, a decolonisation and emancipation of the self, there is no tension between particularity of the national and the search for a common humanity of universalising values: the “building of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalising values... it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows” (Fanon, 1967: 199).

Therefore, in agreement with Alavi and in contrast to Chatterjee, Fanon embeds the inadequacies of the national bourgeoisie in the multi-scalar geography of capitalism, especially in the dependent political economy of postcolonial social formations. While Fanon recognises the very real dangers of degeneration to an authoritarian Bonapartist state, unlike both Chatterjee and Alavi, he does not see the postcolonial passive revolution as developing through an unmediated recourse to coercion. Coercion itself undergirds attempts at a “national-popular” hegemonic project on part of the party-state through a reworking of historical traces of memories, sensibilities and common sense from the era of anti-colonial struggle and racialised capitalism. The personalisation of politics, expansion of the political state apparatus, and its increasing rhizome-like “incoherence” and enmeshment in civil society, forms a tenuous historical bloc within the ambit of the differentiated integral state.

In elaborating the Marxian-Gramscian problematic of the state and civil society, Fanon helps us understand postcolonial state-making as a particular modality of racialised and metropole-dependent passive revolution. Such a passive revolution takes place within the material-ideological terrain of national civil and political society and in their “nodal” production as part of the multi-scalar dialectic of capitalism. While passive revolution in the postcolony draws upon the social-spatial cleavages, memories, and common sense developed through

racialised capitalism and anti-colonial struggle, alternative resolutions are also possible. Fanon points out the social-spatial pathways – the overcoming of urban-rural drift, the potential of peasantry and lumpen proletariat, and the role of radical intelligentsia – whereby the dialectical corollary to the passive revolution may take shape i.e. “revolution in permanence” or, in Fanon’s terms, “true decolonisation”. As such, Fanon may be seen as expanding upon the multi-scalar and strategic sense of passive revolution (as envisaged by Gramsci), and “stretching” the concept of passive revolution for understanding postcolonial states and civil society. It is with this “nodal” conception of the nation and the accompanying multi-scalar, strategic understanding of passive revolution that we will turn to the case of Pakistan in the next section. We will deploy the insights obtained thus far to analyse the processes of passive revolution and *trasformismo* in post-1970s Pakistan, the ongoing changes in the historical bloc, and the attendant material-ideological terrain. This delineation of passive revolution(s) in Pakistan will then set the strategic terrain for our study of the working class in Karachi in the following chapters.

Passive Revolutions in Pakistan

In 1972, just as Pakistan was emerging from over a decade of military rule and the traumatic secession of more than half the country (as independent Bangladesh), Hamza Alavi proposed his pioneering conception of the Pakistani state as part of his general theory of the “overdeveloped” post-colonial state (Alavi, 1972). Emerging in the context of the Miliband-Poulantzas debate on the state, Alavi aimed to come to grips with the presence of a plurality of dominant classes (indigenous bourgeoisie, metropolitan bourgeoisie, and the landowning class) within the single, dependent structure of peripheral capitalism. For Alavi, due to the relative weakness of the indigenous propertied classes, the postcolonial state itself and, specifically in Pakistan, its

civil-military bureaucratic oligarchy emerged as an arbiter between the propertied classes and as guarantor of peripheral capitalism. Alavi also emphasised the role of the upper middle class *salariat* as one of fundamental importance due to their strategic positioning in the bureaucratic apparatuses. Moreover, as the demand for Pakistan had been articulated in the name of the subcontinent's Muslims and in the context of a state structure dominated by certain demographic groups (mainly from Punjab and Urdu-speaking migrants of India), Islam became a major ideological vehicle for the dominance of the ruling classes and the civil-military oligarchy's undemocratic manoeuvres in face of pressure from ethno-nationalist, and workers' and student movements (Alavi, 1989b: 18).

As discussed previously, Alavi's formulation takes inadequate consideration of the mediations between state and civil society to account for boundary-traversing hegemonic projects in postcolonial social formations. In fact, in the face of popular upsurges of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Pakistan, the institution (and later removal) of the left-populist regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971-1977), and the consequent sea-change in the mode of politics (especially popular politics), Alavi's formulation is unable to adequately account for the pacifying and incorporating machinations of subsequent regimes, both military and democratic. As such, we require new conceptualisations in order to delineate changes within the Pakistani historical bloc and the changing rhythms of state-civil society relations and civil-political hegemony in the post-Bhutto conjuncture.

It is my contention that the post-Bhutto era has been characterised by *two waves of passive revolution* in Pakistan, the latest of which is still unfolding. In both, the weight of the international conjuncture and the emergent fractions of the middle/intermediate classes have played crucial roles in transforming and re-articulating the terms of a "national-popular" project

explicitly around the evolving idiom of “Islam”. Moreover, while both waves of passive revolution have been preceded by a crisis of material and ideological hegemony for the historical bloc, the military-centered security apparatus has retained its centrality as the guarantor of last resort and as the “articulating principle” of unity within the material-ideological terrain⁴⁰.

The first wave of passive revolution commenced in the mid-1970s with the *coup d'état* by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and the resultant entrenchment of military rule. The previous decade had been the high-era of left and popular politics in Pakistan with an increasing assertion of workers, peasants, and ethno-nationalist movements posing a challenge to the reigning historical bloc dominated by the three propertied classes and the civil-military oligarchy (Ali, 2015). In the 1950s and 60s, state-subsidised growth of an indigenous capitalist class centered in the city of Karachi had taken place⁴¹. Enormous 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).

⁴⁰ For more on the “articulating principle”, see Chantal Mouffe’s elaboration of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and ideology (Mouffe, 1979).

⁴¹ Karachi remained Pakistan’s capital until the late 1960s when, under General Ayub Khan’s martial law, 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.

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 Pakhtuns from north-western Pakistan. This was the second major wave of migration into Karachi since the Partition, which had seen a migration of populations across the newly instituted India-Pakistan border "on a scale unprecedented in history" (Arnold, 1955: 121). Much like the earlier migrations, and building on Pre-Partition trends, the migrations of 1950s and 60s fed into Karachi's also already ethnicised division of labour. As we will see in the coming chapters, this was to be a crucial determinant in the landscape of working-class politics in Karachi.

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 Gen. 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 quoted in Gardezi, 1991: 31). Consequently, the late 1960s were marked by a massive anti-dictatorship movement led by 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 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 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 (Akhtar, 2018).

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)⁴² and National Awami Party (NAP)⁴³ along with left-leaning groups working within the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)⁴⁴ were active in these areas (Ali, 2005). Moreover, student groups such as the National Students' Federation (NSF)⁴⁵ formed dynamic solidarity groups with the workers (Ali, 2018: 70).

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

⁴² Translation: Peasants and Workers Party. A pro-Beijing, Maoist party involved in direct peasant action in northern parts of the country.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ The NSF, formed by the state as an alternative to the communist-leaning Democratic Students' Federation (DSF), was infiltrated by communist activists 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.

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, as we will see in the next chapter, 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.

Union density and industrial militancy increased through the late 1960s and peaked in 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). Coordinated militancy in both workplace and residential spaces even led to the emergence of Soviet-style self-governance in several working-class localities in major urban centers (Shaheed, 1979: 198-9). Organic linkages formed between students' and workers; movements led to a reciprocal radicalisation and in the high era of Third World nationalism and anti-colonial movements, culminated in a popular, left-leaning movement which resulted in the ouster of General Ayub Khan's dictatorial regime. Thus, Karachi became one of the hubs of what Aasim Sajjad Akhtar has termed the era of “politics of resistance” in Pakistan (Akhtar, 2008: 153). The crucial role of students in Pakistan's left politics was cemented during this era, and the fate of student politics was to become integrally tied to working class struggles in subsequent years⁴⁶.

The ouster of Gen. Ayub Khan led to Pakistan's first general elections based on full adult franchise in 1970. However, the results of the 1970 elections, according to which the Awami League⁴⁷ from East Pakistan had won the majority, were not accepted by the West Pakistani

⁴⁶ We will explore the crucial importance of student politics in Karachi's context in a subsequent chapter.

⁴⁷ Translation: People's League.

ruling classes. 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 years⁴⁸. The 1971 war also marked the beginning of a concerted policy by the Pakistani military of using fundamentalist Islamist forces, in this case militant wings of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)⁴⁹, to outsource violence. The humiliation of defeat forced General Yahya to step down and hand over power to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The mass movements of the 60s and the break-up of the country meant that the ideological and political crisis of the ruling bloc had reached its most severe point.

A populist leader in the mould of Sukarno and Nasser, Bhutto headed a civilian government dominated by the nominally left-leaning, social democratic Pakistan People's Party (PPP). While the inauguration of the Bhutto regime in 1971 resulted in genuine gains for the working classes, this was also accompanied by a purge of the radical left within his party and an incorporation of sections of the working class through increasing "statisation" of incipient democratic structures (such as trade unions). A half-baked nationalisation program resulted in the bureaucratisation of the commanding heights of the economy, but without any concomitant state investment due to the world-level economic downturn of the 1970s. Moreover, with the secession of Bangladesh, ruling classes in Pakistan had lost what was effectively an internal colony. In 1970, for example, East Pakistan was a market for 40% of West Pakistan's total exports, while East Pakistan's share in Pakistan's overall exports was almost 60% (Nations, 1971: 21-22). Effectively, foreign exchange earned from export of cash crops from East Pakistan

⁴⁸ Both countries had earlier fought a war in 1965.

⁴⁹ Pakistani counterpart of the *Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen* (Muslim Brotherhood).

had been used to finance industrialisation in the West, with the East also serving as the West's main market. Thus, a deepening economic crisis was added to the ideological and political crisis of the ruling.

The international economic downturn of the 1970s and the oil boom in OPEC countries led to large-scale labour migration out of Pakistan. The combined effect of massive foreign remittances and capital-intensive reforms initiated under the Green Revolution in the 1960s was the emergence of "intermediate classes" from within subordinate classes, which had formed a crucial component of the "politics of resistance" in the late-60s and 70s (Akhtar, 2008: 203). For instance, in the ten years between 1977 and 1987 more than US\$20 billion was remitted through official channels alone (Zaidi, 2005: 503). With the exhaustion of Bhutto's left populism and the re-assertion of the civil-military oligarchy (through Gen Zia's military coup), the intermediate classes in turn became a major plank of the Zia-ist passive revolution in Pakistan. 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 (only nominal) land reforms and nationalisation policy. Considering the close association of the US with Pakistan's military, it has often been speculated that the *coup d'état* and Bhutto's subsequent hanging in 1979 (on trumped-up charges of the murder of a political opponent) had the silent blessing of the Pakistani state's imperial guarantors⁵⁰. Bhutto's plans to build an atomic bomb as a counter-weight to India's recent entry into the nuclear club had also not been received well by the United States⁵¹.

⁵⁰ 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* (Ali, 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'.

⁵¹ 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).

The commencement of the Soviet-Afghan war in neighbouring Afghanistan provided the praetorian regime an opportunity to bank on American largesse for sustenance and legitimacy. In Pakistan's generals, who made windfall profits from smuggling weapons and drugs during this time, American imperialism found a willing intermediary to train, arm, and organise the transnational *jihad* against the Soviet Army. As part of this imperial war, the Zia regime, backed and supported by right-wing Islamist forces such as the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (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. Due to the wide scale and spread of popular uprisings which preceded Zia, this phase of passive revolution was characterised by massive coercion and violence towards the subordinate social groups, including trade unions, student unions, and women's and pro-democracy movements (Toor, 2011). Moreover, the existential ideological confusion of the ruling bloc after the break-up of the country exacerbated the crisis of hegemony and accelerated the tendencies towards a deep and long-lasting re-alignment of the material-ideological basis of the hegemonic project. The Zia regime, with the help of right-wing Islamist parties such as the 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" was instituted to legitimise the regime and its machinations (Bannerji, 2011: 103). The patronage of right-wing Islamist groups extended to student politics. Campus

politics was banned except for reactionary groups (like the *Islami Jamiat Talba*, IJT)⁵², who were actively supported in a bid to defang the pro-democratic and left student cadre.

Islamization entailed “a gendered discourse of citizenship” which institutionalized existing inequalities of gender, class, and religion (Amina Jamal, 2014: 111). Militarisation and the generalisation of “violence as a central organizing principle and practice at the level of both the state and civil society” went hand in hand with “an increasing masculinization of public space” (Rouse, 2002). As a result, religio-political organisations and clerics became the second major plank of the Zia-ist passive revolution as crucial disseminators and intermediaries in the ideological project of an Islamist military regime.

Economic liberalisation and later signing of Pakistan’s first IMF-sponsored structural adjustment program in 1988 led to an increasing informalisation of the Pakistani economy and labour force. This was combined with a major structural shift away from agriculture and manufacturing towards the service sector. By official estimates, the service sector accounts for just over half of the GDP and more than one-thirds of the total labour force (Javed, 2017: 193). Figures on the extent of economic activity occurring outside the formal economy are hard to come by, although most estimates put it close to, if not above, the size of the formal economy (Kemal and Qasim, 2012, November)⁵³. In Pakistan’s biggest industrial city Karachi alone, 75% of the working population is employed in the informal sector, and up to 3 million people (out of a total estimated population of 20 million) are daily wage earners (Yusuf, 2012: 26).

The expanding informal economy also became the site for the operation of an extremely personalised capitalism, which made precarious and dispersed labour increasingly dependent on

⁵² IJT is the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).

⁵³ In the previous chapter, we have discussed problems with the discourse and definitions of the “informal sector/economy”. In a subsequent chapter, we will discuss some of the different types of labour regimes and relations within the “informal economy”.

the aforementioned “intermediate classes”: a petty bourgeoisie straddling the urban-rural divide and organically linked to the state, which greatly increased in number and influence due to combined effects of post-1980s economic liberalisation and foreign remittance inflows from primarily the Gulf countries, among other factors. According to Akhtar, co-option of the intermediate classes and religio-political movements into the historical bloc has been the main strategy through which the overdeveloping state subverted the “politics of resistance” organized along horizontal, class lines which had emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. Thus, the intermediate classes—which “derive their political influence from their access to the state, while their economic power owes itself to the deepening of capitalism”—became crucial intermediaries in the re-formulated historical bloc's “boundary-traversing” hegemonic project (Akhtar, 2008: 171). In fact, not only did the intermediate classes become enthusiastic purveyors of the Zia dictatorship, the political formations emerging from this social group—initially, the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) and later the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N)—became highly successful electorally and have formed governments at the national and provincial levels throughout the 1980s to 2010s.

Concerted state patronage (through mechanisms such as local body elections), economic liberalisation, and the outsourcing of civil hegemony to religio-political parties and organisations therefore underwrote the first phase of post-1970s passive revolution in Pakistan. Mechanisms of *trasformismo* were deployed for “the gradual but continuous absorption” (Gramsci, 1971: 159) of the intermediate classes and religio-political movements into the previously stable ruling bloc composed of the civil-military oligarchy and the dominant propertied classes. With regards to subordinate classes a complex and spatially variegated dialectic of coercion and consent was

deployed which often re-worked the culturally embedded logic of *ihsan*⁵⁴ and mediated incorporation through vertical patronage networks (which in working through social relations such as caste, ethnicity, and religion, often undercut the politics of class)⁵⁵. Thus, a “politics of common sense” was instituted “based on the acceptance of oligarchic rule and an attempt to secure political and economic resources through direct or indirect access to the state” (Akhtar, 2008: 203).

The ideological terrain on which this “molecular absorption” of emerging social groups and subordinate classes took place was dominated by the unitary, Islam-centered nationalism, which had been espoused by both liberal and conservative nationalist ideologues since Pakistan's founding (Toor, 2011). Among the increasingly important intermediate classes, prey to the alienation of urban life, and increasingly uprooted from its rural origins and other ascriptive ties such as that of caste and clan, a more austere version of Islam, which looked down upon the syncretic and heterodox religious practices of popular classes, found a willing recipient (Zaman, 1998). Crucially, in the post-1970s passive revolution, a re-articulation of Islam to an exclusivist nationalism took place on the terrain of civil society through the religio-political movements with extensive patronage provided by state apparatuses, especially the security establishment.

The Zia 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

⁵⁴ 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 person's or their group/family's issues with regards to securing jobs, solving problems with the police etc.

⁵⁵ In the next chapter, we will discuss in much greater detail the mechanisms of *trasformismo* and the instantiation of this phase of passive revolution especially with regards to the trade union movement in Karachi.

of many a general⁵⁶. Zia introduced a “lateral-entry” policy 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)⁵⁷. 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. These include (among others) banking, insurance, private security, fertiliser manufacturing, urea manufacturing, cereal manufacturing, corporate farming, construction, and transport. The military’s economic clout (which, in many ways, underpins its political power), especially its interests in real estate, plays 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). Thus, to the prevailing ideological ensemble was thus added the decisive role of the military, which was—in the manner of a “reactionary” Caesarism—in the driving seat of this phase of passive revolution.

As the only seaport, Karachi’s role as a central conduit in the circuit of guns and drugs was cemented during the Afghan war, 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 passing through

⁵⁶ Captured perhaps most poignantly in Mohammed Hanif’s highly acclaimed novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (Hanif, 2009).

⁵⁷ 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.

the port (and used to finance the “jihad”), went from being virtually unknown before 1979 to over 600,000 addicts within ten years, while Karachi became the world center of the heroin trade (Levi and Duyne, 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)⁵⁸ in 1984. An exclusivist, ethnic Mohajir party, the MQM formed to give voice to promote the Mohajir’s community for accessing state resources, jobs and university quotas etc. Because 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). Ethnic conflict in the city started in earnest, with frequent 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: 94). In fact, as will be argued in a subsequent chapter, this phase of passive revolution, and its instantiation in the case of Karachi, was to have a long-lasting effect on the working class and its politics. The patterns of social-spatial exclusion,

⁵⁸ 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 in the next sections, this move has been largely unsuccessful. For a detailed account of the evolution of the MQM see (Baig, 2008).

mobilisation, and politics developed during this era continue to overdetermine working class subjectivity and politics in Karachi. The politics of resistance was giving way to the politics of exclusion.

The beginning of the second (and ongoing) phase of passive revolution—emanating directly from the contradictions of the first wave—can be traced to 2007. In fact, and to a much greater extent than its predecessor, this phase may be seen as the expression and further elaboration of a historical bloc wedded to neoliberalism. The project of structural adjustment, economic liberalisation, and privatisation proceeded in fits and starts during the 1990s⁵⁹. The infighting and paralysis within the ruling classes that encouraged another military coup in 1999 saw the beginning in earnest of neoliberal macroeconomic adjustment in Pakistan directed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs). For example, a former Vice-President of Citibank was appointed Finance Minister (and promoted to Prime Minister in 2004) while a World Bank official was appointed provincial Finance and Planning Minister for Sindh (later made Federal Minister for Privatisation and Investment). Much more than any inherent “economic” imperative, the military regime’s adoption of IMF-peddled programs was dictated by its wholesale entry into the so-called War on Terror led by the US. As several commentators have pointed out, Pakistan has generally not had a major role in the economic calculus of multinational capital, but is of enormous geopolitical significance for imperialism (Ahmad, 1983: 132). As such, the US has always maintained much closer and organic linkages to the Pakistani military than the various fractions of the bourgeoisie. Some writers have called this a “locational rent”: “a resource that has produced continuous inflows of easy money that prevent a broadening of the revenue base as

⁵⁹ Pakistan had nine different governments between 1988-2001 who signed nine different agreements with IMF during this period (Nasir, 2012).

well as hinder the accumulation of reserves through broadening of the export base” (see Hussain, 2015, January 11)⁶⁰.

Under General Pervez Musharraf’s military rule, the deepening of economic liberalisation led to the emergence a new fraction of the middle class. While similar to the aforementioned intermediate classes in terms of their position in the social division of labour, this new middle class fraction is occupationally distinct from the intermediate classes due to being dominated by upper echelons of state personnel and private sector professionals such as doctors, engineers, and lawyers. Estimates of its magnitude have ranged from about 40 to 60 million (out of a total population of 207 million), and this new middle class fraction is based mainly in urban areas of the historically “core” province of Punjab, with smaller concentrations in urban Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Warraich, 2013 May 1; Durr-e-Nayab, 2011). Compared to the Punjab and KP, and due to specific local histories, political expression of the middle class in Sindh has (largely) taken a differing trajectory in the form of a complex, ethnic nationalism⁶¹. Notably, the growth of the middle class in Punjab and especially its “new”, post-liberalisation fraction has been accompanied by a move away from the traditional vehicles of this class’s socio-political aspirations: the state-centered civil-military oligarchy.

As the 2000s wound down, the tenuous hegemony of the Musharraf regime, already challenged by a nationalist movement in Balochistan province, was nearing exhaustion. Complicity with the US-led War on Terror put the military establishment’s Faustian pact with religio-political formations under severe stress. An historical bloc, which had legitimised itself

⁶⁰ The effects of IMF-induced economic liberalization on Pakistan’s political economy and working class will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter

⁶¹ While we do not have space to delve into this phenomenon here, excellent accounts of the rise of ethnic politics based in the *Muhajir* (migrants from India during Partition) middle class of Sindh can be found in Verkaaik (2004) and Baig (2008). We will explore this in greater detail in the coming chapters, especially in Chapter 6.

over the past three decades through heavy doses of an Islamist-praetorian nationalism, now found itself in direct conflict with many of the same religious militant groups and their ideologues in the terrain of civil society. The emergence of the new middle class too limited the absorptive capacity of the reigning historical bloc. Moreover, the Musharraf regime's clash with the state judiciary and its lack of substantial economic re-distribution on the back of growth fuelled mostly through speculative activity in real estate and stock markets, resulted in a conjuncture ripe for a populist upsurge led by the newly emergent middle class fraction. As such, this populism emerged in a conjuncture characterised by "a double movement": a crisis of the dominant bloc (i.e. within the hegemonic bloc) and a crisis of transformism (i.e. a crisis of the absorption of popular democratic mobilisations from beyond the dominant bloc) (Laclau, 1979: 172-176). Moreover, this double crisis was itself undergirded by both a social-economic crisis and an ideological crisis of the reigning historical bloc.

In response to the double crisis of the historical bloc, the new middle class has attempted to forge its own material-ideological response, especially through the newly emergent *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf* (PTI, Pakistan Movement for Justice) political party led by cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan. The new middle class, exposed through globalised media and their own diasporic linkages to the climate of Islamophobia in Western countries while also facing the increasing violence of millenarian Islamism at home, has attempted to forge a new project of nationalism based on a "modern", "moderate" and more urbane Islam (Khan, 2002 Jan 14). This rearticulation of Pakistan nationalism attempts to re-work (and re-center) the place of Islam in the "national-popular" project, even while its discourse of corruption, morality and technocracy centers on the socio-political aspirations of its middle-class interlocutors. The tropes of "justice", "merit", and "dignity" have been liberally deployed with the cult personality of

Khan himself forming a nucleus around which a “multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim” (Gramsci, 1971: 349).

The private media, professional associations, hyper-active internet forums, and charity initiatives (best embodied in Khan’s own free cancer hospital and foundation) comprise the key apparatuses in the terrain of civil society, whereby the new middle class has attempted to forge an “ethical-political” hegemony. Such institutional apparatuses have become crucial avenues for shaping and influencing Pakistan's power politics. As such, they have played a crucial role in articulating the “boundary-traversing” hegemonic aspirations of the new middle class. However, while the fast growing, professional middle formed the hegemonic core of the PTI, the structuring of the political terrain worked against its ascension to the corridors of state and executive power. Concentrated overwhelmingly in the urban core of the country, the middle-class base of the PTI was constantly frustrated in its attempts to attain the hegemony over space crucial for attaining power in constituency-based parliamentary politics. Khan and the PTI realised that dominance of social media and television airwaves is one thing, while dominance over (non-virtual) space is quite another.

Such a re-structuring and spatial expansion of the PTI-project in the 2018 general elections was attained through three crucial openings. Firstly, the influx of new – and especially young – voters on electoral rolls was almost completely absorbed by the PTI. While the two other major parties, PML-N and PPP, maintained their vote numbers from the 2013 election, the increase in the number of total votes cast for PTI (about 9.2m) exceeded the increase in number of votes cast in aggregate (about 7.6m). Second, the clash between the military-judicial establishment and the PML-N widened splits in the ruling elite, while subsequent terrain-engineering through suppression of rivals favoured the PTI’s election campaign. Third, and crucially, the PTI’s

opening up to Pakistan's landed and big capital elite, already underway since 2012, was vastly accelerated. Political brokers in rural and peri-urban constituencies – ever sensitive to the cajolements and directions of the establishmentarian breeze – pledged allegiance to Khan's "anti-corruption" platform and boosted the spatial-social spread of PTI's electorate. Thus, the PTI and Khan headed into elections with a terrain clearer than ever before, and with a set of social-spatial alliances which put it in prime position to finally translate its hegemony from the virtual spaces of the Internet to the corridors of parliamentary power. Ultimately, the PTI emerged as the largest party in parliament and, with the help of some independents and smaller parties, Khan was elected Prime Minister.

As far as such dubious class alliances preclude a more progressive social-political project, the PTI and Khan now deal in high-sounding bluster and populist rhetoric. The "long march" through the trenches and ditches of civil society, so crucial for a viable hegemonic project centered on the popular classes, has been assiduously avoided, compromises have been made, and silence adopted towards key reactionary forces and institutions in the domains of civil and political society. For example, while Khan's compromises with the military establishment have already been mentioned, a telling silence and even an accommodating stance was adopted towards fascist forces such as various Islamist groups organised around persecution of minorities and religious heterodoxy. With no progressive constituency to fall upon, and the ruling elite's international legitimacy in tatters due to their profligate ways and geopolitical (mis)adventures, Khan and the PTI remain beholden to oligarchic elites and institutions, and reactionary forces are expected to gain strength

Significantly, the party's technocratic rhetoric of "efficiency", "good governance", and "anti-corruption" dovetails extremely well with the needs of international capital as embodied in

the discourse of IFIs (Dunya News, 2014 Aug 13). Whittling down Pakistan's complex problems to matters of efficiency and leakage, problems of unequal power and class structure become merely issues of "rent-seeking" and "corruption" predicated on cultural-moral deficiencies, which distort the smooth functioning of the otherwise fair and efficient market. As William Graf has noted, according to such a worldview "making the system work is then merely a matter of honest administration, stability, law and order, and an adequate infrastructure" (Graf, 1995: 145). Thus, the new middle class's aspirations as embodied in the PTI and Khan "fit neatly into the neoliberal concept of democratisation". Such a hollowed-out conception of democracy and good governance is in turn "the political form most compatible with recommodification and the new globalism" which characterises neoliberal globalisation (ibid: 146).

Along with the absence of a program resembling any substantive redistributive project, and thus a failure to transcend its merely "economic-corporate interests", the new middle class populism has adopted a telling silence on the coercive machinations and economic empire of the Pakistani security establishment. In fact, the new middle class's wedding to a nationalist project which, even while being re-articulated, operates within the confines of a (soft) praetorian Islamism, and its ambivalence regarding the military has made it particularly susceptible to co-option by the reigning historical bloc. Recent "anti-terrorism" moves led by General Raheel Sharif (the previous strong-man Army chief)⁶² in partnership with the civilian government, and the prospect of \$46 billion of (mainly infrastructure and agriculture-based) investment from China have found willing cheerleaders in the ranks of the new middle class. It goes without saying that these "anti-terror" operations cause massive displacement of local populations and are often a selective response to the existential threat faced by state institutions from formerly

⁶² Having retired at the end of 2016, Gen. Sharif is now leading a Saudi-led 39-country "Islamic" military coalition. Pakistani generals' willing – and well-paid – services to foreign powers are of course no new development (see, for example, Mashal, 2011, July 30)

allied fascist Islamist groups. In fact, the re-working of this praetorian nationalism has seen an upsurge in state violence—under the “National Action Plan”—on a whole host of subordinate social groups and movements, in the name of purging “foreign agents”, “Afghans” (a signifier for “terrorist”) and “illegal encroachers” (Sahill, 2017; Boone, March 19, 2014).

There is also a pronounced spatial aspect to the proto-hegemonic project and aspirations of the newly emergent middle class, most visibly expressed through yearnings towards a “world class” city and claims to (an exclusionary) urbanity⁶³. These proto-hegemonic aspirations have been mediated through material and discursive claims over space, urbanity, and citizenship. In effect, gated communities, residential enclaves, high-profile infrastructure projects, and emerging spaces of hyper-commodification and conspicuous consumption (such as gigantic shopping malls and sanitised entertainment spaces) have become emblematic of this new social group (Anwar, 2012). The discourse of “expertise”/criminality, technocracy/backwardness and merit/moral laxity is mapped onto this restructuring urban landscape. With the boom in the consumer goods sector and services economy, a proto-hegemonic urbanism entailing “a new subjectivity based on a consuming Pakistani identity” is being institutionalised (Anwar, 2012: 615). In the case of mega-cities like Karachi, due to historical trends of uneven development and occupational hierarchies along lines of geographical origin, processes of spatial purification have often led to the marginalisation of certain “ethnic” communities and thus, the co-production of “ethnicity” and class. Thus, new forms of social-spatial restructuring are taking place in Karachi in this latest phase of the passive revolution. Attendantly, within the contradictions of this renewed social-spatial project, new forms of working-class subjectivity may also in the making (this will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 6).

⁶³ I have discussed the (urban) spatial aspects of this second project in a recent article in *Urban Geography* (see Mallick, 2018).

To be effective, any hegemonic project cannot be merely ethico-political, “it must also be economic” (Gramsci, 1971: 161). For example, in the wake of Narendra Modi’s ascendancy, it was pointed out that “development” and Hindutva have become twin complements of the BJP-RSS hegemonic project (Ahmad, 2016; Palshikar, 2017). In Pakistan’s case, the promised investment of \$50 billion as part of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—itself part of a wider “One Belt One Road” Chinese policy of regional economic integration—and the re-working of a praetorian, soft Islamist nationalism have become crucial planks of the revitalised hegemonic project in the latest phase of passive revolution. This has been marred, however, by much debate regarding CPEC’s impact on local industry, opacity regarding rates of return, displacement of indigenous groups and environmental destruction due to open-pit coal mining, exacerbating uneven development, and lack of clarity about exclusive enclaves for Chinese industry, agriculture and labour⁶⁴. The building of infrastructure benefitting core areas (such as limited public transit projects and highways) have in effect formed the center-point of a kind of “infrastructure populism”.

Complementary to the economic thrust of this phase of passive revolution, there has been a re-working of the relationship between state and civil society, as part of the “boundary-traversing” hegemonic project of the ruling bloc. This involves a combination of military operations, “legal” state-sanctioned terror, and curtailment of civil rights and freedoms. Military operations are undertaken against—formerly patronised—militant groups that have turned against the state, while efforts are being made to “integrate” selected Islamist-sectarian groups into mainstream politics (Rehman, 2017 February 6; Arfeen, 2017 April 9). While the targeting of militant groups has been selective (mostly due to the ruling bloc’s regional geo-strategic

⁶⁴ See: Jorgic (2017, March 30), Husain (2017, Jan 5), Guriro (2016, Aug 28), Kakar (2016, Jan 21), and Husain (2017, Mar 9).

ambitions), this has been accompanied by low-intensity warfare by means of “constitutionally-sanctioned” military courts, disappearances of critical intellectuals, activists and internet bloggers, and deportations of Afghan-origin “refugees” and naturalised citizens in the name of fighting “terrorism” and—in the words of Gen. Sharif— “leaving no stone unturned to ensure its [CPEC’s] timely completion and uninterrupted success”⁶⁵.

Many of the arrested and missing activists—who have been critical of CPEC, military operations and extrajudicial state terrorism—have been accused of “blasphemy” against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (which is a highly sensitive issue in Pakistan, often being the trigger of vigilante attacks on the accused). A toxic campaign of propaganda and coercion has forced out over half a million Afghan refugees in what Human Rights Watch called “the world’s largest unlawful mass forced return of refugees in recent times” (HRW, 2017 Feb 13). Similarly, while bomb attacks by myriad Islamist groups and targeted killings of religious minorities (such as Ahmadi and Shia Muslims) have continued, provincial authorities revoked the registration of 3,773 NGOs out of a total of 8,529 registered in (mostly underdeveloped) southern Punjab, for being involved in “anti-state activities” and “destabilising development” (Jalil, 2017 Mar 27).

In this context, the onset of Chinese investment has lent a degree of coherence to the ongoing phase of passive revolution. The regional and international conjuncture—characterised by “the War on Terror”, diminishing US influence in Afghanistan, and greater Chinese ambitions—has prepared the terrain for a renewal of the ruling bloc’s hegemonic project. This has in turn been actively shaped by “nodal” projects of “boundary-traversing” hegemonic practice entailing the changing articulation of state-civil society linkages and re-formulation of the dialectic of consent-coercion. Where the first phase of passive revolution in the 1980s

⁶⁵ See: DAWN (2017 Feb 28), Sayeed (2017 Jan 18), and Express Tribune (2016 Jul 29).

involved much greater degrees of repression due to the previous strength of organised labour and the student movement, the latest phase has witnessed more targeted and tactical uses of repression through “legal” mechanisms, propaganda, and extra-judicial disappearances. While the first phase of passive revolution incorporated the intermediate classes into a re-formulated historical bloc, the second phase has entailed absorption of the post-liberalisation fraction of the middle class. In effect, the latest phase of passive revolution, articulated around the nodes of “development” and a praetorian nationalism, is incorporating the newly emergent middle class into a reformulated historical bloc with the military retaining its central role. A dynamic hegemonic project, undergirded by coercion and mediated by changing articulations of nationalism and development, is now being institutionalised resulting in a dialectic of continuity within discontinuity.

Feudal, Proto-Capitalist, Capitalist? A Brief Note

As may be surmised from the above, I consider the Pakistani social formation a capitalist one, albeit with its own specificities with regards to post-colonial forms of control, dependency, and accumulation. As with other post-colonial and ex-colonial social formations, reflections on the incumbent mode of production have been important in analytical debates in Pakistan too. Importantly, debates over the prevalence of feudalism, semi-feudalism, and/or capitalism have held crucial political implications (for example, in the making of class alliances in left projects) (cf Ishaq, 1972 and 1973; Ali, 2019: 244-252). In neighbouring India, these debates have taken place in much greater depth and intensity (cf Thorner, 1982). In other parts of the post-colonial world too, reflections around transition, articulation, world-systems theory and dependency have been integral to debates about the mode of production.

As discussed earlier, Hamza Alavi argued that a particular modality of capitalism – “peripheral capitalism” – is prevalent in post-colonial social formations such as Pakistan. It is important to briefly account for some of the extensions and challenges to Alavi’s work in Pakistan in this regard. For example, we have already touched upon Aasim Sajjad Akhtar’s work above, who has demonstrated how a dialectic of coercion and consent, mediated through clientelistic politics and vertical networks of patronage, has anchored a re-formulated historical bloc in the post-1970s conjuncture (Akhtar, 2018). This process of *trasformismo* has entailed the absorption of newly emergent intermediate classes – comprised of petty bourgeoisie entrepreneurs and *bazaar* merchants straddling formal/informal and rural/urban divides – into a dynamic historical bloc. Crucially, while Akhtar delineates changes in the incumbent hegemonic bloc of classes – including within and between the Alavian nexus of metropolitan bourgeoisie, indigenous bourgeoisie, landed elite, and the civil-military oligarchy – he does not stray from Alavi’s characterisation of Pakistan’s peripheral capitalist character. In many senses, Akhtar also works to critique the gaps in the Alavian framework identified previously, while demonstrating how the deepening of capitalism in the Pakistani social formation serves to mediate the legitimisation the power of the overdeveloping state “from below”.

In contradistinction to the above however, Tariq Amin-Khan has recently critiqued Alavi’s characterisation of “peripheral capitalism”, especially in relation to Pakistan (Amin-Khan, 2012). Crucially, Amin-Khan contends that colonised societies *cannot* be characterised as capitalist (peripheral or otherwise), as feudal relations were (re-)constituted during colonialism and continue to persist in the post-colonial era. For Amin-Khan, social relations of production during the colonial era were “neither fully feudal or capitalist”, as there was no separation of the economic and political moments in surplus extraction and domination (ibid: 102-7).

Post-colonial societies are thus characterised (as in Alavi) by a plurality of dominant classes, but these include the bureaucracy (as an auxiliary class) and (*contra* Alavi) a politically dominant class of “feudal landowners” (ibid: 113). For Amin-Khan, post-colonial states can be classified into two types: proto-capitalist (most post-colonial states, including Pakistan) and capitalist (e.g. India). These are distinguished by the strength of the indigenous bourgeoisie, the relative autonomy of the state, and the causal primacy of the political or economic moments for accumulation (ibid: 120-125, 199-200). Proto-capitalist post-colonial states, such as Pakistan, also have a contradictory character: they are “weak” in comparison to the imperatives of metropolitan capital and imperialist states, while being “strong” in relation to their own populace (ibid: 110-1).

Amin-Khan’s formulation has the advantage of focussing attention on the determinant role of the “capitalism-imperialism nexus” and the specificity of modes of accumulation in post-colonial states like Pakistan. However, much like Alavi, Amin-Khan’s key weakness is a one-sided focus on the shifts and changes (or lack thereof) among the dominant classes, while minimally accounting for the role of subordinate classes. Briefly put, Amin-Khan discounts the mechanisms of hegemony and the rhythms of the integral state, ending up with a truncated account of social struggle in the social formation i.e. much like Alavi, Amin-Khan privileges *horizontal* class struggle (i.e. among the dominant classes) at the expense of *vertical* class struggle (i.e. between the dominant and subordinated classes). Changes in the rhythms of hegemony, shifts in modes of accumulation, and emergence of new social groups within state, civil society, and the historical bloc – such as those elucidated in our account of passive revolutions above – are not considered. This emphasis on horizontal class relations makes it difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the social character (capitalist or otherwise) of relations

of (re-)production. As a result, the thesis of “feudal” persistence and proto-capitalist continuity comes across as both static and dependent on an untenable comparison with an ideal-type of “proper” capitalism in the “Western” states (Amin-Khan, 2012: 114). Moreover, such a static formulation also cannot account for the mechanisms of “extraversion” and relative autonomy through which the post-colonial ruling bloc negotiates with and between different imperial and sub-imperial patrons – such as the US, Saudi Arabia, and China – even while affirming the bounds of dependency (cf Bayart, 2009).

Treating class and state above as a relationship among dominant classes and class fractions also hinders a full socio-political analysis of relations of subordination. As demonstrated in previous sections of this chapter, the intensity and varied absorption of struggles from subaltern groups cannot simply be put down to (unmediated) coercion from the state/ruling bloc. In fact, the deepening of capitalist relations and the commodity form in the social formation, along with shifting registers of ideological-material mechanisms of *trasformismo*, are crucial for understanding these struggles historically and in contemporary Pakistan. As studies from different parts of Pakistan have shown, capitalist relations of production – in various open and “disguised”/mediated forms – are now dominant in the social formation in both rural and urban areas⁶⁶. Of course, that does not mean that varied – often “atavistic” – forms of labour control do not exist. However, as I will show in the following chapters, while different forms of labour subsumption continue to exist and are continually reconstituted, these are integrally related to

⁶⁶ For a small selection, see Rouse (1983), Zaidi (1999), Breman (2013), Akhtar (2018), Anwar (2018), and Jan (2019). Moreover, with the increasing penetration of (local and international) capital and the latest phase of global depeasantisation also seeing its effects in Pakistan, boundaries between “rural” and “urban” themselves are increasingly blurred (Ali, 2002; Qadeer, 2000; Araghi, 1995).

rhythms of capital accumulation at regional, national, and international scales⁶⁷. Thus, while Pakistan is incorporated into the world-system in a dependent and imperialised manner – specifically through circuits of migrant labour export, export-oriented production of primary and low value-added commodities, and the imperatives of US militarism – the dominance of capital in the social formation is also without doubt. Therefore, to understand the pacification-absorption of labour in Karachi (and in Pakistan generally), it is crucial to elucidate exactly these shifts in modes of accumulation and labour subsumption in their integral relation to changing modalities of material-ideological hegemony⁶⁸.

As has been remarked in debates on transition and modes of production in (post-)colonial formations, questions of “feudal”/“capitalist” characterisation often come down to the scale at which analysis is carried out (e.g. all the way from the firm/farm to the level of the world-system) (Foster-Carter, 1978: 75-6). The vantage point of analysis and extension, in the Marxian/Ollman sense, is itself integrally imbricated with the political orientations, purposes, and implications of social scientific practice (Ollman, 2003). Therefore, for our purposes of elucidating the differentiated and uneven evolution of the working class in Karachi, instead of resort to ideal-type comparisons or abstract pronouncements on the separation of the economic and political (or lack thereof), it is much more useful to elucidate the upward- and downward-linkages through which surplus extraction and dominance is constituted (such as via global, regional, and national circuits of accumulation, varied forms of labour control/subsumption in different sectors, regions etc.). In the following chapters, for example through the heuristic of “labour regimes”, we will shed light on exactly these upward- and

⁶⁷ We will encounter several of these different regimes of labour control – with their determinate effects on workers’ organisation and consciousness – in the following chapters.

⁶⁸ We will elaborate more on the structure of Pakistan’s economy and its shifts in the era of neoliberal globalisation towards the end of next chapter, and then through more detailed focus on forms of labour subsumption and socio-spatial restructuring in the following chapters.

downward-linkages of labour subsumption and value extraction with a view to the determinate conditions and potentials of labour incorporation, organisation, and consciousness therein. In continuity and discontinuity with the feudalism/capitalism debates, it is obvious that struggles over land (and space) remain of integral importance in Karachi (and Pakistan generally) – and that the need for comprehensive land reforms remains paramount. However, as will become clear, this is through increasingly urban and decidedly *capitalist* modes of dispossession/accumulation, incorporation, and resistance.

Towards the Revolution in Permanence

In this chapter, we have delineated a Marxist-Gramscian problematic of state-civil society to elucidate the post-1970s conjuncture in Pakistan, and as a prelude to our investigation of working class politics in Karachi. This was in keeping with our elaboration of the problematic of class in the previous chapter, whereby the concrete study of class could not be divorced from its embeddedness in determinate projects of material-ideological hegemony. A brief exegesis of the Marxian and Gramscian conceptions of the state and civil society yielded a focus on the practice of hegemony as a “boundary-traversing” project within the ambit of a differentiated “integral state”. Relatedly, Gramsci’s delineation of “passive revolution” was seen to lend itself usefully to the study of post-colonial states and civil society as “distinctions-within-a-unity” or “nodes” within the multi-scalar territoriality of capitalism. As such, in distinction from reified conceptions of the “global” versus “local”, or “West” and “East”, it is imperative to understand how these projects are co-produced in determinate contexts through the particularities of historically situated social-political practice (Hart, 2018).

In conversation with Marx, Gramsci, and Fanon, a focus on the practice of politics and different modalities of passive revolution offered a productive avenue to understand postcolonial states and social formations beyond recourse to unmediated coercion or “domination without hegemony”. The organic linkages and changing relations between civil and political society were explored with reference to attempts at forging “boundary-traversing” hegemony and incorporating various social groups into a changing historical bloc – with an emphasis on the material-ideological re-articulation of “national-popular” projects. In this regard, it is important to trace how ostensibly non- or minimally-democratic Bonapartist regimes attempt to construct hegemony through material-ideological projects based on unstable equilibria of consent and coercion, drawing upon historically-formed sedimentations of common sense. Thus, it was demonstrated how the international conjuncture (consecutive Afghan wars, the “War on Terror”, Chinese investment) is constitutive of “nodal” developments at the scale of the “nation” as well as in the formulation and crises of hegemonic projects in Pakistan. The multi-scalar and strategic conception of passive revolution also helped us in thinking through the formation of state-civil society in Pakistan in *integral relation* to the struggles, incorporation, and/or exclusion of subaltern social groups. Thus, different phases of passive revolutions – and attendant projects of material-ideological hegemony – were themselves conditioned by the preceding waves of struggles articulated through Left, anti-dictatorship, and/or democratic movements. Moreover, the rhythms of hegemony, coercion, and incorporation were overdetermined by the changing international conjuncture

While the heuristic of passive revolution lent itself usefully to an interrogation of the changing historical bloc in Pakistan, it also points towards the direction of our upcoming chapters. Thus, a *strategic* conception of passive revolution necessitates the delineation of the

possible forms, contradictions, and pathways of its dialectical corollary i.e. the revolution in permanence. If the unification of the dominant classes through the state is the effect of passive revolution, then an alternative project of hegemony can be nothing less than an “anti-passive revolution” instituted through the realms of civil and political society (Buci-Glucksmann, 1979: 232). It may be said that our aim in delineating the passive revolutionary form of modernity in post-1970s Pakistan is to think through what strategic-organisational forms are required for the “revolution in permanence”. Therefore, the subsequent chapters of this study may be seen as a project of thinking through the dialectical corollary of Gramsci’s passive revolution through i) delineating the modalities of passive revolution, hegemonic incorporation, and/or exclusion with regards to the working classes in Karachi, and ii) elucidating possible cracks, slippages, and contradictions which may point towards an alternative resolution of the passive revolutionary impasse in Karachi and Pakistan.

3. No Shortcuts to Hegemony: The Trade Union Movement in Karachi

“There undoubtedly does exist a tendency to (at least provisional stages of) unification in the historical activity of these [subaltern] groups, but this tendency is continually interrupted by the activity of the ruling group... Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only “permanent” victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately.”

Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* (55)

This chapter picks up on the thread of the post-1970s passive revolution and its associated practices entailing the absorption and pacification of subaltern upsurges in the case of Karachi. Specifically, this chapter will focus on the “organised” labour movement in Karachi and its evolution over the last three to four decades. An account of the trade union movement and its decline in the post-1970s era is a crucial part of the story of working class evolution in Karachi (and in Pakistan, generally). The downfall of the trade union movement has not only led to a general degradation in the state of labour in the country but, in the case of Karachi, it has also created a vacuum which has seen other, often regressive, forms of politics thrive.

Relatedly, while Karachi’s politics has often been understood through lenses centered on ethnicity, violence, and/or religious sectarianism, the role of the labour movement remains an often-ignored part of the city’s history. Thus, while analyses focused on ethnicity and political violence provide valuable insights (cf Gayer, 2014), they remain incomplete without a consideration of the integral role of labour struggles (and pacification) in shaping Karachi’s politics. In fact, my contention in this and subsequent chapters is that without an account of labour and working class struggles – in all their complexity and various contradictions – it is in

fact impossible to fully understand the later upsurge of politics in Karachi organised along lines of ethnicity, religion etc. As such, to understand the present moment it is essential to go back in history to uncover a moment when alternative imaginaries of space, state, and politics seemed possible. Thus, a focus on delineating the moment of labour insurgency and later mechanisms of pacification is crucial for understanding not just the evolution of the working class in Karachi, but also the wider politics of the city itself.

In this regard, this chapter will focus on the mechanisms of *trasformismo* through which an insurgent labour movement was disciplined and degraded in favour of the changing ruling bloc. In line with the periodisation presented in the last chapter, the pacification of the labour movement is situated primarily in the first phase of passive revolution i.e. through the latter half of the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, as we will see in this and the subsequent chapters, this phase of passive revolution is a crucial moment in Karachi's history as the patterns of politics – and especially, working class politics – (tenuously) institutionalised in this era, continue to overdetermine the city's politics even to this day.

This chapter will therefore shed light on the trade union movement in Karachi, especially through specifying the contradictions, slippages, and mechanisms through which practices of *trasformismo* operated. In doing so, we will proceed through six sections. The first section will give a brief account of the high point of the labour movement in Karachi (and Pakistan) in the 1960s and 1970s. The strength and intensity of the labour movement will then, in the second section, lead to an account of the high levels of repression which had to be deployed by the ruling bloc as a first step for dispersing the organised working class. In the third section, some broad mechanisms of transformism will be identified along the lines of state-centered bureaucratisation, the provision of material incentives, and (relatedly) an increasing

“cosmopolitanism” of upper echelons of trade unionism through mechanisms such as NGOisation. The fourth section will focus on a crucial pitfall of the Left in Pakistan generally and the labour movement in Karachi specifically, i.e. the lack of organic intellectuals. The truncated process of the formation of organic intellectuals will be seen to be a function of many of the mechanisms highlighted above, along with – crucially – the specific relations within progressive/Left parties both internally and with the wider social environment and emergent subjectivities. This will then lead, in the fifth section, into a broader discussion of the faultlines and contradictions within the labour movement that fed into its incorporation-pacification through transformism. The last section will elaborate on the changing economic terrain of the 1980s and 1990s which dealt the final blow to the trade union movement in Karachi. This will then lead us into the next chapter focussing on different forms of labour in the post-liberalisation phase. 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 working class politics are simply additive. On the contrary, these myriad factors are mutually constitutive in effectively subverting-pacifying the integral and independent political articulation of the working class. Put simply, they are *internal relations or integral moments* in the *open* totality which constituted the first phase of post-1970s passive revolution in the specific context of Karachi (cf Ollman, 2003).

For this delineation of the trade union movement in Karachi, I will be drawing upon insights from multiple sources. These include detailed interviews with rank-and-file workers and labour organisers involved in trade unionism through 1960s, 70s, and 80s, and archives on the labour movement kept by the Pakistani Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER). The archives, while not extensive, provide useful insights into some of the discussion among trade unionists in the period under consideration, in addition to some accounts by labour

organisers, correspondence between trade union federations, and periodic reports regarding different sectors of labour. I will also be drawing upon published and unpublished biographical/autobiographical accounts of individuals involved with the Left and labour movement. While these are few and far between, they provide useful insights into the evolution of the labour movement in Karachi and on the themes indicated above. I will also be drawing upon my organisational and activist experience with left politics in Karachi and especially, in the context of this chapter, with the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF). The National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), formed in 1999, is one of the largest 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 workers in both the formal and informal sectors, and is dominated by activists who are/have been part of various left-wing political parties in Pakistan. Finally, I will also draw upon the secondary literature published on the labour movement in Karachi.

As such, these varied sources will be combined with an eye towards centering the experiences of the workers, labourers, and organisers who were involved in the movement and, often, suffered immensely due to it. Their struggles, perceptions, and hindsight thus provide us an account of not just the evolution of Karachi's trade union movement, but also an insight on the changing power bloc in Pakistan (so to speak) "from below". Relatedly, the focus on the moment of struggle and insurgency, especially as seen through the eyes of those involved in it, is essential to denaturalise the categories of "ethnicity" and "religion" which have come to be the "common sense" vantage points for understanding Karachi. In fact, just as Gramsci berates Benedetto Croce for a historiography of the Italian Risorgimento that "excludes the moment of struggle" and therefore takes "placidity... the moment of cultural or ethical-political expansion",

it is impossible to understand the passive revolution in Karachi without an account of the preceding labour upsurges (Gramsci, 1971: 118). In the absence of this “moment of struggle”, an account of subsequent history is “nothing but a fragment of history”. To fully grasp the significance, extent, and mechanisms of the passive revolution, it is therefore essential to understand “the moment in which conflicting forces are formed, are assembled and take up their positions; the moment in which one ethical-political system dissolves and another is formed by fire and steel” (ibid: 119). It is thus that we turn to the moment of upsurge and insurgency represented by the late 1960s and 1970s in Karachi. “For all of history,” as Gramsci reminds us, “bears witness to the present”.

Insurgency

Colonial era patterns of social change and economic geography integrally determined the rhythms of the labour movement and the development of the Left in the post-Independence era. In many ways, Karachi’s place in the broader colonial economy and geography would crucially inform the emergence of ethno-spatial populisms in the 1980s. To put it briefly, the character of colonial rule in India (including the areas now in Pakistan) underwent a decisive shift in the aftermath of the 1857 rebellion (Singh, 2013). Earlier class-caste alliances had integrally involved the *bania*/money lender castes as part of the emergent ruling bloc. However, as the 1857 war was marked by a movement of peasants and soldiers, under the hegemony of the reigning caste-class of landlords, a reconfiguration of the caste and class bases of British collaboration took place in the post-1857 milieu. This in turn was combined with massive changes in the emergent colonial state space, such as spatial nodes of banking-money lending and transport-communication infrastructure. The urban corridor from Calcutta in the east to

Karachi in the west became “the central zone for state-sponsored agricultural development” cutting across existing trade and commercial routes and “profoundly alter[ing] the spatial organisation of production” (Goswami, 2004: 59).

What is important to note here is that due to the dominance of agrarian incumbents, the area comprising Pakistan emerged as an industrial backwater (Ali and Malik, 2009: 33-34). Moreover, due to the proximity with Imperial Russia, these areas had heavy footprints of military infrastructure and military recruitment to the British Indian Army. In Karachi’s case, the development of a trading bourgeoisie and transport infrastructure was inflected through its linkages with cotton and wheat-producing regions of the Punjab along with migratory-trading networks with the neighbouring Gujarat/Bombay Presidency areas. Karachi was also an important military base for the British in their campaigns in Sindh and beyond. Due to these patterns of economic geography, Karachi came to be regarded as “a bridgehead of imperial culture and modernity set apart from its rural hinterland [in the wider Sindh province]” (Anwar, 2014: 37). In post-Independence years, this socio-spatial differentiation and disarticulation from the rest of Sindh province – combined with wider patterns of state recruitment and cultural dominance – would have determinate effects on Karachi’s emergence as a “Muhajir”/migrant city and later production of ethno-spatial populisms.

While we will discuss the immense spatial and demographic changes brought about by Partition in more detail in the chapter on urban space (Chapter 6), it is important to briefly note the effects of the above-mentioned patterns of development on the labour movement and the Left in Karachi. The exodus of Hindus in the aftermath of Partition completely changed Karachi: almost overnight it became an overwhelmingly Muslim city with a majority non-Sindhi population. As active cadres of the left and labour movement had been drawn mainly from

among Sindhi-speakers, and especially Sindhi Hindus, this created a huge gap of experience and organising. As Eric Rahim, a member of the Communist Party in the 1950s and himself a recent migrant to Karachi recalls in his memoirs, “there was hardly any Sindhi Muslim party member in Karachi [and] the party unit had to be created from scratch” (Rahim, 2018: 18). In fact, in the whole of Sindh (including Karachi), “only two Hindu party members stayed on in Pakistan – Sobho Gianchandani and Pohu Mal”, with Pohu Mal soon retiring from politics. As such, the left and labour movement in Karachi had to be built up from scratch mainly by Urdu-speaking migrants from India, who had little social bases and connections among the wider Sindhi hinterland. In turn, this would have crucial effects on the development of the left and labour movement, and its ability to account for existing and emergent faultlines within Karachi’s working class-in-making. Thus, left politics too was critically informed – and hampered – by Karachi’s wider socio-spatial disarticulation, a process that was only accelerated by the Partition exodus.

As indicated above, the area constituting Pakistan had generally been an industrial backwater at the time of independence. As such, 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 (Communist Party of Pakistan), was based in large part on the West Pakistan Railway workers and, along with the CPP, it was banned by the state in 1954 (Shaheed. 1983: 273). State-sponsored industrialisation during the 1950s and 1960s also led to a proliferation in trade union activity. In fact, the post-Independence profile of labour and trade union activity can be usefully seen through the lens of two (or perhaps, three) upsurges. The first phase of concerted labour upsurge had

appeared in 1963, while the second and third phases (in 1968-69 and then in 1972) merged into each other to form the high point of the labour movement in Karachi and Pakistan.

There had been a smaller upsurge of labour in the decade of the 1950s as the new country's ruling classes and state bureaucracy struggled to forge a hegemonic balance within the reconstituted power bloc. Labour upsurges had taken place in Karachi through the few unions that had been left intact post-Partition and the subsequent displacement of much of Hindu middle class which had provided cadres for left politics. As the national capital, different countries' diplomatic missions had moved into Karachi's Shrine Hotel. Here, in the upsurge of enthusiasm after independence, hotel workers picketed outside the Shrine while a huge red flag was planted outside the Russian "embassy" (Chandani, undated). In 1954, the ruling Muslim League lost the provincial elections in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to a United Front of democratic, anti-imperialist, and Left political parties (the "Jugtu Front"). A few months later, labour struggles and outbreak of violence in cities like Khulna and Chittagong, were made a pretext of imposing martial law in East Pakistan and re-asserting the dominance of the West Pakistan-centered bureaucracy in the province (Khan, 2015: 60-61).

While most new industries had been dominated, since the banning of the CPP, by government-sponsored and American—"advised" trade unions, labour struggles often tended to outpace these. British-French aggression over the Suez Canal led to massive protests in Karachi coordinated by students, while the workers at Karachi Port Trust refused to load-unload for French vessels (Khwaja, 2016: 330). Pakistan's first constitution had been passed in 1956 and elections were scheduled for 1958. In the same year, workers of multi-national oil companies held the biggest strikes to date in Pakistan's history. Faced with labour upsurge, student protests, and increasing demands for autonomy in the smaller provinces, the civil-military bureaucracy –

afraid of losing their grip on power in any free and fair election – imposed martial law in October 1958. This was followed by a ban on all strikes and demonstrations, and severe repression on communists and trade unionists. In a wide-ranging crackdown before US President Eisenhower's visit to Pakistan, Hassan Nasir, a leader of the banned CPP and office bearer of its mass-front National Awami Party (NAP), was captured from a workers' colony in Karachi. He was tortured to death in the Mughal-era Lahore Fort. The location of his body remains a mystery to this day.

In 1962, when the ban on political activities was partially lifted, a Workers' Coordination Committee was formed and trade union activities were resumed albeit in a very limited manner. In the Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC), workers formed an independent union to undercut the puppet union of the management (Khwaja, 2016: 334). A lower-caste Christian sweeper, Inayat Masih was elected an office bearer, someone who shared the negotiating table with management during meetings, but had to sit in a separate corner in the factory canteen during meal times. The union's demands over better conditions in the canteen along with general better working condition, led to dismissals of active union members. Workers' sit-ins started during meal-times and for an hour after work in front of the manager's office. More dismissals led to sit-ins outside the factory gate, the formation of an Action Committee, and the spread of solidarity actions by workers in other sectors. Close coordination was achieved between the workers' colonies and the Action Committee to counter management cars which went around areas with loudspeakers spreading rumours about workers of one ethnicity or the other having agreed to resume work. Agreement was reached after a month of strikes, where production had decreased from 14 million cigarettes a day to a few hundred thousand (ibid: 336).

The strike wave however was not abating. On 20th February 1963, workers in Zeibtun Textile and Valika Textile (two of the biggest mills in Karachi's SITE area) convened a meeting

in the Zeibtun grounds. Valika was the first textile mill formed in Pakistan after Partition and is remembered by workers for having a particularly cruel owner (Qureshi, 2010: 7). The government imposed colonial-era Section 144, which criminalised gathering of more than four people. Workers' activity shifted to their residential areas and meetings of the Workers' Coordination Committee – consisting of disaffected labour leaders and underground communist militants – took place every day for the next week. After a hiatus, the student protests had flared up again in 1961 against the Universities Ordinance which gave authority over universities to provincial Martial Law administrators, the CIA-sponsored assassination of Congolese revolutionary leader Patrice Lumumba, and over Jabalpur riots in India (Leghari, 1979: 96). Students joined the workers of textile mills and the Coordination Committee demanded more trade union freedoms and relaxation of strict assembly laws (Shaheed, 1979: 186-7). The Committee announced a general strike on 1st March 1963. As workers started their march from the Pathan Colony, police firing commenced near Valika Mills killing six and injuring 23 others (Khwaja, 2016: 344). Over 800 workers and labour leaders were arrested, and workers were forced back to work by the police and army.

While the 1963 strike wave abated in the face of state repression, the pattern of student-worker alliances, the importance of workers' colonies, and the central role of Action/Coordination Committees (as separate from Labour Federations) for coordinating militancy was set during this era. It was also in this strike wave, that the integral role of textile mill workers – which had the biggest footprint in the private sector – was set. General Ayub Khan announced Presidential elections for January 1965, and the locus of political activity shifted. In 1959, Gen Ayub Khan had held local level elections under the “Basic Democrats” (BD) system, in a bid to showcase “true” democracy to the people of Pakistan but in effect,

restricting franchise to local-level power holders, while concentrating power at the top. The 1965 presidential elections were to be held through a similar indirect system. The BD system had been much hated among working classes because of its enforcement of the power of exploitative middlemen. Such “BD-*wallahs*” not only acted as jobbers for up-country migrants in the newly emerging industries, but often doubled as loan sharks and landlords in working class residential areas (Shaheed, 2007: 163).

The 1965 presidential elections therefore emerged as a chance to strike out against the power of BD-*wallahs* and to express discontent against the military regime. The Combined Opposition Parties – an amalgam of left parties such as the NAP and some elements of the religious right – put up Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Pakistan’s late founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah, as their joint candidate. Labourers from various areas of Karachi participated vigorously in Ms. Jinnah’s campaign. A sign- and board-painter, Shabaan Baakda, who worked in the *Khajoor Market* at the time recalled his and his *ustaad*’s [trainer to whom he was apprenticed] decision to make the largest election banner in Karachi (S. Baakda, personal interview, Feb 28, 2018⁶⁹). This was done completely voluntarily and to avoid the police, they used to work in the night after the market had closed. In the end, they made a cloth banner with a Lantern on it (Jinnah’s electoral symbol) which spanned the length and breadth of a residential street in the area. Important to note here is that Baakda himself is from a Sindhi background while the *ustaad* was a Pashtun. A highly-charged campaign resulted in Fatima Jinnah’s victory in Karachi, but Ayub Khan – through considerable electoral manipulation – managed to win the Presidential elections overall. In fact, Karachi was the only city in West Pakistan where Fatima Jinnah succeeded because of the wide cross-section of support from working class, students, and

⁶⁹ I have changed names of some research participants and interviewees. This has been done keeping in mind that some of these individuals are still involved in politics and/or are in sensitive professions such as journalism.

intellectuals. Baakda recalls these events with much excitement and characterises Karachi at the time as “*jamhooryat ka qilla!*” [fortress of democracy].

Ayub’s legitimacy took a great hit due to the rigged elections. His son Gohar Ayub had led a procession of Pashtuns through Karachi’s predominantly Urdu-speaking area of Lalukhet, resulting in some ethnic clashes. Ayub and his generals then managed to trigger a war with India in August-September 1965 which, in spite of the patriotic propaganda which had been aired through government-controlled media, ended in a stalemate. The 1965 war, the earlier Sino-Indian conflict, and the emergent Sino-Soviet split in the worldwide communist movement had, by this point, triggered fractures within the left in Pakistan too. This was compounded due to the fact of Ayub Khan’s closeness to China especially in the aftermath of the 1965 war and the Soviet Union’s concomitant tilt towards India. In Gen Ayub’s years in power two-thirds of capital investment in West Pakistan had come from outside the county (Shaikh, 2010: 76). The 1965 war led to a cooling of relations with the US, a downturn in foreign investment, and with the post-WWII boom in the West slowing down, the Pakistani economy started floundering.

In 1968, Ayub decided to celebrate a “Decade of Development” to celebrate ten years in power. In response, students of the left-wing National Students’ Federation (NSF), who had been at the forefront of the growing anti-Ayub student movement through the 1960s, decided to mark the year as one of a “Decade of Decadence”. By this time, twenty-two families controlled 66% of Pakistan’s industrial assets, while the share of labour’s wages in manufacturing had fallen from 45% in 1959 to 25% by the end of the Decade of “Development” (Mahbub ul Haq in Gardezi, 1991: 31). When in November 1968, students from Rawalpindi’s Gordon College were manhandled by the police and arrested, a boiling pot of lava erupted. On 7 November 1968, the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, police armed with batons, tear gas and rifles, opened fire

upon a procession of students and killed a seventeen-year-old (Ali, 2018: 19). This coincided with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's arrival in the city. Bhutto, who had been Gen. Ayub's protégé Foreign Minister, had resigned after a "humiliating" ceasefire agreement with India. A spontaneous movement of students and young radicals found a hero and outlet in Bhutto's increasingly radical rhetoric.

One combined effect of the 1960s student protests, the 1963 movement of students and labourers, and the 1965 presidential elections, had been the tentative emergence of a new generation of labour and left leaders. In Karachi, this was especially significant as state-controlled trade unions and labour federation had dominated labour-capital relations in favour of social "stability". Whereas the labour federations and established unions had been dominated by educated and middle-class activists hailing from Urdu-speaking backgrounds⁷⁰, the migrant labourers in Karachi hailed from up-country Punjabi, Hazara, and Pashtun communities. As such, when workers joined the 1968 protests, it continued the process of undercutting existing labour leaders and federations which had begun with the 1963 upsurge. The older Left often came across as incoherent due to the Sino-Soviet split and attendant divisions along the lines of strategy and personality. With students pushing the old Left, and Bhutto's newly formed Pakistan People's Party (PPP) also pulling radicalised students and newly emergent labour protests, the emergence of a new Left was on the horizon (Leghari, 1979: 158-9).

With the protests increasing, opposition political parties – including those on the Left – attempted to give the movement direction. However, with the entry of workers and the urban poor into the movement in 1968, the movement took on a decidedly proletarian character. On 17 January 1969, a Demands Day was called by the Student Action Committee in Dhaka. This was

⁷⁰ Mostly migrants from India.

joined by workers and opposition political parties, bringing both wings of the country to a complete standstill. A week later, on the 25th, intense street battles were fought in Karachi between police, students and workers. Government offices, petrol stations, buses, and trams were burnt down. “The class hatred of the Karachi proletariat”, declared Tariq Ali who was visiting Pakistan at the time on the invitation of other student leaders, “was unequalled elsewhere in the country” (Ali, 2018: 73).

From the mid-1960s onwards, the peasantry of East Pakistan specially had shown signs of increasing restlessness. Ayub Khan’s “Green Revolution” had increased the power of big landlords, while the BD system had further augmented the hold of the *jotadar-mahajan* nexus (landowners-money lenders). There were increasing incidents of killings of *jotadars* and *mahajans*, taking on a great intensity in late 1968 and early 1969 (Shaikh, 2010: 82-83). In the “tribal areas” of northwestern Pakistan, a mass meeting of Bhutto’s supporters was prevented by pre-emptive arrests and tear-gassing. In Dera Ismail Khan, the National Students’ Federation (NSF) had joined with a local organisation *Dehqan Qalam* (Peasants’ Pen) for anti-feudal campaigns. Journalists, teachers, and even sex workers had joined the protests. On 13th February, a group of angry protesters including workers and students marched to the Oxford University Press shop in Lahore and burned it down (Ali, 2018: 82). The OUP had published Gen Ayub’s biography in 1967 where he had declared democracy unsuitable for the “genius” of the people of Pakistan due to their inhabitation of “a hot climate”. The night between 17th and 18th February, students and workers spontaneously took over Dhaka and ran the city for a limited time. The Ayub regime was tottering.

In early March 1969, Maulana Bhashani – the most prominent pro-China communist leader of NAP and the CP – visited Karachi and in a speech in the Lalukhet area exhorted the workers

to apply *gherao* (encirclement of factories, offices etc.) to win their demands (Leghari, 1979: 138-9). The technique had long been deployed by workers in colonial Bengal and in East Pakistan; it now graduated to West Pakistan. Joint Action Labour Committees had been formed which were coordinating strikes in certain industrial areas and cities. One of the most powerful of these was the *Muttahida Mazdoor Federation* (United Workers' Federation) formed in 1969 in the SITE industrial area of Karachi. More than 450 factories in Karachi, including over a hundred thousand workers, went on strike for five days in March. The Karachi Chamber of Commerce requested the government to provide military protection to factory owners (Khwaja, 2016: 351). Railway workers – who had been represented in the early years of Pakistan by a subsequently banned CPP-associated union – had had a simmering dispute with the Ayub regime over trade union freedoms. In October 1967, low-intensity strikes had begun in the railways and 300 leaders and active workers of a militant union had been arrested. On 17th March 1969, workers of Pakistan Railways all over the country and in the Karachi docks went on strike (ibid: 348). The country had come to a standstill. On 25th March, Gen. Ayub Khan resigned. Power was handed over to a cabal of army generals who immediately imposed martial law.

Gen. Yahya Khan's military regime announced general elections for October 1970. A new Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO 1969) was announced which, in a contradictory manner, opened space for trade union activity in the country⁷¹. In the meanwhile, a new wave of suppression began. Prominent political leaders, student activists, and labour organisers were jailed to be tried subsequently in military courts. In Karachi alone, 45000 workers were retrenched between 1969 and 1971 (Khwaja, 2016: 349). Elections were postponed due to Cyclone Bhola in East Pakistan which caused widespread destruction and the neglect of the

⁷¹ The IRO 1969 remains, with minor amendments, the basic framework of labour laws in Pakistan today. We will examine the effects of the legal framework on the labour movement in more detail in an upcoming section.

regime fed into the Bengalis' growing disillusionment with the state. The 1970 elections, the first since Pakistan's formation based on universal franchise, resulted in the victory of Shaikh Mujib's Awami League (an amalgam of peasant and petty bourgeoisie forces) in East Pakistan giving them an overall majority in parliament. Bhutto's People's Party dominated polling in West Pakistan, while the National Awami Party also gained prominent results especially in "peripheral" provinces of NWFP and Balochistan. The West-Pakistan-centered civil-military bureaucracy – in collaboration with Bhutto's PPP – refused to concede power to Mujib and the Awami League. A bloody civil war ensued, hundreds of thousands were killed, thousands of women raped. A second Partition ensued. East Pakistan became Bangladesh and Pakistan, already "moth-eaten" in 1947 in the word of its founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was reduced to West Pakistan.

Pro-Soviet communists had vehemently opposed the military operation in East Pakistan, and were vilified as "traitors"; the pro-China communists saw divisions among themselves on the issue of supporting the military operation in the name of defending "national sovereignty" (Khan, 2012a). This also built on earlier divisions among the communists on the issue of participation in elections and on engagement with the PPP. A large part of the pro-China group, especially those associated with Maulana Bhashani, boycotted the elections and had raised the slogan of "*Parchi Nahi Barchi*" (Not the Ballot, but the Spear) (Shaikh, 2010: 84). This remains a contentious issue in the communist movement in Pakistan to this day⁷². Commentators estimate that had the communists decided to participate in the elections they would have won at least 50 seats (out of the 300) (ibid). Tufail Abbas, general secretary of the underground pro-China CP and a major leader of the Pakistan International Airlines' union, later narrated in his

⁷² For a succinct review of different positions, see Feroz Ahmed's interview with Major Ishaq in the *Pakistan Forum* of October 1972 (Ishaq, 1972).

autobiography that Bhutto himself had offered the communists twenty-two seats through the PPP (Abbas, 2010: 151). While Abbas refused the offer, many members of his group in Karachi, especially those of the “new” Left comprising of students of the NSF, radicalised intellectuals, and new shopfloor leaders, associated themselves with the PPP even while themselves refusing electoral nominations. An established labour leader of the old Left, Mirza Ibrahim (of the pro-China group of Tufail Abbas/CR Aslam) lost in the elections to a PPP candidate (Leghari, 1979: 156-7).

In an emulation of Chairman Mao, Bhutto had been elected “Chairman” of the PPP, donned a Mao cap, declared “Islamic Socialism” as his vision of the economy, and took up the slogan of “*Roti, Kapra, Makan*” (Bread, Cloth, and Shelter). The humiliation faced by the army in Bangladesh forced Gen. Yahya to relinquish power and hand over the reins of government to Bhutto. The PPP came to power at the center, the NAP formed coalition governments in NWFP and Balochistan, and after more than a decade, the army was back in the barracks. A new beginning seemed to be in the offing for Pakistan. Many of the incarcerated trade unionists and leaders were released. Bhutto announced a new labour policy with provisions for increased workers’ role in profit-sharing, industrial management, and concessions such as social security and “son quotas”.

Faced with an economic crisis after the secession of East Pakistan and in a bid to consolidate his power, Bhutto and the PPP wanted to control the restive and increasingly radical trade union movement. The opening provided by the IRO 1969 and the release of labour leaders incarcerated during Martial Law led to a wave of unionisation. Many of these labour leaders were independent of the older, more established, and more middle class trade union leadership. In certain areas of Lahore such as Kot Lakhpat, some of these labour leaders themselves formed

“local, informal structures of power that self-avowedly claimed to be alternatives to those controlled by the PPP” (Malik, 2018: 837). In Karachi, a new wave of workers’ agitation began demanding the release of still incarcerated workers and backpay owed by employers due to lockout of workers during the 1968-69 movement and during the 1971 war. Bhutto’s pre-campaign rhetoric against capitalists had fired up the workers’ imagination and slogans such as “*nikal jao sarmayadaron, Pakistan hamara hai*” [Capitalists get lost, Pakistan is ours!] were exceedingly popular (ibid: 831). A real sense of possibility permeated the air.

In power though, faced with economic crisis and the considerable feudal element within his own party, Bhutto warned the workers to back down lest “the strength of the street meet the strength of the state”. The workers in Karachi however had been radicalised and were led by federations such as the MMF (in SITE area) and the Labour Organising Committee (in Landhi-Korangi Industrial Area) comprising shopfloor leaders, leftist intellectuals, and radical students. In March 1972, workers at Zaibtun Textile in SITE went on strike for reinstatement of dismissed colleagues and against forced lockout by the owners. On 28th March a spontaneous strike of 200,000 workers brought the entire SITE area to standstill (Ali, 2005: 90). Police retaliated with aerial firing and six labour leaders were arrested. The government meanwhile was hardening its stance through the state media, accusing industrialists of provoking strikes due to Bhutto’s nationalisation policy, and raising the ever-present spectre of “foreign conspiracy”. The confrontation came in June 1972, when management at Feroz Sultan Textile Mills in SITE refused backpay to workers. Police came in and locked the gates trapping some workers inside. By late afternoon, 5000 workers from the SITE area and nearby workers’ colonies had encircled the factory. Stones were thrown at the police, and the police opened fire. Three people died, and more firing on the funeral procession next day killed ten more, including a small child (ibid:

91-92). A wildfire strike spread all over Karachi, the city was shut down for almost a month and there were solidarity actions by workers all over Pakistan.

A Joint Action Committee of labour leaders and workers in Karachi negotiated with the government on issues such as accountability for police violence and civic facilities for workers' colonies. Mixed signals were being received from the government, due to competing fractions within the PPP (including those in favour of the workers, such as the student leader Mairaj Mohammad Khan and Labour Minister Abdul Sattar Gabol). The government's proposals were put forward in front of an *awami adalat* (People's Court) where much confusion reigned due to differing visions of the trajectory of the workers' upsurge and, not least, due to the competition between different leftist groups (Ali, 2005: 93). The developing situation however did not stop there. The Labour Organising Committee (LOC), pro-China like the MMF in SITE but distinct from it⁷³, had been organising workers in the Landhi-Korangi Industrial Area. In September 1972, the LOC had pulled off a series of coordinated, daily two-hour token strikes to protest dismissal of union leaders. In face of government intransigence, the workers' demands became increasingly radicalised. In October 1972, workers occupied two of the biggest factories in Landhi-Korangi: Dawood and Gul Ahmad (close to 12000 workers combined). Managers and supervisors were thrown out, workers managed the raw materials, ran the factories and stored the product in the warehouses (A. Hassan, Skype interview, Dec 2, 2018; S. Baakda, personal interview, Feb 28, 2018). A flurry of communication between different left groups, LOC leadership, and pro-labour elements within the PPP failed to produce a compromise. Eventually,

⁷³ The LOC had linkages to the underground pro-China group of the Communist Party, while the MMF was not directly linked to any communist party/group but retained a broad pro-Chinese outlook. These affiliations however are difficult to trace due to several reasons, including the underground nature of most CP groups and individuals, and the protagonists' continuing reluctance to clearly talk about these links. I am grateful to former CP member and historian Aslam Khwaja for helping me navigate through the various divisions and left groups in Karachi during these decades. We will discuss these divisions in greater detail in an upcoming section.

between 18th and 19th October, paramilitary personnel, along with the army and police, used bulldozers to enter the factories and fire on the workers (ibid). Days and months of repression by the government followed. The military action in Landhi-Korangi heralded the death-knell of the labour movement in Karachi and Pakistan.

While we will look at the ensuing repression on the labour movement in Karachi in more detail in the next section, it is important to note here what the upsurge of 1969 to 1972 meant to the workers themselves. As indicated earlier, a new generation of labour leaders and student radicals had emerged in the preceding anti-Ayub protests. New imaginaries of social alliances, workers' control, and a future era of prosperity had been forged during struggle. This was evident during my interviews with workers and labour organisers from different sides of the Sino-Soviet divide. Messengers sent to union leaders in the occupied Dawood Mills returned with the organisers inside expressing helplessness in front of the workers. Khizar Hayat [also known as Khizar Kainaati], an office bearer of the Dawood union, sent back a message saying that if he asks workers to finish the occupation "*meri shalwaar utar jaye gi*" ["my pants will come off", an evocative way of saying that he will lose face completely and will face utter humiliation] and that workers will call me "*buzdil*" and "*darpok*" [coward and fearful] (S. Baakda, personal interview, Feb 28, 2018⁷⁴). Another messenger reported that workers had formed an "*inqilabi morcha*" [revolutionary bunker] inside. In an earlier occupation, in Valika Mills in SITE, one worker had made a "*teen ki tope*" [a tin cannon], placed it on the roof of the mill, and manned it vigilantly in order to scare off police-wallahs!

Major factories in SITE and Landhi area in 1972 proudly bore red and black flags. In fact, these flags were a source of great symbolism and strength for the workers. The unfurling of these

⁷⁴ Bakda himself was a union leader in an American multinational's factory in the Landi-Korangi area, but his union's federation was affiliated with the pro-Soviet wing of the Communist Party.

flags would herald the beginning of a strike and would signal to other workers in the industrial area to unfurl their own flags and/or converge on the flag-bearing factory for solidarity actions (Sabira personal interview, Apr 18, 2018)⁷⁵. Many of the new shopfloor leaders had been participating in study circles held by militant federation leaders and radical students in the offices of respective federations and in workers' colonies. A female worker, Sabira, in the Johnson & Johnson factory (an American multi-national) recalled how one day the District Superintendent [DSP] of the police Ansar Burney came to the factory, called up the union leader, and demanded that the flag be taken down. A police wallah got up on the roof and started taking down the flag. Sabira remembers some female workers going to the union leader and asking him "are you asleep? Can you not see what is happening?". With the "*sharminda*" [embarrassed] leader being silent, workers took their own initiative. One worker went up to the roof and took the chair out from under the policeman who was taking the flag down. The workers – and Sabira emphasised here "both male *and* female" – then formed a human shield against the DSP who was standing outside the factory and supervising the flags' takedown.

In another incident, Sabira remembered that the management had got workers to build a special staircase leading up to their office from the factory floor. Top-quality "Burma-tick" wood was used along with marble for this and the officers subsequently designated this staircase for exclusive use for themselves. One day, a "*farmanbadar chapraasi*" [an obedient janitor] Chacha Sultan was called by one of the officers and, in a hurry, he took the carpeted route up. In response, Chacha Sultan was dismissed. The workers – already smarting from management's discriminatory practices and radicalised by study circles and corner meetings on "*Amreeki Samraaj*" [US imperialism] – decided to hold a protest on top of that very staircase. Police had

⁷⁵ Name has been changed due to reasons explicated earlier.

been called by management in response. Sabira recalled that the rage on this “*Firauniyat*” [Pharaonic-ness] of the management was such that they started trampling the carpet with their own feet. Up and down they went, over a hundred workers, male and female, “girls and men were jostling with each other, but we did not care”. “We didn’t even realise what we were doing, but this was made by our hands, and now we were the ones not allowed on it!”. The carpet’s four-inch screws came out and were strewn all over. The police watched helplessly. Here again, Sabira emphasised how the barrier between male and female broke down. This was transgression, not just against the spatial and social hierarchies, but also against prescribed norms gender interaction.

A prominent female trade unionist of the time, Kaneez Fatima (associated with the Bhashani-CR Aslam group of NAP), narrated other instances of female proletarian action. For example, she recalled leading a *jalsa* of “*burqa-posh*” [burqa-clad] women in Empress Market in heart of downtown Karachi over issues of residence for refugees. Fatima claims that the District Commissioner was first afraid as “so many burqa-clad women had never been before in protest”, and threatened to clamp down on them [Fatima was later banished from Karachi along with several others labour and student leaders] (K. Fatima, personal interview, Apr 29, 2018)⁷⁶. Similarly, an upsurge in the working-class localities of Lyari (Karachi’s oldest neighbourhood) over civic issues and against threats to eviction, led to Bhutto visiting the area during his election campaign with the promise of securing tenure for the residents (Gazdar and Mallah, 2013: 7). Lyari, historically the breeding ground of many prominent radicals of Karachi, has remained a stronghold of the PPP ever since.

⁷⁶ Gendered divisions of labour and forging subjectivity among workers have been a major thread running through the labour movement and working class culture in Karachi. We will explore the role of these on the trade union movement in greater detail in an upcoming section of this chapter. Gendered divisions of labour – and the forms of labour control, consciousness, and organisation emanating from such – will also be explored in our discussion of home-based workers in the next chapter.

Similarly, when the Joint Action Committee in SITE had taken the government's proposals to the People's Court in June 1972, they were accused by some with slogans of "*khoon beicha, paani liya*" [you sold our blood and got only water]. During the same strike, when a visiting leader of the Maoist Mazdoor Kissan Party Afzal Bangash⁷⁷ began his speech with the declaration "Everywhere there is a *qatl-e-aam* [mass murder] of Pashtuns", the workers (most of them Pashtuns themselves) shouted him down as they did not want to listen to speeches which divided them along lines of ethnicity. Karamat Ali, a leader of the SITE-centered MMF, recalled that they tried to reason with the workers as the MKP was a major leftist party, but they refused to let Bangash speak. The workers had taken over the colonies, prevented police from coming in, and *mazdoor* committees had been formed every ten streets, then in an area, and so on (K. Ali, personal interview, Feb 16, 2018). These committees even tried to fashion culture in a more "progressive" direction through measures such as preventing drinking, dancing girls, and aerial firing during Pashtun weddings (these measures were taken as these practices had often led to in-fighting between workers). Thus, a wide cross-section of social groups in Karachi participated and articulated their demands during the 1969-72 labour upsurge, and issues of labour rights, residence, culture, and cross-ethnic class solidarity were being articulated.

Workers recalled seriously thinking that "*proletaari raaj*" [proletarian dictatorship] was just around the corner. The owner of Ahmad Foods was thrown by some workers in a boiling *karhaai* [cooking pot], others were locked up in factory bathrooms reserved for workers. It was a time of great chaos. Grand visions, workers' self-directed and autonomous activities, and

⁷⁷ The MKP's cadres at the time were waging an armed struggle against landlords associated with the NAP in parts of the NWFP province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, KP). This puts Bangash's "Pashtun" invocation into context. Testimonies from the time also tell of a tactical understanding between the MKP and Bhutto's federal government, as the Bhutto government also considered NAP its main adversary (Ahmed, 2010: 261). Notwithstanding, there is no doubt that peasants and the MKP fought valiantly and the movement resulted in genuine gains for the working poor (Ali, 2019).

competing imaginaries of the future jostled with each other. Workers took out solidarity rallies for the Viet Cong and demonstrated in solidarity with freedom fighters in South Africa and Guinea Bissau (Khwaja, 2016: 369). As Mairaj Mohammad Khan would recall many years later: “We were breathing in the century of revolutions”.

Coercion

The ruling classes of Pakistan were aware that such a wide and militant upsurge could not merely be pacified through tried and tested techniques of material incentives, corruption, and electoral concessions. As such, the first step in the disciplining of the working class turned out to be that of an unprecedented upsurge in repression. Due to the depth, intensity and scope of the preceding upsurge, the violence deployed to tame the labour movement was wide-ranging, multi-pronged, and highly sustained. While the initial (and probably decisive) blows of repression were delivered during the regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, these not only set the tone for but also heralded the brutal dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq. Moreover, these measures were an integral part of the commencement of the first phase of passive revolution as identified in the last chapter. The coercive pacification of labour was indispensable if the ruling bloc was to come out of the deep political, ideological, and economic crisis it was facing after more than a decade of dictatorship and the secession of more than half the country.

Workers and prominent labour organisers maintain that the firing on workers in SITE (June 1972) and the subsequent operation in Landhi-Korangi (in October) heralded the downfall of the labour movement in Karachi and Pakistan. The repression of the LOC strike in Landhi-Korangi especially is remembered by all as a particularly dark chapter in their lives. As Shabaan Bakda recalled, in addition to cutting off the gas and electricity, ambulances waited outside the Dawood

and Gul Ahmed Mills, while the media was barred from the area, indicating that the government had already set its mind on inflicting casualties. Aziz-ul-Hassan, who was a union leader inside Dawood and the major leader of the LOC, confirmed this and said that the government was hell-bent on doing a “*safaya*” [total cleanup] of the labour movement starting from the LOC. The bulldozers came from two sides and entered the occupied mills. Official reports claim there were four dead and more than fifty injured but eyewitnesses differ on this (Ali, 2005: 99). The security forces took most of the dead bodies to bury them on their own. Some labourers and union leaders took up position on top of a small hill in nearby, where police did an operation three days later and killed three more workers. Bakda, who used to live in the Korangi area, recalls that when he went to Gul Ahmed a few days later, there were at least 250 bicycles there lying unclaimed since the operation. Aziz, Khizar, and the other leaders within the mills barely escaped with their lives by donning the *chowkidar* [uniform] and jumping over the back wall which was adjacent to some workers’ residence.

This episode remains a source of much debate and controversy within the labour movement in Karachi to this day, and individuals associated with different groups have different takes on it. Individuals from the pro-Soviet groups sometimes accuse the pro-China LOC people (some of whose colleagues were also in the PPP) of being agent provocateurs on behalf of Bhutto’s aim to crush/tame the labour movement. This of course is quite far-fetched. Others, such as those from the MMF in SITE (also pro-China), put it down to an excess of ideologism, lack of a long-term vision/strategy, and – with the benefit of hindsight – look at the occupation as premature (K. Ali, personal interview, Feb 16, 2018). Other leftist groups had thought that, in the aftermath of the 1971 debacle, the Pakistani state had become weakened and a 1917-type moment was fast approaching. The leaders of this group, such as Rasheed Hassan Khan, were also in favour of a

“Naxalite” strategy for revolution and thus, an insurrectionary moment was seen as a promising pathway for wider change (Leghari, 1979: 168-9). More prosaically, union leaders inside the mills such as Aziz-ul-Hassan, maintain that their hand was forced by the actions of the government who had already decided to use violence against the workers. All they (the workers and LOC) intended through the occupation was to have their Charter of Demands accepted, reinstatement of retrenched workers, and an end to further vengeful steps against the workers. Of course, as the testimony of Khizar Kaainati and others mentioned in the last section show, the workers inside the factory were also radicalised and thought of their aims as greater than some demands. Moreover, it was also not envisaged that Bhutto’s “pro-worker” government would carry out such an action against labour.

Whatever the reality to these different accounts, there is no doubt that the October operation and subsequent coercion came as a fatal blow to the labour movement. The Bhutto government went after active workers and labour leaders with a vengeance. Industrialists, taking their cue from the Bhutto government’s hardening stance, embarked on further rounds of retrenchment while employment became increasingly difficult for prominent/notorious organisers. All the major LOC leaders were soon arrested. The government also went after organisers and active workers affiliated with other groups such as the MMF. At least three thousand workers were arrested from the Landhi-Korangi area alone during the LOC crackdown (Salar, 1983: 23). Sabira remembers that one day they received news that a high-level meeting of officials from the police, district bureaucracy, and the American consulate had taken place in the Managing Director’s house. This was conveyed to them by the gardener who used to work at the MD’s house. Subsequently, the union leaders of Johnson & Johnson (several of whom were

close to the pro-Moscow NAP) were charged for disorder by the newly established National Industrial Relations Commission (NIRC).

Shabaan Bakda, who had by now married an Urdu-speaking female worker, was dismissed from employment. Falling upon hard times, he recalled how even his wife was refused employment due to her association with him. He grew a disguise beard, moved from Landhi-Korangi to SITE area, and there found a job as dishwasher in the National Motors canteen through an old union contact. Having been dismissed and in disguise, he had to produce fake references from the Sindh Islamia Hotel (where he had family friends) and the Pakistan International Airlines (again through a former union contact) to secure the dishwashing job. Bakda's wife ultimately found a permanent job through the help of sympathetic workers in a pharmaceutical factory. The owners who knew her as the underground Bakda's wife would dismiss her periodically to avoid making her permanent. However, union sympathisers surreptitiously punched her card enough times that she could not be legally denied permanency. Thus, while small acts of solidarity and class consciousness continued in the everyday life of workers, the institutional structures of working class militancy and autonomy were being degraded.

The 1972 operation was also the first time after the 1971 debacle that the army and paramilitary forces were deployed again (A. Hassan, Skype interview, Dec 2, 2018). The military, which had finally gone back to barracks after more than a decade of martial rule, was allowed a way back into public life after their humiliation in East Pakistan. Subsequently, Bhutto also dismissed the NAP's coalition government in Balochistan on the pretext of a "conspiracy" to break Pakistan. This heralded the beginning of an armed insurgency in the province and the military was called up again to quell the rebellion. The NAP was subsequently banned and its

prominent leaders embroiled in the Hyderabad Conspiracy case. In addition to letting the military back into public life and increasing its legitimacy, Bhutto formed a paramilitary force called the “Federal Security Force” which was personally answerable to him. Opponents, party sympathisers (such as Tufail Abbas of the pro-China CP), and even party dissidents (such as the prominent leftist leader Mairaj Muhammad Khan) were arrested and tortured. The crackdown on NAP resulted in even more leftists and labour leaders ending up in Bhutto’s jails. By 1975 the labour upsurge was all but over. Karamat Ali of the MMF estimates that at one point out of Karachi Central Jail’s capacity of 1400 prisoners, 1200 of those incarcerated were workers, trade unionists, and activists associated with the NAP and other left groups (Ali himself was one of them).

Having cut the (progressive) ground from under his feet, Bhutto was forced to first turn to the landlords and then to the religious Right to shore up the weakening basis of his rule. It was not to end well for either Bhutto or the left in Pakistan. In a prophetic article in 1974 titled “Signposts to a Police State”, Eqbal Ahmad (a member of the Harrisburg Seven and a veteran of the Battle of Algiers) predicted that developments under the Bhutto regime “constitute a qualitative shift toward the regimentation and institutionalisation of terror... to a fascist polity” (Ahmad, 1974: 444). In 1977, after accusations of rigging in an election, an anti-Bhutto mass movement of right-wing and petty bourgeoisie elements commenced (amalgamated into the Pakistan National Alliance, PNA). This was supported by key sections of capital and the landlord class, who had been frightened by Bhutto’s plans for an impending second round of nationalisation and land reforms. Many of the pro-state labour federation leaders, the only ones who were not either underground or in Bhutto’s jails, were corralled into an anti-Bhutto collective Pakistan Labour Alliance (PLA). Many industrialists even gave their employees paid

days off to encourage participation in anti-Bhutto demonstrations (K. Ali, personal interview, Feb 16, 2018). With labour quiescent, the Left beaten and incarcerated, and American imperialism extremely displeased by Bhutto's increasing "Third World"/Muslim "bloc" rhetoric, the army stepped in again under General Zia-ul-Haq. The PLA lent its support to the martial law. Several of its top leaders were rewarded with seats in Gen Zia's phoney, "nominated" parliament [*Majlis-e-Shoora*] (Amjad-Ali, 1995: 91-2).

The Zia era heralded a new and renewed round of repression for the labour movement. Political activity was banned and unions in key sectors were disbanded by including them under the "Essential Services Act". Martial Law Order no. 5 banned all trade union activity. Capitalists, emboldened by the Zia regime, began mass layoffs of workers. On 26th December 1977, a tri-partite labour conference was held during which General Zia announced that his government will provide lawyers to workers laid-off by employers (Khwaja, 2016: 373). Within a week, workers in the Colony Textile Mills in Multan held a sit-in for the payment of enhanced bonuses which had been guaranteed to them under the previous labour policy. This was one of the most profitable mills in the country and employed over thirteen thousand workers. A Mazdoor Action Committee (Workers' Action Committee) and the CBA⁷⁸ Peoples' Labour Union partially succeeded in negotiations with local administration, Labour department representatives, and Martial Law authorities. However, the issue of strike pay was still unresolved and on 2nd January 1978 during the afternoon shift change, workers gathered in front of the mill-gate for an informational meeting (ibid: 376). General Zia, who was in Multan at the time to attend the wedding of the mill owner's daughter, got wind of the gathering and was told by the mill

⁷⁸ The IRO 1969 and subsequent labour policies institutionalised the presence of multiple unions within an establishment, with workers allowed to elect one as a CBA (Collective Bargaining Agent) for negotiations with owners and state representatives. This was part of the process through which labour militancy was muted, and will be elaborated upon in the next section.

administration that the workers intended to disrupt/attack the wedding. Police was given the go ahead to baton-charge the meeting. Workers threw stones, and the police retaliated with firing. The firing continued for three hours. A stampede followed. The state media reported 18 dead and 25 injured. Workers themselves estimated over 200 dead. The Mazdoor Action Committee put the figure at 133 dead and over 400 injured (ibid: 378).

In 1979, workers of Karachi Shipyard went on a strike over termination of colleagues. The Union, led by the prominent female trade union leader Kaneez Fatima (previously associated with the pro-China NAP), held a procession heading towards the Tower landmark of Karachi. Here, they were greeted by a huge contingent of police and, in Fatima's estimate, the greatest amount of tear-gas ever used in a single incident in the history of Pakistan (K. Fatima, personal interview, Apr 29, 2018). Subsequently, seven thousand workers (including Fatima) were dismissed with the stroke of a pen. The Zia martial law sounded the death-knell not just for the labour movement, but also went after allied social groups such as journalists and students. With labour quiescent and disillusioned from Bhutto, students and journalists were among the first constituencies to agitate against the martial law. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists led by Minhaj Barna (elder brother of the student leader Mairaj) offered valiant resistance. Hundreds of journalists were arrested, dozens were flogged publically (Kalra and Butt, 2019). Top student leaders were arrested, second-tier activists were flogged, more than a dozen students from one medical college in Karachi alone were banished from the province of Sindh (Javed, 2017: 16). Poets such as Ahmed Faraz and Fehmida Riaz, and intellectuals such as Aijaz Ahmad, were either forced out of the country or went into voluntary self-exile. In a sham trial, Bhutto was indicted for the murder of a party rival and was hanged in April 1979.

For the ordinary workers and militant labour leaders of Karachi, who had lived and led the years of post-1968 insurgency, the travails of the Bhutto and subsequently the Zia era heralded a deep-seated feeling of disappointment and betrayal. As mentioned above, many had already been arrested and tortured. Those who managed to escape suffered from a great sense of loss and almost a complete loss of the coordinates of their social life, activity, and imagination. These young men (for they were, with honourable exceptions, mostly men) had spent the prime of their lives dreaming and agitating for a better, more just social order. Instead what they had ended up with was a fickle “saviour” in Bhutto and then a fascist in Zia to rescue the impending crisis of state and capital. Aziz-ul-Hassan of the LOC narrated how, after the Landhi operation, many of the most prominent workers just resigned and left for their villages. According to Hassan, this was due to the “workers’ sense of dignity” due to which they could not bear to face their colleagues with whom they had forged big dreams and planned such grand actions. Usman Swati⁷⁹, who had been a shopfloor leader in a hosiery mill in the SITE area, narrated that workers became “*tittar bittar*” [completely dispersed and broken] in the aftermath of Bhutto’s repression (U. Swati, personal interview, Feb 20, 2018). Some went to their villages, others (after not finding jobs in a worsening economic situation) took the route of the Middle East where a petrodollar-fuelled construction boom was just beginning. Much of this had to do with the sense of betrayal so many workers felt from Bhutto and the PPP. Much hope had been invested by the working class in the PPP’s socialist rhetoric. The dashing of those dreams and the subsequent martial law killed off the morale of the new, militant leadership which had emerged through the 1960s and 1970s. Karachi’s labour movement would never again reach the heights of militancy attained in those heady days. The long Thermidor had begun.

⁷⁹ Name changed.

Trasformismo

With coercion having dampened labour militancy, concerted mechanisms of transformism/*trasformismo* were deployed to absorb the labour upsurge into a changing historical bloc. This represented an attempt on the part of the ruling bloc to disperse working class action tending, potentially, towards an “integral autonomy” i.e. one involving subaltern social groups’ independent hegemonic apparatuses within the ambit of a reconstituted civil and political society. A process of “gradual but continuous absorption” took place, “achieved by methods which varied in their effectiveness... even of those who came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile” (Gramsci, 1971: 59). In any hegemonic project, even a weak one as passive revolutionary projects inevitably are, coercion alone cannot explain the pacification of oppositional and insurgent social groups. As such, it is important to understand the exact modalities of incorporation and absorption through which the preceding insurgency of the working class was dispersed and pacified in post-1970s Pakistan. Here, the specific mechanisms of *trasformismo* involved an amalgam of “legal” methods (and thus, a recalibration of the dynamic relation/boundary of civil and political society) and material incentives. It is to these modalities of passive revolution and *trasformismo* that we will turn to in this section.

Here it is important to understand how the structure of labour laws and interest arbitration mediated the agonistic absorption of elements of the labour movement in Pakistan⁸⁰. As mentioned earlier, the Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO) 1969 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. A key measure

⁸⁰ I am grateful to Karamat Ali (formerly of the MMF and current Executive Director of PILER) and Nasir Mansoor for explaining the structure of labour laws to me.

instituted in the new IRO was the need to identify an “employer” for the formation of a trade union. This allowed for two things: firstly, it legitimised the presence of more than one union within a single establishment/enterprise; secondly, the measure also – albeit indirectly – prevented the formation of industry/sector-wide unions. As such, while allowing multiple unions within a single establishment was seemingly a democratic move, in a context of changing balance of forces, it effectively turned into a tool for manipulation by owners, political forces, and the state bureaucracy to entrench their interference at the shop-floor level.

Additionally, a cap of 25% was put on the number of “outsiders” in any union, subsequently reduced to 20% in some provinces after the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010 (Awan, undated). This too had the effect of restricting the ambit of unionisation to enterprise-level negotiations and thus, hindering wider institutional mechanisms of solidarity and collective negotiation. Outsiders – often labour lawyers, federation leaders, middle class sympathisers, and/or former employees dismissed due to union activity – have always been a key part of trade unionism in South Asia. The elaborate legal framework of trade unionism, by channelling confrontation into long-drawn procedures of negotiation, institutionalises the role of educated, often middle class, trade unionists and lawyers. Restricting the number of outsiders prevented industry-level bargaining structures. For example, if five factories form a union together, the total number of “outsiders” (i.e. those not under the ambit of one employer) comfortably exceed 25%. Crucially, the outsider restriction and the requirement to identify the “employer” also prevents incorporation of “informal” workers within bargaining structures. “Informal” workers, who can be temporary workers within the same establishment or home-based workers, are both “outsiders” and (in the latter case, especially) often unable to

identify an “employer” due to multiple levels of sub-contracting. As such, the legal structure of industrial relations contributed to differentiation and division among workers.

Among the multiple unions within a workplace, referenda were to be held every two years to election the CBA union (Collective Bargaining Agent). In an era of the re-assertion of state and capital’s power, this was a requirement honoured more often in its breach than its implementation. The IRO also institutionalised the tri-partite mechanism of labour dispute resolution with the representative workers on a committee comprising government/state officials and employers/capitalists. New institutions such as labour courts and the National Industrial Relations Commission were set up. Organisations such as the Workers and Employees Bilateral Council of Pakistan were also set up for greater cooperation between labour and capital. In the context of post-World War trade unionism in advanced capitalist countries, 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 the state and applications/notifications of strikes to be filed with labour department well in advance of the action. Thus, 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 must 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 community” or as “prejudicial to the national interest” (Section 35, GoP 2011)⁸¹.

⁸¹ GoP: Government of Pakistan

The curbs placed by IRO 1969 on unionisation in “essential sectors” (such as agricultural workers) are, by and large, in place even today⁸². Moreover, the Martial Law authorities (and subsequently, by civilian regimes as well) also used the “Essential Services Act” to sporadically curb union activity in certain sectors such as Railway open lines, banking, public utilities, and ordnance. Often, these proved to be precursors for and a way of testing the waters for privatisation of state assets (PWC, 1998 April 3). The combined effect of the institutionalisation of such a restrictive legal framework of trade unionisation, especially in an era of wider curbs on political activity and labour suppression, was a labour movement widely seen as suffering from a deficit of democracy. As Hamza Alavi described in the early 1980s, “an elaborate institutional structure [of industrial relations] ... enables the state bureaucracy to be directly involved at every stage in the management and manipulation of industrial relations” (Alavi, 1983: 56). As such, within the labour movement it established a privileged position and “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” (ibid: 56-7). This elaborate structure of curbs and negotiations served “to control, limit and manipulate working class militancy” and to co-opt the upper layers of the labour movement through devising pervasive mechanisms of control at almost *every* level of labour activism.

In fact, in both the archives of PILER and in my experiences and conversation with labour organisers, there is a general recognition of the effect of such deep-level penetration of the state in industrial relations. This has resulted in what one labour organiser described to me “a massive jungle of laws and rules” (N. Mansoor, personal conversation, Nov 14, 2017). A labour leader I

⁸² 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 passed a law legitimising unionisation of agricultural workers and the first trade union of *Haris* (peasants) was formed recently in affiliation with the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF).

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, 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.

In the archives of the labour movement at PILER, there is ample evidence of both the recognition of the problem presented by the prevailing legal-institutional regime and clues as to reasons for its continuity. Thus, for example in August 1999, a workshop of trade unionists from all over the country was conducted in Multan. The aim was to set an “Agenda for the Twenty-First Century” and the workshop newsletter records participants expressing concern over several issues (no author, 1999). Foremost among these is a concern over the current structure of trade unions being “un-democratic”, which excludes many different social groups such as unorganised and contractual workers, and women (as we will see in the next chapter, there is often a considerable overlap between the two) (ibid: 15). A participant also expressed concern about unions being cut-off from young people, this then leading to “a general lack of sympathy among wider public for the labour class” (ibid: 12). As such, a lack of wider socio-spatial hegemony and, in great contrast to the insurgent years, a lack of attraction for students and younger people are identified among key issues afflicting the trade union movement.

Accounts of rank-and-file leaders from this era also describe the mechanisms through which the legal-institutional structure co-opted prominent individuals associated with the labour movement. This was done in a manner which promoted individuals at the expense of the collective movement and thus, served as a mechanism of “molecular transformism” (Gramsci, 1971: 58fn). Thus, Faseehuiddin Salar describes that in the absence of a right of recall or

mechanisms of CBA accountability, the CBA union is effectively a law unto itself in the intervening two years between referenda. In such a situation, it is quite easy for CBAs to be bought off by management, resulting in disillusionment of workers with the CBA union and formation of alternative unions in the same establishment. This results in workers on the same shop floor being divided permanently among separate factions, thus making the right of association and unionisation “practically ineffective” [*amlan ghair-mo 'sr*] (Salar, 1983: 15-16). Similarly, the suppression of the late Bhutto and then Zia eras, resulted in “political activists” being displaced from trade unionism while “the ones who are left are merely their’ [workers’] lawyers or in fact lawyers have stepped in to *guide* the workers” (ibid: 25, emphasis added). Again, there is an emphasis on the absence of militant leadership and the concomitant institutionalisation of a legalistic, top-down, and paternalistic mode labour-capital relation as opposed to the “bargaining from below” which had come to be a characteristic of the insurgent years.

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 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 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 file⁸³.

The lopsided incentive structures prioritising individuals and individualistic modes of negotiation can also be glimpsed in various sources. Thus, where there have been attempts at consolidation of trade union federations in the form of national or sector-wide confederations, these have often floundered due to bitter acrimony between established federation leaders. Accusations range from those of corruption, power grabbing, and being an “NGO”. Other federation leaders see the labour movement being “not mature enough” for wider-level consolidation while invoking their own status “as a responsible trade union federation” which has ensured “only two legal strikes where our unions are present” (Lodhi, Letter, 2002 Dec 28; Awan, Letter, 2003 Jan 4; Fatima, undated). Whatever the reality of these exchanges of accusations, and beyond the merely moral condemnations of “ill”-intention or –character, it is obvious from the records that the current model of trade unionism tends towards the consolidation of individualistic tendencies and personal cliques. These are often based on differential access to various officials in influential political parties and the state bureaucracy.

The consolidation of individualistic modes of labour-capital negotiation has in turn been facilitated by Bhutto-era reforms to the civil service. These reforms, through introducing regional quotas, aimed to break the “iron cage” of the (post-)colonial bureaucracy, and have led to an increasing rhizome-like enmeshment of the bureaucracy within the ambit of civil society and prevailing social identities. Here, owners often use their contacts in the labour bureaucracy to circumvent the legal requirement of having a union in any establishment over 10 or more

⁸³ We will discuss this in more detail in the following sections.

workers. Fake unions, colloquially known as “pocket 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* [labour contractor/middle-man] 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 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 to hold a genuine election. Thus, even the process of forming genuine unions, is predicated on access to the state bureaucracy and potentially introduces a hierarchy even before any kind of meaningful horizontal solidarity has begun on the factory floor.

Related to the promotion and formation of personal cliques has been the provision of material incentives that further entrench said individualistic modes of action. In addition to the previously mentioned closeness to employers promoted by the current structure of industrial relations, this can take several forms including embezzlement of state-provided funds and/or concessions obtained through closeness to state and party elites. Favours bestowed upon selected labour leaders extended to several prominent members of the Pakistan Labour Alliance (formed during the anti-Bhutto agitations) being made members of Gen Zia’s “selected” parliament (Amjad-Ali, 1995: 91-2). That labour leaders consented to this at a time when fundamental political rights, including those of trade unions, were suspended due to various martial law regulation, was nothing short of dark humour. Several labour leaders were also awarded land to

develop “workers’ colonies” as a form of affordable housing for the working class. As real estate speculation has become a major source of accumulation for the ruling classes and emergent middle classes, this proved to be a major avenue for embezzlement of funds and for fostering clientelistic relations between political and labour elites. Thus, for example, in one such “workers’ colony” in Karachi, the cheapest, smallest (120 sq. yards), unbuilt plot of land I could find after inquiry would cost between 3.3 million to 3.5 million rupees (about \$25,000). By contrast, the government-stipulated minimum wage in Pakistan is 16,200 rupees (about \$120) which – as we will see in the next chapter – is again honoured more in its breached than compliance.

Relatedly, coercion and the increasing institutionalization of a clientelistic form of politics also served to disperse the working class. For example, Bhutto’s top-down form of nationalisation and civil service reforms resulting in greater enmeshment of bureaucratic and societal structures, provided ample opportunities for clientelistic politics through hiring and firing of political appointees in public sector institutions. While regional quotas within the bureaucracy and the state sector worked as affirmative action, they also privileged solidarity along “vertical” lines of sociability (such as ethnicity and, more importantly, access to influential politicians, state functionaries and labour bureaucrats). For example, the Pakistan Steel Mills in the early 1990s had 3800 employees who existed merely on paper, with the salaries going straight to the *Mohajir Qaumi Movement’s* [MQM] headquarters in Karachi, Nine Zero (Hasnain, 2016). Similarly, when the PPP was elected back into office after the restoration of civilian rule post-Gen Zia’s plane crash, the PM Benazir Bhutto formed a “Replacement Bureau” in the Pakistan International Airlines through which party sympathisers were recruited. While

many of these were based on the Airline's need and the candidates' professional competence, there was a substantial element of nepotism involved (A. Haider, phone interview, Dec 9, 2018).

Relatedly, from the Bhutto-era onwards, Pakistan's working classes also served as a form of cheap labour export for the construction boom in the Gulf countries. Due to economic downturn and Bhutto's increasing turn towards the Gulf monarchies as part of his plans to build an "Islamic bloc" of countries, migration of labourers was actively encouraged. During the Bhutto era, the number of workers migrating through just official sources, increased from two thousand per year to thirty thousand (Khwaja, 2016: 353). In the Zia era, this increased even further with millions now residing in the Middle East. For instance, in ten years between 1977 and 1987 more than US\$20 billion was remitted through official channels alone (Zaidi, 2005: 503). As such, out-migration and the institutionalisation of clientelistic politics served to disperse the working class and added to the *trasformismo* modality of labour incorporation during the Zia-ist phase of passive revolution.

In sum, the late Bhutto and Zia eras were defined by an unstable equilibrium of coercion and transformism through which the preceding era of labour insurgency was pacified, absorbed and incorporated into a changing historical bloc. Corruption, as Gramsci reminds us, stands "between consent and force... [and aims for] procuring the demoralisation and paralysis of the antagonist (or antagonists) by buying its leaders – either covertly, or, in cases of imminent danger, openly – in order to sow disarray and confusion in his [sic] ranks" (Gramsci, 1971: 80fn). Where *trasformismo* itself is representative of a (weakly) hegemonic order where both consent and coercion cannot be guaranteed and/or exercised fully, the promotion of corruption, fraud and embezzlement becomes a major mechanism of *trasformismo*. As such, where the more militant labour leaders were suppressed through coercion, another layer was coopted through

different modalities of transformism. Moreover, migration, clientelism and legal mechanisms worked towards “prevention of the emergence of competing (organised and institutional) perspectives” centered on the previously insurgent working class (Thomas, 2009: 150). The dispersion of working class activity through took the form of a “depoliticisation of politics – that is, the conversion of formerly expressly political debates into purely bureaucratic or technical questions” (ibid: 151). As such, the passage from an “economic-corporate” phase to a hegemonic one based on an “integral autonomy” of subaltern classes was blocked through the changing relation/boundaries between civil and political society within the ambit of the differentiated “integral state”.

Of course, such a periodization/schematization of the trade union struggle in Pakistan also leads us into the wider problem of the place of trade unions in the reproduction – or, as it may be, the disruption/overcoming – of capitalism. From Lenin to Luxemburg and Gramsci to Fanon, the role of trade unions in fostering (or preventing) wider class consciousness has been the subject of much debate in Marxist theory and practice. Thus, where Lenin’s characterisation of the “labour aristocracy” in the era of imperialism may dovetail with Fanon’s characterisation of the urban proletariat as a “sibling of comprador privilege”, others such as Luxemburg emphasized the role of crisis and general strikes as working above and beyond established organs of the labour movement to produce a broader class consciousness. Thus, while there is “a permanent tension” within the structure of trade unionism between mobilizing workers and disciplining them for bargaining agreements, a historical analysis of trade unionism from different contexts does not prove trade unions as an invariably positive promoter or a negative barrier towards broader class consciousness (Kelly, 1988: 166).

In fact, as John Kelly and Michael Burawoy have shown, it is the articulation of sectional demands with other sectors of militancy, the extent of social crises, and the dialectic of the sphere of production with ruling classes acting through the state, which have a decisive effect on the relations and rhythms of class consciousness and trade unionism (Kelly, 1988: 127, 145-6; Burawoy, 1988). Moreover, barring “exceptional” moments (such as the onset of revolution), the “outer limits” for trade unionism and the extent of working class autonomy are often set by the structural features of national capital and its insertion into the world-scale division of labour of capitalism (Kelly, 1988: 254). Therefore, stratification within trade unions and the labor movement does not lead to a secular trend towards inevitable “bourgeoisification”, but is more cyclical-dialectical depending on the materiality of working class organisations’ internal practices and their articulation with wider rhythms of state, space, and capital. While we have considered the articulation of the labour movement with the rhythms of state coercion and mechanisms of *trasformismo*, and (briefly) the insertion of Pakistan into world-scale capitalism and its effects on working class organisation, the latter will be discussed in more detail in the last section of this chapter and in the next chapter. It is the materiality of working class organisations and political apparatuses, and their effects on developing working class autonomy, that we will examine in the next section through a consideration of the question of organic intellectuals.

Organic Intellectuals

As discussed in Chapter 1, part of the passage from a position of subalternity towards an integral autonomy is an attempt by working classes to form a coherent “conception of the world”. This would entail the potential formation of the working class’s own “organic intellectuals” i.e. a stratum of individuals and organisation which could have preserved, elaborated and disseminated the autonomous and independent praxis of the working class (as a combination of consciousness

and practice). Any viable hegemonic project requires such a stratum of *practical* thinkers who can articulate a social group's consciousness and autonomy through the realms of the integral state i.e. forge a "boundary-traversing" hegemonic project across the spheres and spaces of civil and political society. That the working class in Karachi (and beyond) was unable to forge this stratum of organic intellectuals is a key explanation for its eventual defeat and supersession at the hand of the ruling bloc. It is exactly this process of the formation of organic intellectuals (or lack thereof) that we will examine in this section with reference to the example of the labour organiser and political worker Usman Swati.

For Gramsci, the definition of "intellectuals" cannot be confined to the professions conventionally defined as being involved in "intrinsically" intellectual activity. In fact, as far as "all men [sic] are intellectuals" (i.e. there is no activity in which thinking does not inhere), the definition must be broadened merely from those who "have in society the function of intellectuals". Thus, the definition of intellectuals must account for the "ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of relations" (Gramsci, 1971: 8-9). In context of this broad definition, Gramsci distinguishes between two types of intellectuals. Organic intellectuals provide a social group emerging "on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production... [with] homogeneity and an awareness of its own function in the social and political fields" (ibid: 5). Traditional intellectuals, on the other hand, seem to "represent a historical continuity... and put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group" (ibid: 7-8). Seen historically however, traditional intellectuals are those who acted as organic intellectuals during the rise of the current hegemonic class, and have now become institutionalized due to the said class's dominance. As such, traditional intellectuals – in

institutions such as the Church, media, bureaucracy etc. – are key mediators in the material and ideological reproduction of the prevailing hegemonic order.

What is important to note in Gramsci's definition is the importance given to organic intellectuals' changed role under capitalism. Thus, where capitalism effects a (real and illusory) separation of the economic and the political, the organic intellectual of a rising class must also be a "technical organiser" (Gramsci, 1926: 13). The new intellectuals' "mode of being" cannot be confined to a mere "mover of feelings and passions, but [must incorporate] active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent crusader'" (Gramsci, 1971: 10). While a class's productive activity produces "specialisations" among intellectuals, for the said class to concretise its hegemonic project over the differentiated integral state, its organic intellectuals "must have the capacity to be organisers of society in general, including all its complex organism of services, right up to the state organism" (ibid: 5). Thus, organic intellectuals mediate between the dialectic of the particular-universal: they serve as "mediating moments of transmission of a class's hegemonic project from one 'attribute' of the integral state to another, the agents of condensation of social forces into political power" (Thomas, 2009: 413). As such, in keeping with our problematic of the integral state, and the hegemonic/passive revolutionary projects therein, organic intellectuals are key organisers of the "boundary-traversing" project (i.e. between civil-political society and structure-superstructures) of any aspiring and/or potentially hegemonic social group.

For subaltern social classes, the problems of producing organic intellectuals are even more acute due to their lack of control over the means of production, dissemination (such as the media), and instruction (such as mosques, schools and colleges), through which mediation is achieved between the spheres and spaces of the integral state. In the *Southern Question*,

Gramsci's long meditation on the problems of social-spatial hegemony and intellectuals in Southern Italy, he recognizes that the proletariat "as a class, is poor in organising. It does not have its own stratum of intellectuals, and can only create one very slowly, very painfully" (Gramsci, 1926: 20). In such conditions, the role of a subaltern class's – potentially hegemonic – apparatuses (such as political parties, trade unions etc.) becomes even more pronounced as "nothing other than *their specific way* of elaborating their own category of organic intellectuals in the political and philosophical field and not just in the field of productive technique" (Gramsci, 1971: 15, emphasis added)⁸⁴. Therefore, in an asymmetrically structured social terrain, the social and political apparatuses of working class organisation are indispensable if the class has to transcend merely "economic-corporate activity... and become agents of more general activities of a national and international character" (ibid: 16). Moreover, in conditions of uneven development and attendant cleavages within subaltern social groups, organic intellectuals take on an added function of mediating subaltern apparatus's socio-spatial hegemony among different regional, linguistic, and/or ethnic fractions of the working class. As such, the problematic of organic intellectuals takes us to the heart of the question addressing working class apparatuses (such as communist parties), their relationship to the masses, and their practices with regards to "systematically and patiently" developing the capacity of working class subjects for "ensuring that this force is formed, developed, and rendered ever more homogenous, compact and self-aware" (ibid: 185).

In this regard, it is useful to examine the case of Usman Swati as an instantiation of the failure of left political formations in Karachi (and Pakistan generally) to elaborate and develop working class organic intellectuals, who could potentially have become mediators of a

⁸⁴ Here, Gramsci also delineates the role of the political party as "welding together" organic intellectuals with parts of existing traditional intellectuals in a bid for wider hegemony. We will return to the theme of traditional intellectuals in much more detail in a subsequent chapter on student politics in Karachi.

boundary-traversing hegemonic project. Usman Swati hails from a working-class Pashtun family who migrated to Karachi from rural Swat (in north-western Pakistan) in the early 1950s after his father became involved in a land and rent dispute with a relative⁸⁵. Swati's family was desperately poor and at the age of 10, his father instructed him to leave school and get a job. For the early morning, his father had assigned a duty him to get water out of a well for the local mosque as a way of earning heaven [*Jannat*]. For later in the day, Swati's elder brother found him a job in a hosiery mill for 50 rupees per month where he learned overlock work. After becoming skilled in this, he moved to Ghafoor Textile (near Valika Mills) and here, at the age of 16, become part of the consultative assembly [*Majlis-e-Ama*] of a wider hosiery mill workers' union which represented multiple factories. This was 1968 and, with the movement against Ayub Khan just beginning, Swati became embroiled in protests and demonstrations, going to jail for small infractions several times during these turbulent years.

In 1972, at 20, Swati had gotten a job at Paramount Hosiery and eventually became the union's General Secretary, despite being one of the few Pashtuns in a majority Urdu-speaking workforce. His work among labour impressed an old acquaintance who introduced him to Dr. Taj Mohammad, a "famous comrade" of Frontier Colony (in SITE), who was a provincial office-bearer of the Communist Party (pro-Moscow group). Having experienced poverty and hardship all his life, Swati became enthused about socialism and proletarian dictatorship through his interactions and study circles with Dr. Taj and other CP cadres. The immense tribulations of working class precariousness, and the tensions between the personal and political, may be gauged by an incident involving Swati's wife and daughter. In 1975, with him as General Secretary of the Paramount union, there was a workers' case in the labour court. His wife

⁸⁵ All information presented here is from detailed interviews with Usman Swati over February and March 2018. Name has been changed due to aforementioned reasons.

however begged for him not to go as his daughter was extremely ill. Ignoring her pleas, Swati recounts saying to her that “this is just one child, while with 260 workers, the bread and livelihood [*rozi roti*] of over 500 children is my responsibility [assuming 2 children per worker]”. Swati went to work and then to the labour court [at different ends of the city in Korangi and Gurumandir, receptively]. When he returned home late in the evening, “people were just returning from the graveyard. My daughter was already dead and buried by the time I got back”. Today, Swati thinks of this episode as epitomizing his “foolishness” [*himaqat*], but tells me about it as evidence of his passion [*jazba*] for the cause at the time: “at the time, I was thinking I was such a big *comrade*”.

Swati’s wife passed away soon after this tragedy, and he fell into a deep depression. To recover from this, he became part of the CP’s delegation from Karachi to help with the Pat Feeder peasant movement in Balochistan in 1977-78. The Pat Feeder movement had begun after General Zia’s regime had come to power, and the feudal lords aligned with it in the Temple Dera area of Balochistan tried to capture land from peasants (Khwaja, 2016: 4446). These lands had become peasants’ property due to land reforms in 1972, but Bhutto’s dismissal and the martial law had emboldened the feudals of the area. A peasants’ resistance had commenced after a landlords’ militia under Zafarullah Khan Jamali⁸⁶ had attacked peasants’ villages and the Levies paramilitary force had been deployed (ibid: 444). A CP delegation including Usmat Swati was sent to Temple Dera in February 1978 by the party’s *Mazdoor, Tulba, Kissan Awami Rabta Committee* [Workers, Students, and Peasants’ Coordination Committee]. They decided to hold a hunger strike in solidarity with peasants along with the local PPP workers to press the demands for accountability of peasants’ murder, release of arrested peasants, and removal of Levies forces

⁸⁶ Jamali would later become the titular Prime Minister of Pakistan in 2002, after another military coup under General Musharraf in 1999.

from the mustard crops. The delegation was soon captured by the Levies. They commenced a hunger strike in the Temple Dera lock-up, which ended in a few hours after the District Commissioner swore on the Quran to resolve the matter. Eventually, Swati and other comrades were shifted to Sibi jail where they were produced before a military court and handed sentences ranging from three months to a year.

Swati recalls the time spent around the sentencing and in jail as one where they gained respect of the locals and the inmates for their struggles on behalf of the oppressed. They were jailed in independent barracks and won several concessions from the jailers through internal unity and agitation. Once out of jail, Swati returned to Karachi to resume political activities. The locus of work having shifted under martial law, Swati recalls the trials and tribulations of General Zia's time. He recounts how they had to walk miles and miles through the SITE and Nazimabad area, then eventually get on a city circular tram, just to hold study circles and shake off the CID (Central Intelligence Directorates) operatives who followed them. He remembers with a mix of enthusiasm, amusement, and much disappointment the "maddening passion" [*jazba* and *junoona*] they had towards the communist cause. However, it was during this time that he began getting disillusioned with the policies of the party leadership. Specifically, the fate of his fellow comrades – such as Dr. Taj and several others – troubled him. Dr. Taj, who hailed from Dir in the north-western "tribal" areas, was being labelled a *kafir* [infidel] in the mosques of his native village for his "activities" in Karachi. When Dr. Taj returned to Dir to clear his name and expose the lies of the Mullahs, he was eventually killed by Jamat-e-Islami militants in the area acting under the instruction of the fundamentalist cleric Sufi Mohammad⁸⁷. Swati

⁸⁷ Sufi Muhammad would eventually become famous for leading a movement for the establishment of "Muhammad's Sharia" [Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi, TNSM] in Swat in the early 1990s. His son-in-law Mullah Fazlullah would go on to become chief of the Pakitani Taliban [Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, TTP] and was killed in a US drone strike in 2018.

remembers bitterly Dr. Taj having approached the party leadership for advice but none was forthcoming, and no one stopped him from going to Dir where he was eventually murdered. Another colleague of Swati in the CP was similarly snubbed when him and others tried to build an independent youth organisation in Karachi over to deal with civic issues and developing youth cultures (we will discuss this further in the chapter on youth and student politics). Under the pressure of martial law and the ongoing anti-Soviet jihad next door in Afghanistan, the CP in Pakistan underwent further splits. Disillusioned from politics, and like thousands of Pashtun workers, Swati left for Saudi Arabia to seek employment and spent the whole of the 1990s there. Today, he works as a low-level staffer in a small Urdu newspaper.

Regarding his association with the CP and the trade union movement, Swati remembers this as a time of great promise but also as bearing the seeds of its own downfall. He narrates how even after enduring great troubles for the cause, people like him in the party cadre were treated as mere pawns by the leadership. There are several ways in which Swati describes both the distance of the leadership from the base and the feeling of rank and file party workers feeling used and abused. One of the metaphors that Swati often uses was of being a “*baraati*” [someone who is part of a bridal party]. Swati relates this to the poor people in his village who, while having nothing to do otherwise, serve as carriers of the dowry and self-styled dancers and jesters at any wedding procession. The rich in the village would deliberately have the *baratis* carry the expensive furniture and other material from the bride’s dowry right through the middle of the village as a way of asserting and increasing their prestige. At the end of the day, the *baratis* themselves were mere pawns with their greatest solace being a proper meal at the end of the wedding. The problem of personality-centrism (*shakhsyat parasti*) and the tendency to form little cliques meant that working class individuals and organisers with Swati remained *baratis*:

curtailed in the independence of their own organisational creativity and forced to become appendages to the clique of this leader or that.

Swati blames this attitude of personality cults and insufficient trust in rank and file workers/organisers as the reason behind eventual splits of the party in the 1980s. He sarcastically calls the Politburo members of the party “Socrates” [*Suqraat*], “Hippocrates” [*Buqraat*], and “learned men” [*daanishwaran*]. Another term that he used regularly is that of the party’s “*Pandits*” [upper-caste, Brahmin learned men], who were more intent on keeping their party positions than in helping rank and file workers develop the organisation through grassroots work. As a result, Swati says that “today, just as I was when I started working, I am still child labour”. This is not just due to his wage, which is below that of minimum wage, but also because within the party the organizational and intellectual capacities of people like him were ignored. As a result, he spent the prime of his years in activism and jail, which did not even help him in making a decent living once he had left active politics. Today, the same “egoism” [*ananiyat*] has led to the CP being splintered in more than a dozen groups, with each split’s workers being like a “*kohlu ka bail*” [the ox which turns the oil-press]. As such the workers are likened to the ox which has its eyes blinkered and is tied to the oil press, while the party/faction leader is like the *taili* people [the oil gatherers]: “So the *bail* is driven one step at a time and you think that ‘I have started from Shershah [an area near SITE] and must have reached Nagar Phatak by now’; in reality however, they are just going around in the same circle. The *taili* is running his home with the oil that the *bail* [ox] is taking out, and the *bail* is getting grass and water, thinking he is on a journey. So right now, every person is a *kohlu ka bail*!”

As part of the *baraati qabeela* [the tribe of *baratis*/followers], Swati says that now the word “comrade” has come to bear a very negative meaning and denotes painful memories for

workers of his generation. The upper class and middle class party members were able to take care of “their own” [i.e. their family] and went to work in their professions, in NGOs or became “merchants of the grief and misery of workers” [as “established” trade union leaders]. However, people like Swati became like a “*kati patang*”, a kite which is cut off from its strings and left to the vagaries of the breeze, wind and storms. He now lives in a “slum” area in the center of Karachi, and apart from the newspaper work, spends his time reading in a small room donated to him in the area by an acquaintance [this is the room where we usually met and talked]. As such, Swati rues his “*himaqat*” [foolishness, overenthusiasm] for having lost his family, career and hopes as part of a movement which left people like him in a state of “child labour”. All through our long and meandering conversations, Swati was very keen on impressing upon me that he has not turned away from the *nazariya* [ideology], but is disillusioned and has lost heart [“*mein ne inhiraaf nahi kiya, mein bad-dil aur bad-zan hoon*”]. As a result, the word “comrade” which used to denote people of “a clean heart” and humanist [*insaan-dost*] leanings, has now become a word of sarcasm and humiliation for him [*tanz aur tehqeer*].

The disillusionment and sense of betrayal felt by Swati was not his alone. A majority of the rank and file workers involved with party work that I interacted with felt similarly. Not given enough space for their activities, facing suspicion, and feeling distant from decision-makers within the organisations, working-class organisers like Swati either fell into appendage-like/clientistic relationships with different factional leaders or became disillusioned with politics altogether. The better off ones joined professions or became assimilated in a growing NGO sector. Those like Swati, who came from working class backgrounds, and were both active and ideologically “developed”, fell into a no-man’s land: they understood the deep structure of politics, but cut off from the organs of the working class’s political apparatuses, were

left as *kati patangs* [untethered kites] at the mercy of the winds of economic compulsion and financial penury.

Of course, the failing of the parties was not merely down to the subjective whims of their leaderships. The CP in Pakistan had been historically hampered due to the cultural-social gap between the upper and lower tiers of the party. Post-Partition, most of the cadre of the CP – especially in Karachi – had been provided by Urdu-speaking migrants from India⁸⁸. Where much of the post-1950s proletariat came from upcountry areas (such as Usman Swati’s father), this introduced ethnic and class differences between the different tiers of the party. Moreover, the repression faced by the party from almost its very inception, and the resulting underground positions of most of the prominent leaders, bred not just suspicion but also distance between the rank-and-file and upper tiers. As Jam Saqi, a legendary leader of the CP who spent most the 1970s and 1980s “underground” recalled in late years: “The PCP [Pakistan Communist Party] never succeeded in building a mass base. Partly this was due to an excessive emphasis on underground work. They were buried so deep underground that the workers couldn’t see them. I think maybe the only people who knew where they were the police!” (Saqi, 2007).

The promotion of personality cults, factionalism, and authoritarian attitudes were – at least partially – a product of the circumstances in which left and working class political activity took place. In another scenario however, with parties and organisations structured more democratically and with a more organic dialectic between the leadership and the rank-and-file, individuals like Swati could potentially have played the role of organic intellectuals. i.e. one of a mediation whereby there is “a continual adaptation of the organisation to the real movement, a matching of thrusts from below with orders from above, a continuous insertion of elements

⁸⁸ An excellent account of the cultural politics within the CPP and wider progressive movement in the early years after Partition can be found in Kamran Asdar Ali’s *Communism in Pakistan* (see Ali, 2015).

thrown up from the depths of the rank and file into the solid framework of the leadership apparatus which ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experience” (Gramsci, 1971: 188-9). In effect, what took place – and continues to haunt left formations to this day – was the development of a debilitating generational (and cultural) gap. The new Left composed of individuals like Swati, a product of the rank and file convulsions of the 1960s and 1970s, could neither identify with nor could work with the old Leadership for long. They either put in their lot with the PPP, which proved to be a mirage and vehicle for transformism (Leghari, 1979: 158-9), while others like Swati – attracted to left-wing and communist organisations – became disillusioned and eventually, side-lined from politics. With no organic intellectuals to mediate and shape the workings of left-wing parties “from below”, a culture of disconnect, discontent, and defeat set in.

This disconnect grew with the fall of the Soviet Union and the growing trend of NGOs absorbing progressive activists in the 1990s. Middle and upper class activists became subjects of what Gramsci would term “cosmopolitanism”: a phenomenon of the peripheries and semi-peripheries where theory and practice “is not tightly linked to a vast local economic development which is artificially limited and repressed, but is instead the reflection of international developments which transmit their ideological currents to the periphery” (Gramsci, 1971: 116). Delinked from the ground of the “national-popular” due to their place in the world-scale division of labour, the local vagaries of state and capital, and the shortcomings of the potential apparatuses of working class culture and hegemony, such intellectuals tend to become a “caste” and a “crystallisation”⁸⁹. Reminiscent of the Catholic Church’s distinction between “intellectuals” and the “simple” in Gramsci’s day, progressive ideas and ideology became the

⁸⁹ We will be discussing intellectual and left cultures in greater detail in the chapter on student politics.

preserve of a stratum of intellectuals and social groups with only a “surface unity” with layers below (Green, 2018: 532). A specialised culture of “progressivism” was created among restricted intellectual groups drawn into networks of NGOs and various donor-funded “festivals”. While many of these organisations and individuals did important research and advocacy work, it also created pathways displaced from the *integral and independent organisational work* of subaltern masses (and thus, a further mechanism of *trasformismo*). With the eschewing of an immanent embeddedness in/reform of the “disjointed” and “episodic” common sense of the “simple”, an attitude of condescension and disconnect developed with regards to subaltern social groups, supposedly irredeemably tied to “primordial identities and practices” of ethnicity and/or religiosity (Gramsci, 1971: 324).

The diversity within the working class (as in Karachi) thus became a source not of their strength, but of cleavage and weakness. The party was unable to serve as a “cell” for developing the “germs of a collective will tending to become universal”, with the working class unable to develop its “boundary-traversing” organic intellectuals (ibid: 129). In the absence of a coherent “conception of the world” which would suture *both* the identity and difference in working class experience and practice into an integral unity, the faultlines within the working-classes became a source of their (literally, in the case of Karachi) weaponisation and absorption in projects of right-wing populism such as those which came to flourish in the city during General Zia’s regime and beyond. It is to these faultlines in working class experience and culture that we will turn to in the next section. This will then serve as means of understanding both the shortcomings of the left and, crucially, the generalisation and weaponisation of ethnicity as a mode of politics in the Karachi of the 1980s.

Faultlines

In this section, we will pinpoint the developing faultlines within the labour movement which – even during the high-era of left and labour politics in Karachi – introduced complexity to the oft-discussed narrative of a seamless/unified “working class”. While most protagonists of the high-era of the labour movement in Karachi remember it – not unjustifiably – as a time of unprecedented working class solidarity, it is imperative to understand the multi-variate sutures, contradictions, and faultlines within Karachi’s diverse working class which could lend themselves to different kinds of political alliances and projects. Here, considerations of gender, caste, and – especially in the case of Karachi – ethnicity are foremost. This not least due to the fact that it was ostensibly on the basis of “ethnicity” that later social-political projects in Karachi were articulated with devastating consequences for the vast majority of the city’s population.

To clarify, my intention here is neither to reify “ethnicity” as a static or “primordial” identity to which workers were indelibly attached, nor to set up a (moralistic) hierarchy of primacy between different social relations or between “good” and “bad” politics (such as that organised around class versus ethnic politics). In contrast, the aim is here to historicise and secularise the rhythms of class formation and, relatedly, denaturalise “ethnicity” in the case of Karachi. If class – *ala* Marx and Thompson – is a *historical process* and “a rich totality of many determinations and relations”, then it is inevitable that the process of proletarianisation and class formation is conditioned by subjects’ varied historical-geographical entry-points into the given socio-spatial terrain. Therefore, an examination of the rhythms of class, space and state formation in their imbrication with ongoing histories of land dispossession and uneven development, allows us to understand the mutually constitutive rhythms of varied social relations in Karachi/Pakistan. In keeping with Jacques Rancière’s call for attention to stratifications within

working class experience, our aim is to counter the temptation of “attach[ing] too much importance to the collectivity of workers and not enough to its divisions”, and thus to “rethink it [working class politics] outside any axioms of cultural homogeneity” (Rancière, 1983: 10, 14). Therefore, we begin here to historicise *difference* within the working-class milieu by relating it integrally to wider rhythms of state, space, and hegemony in Karachi and Pakistan (this discussion will also be taken up in the upcoming chapters on “informal” labour and on urban space).

A review of the existing literature on the labour movement, along with an against the grain reading of labourers and organisers’ accounts/interviews, provides ample evidence to the various developing faultlines and stratifications within the working class-in-formation in Karachi. While ethnicity was perhaps the most important of these mutually constitutive relations, the constitutive role of gender (or lack thereof) within the labour movement cannot be overemphasised even to this day. While we will be discussing the role of gendered labour in greater detail in the next chapter, some brief comments here are apposite. Unions have always been male dominated even in establishments and sectors that have a substantial presence of women (such as garments, pharmaceuticals, and electronics industries). Much of this has to do with the existing structure of industrial relations – and the prevailing patterns of trade unionism – in the country. Thus, with the increasing liberalisation of the economy, geographical dispersion of labour process (such as through sub-contracting) has become increasingly common. Here, home-based women workers are employed through multiple levels of subcontracting to offset labour costs and/or ensure in-time production. While the employment of women has increased since the 1980s, recruitment is often mediated through kinship and community networks, whereby ethnic segmentation of labour is reinforced. Within “formal” establishments, female workers are employed on an

“informal” basis – such as on contractual basis and/or without employment letters – as a deliberate means of introducing stratifications among workers. Moreover, women are mostly placed in low-paid and “low-skill” jobs thus resulting in stratifications within the labour process itself, which is tied to notions of masculinity, “proper” work, and to organising. As such, different kinds of labour regimes are imbricated with the production, promotion and reification of gendered difference within the production process.

In fact, accounts by trade unionists and labourers from the high era of the labour movement show that gender divides, while latent and non-overt, contributed to workers’ sense of self during work and in organising. For example, Johnson & Johnson employee Sabira’s account of gendered divisions on the factory floor – and their momentary overcoming during struggle – has already been mentioned above. While there are examples of prominent female trade unionists, such as Kaneez Fatima mentioned above, often these came from families with established associations with the left/labour movement (Kaneez Fatima’s brother and father were both prominent members of the pro-China NAP). Relatedly, Karamat Ali of the MMF also relates their struggles (and oversights) around the inclusion of women within the prevailing labour movement (K. Ali, personal interview, March 9, 2018). For example, during a convention of the MMF in 1972 in Karachi’s Kartrak Hall, some young female activists had published a pamphlet on the “women’s question” and distributed it among the attending delegates. However, “seniors” associated with the federation discouraged this activity as it was perceived to “divide” the working class.

The Zia martial law also mobilised gendered difference as a marker of its efforts to “Islamise” Pakistani society. Foremost among this was the passage of laws that relegated women’s testimony to half and made the processes of reporting gender violence completely

prohibitive. Moreover, arch-conservative religious clerics (such as Maulana Israr Ahmed, formerly of the JI) were given primetime slots on national television to pontificate on the “proper” place of a women in the home and on the “divine providence” of laws requiring four male witnesses to prove sexual assault. Karamat Ali recalls a labour convention in 1979 where a resolution was tabled against Ahmed’s anti-women rhetoric. While most resolutions at such conventions used to pass “unanimously”, this one created furore with many delegates declaring it a “religious issue” [*mazhabi masla*] and thus, by implication, not a labour issue. A debate ensued within the convention and the resolution was eventually passed by a margin of one vote. However, Ali recalls two Pashtun workers came up to him afterwards and said that while they did not agree with the proposed resolution, they only voted for it out of respect for Ali [*takay aap ki bey-izzati na ho jaye*]. While this may be another instance of a form of paternalistic relations between labour leaders and rank-and-file workers, it is also evidence of the gendered self-definition and constitution of working class subjectivities (we will discuss this further detail in our ethnographic account of male transport workers in the next chapter).

Such gendered differences – integrally related to the materiality of labour processes and production regimes above – can be seen to work against the constitution of truly democratic working class subjectivities even to this day. Thus, while women workers are an increasingly important part of the manufacturing workforce, their representation within trade unions remains abysmal. For example, a 1988 survey by PILER revealed that in ten factories with unions, only 160 women were union members with none being in leadership positions out of a total of 1446 women (35% of the workforce) (Parveen and Ali, 1996: 142). While women get involved in union work on the factory floor, after-work organising is difficult for them due to a combination of domestic “responsibilities” and prevailing reluctances regarding women’s “appropriateness”

(or lack thereof) for trade union leadership. Moreover, the “lower skill”/wage differentials and greater mobilisational barriers with regards to women workers on factory floor, have also led to a general ignorance towards women workers from established trade union organisations. This is due to the low level of financial contributions and lengthy legal-mobilisational efforts required to organise women within unions (ibid: 142-143). Women-only unionisation efforts have been proposed, especially for home-based workers, and will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

In fact, the functioning of capital itself generates an impetus to create and reproduce differences among workers based on race, ethnicity, gender etc. As Charles Post – drawing upon the work of Anwar Shaikh and Howard Botwinick – shows, the continual creation of a reserve army due to mechanisation and the competition between capitalist firms leads to differentiation in labour processes, wage rates, and profits (Post, 2017). In such a situation, both capitalists and workers can utilise ties of “race”, ethnicity, caste and/or gender as “a way of ordering the employment queue” (ibid). For capitalists, workers are ascribed or assigned different levels of skill, reliability, and/or docility along ascriptive and/or biological “characteristics”. While for workers, ascription to ties of ethnicity, gender etc., can serve as (meagre) protection against pressures from the reserve army of labour and from capital’s deskilling and differentiation through mechanisation and fragmentation of work. Capital thus creates the social ground for the production and reproduction of difference within the working class. In postcolonial contexts like Pakistan, such differentiations can draw upon historical sedimentations – and the concomitant common sense – of regional, ethnic, and gendered unevenness. “The regime of capital,” as Stuart Hall reminds us, “can function through differentiation and difference, rather than through similarity and identity” (Hall, 1986a: 437).

While we have touched upon the production of gendered difference briefly above, such mechanisms of differentiation with regards to the working of labour, state, and capital will be discussed in more detail in the case of home-based women workers in the next chapter. Moreover, the production of difference through “ethnicity”, along lines of linguistic and regional origin, has been – arguably – an even greater determinant of working class politics in Karachi. This has taken place through various factors, operating over multiple scales and temporalities, and having determinate effects on working class politics in Karachi. Thus, Karachi’s place as a migrant destination, especially in the post-Partition era, lent its working classes a diversity unknown in any other major metropolis in Pakistan. As discussed in the last chapter, Karachi’s development as a colonial port and military center, and its geographical positioning at the intersection of Balochistan, Sindh and the Bombay Presidency, played a crucial role in the development of occupational and ethnic patterns. In the pre-Partition era, the merchant and trader classes were drawn from Gujarati and Memon communities with origins in the neighbouring areas of Gujarat and Bombay. Skilled workers were often drawn from mostly-Hindu Mahrashtran communities, while unskilled labour in important infrastructure industries (such as ports, railways, and tram) were dominated by Karachi’s “indigenous” Makrani, Sindhi and Baloch communities (Shaheed, 2007: 30). With the onset of Partition, where there was a large out-migration of Hindus, the influx of Urdu-speakers and other communities with origins in North and Central India led to a rapid and substantial change in the city’s ethnicized social geography. Urdu-speakers, though not (yet) fashioned as an “ethnicity” as such, were generally better educated and had a more middle class character. Thus, while many parts of the Urdu-speaking community were adjusted in the new state’s bureaucracy, they were also well-represented among the skilled workforce in the developing manufacturing sector.

The post-Partition wave of industrialisation also saw the re-enforcement of previous patterns as traders from Gujarati, Memon and certain Delhi-origin communities came to form the backbone of the newly emergent capitalist class. Where the bulk of the labouring class for these industries was provided by up-country migration into Karachi (especially of Pahsto-speaking communities, but also including Punjabi- and Hindko-speakers), a further layer of linguistic stratification was added to Karachi's already diverse working class-in-making. That these migrations and diversity within the working class drew upon older histories and on-going practices of uneven development in context of Pakistan (and British India) bears noting. Pashtun and Baloch regions in western Pakistan and large parts of "rural" Sindh had served as backwater frontier areas during the colonial era and beyond. As such, the relative underdevelopment and relations of dependency of these areas on "core" areas such as Karachi, also meant that the development of consciousness within the working classes was bound to be uneven. That the migrants from India were incorporated into prevailing structures of state formation and industrial development, lent further salience to these potential divisions within Karachi. As part of the project of "Muslim" nation-building post- Partition and due to their greater representation in the state bureaucracy, migrants from India were preferentially accommodated with regards to housing and urban social services. As Sarah Ansari has shown in her research on competition and transfers within the Sindh police department, there was already – in the early years of Pakistan – a developing sense of "indigenous" and "non-indigenous" communities in Karachi (Ansari, 2014). Thus, from the very beginning, there had been definite linkages between the production of class and ethnicity in the context of Karachi. As we will explore in the coming paragraphs (and chapters), this would have crucial effects on workers' everyday experiences and consciousness, often mediated through claims on the "city" and over "urbanity".

Before we delve into labourers' and organisers' self-conceptions with regards to ethnicity and class, it is important to note how ruling classes attempted to weaponise these potential faultlines even during the high-era of class struggle in Karachi during the 1960s and 70s. The point of course is not to imply "divisions" within the working class as the product of some sort of conspiracy "from above". In fact, as already indicated above and will be explored further below, differentiations within working class were concretely linked to the rhythms of state, space, and capital formation in Karachi and Pakistan, and that these were "lived" as determinate – though not exclusive – coordinates of everyday experience. However, it is important to recognise how the ruling bloc often attempted to produce and reify prevailing patterns of state, space and class formation through resort to tactics of populist mobilisation and/or coercion. Thus, for example, the wrangling over evacuee property allotments and bureaucratic appointments notwithstanding, workers and labour leaders from the high-era of struggle remember the events after Ayub's controversial election win in 1965 as the first instance of ethnic mobilisation in Karachi (K. Ali, personal interview, Feb 16, 2018). As mentioned earlier, Karachi was the only major urban center in West Pakistan where Gen Ayub had lost the elections to Fatima Jinnah. Crucially, this had been preceded in 1963 by a student movement (dominated by students from Urdu-speaking migrant communities) and the second phase of labour struggle post-Partition. In the aftermath of Ayub's victory, his son Gohar Ayub then led processions of Pashtun workers through neighbourhoods such as Laulkhet which had been settled by Urdu-speaking migrants post-Partition (Ayub's family was from the Hazara area of Pakistan and of Pashtun origin). Gen. Ayub himself warned migrants from India that, with nowhere for them to go, the next step would be to "throw the Mohajirs into the Arabian sea" (Hassan, 1972).

Moreover, the ruling classes' One Unit policy which led to subsumption of provincial units into a singular "West Pakistan" province, had provided a rallying point to struggles for regional autonomy and provincial rights articulated through ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity. The centralising tendencies and the geographical-linguistic differentiation which inhered among the dominant classes was reflected in a wide variety of spheres, from housing, business and state appointments to the realms of art and culture. Thus, in his assessment of cinema in the early decades of Pakistan, Iftikhar Dadi points towards the promotion of a "universality" which was blind to the differentiations of gender and ethnicity. Within the prevailing modes of cinematic representation – and in wider spheres of civil and political society – there was a "foreclosure of non-UP⁹⁰ Urdu speakers from morality and modernity [which] brings out the modern ethical subject as primarily UP Urdu-speaking" (Dadi, 2010: 166). The democratic insurgency of the 1960s and 1970s, and especially the independence of East Pakistan, wrought a sea-change in the reception and assertion of ethnicity in what was left of Pakistan.

In fact, in July 1972, at the height of the labour upsurge in Karachi, the Bhutto government attempted to mobilise linguistic sentiment through the institution of a Sindhi Language Bill. The Bill declared Sindhi to be the sole official language of the province, with measures for its progressive institution in educational and state apparatuses. In reaction, elements among the Urdu-speaking community saw this as an attack on the primacy of Urdu (and its linkage to Muslim identity). While some commentators saw this as an attempt to appease a growing Sindhi middle class in its demands for accommodation within state structures, there is no doubt that the ensuing riots, whereby ten people were killed due to police firing, resulted in aggravation of divisions within Karachi's populace (Hassan, 1972). Eventually, while the status of Urdu as

⁹⁰ United Provinces of British India, renamed "Uttar Pradesh" in post-Partition India.

official language was restored (this time in parity with Sindhi), the mobilisation of workers was affected. Aziz-ul-Hassan (of the LOC) and Karamat Ali (of the MMF) maintain that the participation of Urdu-speaking workers in the 1972 upsurge was dampened compared to Pashtun workers. This may also be due to the placement of Urdu-speaking workers in more modernised industries as skilled workers with better conditions (Ali, 2005: 94-5). Rasheed Hassan Khan maintains that this was “a calculated incendiary move” by the Bhutto government as part of a larger plan to bring the left and labour movement to heel. As such, there were determinate attempts by ruling classes to tackle/displace challenges from below by articulating the prevailing patterns of class, space and state formation through the idiom of ethnic-linguistic difference.

However, it is important to emphasise that the idioms of ethnicity and differentiations within the working class were not mere impositions on a pre-given and unified working class collectivity “from above”. In fact, as pointed to above, many of these faultlines were rooted in long-standing patterns of uneven development and the differentiated incorporation of labourers into Karachi’s working class and wider urban fabric. While politics around ethnicity only came into full (militarised) effect in Karachi in the 1980s⁹¹, it is important to understand that markers of linguistic and ethnic identity formed a crucial part of workers’ everyday experience. As mentioned earlier, migrant Pashtun workers during the first phase of industrialisation lived in informal workers’ colonies where local intermediaries, often of the BD variety, exercised great control over housing, credit and employment. This contrasted with the Partition migrants from India, who due to greater access to the state and historic patterns of uneven development, had greater opportunities for upward mobility in the labour market (Shaheed, 2007: 57-60). In Sindh, there were property allotments in urban areas, award of agricultural land to army officers,

⁹¹ This will be reviewed in more detail in the chapter on urban space.

bureaucratic appointments, and state-sponsored industrial development which mostly benefitted individuals from non-Sindhi communities (Hassan, 1972). Moreover, workers' like Shabaan Bakda, who was from Sindhi- and Balochi-speaking background and "indigenous" to Karachi, remember clearly the reticence of the Urdu-speaking migrants and their distance from communities such as his own. Bakda recounts how the building his family were living in at the turn of Partition was allotted to migrants from India leading to their eventual displacement from "land on which we had lived for centuries" (S. Baakda, personal interview, Feb 28, 2018). Thus, while Bakda recounts with pride that "we spoke Sindhi at home and Urdu with our *mohalla* [neighbourhood] friends", he also distinctly recalls not being able to read Urdu in school and being ridiculed for it by an Urdu-speaking "*Master saab*" [teacher]. While the emphasis on ethnicity may reflect the effects of remembrance in a political context as overdetermined by ethnic division as today's Karachi, it may also be said – keeping in mind the above-mentioned histories of uneven development, dispossession, and political inequality – that there was already a developing feeling of dispossession and marginalisation among various ethnic-linguistic communities.

In fact, these faultlines may also be glimpsed in accounts by left and labour organisers of the time. As indicated earlier, the One Unity policy had provided grounds for mobilisation along lines of ethnic and linguistic nationalism. Towards the late 1960s, a part of the student group NSF (NSF Kazmi) raised the demand for a separate Karachi province (Kazmi, 2013: 254). The prominent leftist and NSF leader Rasheed Hassan Khan maintains that the demand of a Karachi province was based among the aspirations of Urdu-speaking petty-bourgeois elements within the pro-Moscow NAP (Khan, 2013: 274). Khan also recalls his utmost surprise at encountering the "distance" and "lack of communication" between Sindhi and non-Sindhi students during his time

in jail in late 1960s (Khan, 2012a). At the labour front, Karamat Ali recalls the Maqbool company factory which made Banaspati *ghee* (clarified butter) and soap from where he had been dismissed in 1967 due to his union activities. Here, a controversy arose over the quota system introduced by Bhutto in the aftermath of nationalisation of certain industries, which introduced reservations of 5% for local residents and “rural” Sindhis. Unions generally had agreed “son quotas” with management (institutionalised by the IRO 1969) which gave employment priority to workers’ children in case of injury, death or retirement. However, the established workers (who were from Pashtun, Urdu-speaking, and Punjabi backgrounds) vehemently opposed this measure of affirmative action and refused entry to Sindhi workers into the factory for close to two and a half months. Eventually, the union backed down after threat of expulsion from the MMF general body.

Crucially, Ali narrates this as a crucial lack of deep socio-spatial alliances which would translate (in the Gramscian sense) in a process of mutual constitution, interconnection, and deepening relations between different communities and spaces. For example – commenting on the differing visions of different leftist groups and the isolation of the struggle of 1972 – Ali narrates that “there was absolutely no connection between the village and the city” [*dehat ka shehr se koi waasta hi nahi tha*]. A similar sense of social and spatial fracturing tending towards isolation is conveyed in accounts by several other workers and organisers including that of Usman Swati and Rasheed Hassan Khan (as mentioned above). That these dynamics were in play at the height of the 1972 labour struggle, combined with the earlier mentioned mobilisation over the Sindhi Language Bill, provides indication of socio-spatial faultlines within the working class and their mode of being “lived from below”.

The fractures of Partition displacements and dispossession, One Unit, and ongoing histories of uneven development and stratification thus weighed heavily on everyday working class experience in Karachi. Here, it is useful to refer to Henri Lefebvre's call of attention to Marx's "trinity formula" of land-capital-labour towards the end of *Capital Volume III*. Lefebvre's reformulation of the Marxian dialectic is intended to move beyond the limits of a binary model which opposes capital to labour (simply defined) and towards a consideration of the struggles over land, nation, and territory for a fuller account of class struggle in a determinate context (Hart, 2008: 694). As such, histories of spatial dispossession and uneven development lead to "complex and uneven reverberations and articulations in the present of much longer histories of colonialism and imperialism, along with their specifically racialised – as well as gendered, sexualised, and ethnicized – forms" (ibid). For example, nearly two million acres of land left behind by emigrating Hindus after Partition was awarded to incoming refugees and Sindhi landlords rather than the landless Sindhi peasantry (Ahmed, 1983: 71). Similarly, more than a million acres of agricultural land brought under cultivation through Kotri and Guddu barrages on the Indus were also awarded to non-Sindhi officers of the civil and military bureaucracy (ibid). In the case of Karachi, these differentiated trajectories of class, space, and state formation conditioned the everyday lived experience, memories and consciousness of its working class-in-formation. Such a consideration of struggles around space, state recognition, and economic-territorial sovereignty leads to a much more complex and differentiated conception of the working class (and its faultlines) than a simple recourse to explanations of ethnic "divisions" fostered "from above".

"Spatial interconnection and mutual processes of constitution" between wider rhythms of state, space and hegemony therefore lent a particular salience to the reification of ethnic and

linguistic differences in Karachi (and beyond). Of course, this is not to imply that the production of difference along ethnic and/or linguistic lines led inexorably to divisions and the failure of working class politics. These divisions required a determinate political project to reify and militarise difference as destiny as opposed to history (this would happen in the Karachi of the 1980s with devastating effect). It does however impress upon the need for any viable working class politics to think through the dialectic of labour and capital in an expansive manner. Such a political project would be one which, with a focus on the Marxian “trinity formula”, would pay due consideration to how struggles over territoriality and uneven development are inflected through a working class produced *in and through difference*. As Marx reminds us in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, the project of Bonapartism mobilised “not the revolutionary, but the conservative peasant... not the countryfolk who in alliance with the towns want to overthrow the old order through their own energies, but on the contrary those who, in solid seclusion within this old order, want to see themselves and their small holdings saved and favored by the ghost of the Empire. It represents not the enlightenment but the superstition of the peasant; not his [sic] judgment but his prejudice; not his future but his past” (Marx, 1852: 63). This of course is not to be taken as a quasi-ontological statement valid for peasants at all times, but only to point towards the complex and *contradictory* ideological terrain through which social subjects gain consciousness, and the crucial role of political practice therein. Thus, not only is political articulation contingent upon the contradictory ideological ensemble; it also *shapes* the given ideological terrain in accordance with the limits allowed by the coordinated – but skewed – interests of the historical bloc.

The inhering and articulation of these differences and attendant sedimentations of common sense would go on to become a crucial ground for the politics of belonging and urbanity in

Karachi⁹². During the high era of the labour struggle too, there would be a crucial disconnect between rank-and-file workers and labour leaders, between the party and potential organic intellectuals, and a lack of the socio-spatial alliances so crucial for a subaltern social group tending towards an integral state. In the absence of its organic intellectuals, and devoid of wider socio-spatial alliances between different communities and spaces within and outside Karachi, working class politics was fatally isolated. Potential hegemonic apparatuses of the subaltern classes (such as unions and parties) are “not simply a mechanical and passive expression of those classes, but react energetically upon them in order to develop, solidify, and universalise them” (Gramsci, 1971: 227). In the absence of such an organic relation between party-masses and wider socio-spatial hegemony, the insurrection when it came (whether it was planned or forced is moot) floundered upon its own isolation. A failed insurrection would herald the later onset of exclusivist – even proto-fascistic – politics around ethnicity. In the coming decades, these social and spatial faultlines would be politicised and weaponised with devastating effects for the city and its politics⁹³. Meanwhile, labour politics and trade unionism was being absorbed back within the wider changing rhythms of state, space and hegemony in Karachi and Pakistan. Social, economic and spatial changes would result in a shifting of ground for the working class and wider politics in the city. The retreat of the working class had begun.

The Ground Shifts

The 1980s onwards saw shifts in Pakistan’s economy that contributed further to the degeneration of the working-class movement. As the center of industry, these shifts were particularly apparent in Karachi and combined with ongoing social and spatial changes in the city to – literally and

⁹² We will explore this in greater detail in the chapter on urban space.

⁹³ We will discuss the weaponisation – and veritable creation of “ethnicity” – in Karachi’s politics in more detail in the chapter on urban space.

metaphorically – shift the ground of class articulation and labour politics. The said social and economic shifts in Karachi came about due to a combination of the on-going *jihad* in Afghanistan, economic re-structuring and liberalisation, and, relatedly, state policies of encouraging shifts in the industrial geography of the country. While we will deal with the spatial aspects of social, economic and political change in Chapter 6, in this section we will briefly review the effects of economic restructuring. This will then serve as a segue to our discussion of informalised labour arrangements and process in the next chapter.

Since the 1980s, Pakistan's economy has gone through concerted programs of liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation. This has been part of a shift from (at least a rhetorical commitment to) import-substitution industrialisation to export-oriented industrialisation. This shift in turn has been facilitated by Pakistani ruling classes' subservience to the dictates of US neo-imperialism, often through International Financial Institutions' – such as the IMF's – Structural Adjustment Programs and/or dependence on American largesse for being part of the US's neo-imperial geo-strategic campaigns in the region (Ahmed and Mohammed, 2012). Washington Consensus prescriptions to loosen capital controls, liberalise foreign exchange rates, and flexibilise markets through deregulation and privatisation have contributed to de-industrialisation. Pakistani ruling classes have found convenient avenues of accumulation through international aid and non-manufacturing sectors in an economy with scarce investment in productive sectors. As such, the risks of long-term investment in manufacturing and industrialisation have been avoided through a shift towards the services sector, a consumption-focussed and imports-driven economy, and quick accumulation through investment in real estate and the stock exchange. Thus, a “Dutch Disease” kind of situation has been engendered with ruling classes using Pakistan's “geo-strategic” position as local clients of

US imperialism, while internal economic structures remain centered on export of primary products, low taxations levels on elites, and imports-based consumption (ibid: 9).

During the Zia era, a concerted program of privatisation of previously nationalised industries and of industrial dispersion took place. The increasing law and order problems due to Afghan jihad and rise of ethnic conflicts in Karachi led to shift of industry towards the hinterland of large cities in the Punjab. Moreover, the Zia regime offered incentives such as tax-free industrial zones and patronage of certain caste-geographic communities which facilitated the shift of industrial activity away from Karachi (Khan, 2014). With the onset of the balance of payments crisis in the late 1980s, Pakistan procured its first “adjustment loan” of \$516 million from the IMF in 1988. At the time, this was the largest loan extended by the IMF under the structural adjustment facility (Nasir, 2012). This was a “soft loan with hard adjustment” and in the next the next twenty years, Pakistan would enter twelve IMF programs of which was only one was “satisfactorily concluded” because of US assistance in the aftermath of 9/11 (Ahmed and Mohammad, 2012: 10).

As part of the adjustment, the government took several steps including wage restraint, freezing of public sector employment, and removal of subsidies from basic goods and facilities, and a program of privatisation. For example, in 1990, petroleum and natural gas prices were increased by 42% and 37% respectively for household consumption, while subsidies were reduced/removed for wheat, fertilisers, and edible oil (Nasir, 2012). With social security nets decreased, currency devalued, and markets liberalised, inflation – instead of decreasing, as planned – in fact increased and in the first decade of adjustment between 1988-1999, 14 million people fell below the poverty line (ibid). In the next decade, with lesser capital controls, FDI flowed into the country in non-manufacturing sectors while trade liberalisation led to greater

imports and increase in the current account deficit of Pakistan. Relatedly, the tax structure was unreformed with large parts of the economy – such as land holdings in real estate and agriculture – left untaxed, while several industries were given exemptions through Special Regulatory Ordinances (SROs).

However, structural adjustment undertaken at the behest of IMF should not be seen as a one-way imposition by IFIs on local ruling classes. In fact, not only have Pakistan's ruling classes benefitted enormously from the IMF programs of liberalisation and privatisation, but they have also instrumentalised conditionality and IMF constraints in shifting the burden of austerity and adjustment onto the lower classes. This can be most clearly seen in the repeated resistance to IMF and World Bank incentives to reform the tax structure of the country, including a \$135m Tax Administration Reform Program (TARP) initiated in 2004. Caste-centered networks of “decentralised competitiveness” and state patronage have promoted industrial agglomeration among certain caste communities (such as Memons and Chiniotis), while also facilitating resistance/exemption to inclusion in government/IMF-peddled expansion of taxation nets (Khan, 2014). Thus, the government has relied on indirect taxes as the main avenue for revenue generation, while instituting generous exemptions in corporate tax rates. As a result, over the past ten years, close to two-thirds of all revenue generation at the federal level, and over 90% at the provincial level, has been through indirect taxes. The combined effect of generous exemptions and reliance on indirect taxation affects mostly the poor. Pakistan's tax-to-GDP ratio remains one of the lowest in the world while 60% of expenditure is on debt servicing and military expenses (Safri, 2014: 49). In fact, while being one of the poorest countries in the world, Pakistan ranks ninth among global spenders on the military, thus leaving little room for spending on improving/expanding already meagre social services.

Similarly, the privatisation of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) has been enthusiastically supported by the ruling classes. Since 1988, key figures within government and bureaucracy have peddled privatisation as a panacea for Pakistan's economic ills, with the result that the Washington Consensus has become something of a "common sense" among ruling elites. The ascendancy of neoliberal thinking in Pakistan can be gauged by the fact that while the first six governors of the State Bank of Pakistan (between 1947 and late 1970s) had domestic banking or civil service backgrounds, the next eight have come from career backgrounds in IFIs (such as the IMF, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank) and in international investment banks (Munir and Naqvi, 2017: 1708). A similar trend is observed in the backgrounds of federal finance ministers. Privatisation policies have been pushed through even where SOEs were turning a profit for the public exchequer (such as in the case of the Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited). On the other hand, the reasons given for promoting privatisation in various sectors – such as increasing efficiency, decreasing dependency on public subsidies, and (in the case of banks) increasing investment in productive sectors – have all turned out to be mirages. Thus, for example, the privatisation of the energy sector – under what the US Secretary of Energy Hazel O' Leary in the 1990s described as "the best energy policy in the whole world" – has resulted in an even greater drain on the public exchequer while contributing to the country's power crisis (Munir and Naqvi, 2017: 1711). Generous state subsidies, sovereign profit guarantees, and a shift of private producers towards expensive (oil-based) thermal fuelling, have resulted in higher tariffs for downstream consumers, while costing over \$20 million more per 100MW than in the public sector. Relatedly, the power sector has remained the beneficiary of over two-thirds of state subsidies during this period (Khan, 2018 Apr 27).

Similarly, the privatisation of the financial sector was peddled as means for increasing optimal allocation of resources and decrease of “political lending”, but has led to the exact opposite. Thus, the share of government securities in the total investment of privatised banks has increased to 88.7% at much higher interest rates of 12–13% (in the pre-privatisation era, non-commercial banks were limited to holding 30% of their assets in government bonds, at low fixed rates of 4 to 6%) (Munir and Naqvi, 2017: 1715). In fact, privatisation of SOEs has resulted in ample opportunities for crony capitalism, with massive corruption lining the pockets of foreign and local capitalists. For example, Pakistan’s largest bank (Habib Bank, HBL) was sold to the Aga Khan Fund, a non-corporate entity with no expertise or experience in banking, while the Muslim Commercial Bank was sold to a conglomerate led by Mian Mansha, a close ally of then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Habib Bank was sold at the throwaway price of Rs. 22.4 billion (\$390 million) when its assets alone were worth Rs. 570 billion (\$8.76 billion) (Tariq, 2008 Jun 30). Considering pre-privatisation equity injections and transfer of bad debts to government, the process of privatisation itself ended up in a net loss to the state of \$251 million for HBL alone (Munir and Naqvi, 2017: 1714). In contrast to increases in productive investment touted as justifications, privatisation led to higher power tariffs and even less investment in agriculture and industry. Lending to industry, which had been at almost 50% in the 1970s, has declined while losses for manufacturing firms due to power outages doubled between 2002 and 2007 (ibid: 1719). By 2011, industrial output decreased by almost 37%, while manufacturing growth rates have fell to all-time lows of about 2% In the post-2007 period (ibid: 1720).

The economic structure thus generated is thus based on export of primary products and increasing role of the services sector. Thus, Pakistan’s exports remain concentrated in a few sectors such as cotton, leather, rice, synthetic textiles and sports goods, with cotton and

cotton-based products accounting for close to 60% of exports (Burki et al, 2011: xvii). Concomitantly, with the focus on export-oriented industrialisation, the exposure of manufacturing to global competition, and the above-mentioned pressures on industry, industrial decentralisation, out-sourcing, and subcontracting has increased. Thus, small and medium enterprises constitute 90% of all economic establishments, and employ close to 80% of the non-agricultural labour force (ibid: xxii). This has been accompanied by a shift towards increasingly informalised and service-sector based labour. In fact, the service sector now accounts for close to half of the country's GDP, up from a quarter of GDP in the 1950s (Amjad-Ali, 1995: 81). Moreover, the increase in inequality remains unrelenting: between 2000 and 2018, the income differential between the highest and lowest 20 per cents increased from a ratio of 5:1 to a ratio of 8:1, even while the highest 20% only pay twice as much as tax (Kardar, 2018 October 07).

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the evolution of the trade union movement in Karachi through the two phases of post-1970s passive revolution identified in the last chapter. In this regard, mechanisms of coercion and *trasformismo* were discussed through which pacification-incorporation of organised labour was brought about. The latter included legal instruments for the dispersal of organised labour and the provision of material incentives for higher echelons of trade unionism. Crucially, the intensity of coercion and *trasformismo* mechanisms brought to bear on organised labour through the latter half of the 1970s and 1980s (first phase of passive revolution) was seen to be integrally related to the strength and depth of the subaltern upsurge in the preceding decades. The multi-level crises of the ruling bloc through the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the

insurgency of labour in integral linkage with other subaltern groups (such as students and peasantry), necessitated the high levels of repression brought to bear upon the working class during the first phase of passive revolution.

In this regard, faultlines within the labour movement – especially those around linguistic-spatial divides and within organisational cultures of the Left – were also seen to bear heavily on the fate of the trade union movement in Karachi. This was reflected especially in the failure of the labour movement and left parties to produce organic intellectuals, who could potentially perform the crucial role of articulation and organisational densification of the working class’ own hegemonic apparatuses within the ambit of the integral state. Conversely, the lack of strategic planning, divisions within the Left, and failure to incorporate the diversity of working class cultures and histories, led to increasing distance between the upper and lower echelons of the Left and labour movement – an indication of which was the increasing trend of NGO-mediated “cosmopolitanism” after the fall of the Soviet Union. The resultant curtailment of the working class’s independent organisational creativity fed into demobilisation and demoralisation of working class organisers who had been well-placed to perform the role of organic intellectuals. As such, contradictions within the labour movement and the ruling classes’ increasing confidence fed into the former’s incorporation-pacification through a dialectic of transformism and coercion.

With the onset of economic liberalisation in the 1980s, the changing economic geography, shifting structure of the economy, and industrial dispersion had determinate effects on working class lives and the terrain of labour organising in Karachi. With labour brow-beaten and quiescent due to the above-delineated dynamics of *transformismo* and coercion, the changing patterns of economic activity along with spatial and demographic shifts had their determinate

effects on Karachi's culture and politics. The ground of working-class politics shifted: from the workplace to residential areas, and from the large industrial spaces of the Valikas and Zeibtuns to the mobile workplace of, for example, the transport worker or the "isolated" home-based women workers. While the effect of a consumption-focussed economy and socio-spatial changes on Karachi's political culture will be explored in a later chapter, it is to the increasing informalisation of labour and its effects on working class politics that we will turn to in the next chapter.

4. Time's Carcass: Labour Regimes in the “Informal” Sector

“Time is everything, man (sic) is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcass.”

Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (22)

This chapter continues our investigation of working class lives and evolution in Karachi in the context of economic re-structuring, industrial decline, and the rise of the “informal” sector. While we have looked at the mechanisms of organising and pacification of the organised labour movement, in this chapter we turn our attention to the proliferating spaces of “informal” labour defined by their small-scale production arrangements, footloose labour, and – ostensibly – the absence of state intervention/regulation. The importance of this can be judged by the fact that “informality” has greatly increased in Pakistan due to a combination of globalisation-induced competitive pressures, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, rural-to-urban migration, and the availability of massive amounts of surplus labour⁹⁴ (Khattak and Sayeed, 2000). In fact, as analysis of Pakistan’s Labour Force Surveys shows, informal sector employment has increased from around 60% to close to 75% of the labour force over the past two decades (ILO, 2018: 5; Munir et al., 2015: 177)⁹⁵. Considering that the majority of workers in Karachi and Pakistan labour in this sector of the economy, any holistic analysis of working class evolution and politics cannot be complete without looking at work arrangements, politics, and organising (or lack thereof) herein.

⁹⁴ Akhtar (2011: 160), takes his cue from the International Labour Organization, 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”.

⁹⁵ Of course, this also excludes the vast majority of women who labour in the household and whose “domestic” – therefore, unpaid - labour is therefore discounted in official statistics. While the domestic labour of women in the household was not a subject of my research, due to limitations of (gendered) access, the section on home-based women workers will touch upon the articulation of domestic, unpaid labour with waged home-based work, and its effects on potential organising in the sector.

However, as discussed in earlier chapters, defining the “informal sector” through the state tends to hide more than it reveals, especially when our focus is on issues of working class organisation, politics, and consciousness. In fact, as will be argued in the coming sections, it is much more useful to deploy the heuristic of “labour regimes” to understand the varied labour arrangements, labour processes, linkages to the market, consciousness, and challenges of organisation which inhere within the “informal” sector⁹⁶. The argument of the chapter will therefore be developed in four sections. In the first section, I will do a brief theoretical review of the proliferation of “informal” labour in the Global South, especially in the era of neoliberal globalisation. A general review of the articulation of neo-imperial insertion of Southern labour into global markets will be accompanied by the elaboration of a framework for the study of different kinds of “informal” labour in Karachi. Drawing upon Michael Burawoy’s studies on the politics of production, I will propose a heuristic of “labour regimes” as a concatenation of various factors (such as the labour process, reproduction of labour power etc.) as a more fruitful framework for understanding labour organisation and consciousness than a simple resort to “informality” or the “need economy”. The next three sections will involve detailed elaboration of labour regimes in different sectors of “informal” labour, existing in various kinds of complex linkages/continuum with the “formal” sector. Here, I will focus on *chowk mazdoor*⁹⁷, food transport workers, and home-based women workers as examples of different kinds of labour regimes, with varied spaces and potentials for organising on an integral basis.

⁹⁶ It is also due to the over-homogenising/limited efficacy of the term “informality” that I have put it within quotation marks. I have already reflected in detail on the issues around “informality” in a section in Chapter 1. From here onwards, I will only be putting the term in quotation marks at selected points, but my critique of the term, as elaborated previously and dealt with in the coming sections, will be taken as given.

⁹⁷ Mostly daily wage construction workers who are found on major thoroughfares in almost all big cities in Pakistan. These are colloquially known as *chowk mazdoor*. In Urdu: *chowk* = roundabout, *mazdoor* = worker/labourer.

In doing so, I will be drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Karachi in the first half of 2018 with these different sectors of labour. In these months, I spent time with chowk labour at a major intersection of Karachi twice every week. Here, conversation ensued while labourers waited to be “picked up” by potential employers and during the day with those labourers who, as is often the case, were unable to get any work. During these months, I also worked part-time as worker-cum-supervisor with a food transport service which operated as an arm of one Karachi’s biggest charity foundations, the Alamgir Welfare Trust (AWT). All the workers here were wage labourers and were employed on a mix of formal and informal contracts. At AWT, I had a chance to observe and participate in the whole process of production from the making of food on large scale to its delivery to various government hospitals and *katchi abadis*⁹⁸ of Karachi. To access home-based women workers, I drew upon my long-standing links with the previously-mentioned National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), who have a wing called the Home-Based Women Workers’ Federation (HBWWF). I visited the homes of women workers, observed the labour process, interviewed HBWWF organisers, and attended some of their collective activities (such as study circles, protest demonstrations, and marches). I will also draw upon primary and secondary research material such as relevant academic papers, ILO surveys, and NGO reports. As such, I hope to elaborate and demonstrate a framework which accounts for the complexity and different avenues/potentials of labour organising in the – often misleadingly and homogenously termed – “informal” sector in Karachi. In doing so, I will also shed light on the forms of working class organising, politics, and consciousness which have proliferated in the wake of post-1980s neoliberal globalisation. This will also supplement our earlier elaboration of the trajectories of labour organising through the trade union movement.

⁹⁸ *Katchi abadis* are informal settlements, 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.

From “Informality” to Labour Regimes

The proliferation of informality in the global South has generated a wide literature, ranging from reflections on its potential for poverty alleviation, its linkages to various kinds of political projects, and as a potential node for a different kind of modern sovereignty/emancipation. While we have dealt with some of these debates in our discussion on informality and class in Chapter 1, it is useful to briefly elaborate on these here as a segue into our study of different regimes of labour in later sections. Here, a discussion of the impact of neoliberalism on the proliferation of different forms of labour in the South will be linked to how the potential for assertion of working class politics is circumscribed – or, as it may be, promoted – by these multi-scalar networks of accumulation. In doing so, we advocate for a framework centered on the study of “labour regimes” to understand the challenges and potentials presented by different kinds of “informal” labour for working class organising.

As has been alluded to above, the proliferation of informal labour in peripheral countries like Pakistan cannot be divorced from the world-scale rhythms of accumulation that they are embedded in⁹⁹. As world-systems theorists such as Samir Amin have demonstrated, neoliberal globalisation cannot be divorced from capital’s attempts at recovery from the stagflation and profit-squeeze crisis of the 1970s (Amin, 2015). In fact, just as the previous “long crisis” of capital (from mid 19th century onwards) gave rise to the high era of imperialism, the 1970s-crisis has compelled a move towards “generalised-monopoly capitalism” and a new round of globalisation. This is characterised by a strengthened centralisation of control over the economy by monopolies, deepening of uneven development (including, South-South dependencies and outsourcing of manufacturing to peripheries), and financialisation. Thus, financialisation and

⁹⁹ See our discussion on “Class and Informality” in Chapter 1 and IMF-sponsored economic liberalisation in Chapter 3.

control over information/management systems have been the corollary of networks of outsourcing and subcontracting in the global South. Here, the national polities of peripheral countries have been stripped of any independence/coherence when it comes to economic policy-making beyond the prescriptions of the Washington Consensus and market liberalisation. Conversely, the (geo-)political logic of this new phase of globalisation has entailed – especially since the fall of the Soviet Union – the iron fist of the US empire as the coercive guarantor of neo-imperial economic arrangements.

The corollary “from below” of this neo-imperial/neoliberal logic has been the greater flexibilisation of labour. In fact, as several theorists such as Andrew Higginbottom and John Smith have shown, neoliberal globalisation has entailed competition among Northern firms seeking “competitive advantage” through the surfeit of un- and under-employed workers in the global South (recruited through networks of outsourcing with Southern firms). Thus, while the share of “developing countries” in global manufacturing exports had increased six times by the turn of the millennium (from 5% to 30%), this has been achieved on the back of low-paid, flexible workers in the South, embedded in a “global wage gradient” (Smith, 2015). Such an arrangement, which may be better characterised as “global labour arbitrage”, is itself based on the super-exploitation of workers in the global South which serve to push wages even below the value of labour power. As such, imperialism in the form of neoliberal globalisation works through “global labour arbitrage” whereby the capital-labour relationship has moved from regimes of absolute and relative surplus value to one of super-exploitation of youthful and female proletarians in Southern countries. In fact, in countries like Pakistan mechanisms of global labour arbitrage and super-exploitation are even more apparent, with its weak state/ruling

classes vis a vis imperialism, its consequent subsumption into a neoliberal logic, and concomitant decline of industry and the proliferation of informalised labour.

In keeping with the Marxian understanding of the production of generalities through particularities, it is important to understand the specific forms of labour which have proliferated in Southern countries in such a context of global labour arbitrage. As David Nielson has shown in his exposition on the forms of labour subsumption under the “Third International Division of Labour”, hyper-mobile capital has leveraged low-cost peripheral labour as a reserve army for reducing the security and increasing flexibilisation of workers in the core countries (Nielson, 2007: 105-6). Concomitantly, drawing upon Andre Gorz, Nielson elucidates the development of an “international structure of proletarian segmentation” which, crucially, entails the creation a differentiated “neo-proletariat” in the peripheral countries. This neo-proletariat is distinguished by loss of independent subsistence and unevenly subsumed by capital. Here, the loss of means of subsistence and gaining of wage labour are divorced due to flexible and uncertain employment. Thus, differentiation takes place within the neo-proletariat: ranging from low-skilled, low value work (based on long hours and thus, absolute surplus value); to “self-employed” workers who themselves are subsumed to capital, albeit indirectly through networks of debt; and industrial and service sector employment of various levels of skill (ibid: 107-8).

It is here, in the differentiation of the (neo-)proletariat in southern countries that investigation must begin of the different kinds of labour arrangements, processes, and organising potentials that inhere within. Thus, *contra* Sanyal, this realm of flexibilised, informalised, and super-exploited labour cannot be understood as part of a distinct “need economy” only articulated post-festum with the “accumulation economy” through the master node of the market (Sanyal, 2007: 217). In fact, as has been elaborated before, what is the “accumulation economy”

from the vantage point of capital is a “need economy” from the vantage point of the reproduction of labour power. The proletarian, as Marx reminds us in the *Grundrisse*, is a “virtual pauper” whom capital is under no compulsion to provide employment. Both conceptually and historically, therefore “unemployment precedes employment, and the informal economy precedes the formal... [while] ‘proletarian’ is not a synonym for ‘wage labourer’ but for dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market” (Denning, 2010: 81). An ontological distinction between formal/informal and need/accumulation economies can only be made through discounting various forms of labour which have characterised capitalism historically and the concrete ensembles of markets, institutions, and actors which link accumulation with varied forms of labour control. As such, “a critical account of living and making a living under capitalism must, I believe, begin not from the accumulation of capital but from its other side, the accumulation of labour” (ibid: 80).

Therefore, in order to account for the diversity and complexity of working class lives, it is imperative to transcend the formal-informal division, a division which – while important – is ultimately a function of the mechanisms of state accounting and enumeration. Instead of defining “informality” against the state, Denning contends that this may be more appropriately described as a particular modality of class power, with the Marxian concepts of “relative surplus population” and “virtual pauper” (to describe the worker) being more appropriate characterisations of the precarious state of labour under capitalism (Denning, 2010: 97). The fundamental contradiction then is not between the spaces of “formal-informal” or the “accumulation” versus “need economy”, but between capital and labour. Of course, this is not to say that this contradiction plays out evenly in all circumstances, or that its relation to the modalities of state power is constant. In fact, “informality” itself is a differentiated space

articulated unevenly with the power of state and capital, and subject to wider rhythms of the development of space, state, and civil society.

Our focus is therefore “the accumulation of labour” and its subsumption under different modalities of labour control and its diverse articulations with state and capital. Here, Michael Burawoy’s previously discussed emphasis on the relations *in* production can serve usefully to develop a more concrete understanding of different forms of informal labour (Burawoy, 1985)¹⁰⁰. Instead of divorcing subject from object, and therefore looking at the sphere of production merely technically or mechanically, Burawoy alerts us to the moment of struggle and practice inhering within relations of production. The capitalist process of production is after all “a continuous connected process, of a process of reproduction, [that] produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it *also produces and reproduces the capital relation itself*; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer” (Marx, 1906: 633, emphasis added). Therefore, the “so-called economic realm is inseparable from its political and ideological effects”, and the organisation of workplaces in their relation to other moments and spheres of social reproduction is essential to understanding the varying rhythms and intensities of class struggle (Burawoy, 1985: 39).

As discussed previously, Burawoy introduces the concept of “factory regimes” to concretely map the scope, limits and modalities of struggle and organisation within different contexts. Factory regimes are a combination of the labour process and the political apparatuses of production (the institutions which regulate and shape struggles in the workplace). In lieu of the differentiated insertion of social formations into world capitalism, he delineates four factors whose overdetermined unity shapes different types of factory regimes: the labour process,

¹⁰⁰ I have discussed Burawoy’s conception of the “politics of production” in detail in Chapter 1 and, therefore, will only discuss it briefly here in reference its adaptation for our study of informal labour.

market competition between firms, the reproduction of labour (especially in relation to the level of proletarianisation/alienation from “traditional” subsistence methods), and state intervention (Burawoy, 1985: 87-8). Through a detailed analysis of these factors and elucidation of different types of factory regimes, Burawoy contends for the varying dialectic of labour struggles and capitalist transition e.g. from absolute to relative surplus value in mid-19th century England, and from partial to full subsumption of labour to capital in colonial/post-colonial Zambia.

It is important to emphasise here the capacity of Burawoy’s heuristic of “factory regimes” to delineate varied social relations (such as gender and ethnicity) through a focus on relations *in* production. Thus, for example, Gillian Hart has extended Burawoy’s conceptualisation through a critique of its limitations. Specifically, Hart contends that Burawoy’s albeit “powerful formulation [is] limited in important ways by an exclusive focus on the politics of the workplace,” while discounting that “reverberations among workplace, household, and community politics are just as important for men as they are for women” (Hart, 1991: 95). Hart draws upon Burawoy and feminist political economy through a focus on how the uneven history and incorporation of men and women in labour arrangements and local patronage politics in the Muda region of Indonesia, translates into gender-differentiated forms of class mobilisation and consciousness. In a similar vein, in her tracking of the travels and travails of Madras cotton textiles, Priti Ramamurthy extends commodity chain analysis through a feminist critique whereby the material and semiotic aspects, and multi-spatiality, of commodity production and consumption are brought in integral relation (Ramamurthy, 2004: 743). This focus on the relational nature of social differentiation opens world systems-based analysis – such as of commodity chains – to variegated social relations and to “the importance of gender to theorising class in nonessentialist terms” (ibid: 742).

In a more programmatic register, Wilma Dunaway draws upon feminist political economy and world-systems theory for a call to move beyond the binaries through which women and gender is obscured in analyses of commodity production and labour politics (Dunaway, 2014). Specifically, Dunaway identifies three key (false) binaries which have served to invisibilise/minimise women's labour in political economy and commodity chain analysis: between production and reproduction, between the household and market, and between informal sectors and commodity chains. Moving beyond these binaries through understanding both their production and effacement is crucial to understanding the integral production of class and gender "as a set of context-specific meanings and practices, [which] intersects the structure of global capitalism and its systemic logic of value extraction and capital accumulation" (ibid: 66).

It is my contention here that Burawoy's concept can be adapted as one of "*labour regimes*" to study the different types of informal labour and the struggles therein. Thus, as elaborated above, insertion of different sectors into multi-scalar market networks (from local, national, to global) is a key determinant in understanding varied labour processes. Relatedly, state intervention within a market/sector and the modalities of labour reproduction/proletarianisation also conditions the rhythms of struggle within production. The particularities of the labour process itself – overdetermined by the specific sector and levels of proletarianisation – also have determinate effects on consciousness and struggle within the labour process. In light of the critiques raised by feminist political economy (briefly alluded to above), it is important to emphasise – and move beyond the reification/separation – of the spheres of production-reproduction and household-market to contend with the the "socially composite ground of class" (Bannerji, 1995: 144). In this regard, the Burawoy-ian heuristic's incorporation of the modalities of labour reproduction as integral to "labour regimes" and the politics of

production has potential to account for/inhere with feminist critiques. The integral relation of spaces/rhythms of reproduction to spaces of production will be seen to critically inform the consciousness and organisation of class in the latter. The politics of production and labour regimes entail both ideological and material effects; hegemony – and concomitant challenges – is therefore understood as inhering within the spaces of production (and reproduction) themselves. Thus, the forms of consciousness and organisation (or lack thereof) among different fractions of the working class must be understood with reference to the varied labour regimes in which they are embedded.

A focus on the relations *in* production and the heuristic of complexly determined “labour regimes” helps to avoid several pitfalls. Firstly, it moves away from overly general conceptions of “informality” or “need economy” to a focus on the modalities of specific labour processes and their articulation with wider rhythms of reproduction (including state, space, and capital). Secondly, contra accounts of “informality” or subalternity as the “outside” or “excess” (see, for example, Sanyal, Spivak, Gidwani), the rhythms of the “informal” or the global South subaltern are brought into complex and *internal* relation with the multi-scalar rhythms of class, capital, and state. Third, the account of multi-scalar forces inhering within relations in production also moves away from voluntarist accounts of class struggle, to one where labour regimes condition – and often set limits to – the form and content of struggle. Fourth, the concatenation of the rhythms of production and reproduction in complexly-determined labour regimes moves us away not just from the binaries identified by Dunaway above, but also undercuts the binary between class and difference (such as gender, ethnicity etc.). Instead, we move towards a genuinely dialectical understanding of class as “the concentration of many determinations, hence the unity of the diverse” (Marx, 1973: 41). Fifth, and finally, understanding informality through “labour

regimes” moves us away from a conception which reifies “relations of production”/“economy” through their merely technocratic or “objective” definition. Instead, the concept of “labour regime” brings attention to how the moment of struggle and practice inheres within the sphere of production i.e. a conception where “subjective” and “objective” aspects are mutually/dialectically constituted through the mediation of practice.

The concept of “labour regimes” therefore directs our attention back to the “accumulation of labour”, its enconement in multi-scalar and multi-spatial rhythms, and, as will be demonstrated in the coming sections, offers a useful heuristic to account for modes of organisation/articulation in Karachi’s diverse working class. We have moved therefore from a general conceptualisation of informality as an effect of “global labour arbitrage” in an era of neo-imperial globalisation, to its reproduction through the particularity of specific labour regimes and differentiated social relations. It is with this complex and practice-oriented conception of relations *in* production that we turn to our discussion of different labour regimes in the informal sector in Karachi.

Market Despotism: Chowk Mazdoor

The first labour regime we will be looking at is one whereby *chowk mazdoor*¹⁰¹ are incorporated into the politics of production. Chowk mazdoor refers to labourers found at roadsides, major intersections, and under bridges in big cities in Pakistan. These workers are invariably associated with the construction industry and are mostly employed through verbal contracts on daily wages. The skill level of these workers is generally low, and workers associated with almost all the different processes within construction may be found at major intersections. Where an

¹⁰¹ In Urdu: *chowk* = roundabout, *mazdoor* = worker/labourer.

intersection or location becomes a major nodal point for the gathering of labourers, it is called an *adda* (center). During the months of January to May 2018, I frequented the Kashmir Road *adda* (on average) twice a week to interact with labourers there. This *adda* is located at the intersection of Kashmir Road and Shahrah-e-Quaideen, two major thoroughfares in District South of Karachi. The Kashmir Road *adda* was chosen for its convenient location: it is near my residence in Karachi, it is surrounded by both commercial and residential areas (such as Tariq Road), and it is also near both working class and more middle class localities (such as Lines Area and PECHS). The labour here was also from varied regional, linguistic, and ethnic origins. As such, it afforded a good vantage point of labourers involved in construction work and from diverse backgrounds in Karachi.

The Kashmir Road *adda*, depending on the season, can have anywhere from 500 to 1500 labourers on the roadside every day. The workers start gathering here from 7am onwards to find work. *Malikaan* (owners) and *thekedaar* (contractors) start arriving early in the morning and most of the recruitment is done by 10.30am to 11am. Those who are not able to get work often wait around till the late afternoon (around 4pm) before they leave for their homes or go and sit at one of the *chai dhabas* (working class tea stalls) nearby. My introduction to this *adda* was not mediated through any established intermediary. I visited the *adda* at various times to observe the different parts of the labourers' day – from recruitment in the morning to waiting around for the rest of the day. As a middle-class and Urdu-speaking person, it was difficult initially for labourers to understand why I was interested in their work and lives. This in itself is a measure of the classed and ethnicised enclavisations which have come to characterise social life in Karachi over the last three to four decades¹⁰². Moreover, as the culture of academic research itself is

¹⁰² We will be shedding more light on this in the chapter on urban space.

underdeveloped in Pakistan – especially with regards to working class lives – a person like myself was an especially unfamiliar entity. Here, I introduced myself as a researcher at a local university who was aiming to write a book on the different types of workers who make their lives in Karachi¹⁰³. Workers’ first reaction was of suspicion as they thought that I was a journalist who was going to take their pictures and then publish them!¹⁰⁴ I tried to maintain an attitude of humility, which, combined with persistence and frequent visitations, allayed concerns that I was not there for any short-term gain. Eventually I had the chance to talk in various degrees of detail with dozens of workers at the Kashmir Road adda, at *chai dhabas*, and – in a couple of instances – at workers’ places of residence. The conversations with labourers ranged from their arrival in Karachi, coming into construction work, relations within work (such as contracts, types of work, working conditions etc.), their places of residence, and wider networks of sociality.

For reasons to be elaborated below, I characterise chowk mazdoor as embedded in a labour regime characterised by *market despotism with ethnic segmentation*. Construction work in Pakistan is a completely unregulated sector with minimal to no state intervention, either in terms of working conditions or shaping of the market (through mechanisms such as taxation, regulated state contracts etc.). Chowk mazdoor are characterised by low- to un-skilled labour, low wages, high levels of casualization, and high turnover and therefore, fit into the very lowest level of the labour market associated with the construction sector. Chowk mazdoor are atomised and footloose, with workers often shifting between *addas*/intersections depending on opportunities.

¹⁰³ I was Visiting Researcher at Habib University in Karachi for the 2017-18 academic year. I had judged through conversations that explaining the process and purpose of a PhD dissertation would be too complicated and thus, conveying that my research would culminate in a book on labour in Karachi was easier to convey.

¹⁰⁴ Journalists [*akhbar walay*] were often looked at suspiciously due to their fleeting assignments and their propensity to “invent details because they have to sell [their newspapers]” (Akram, fieldnotes, Jan 10, 2018)

The contracts are invariably based on verbal agreements and wages are most often procured daily. Work varies seasonally and most chowk mazdoor are migrants, who maintain linkages with their villages and/or places of origin through sending money and frequent visitations. Workers are therefore completely at the mercy of market vagaries, which in turn encourages clustering along regional and linguistic lines (both among workers themselves and by employers). This, combined with chowk labourers' migrant status and (often) spatially extended conditions of reproduction, has determinate effects on workers' organisation (or lack thereof) and consciousness. It is due to the above factors, to be elaborated further below, that I characterise the labour regime here as one of "market despotism, with ethnic segmentation".

Unlike many other sectors of the economy, the construction sector in Pakistan has seen a boom in the last two to three decades. This is especially so in the post-9/11 era where loosening of capital controls and the effects of War on Terror in diaspora communities made real estate in Pakistan a much sought-after sink for parking money. Thus, while the Pakistani economy has relied on remittances from Pakistanis abroad, traditionally the GCC countries, especially Saudi Arabia, have been the biggest sources of remittance incomes. However, in the wake of 9/11, the United States overtook Saudi Arabia as the single biggest source of remittance incomes. Moreover, due to the divergent class backgrounds of migrants to these countries, remittances from diasporas in the West differed from the GCC ones "as the recent increase of the former is motivated mainly by the search for economic profits while the latter is primarily for helping finance daily needs" (Oda quoted by Akhtar, 2011: 170). Thus, real estate became a lucrative option for parking money (and for easy profit), leading to precipitous increase in real estate prices and – concomitantly – spatial agglomerations such as gated housing communities. Construction went through a boom, with minimal to no state regulation. Thus, where the real

estate sector is valued at about \$700 billion, in 2018 it contributed just Rs. 23 billion in taxes (Rashid, 2019, Mar 29).

Conversely, on the side of labour, the continuing rural-to-urban migration has led to great increases in urban populations. Despite political/technical disputes over census figures, it is estimated that Karachi's population has more than doubled over the last two decades to around 20 million¹⁰⁵. Close to half of this increase is due to migrants from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab provinces (Raza, 2015, May 03). In fact, such massive amounts of migration is unsurprising given the combination of “natural” disasters, regional/civil wars, and persistent rural land inequality. It is important to briefly specify here the relation of rural-to-urban migration to agrarian relations in Pakistan generally, and with special reference to chowk labour. All over the country, large farms (over 50 acres) still comprise close to 30% of total agricultural area, while the bottom 65% of farms own less than 20% of total land (Khan, 2018 Apr 27). However, the trajectories and genealogies of agrarian change are specified by regional variations. Thus, in large parts of the Sindh and Punjab provinces, it is the increasingly capitalist character of agricultural production that has led to a decrease in tenancy arrangements affording some form of – albeit paternalistic/patriarchal – security of tenure. For example, in Sindh between 1960 and 1990, the area cultivated by sharecroppers fell from one-third of arable land to less than one-sixth (Zaidi, 1999: 42). Similarly, dynamics of transition to capitalist agriculture have long been reported in Punjab, often with big and medium-sized landlords adopting mechanised “self-cultivation” and use of wage labour to circumvent land reforms (for example, see Rouse, 1983 and Hussain, 1989) In other parts, such as FATA, land flight and/or urban migration is driven by conditions of civil and imperial war (in context of the so-called War on Terror)

¹⁰⁵ Indeed, according to *Forbes* magazine, Karachi was the fastest growing megacity in the world of the last decade (see Kotkin, 2013, April 08). A megacity is defined as “defined as areas of continuous urban development of over 10 million people”.

(Hassan, 2018). Overall therefore, rural to urban migration of landless workers and small peasants has continued apace. Moreover, what is also very apparent in relation to chowk labourers, is that they are overwhelmingly comprised of the landless poor. For example, a recent small survey done with chowk labourers in Lahore revealed that almost 90% had no landholdings in the villages or surrounding areas which they came from (MEHNAT and APWIF, 2017: 33). Other qualitative work with construction “*adda*” labourers in Sargodha (Punjab) and Karachi, and my own conversations with the Kashmir Road *adda* labourers, also confirm the overwhelmingly landless background of these workers (Gazdar, 2004: 46).

Spatially-extended social reproduction via retention of small property in the countryside acting as a subsidy to urban/industrial capital is, of course, the subject of long-standing debates in studies of agrarian transition (for example, see Wolpe, 1972). In the case of Pakistan, a parallel may be seen during the era of Cold War, Green Revolution, and Import-Substitution-Industrialisation in the 1950s and 60s. Here, wage depression and currency overvaluation were effectively used by the state to transfer resources from the agricultural sector (and especially, from East Pakistan) to industrialists in West Pakistan (Khan, 1999: 14).

However, the case of contemporary Karachi and especially its construction industry, bears more similarity to post-apartheid patterns of “interstitial urbanisation” and decentralised industrialisation in South Africa. Here, apartheid-era processes of brutal land dispossession and eviction resulted in a form of displaced urbanisation, whereby landless and impoverished workers in “interstitial spaces” have subsequently been incorporated into networks of industrial decentralisation sponsored by Taiwanese capital (Hart, 1996). In Pakistan, it is processes of dispossession – due to a combination of increasing capitalist subsumption, shift towards export-oriented production, war, and/or “natural” disasters (such as floods) – that lead to the

production of large populations of impoverished and/or landless workers¹⁰⁶. These impoverished workers then feed into casual and highly atomised employment such as in construction. While more detailed studies of rural-urban linkages will be required for a definitive assessment of the nature of spatial transfers and agrarian subsidies, in the case of chowk workers, it can be tentatively said that their overwhelming landlessness and impoverishment is not tempered by rural tenancy or land ownership¹⁰⁷. In turn, these also affect the desperate search for employment, footloose nature of work, and the difficulties of labour organising in this sector.

With the boom in the construction industry illustrated above, the relatively low levels of skill and preponderance of manual labour required in this sector, it acts as a sink for un-/low-skilled and migrant labour. Thus, in my interaction with labourers at the Kashmir road adda, almost all the workers were either migrants from Pashtun areas¹⁰⁸ or from various parts of

¹⁰⁶ Due to the articulation of these multi-scalar forces, Pakistan is thus firmly in the midst of the second phase of depeasantisation identified by Araghi in his analysis of world-scale regimes of developmentalism, financialisation, and market deregulation in the post-WWII era (Araghi, 1995). Crucially, Araghi identifies a “collapse of the traditional boundary between the nation-state based categories of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’” as a key moment of the second phase of depeasantisation (ibid: 358). As we will see in this and following chapters (especially in Chapter 6), these modalities of depeasantisation, spatial homogenisation, and differentiation, crucially inform modes of accumulation, incorporation, and resistance in (the now spatially-extended) urban areas too. Note that Araghi’s characterisation of the shifts in global depeasantisation is cognate to McMichael’s elucidation of shifting global property regimes in the post-WWII era discussed in Chapter 1 (McMichael, 1999).

¹⁰⁷ Of course, this does not discount the integral contribution made by gendered (and unpaid) labour in the household and beyond to wider social reproduction. The implications of reproductive labour, and its integrality to the rhythms of capitalist accumulation and resistance, is of course a long-standing concern of feminist political economy and Marxist feminist theory. With the escalating crisis of reproduction in the neoliberal era, multi-scalar/multi-spatial – including transnational – networks of social reproduction have become the subject of renewed theoretical and political interest via, for example, Social Reproduction Theory (cf Bhattacharya and Vogel eds, 2017).

¹⁰⁸ Including KP province, but also the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the Pashtun Areas of Balochistan. Among Pashtun workers, there was a clear majority of persons from FATA. FATA, a center of successive Afghan “jihad” and the so-called War on Terror, has recently been merged into KP province. Up till now it had been governed by highly oppressive and atavistic colonial-era laws mandating “traditional” mechanisms of adjudication and collective punishment, with no recourse to civilian courts and the criminal justice system of wider Pakistan.

Punjab who had come to Karachi over the last ten years. Some older workers among Pashtuns has been coming to Karachi seasonally for over ten years. While some addas have a minority of women workers from Odh/Rangar community (Gazdar, 2004: 51-52), all workers at the Kashmir Road adda were male. Construction work can vary from infrastructure work (such as roads and bridges) to *pukka* (permanent) and *katcha* (semi-permanent) construction (ibid: 38-39). Infrastructure work is mostly done on state contracts and is carried out through networks of established officially registered companies and sub-/petty-contractors called *thekedaar*. *Kutch*a construction is done with materials such as mud, thatch, and unbaked bricks; while *pukka* construction is done with more durable materials such as hardened bricks, concrete, cement, and steel. *Kutch*a construction is more prevalent in rural areas, while most construction in urban centers is *pukka* work. With the real estate boom, *pukka* work for private parties has overtaken state-sponsored infrastructure work as the main construction activity in cities like Karachi. This is especially so for chowk workers as these often are not part of *thekedaar* teams, and operate as individual labourers. Thus, while *thekedaars* often operate with groups of skilled and semi-skilled workers for work on private and governmental projects, low-skill migrant workers (such as those who sit at the Kashmir Road *adda*) fit into the very lowest rung of construction work. The chowk labourers are therefore almost completely atomised, are hired by individual owners or contractors on a daily or project basis, and are not facilitated by any kind of state regulations/protections.

The labour process itself is extremely precarious and uncertain. Chowk mazdoor arrive at the *adda* early in the morning and sit on footpaths/sidewalks lining the intersection. Most workers cluster around specks of shade under trees and near bushes. If they have any tools of their own, these are kept either next to or in front of them, to make easier identification of the

kind of work they do. The types of work include masonry, digging foundations, painting, stone crushing, carrying of bricks, carpentry, roof work, and shuttering. A majority are unskilled workers and those owning tools are often the minority of semi-skilled or skilled workers (such as painters and carpenters). Recruiters arrive at the *adda* between 7.30 to 10.30am; they range from individual owners looking to hire labour for small construction work (such as repair, plumbing, roofing, tiling etc) to *thekedaars* looking for labourers for short-term projects (such as building homes, apartment buildings etc.). The recruiters approach the workers, negotiate a rate from among a smaller group of workers, and then – depending on the number of workers hired – take them to the worksite in their own cars or in public transport such as *rickshaws*. Towards the end of the morning however, with many labourers left, workers start making a beeline for any prospective employer. It is in the recruitment process that the object-like character of chowk labourers is most apparent. As we will see in the coming paragraphs, the completely atomised and precarious nature of the labour has determinate effects on workers' consciousness.

Pakka construction work itself can vary: most workers are involved in unskilled jobs such as digging and carrying of bricks, a minority (close to one-fifth in my estimate) are involved in relatively skilled work such as painting, carpentry, and masonry. Most of the hiring for chowk labourers is done on daily basis and rates vary for different types of work (from about Rs. 700 per day for unskilled workers to up to Rs. 1200 per day for skilled workers). On average, workers earn between Rs. 800-1000 per day, however in any given month the maximum amount of days that work is procured is around twenty days. This varies seasonally and during the winter months when I frequented the *adda*, work is less available as private home-owners prefer to do construction work in the summer, when cement sets better. As a result, the amount of available work in the winter can drop to as low as ten to twelve days per month. This amounts to an

average monthly wage of about Rs. 10,000 (the minimum wage in Sindh province is Rs. 16,200)¹⁰⁹. For those lucky enough to be “chosen”, the work is hazardous and, in the humid heat of Karachi, backbreaking. Accidents in the construction sector are four times more frequent than in other workplaces (MEHNAT and APWIF, 2017: 8). And with no cover of social security, there is no recourse for medical funds in case of injury.

By 11am when hiring is mostly completed, workers will move on to sit in the shade or at *chai dhabas* to wait for any potential recruiters to come by after lunch. Those who have gotten work have their lunch – and sometimes a small daily allowance – taken care of by the employer. Those not recruited will have lunch either at a roadside *thaila* (makeshift stall), or at one of the charity services that make lunches for day labourers with donations from philanthropists. Two of the biggest charities in Karachi (Khwaja Gharib Nawaz and the Saylani Welfare Trust) had their centers near the Kashmir Road *adda*; they served food every day from about noon to half-past one. Each had a sitting space at any one time of about fifty people. The workers however complained about the food they got here, as the meat and spices used were of low quality, and gave several of them skin ailments. In fact, ailments of various kinds were extremely common among the chowk labourers and in most sections of the working class I interacted with during fieldwork. Among those not lucky enough to procure work, it was not a strange sight to see some of them standing at traffic lights at the evening rush hour (between 5 to 6.30pm) asking for

¹⁰⁹ In contrast, the minimum living wage in urban Pakistan was estimated to be Rs. 20,224 per month in 2017 (Sayeed and Dawani, 2017: 8). This is bound to have increased now, due to latest round of IMF-induced devaluation of the Pakistani rupee and the resultant inflation. The wages of labour are therefore pushed below the value of labour power, an indication of “super-exploitation” as explored in the last section.

(The relation between value and price [expressed here in the form of “wage”] is, of course, a matter of much debate among Marxist economists. However, I am operating here on the assumption that the living wage approximates the socially constituted value of labour power.)

alms/charity. The only thing worse than being exploited in capitalism is, of course, not being exploited at all.

Towards the late afternoon, around 4pm, workers not recruited congregate at *chai dhabas* [tea stalls] to watch television or talk among themselves. Here, they would sit till about 6.30pm to avoid the rush hour and either walk or take the bus back home. Much of my time with chowk labourers was spent at the roadsides while they waited for work and at these dhabas where they congregated during afternoons. Sometimes when a VIP's motorcade is passing through the intersection or when some political rally was going to take place nearby, the workers at the adda would face harassment and displacement at the hands of the police and/or Karachi Municipal Corporation teams. This was not a rare occurrence as the mausoleum of Muhammad Ali Jinnah (the "founding father" of Pakistan) and the Numaish Chowrangi (roundabout) are nearby, both major venues for political gatherings and dignitaries "paying their respects" at the founder's grave. The business of making a living of course has no reason to come in the way of the business of death, especially if those attempting to make a living belong to the working class.

Payment is usually made at the end of a day's work; the minority of chowk labourers who work with sub-contractors over the medium- to long-term get paid at the end of a given project. Workers complain that sometimes recruiters do not pay in full at the end of the day. This is especially the case when working for thekedaars who themselves operate on fine margins and thus, cut back wages at the slightest excuse such as being late or tardiness on the job. A minority of workers – i.e. those who can afford to do so and trust the contractor – prefer to receive wages after a project is completed and/or at regular intervals as a way of saving. As indicated before, the vast majority of chowk labourers work independently and as individuals. This is due to several factors, not least because they are unskilled with already meagre incomes, and so

working alone avoids the small cut in payment that workers must part with when working through contractors. However, more established/skilled workers with the appropriate networks, might also choose to work with contractors where work is more guaranteed, even if slightly less remunerated.

Within recruitment and in the daily lives of chowk labourers, “ethnicity” and locality are deployed as markers of occupation by employers, and as markers of association by workers. For example, occupational segmentation by employers operates along regional/linguistic lines. Thus, Pashtuns, especially those from FATA and Afghans, do mostly hard manual labour such as carrying heavy loads and digging foundations. This is tough work with labourers working in teams often carrying loads up and down several stories. Similarly, painting and carpentry work at the Kashmir Road *adda* was dominated by migrants from Punjab. Workers themselves can often claim to be part of a “group” defined by linguistic commonality or area of origin. This is especially so when it comes to residential quarters. Thus, for example, about seventy-five labourers at the Kashmir Road *adda* from the villages around Khar in Bajaur Agency of FATA lived in a *dera*¹¹⁰ next to the nearby Alfalah mosque. Similarly, a group of workers at the Kashmir road *adda* from Bahawalpur – almost all of them painters and masons – live in migrant workers’ lodges (*musafir-khana*) near the Cantonment Station. While workers of other ethnicities live here too, the majority are from Punjab and musafir khanas are also often run by persons from Punjab. These are often no more than open plots of land with a hundred to hundred and fifty handmade, woven beds (*charpai*) under the open air. Toilet facilities are available on site and the rent for living in the *musafir-khana* can vary from Rs. 50 to 100 per day. Newcomers, especially those with no prior “contacts”, are charged more. Thus, ethnicity and linguistic/regional origin is

¹¹⁰ A center of congregation, often a cluster of low quality shacks/hut built for temporary working class residence.

often mapped onto occupation, while also serving to organize networks of sociality for wider social reproduction (such as in procuring residence). In fact, chowk workers' attachment to ties of locality and ethnicity also serves as an anchor, a source of certainty in the face of rampant atomisation, the vagaries of the market, and the harsh conditions of work and social reproduction.

If workers have families in their native villages an average of half to one-third of their earnings are sent back home every month. This is done either through an acquaintance who might be travelling back or through an acquaintance in Karachi who might have contacts in the village (such as a brother who runs a shop or has a small business). Workers who have mobile phones also sometimes use more modern technologies such as the various instant money transfer schemes offered by telecom companies. Moreover, many of the Pashtun workers – including the ones from Bajaur – come to Karachi seasonally. In the summer months, they either go back to their own village for crop cutting and harvesting or find work as agrarian labourers in other parts of Pakistan. As such, not only are chowk labourers footloose due to the pressures/vagaries of finding regular work, they are also part of spatially extended networks of social reproduction. This may be in the form of labourers' families back in villages/small towns of their origins or their own seasonal circulation.

As seen above, due to the highly footloose and precarious nature of the work, conditions of organisation are very weak. Contingent and shifting networks around ethnicity and locality provide some semblance of anchorage and organisation in the face of the highly atomised and uncertain conditions of work. This is further reinforced by workers' dependence on extended networks of labour reproduction in the form of internal remittances and seasonal migrations.

Conditions of market despotism, and extended networks of production and reproduction, crucially shape consciousness among chowk labourers.

Here, it is important to emphasise that consciousness must be understood more as an ideological *terrain* with diverse elements, rather than a unified or coherent whole. Ideology is, as Marx and Gramsci remind us, the “terrain on which men [sic] move, acquire consciousness of their position, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle” (Gramsci, 1971: 377). As such, while ideology is integrally related to subjects’ conditions of existence, it is also a *second-degree relation* as it does not express the real relation between human subjects and their conditions of existence simply or directly, but “*the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence*” (Althusser, 1965/69: 233). Thus, while ideology expresses (and shapes) the substratum of subjects’ concrete activities, it does so only *indirectly* i.e. through the “(overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence” (ibid: 233-4). What is important to emphasise here is that the complex terrain of consciousness and ideology is determined over both synchronic and diachronic axes: on the synchronic axis, it takes up the prevailing conceptions of the specialists, sciences, and technologies of the day, while on the diachronic axis it not only incorporates “prejudices from all past phases of history” but also “intuitions of a future philosophy” (Gramsci, 1971: 326 fn5, 324).

Subjects’ consciousness of their conditions is concretely linked to their practice and everyday life (for example, their embeddedness in specific labour processes). However, these aspects of consciousness are also inflected through other levels of social totality (such as the institutions of civil and political society) and through reigning ideological complexes (such as articulations of nationalism, religion etc.). Contradiction is constitutive of all these levels –

everyday practice, apparatuses of the integral state, historically formed ideological complexes etc. – due to their concrete linkages with varied social practices and the rhythms of hegemonic projects. Thus, while ideology produces “subjects” in a given social formation, it should not be understood as completely functional for social reproduction. In fact, the complex ideological terrain contains within itself critical, contradictory and dissonant elements with the potential for rupture and cleavage. Such an integral conceptualisation of ideology and consciousness also segues well with our conception of labour regimes as an overdetermined unity of differentiated processes, including the labour process, state-sectoral linkages, and the rhythms of reproduction and proletarianisation¹¹¹.

¹¹¹ It is important to note, what may be termed, a continuing separation between two strands of ideology-theory within the Marxist tradition: one developing Marx’s insights into reification and fetishism engendered by the commodity form in everyday practice (in *Capital Vol. 1*), and the other on the mystifying conceptions of the world disseminated by reigning/ascendant historical blocs via hegemonic apparatuses (indicated, for example, in *The German Ideology*) (Rehmann, 2013: 48-9). While the reification/fetishism strand of ideology theory was developed by Lukacs and the ensuing tradition of Western Marxism, the Marxist-Leninist tradition has generally focussed on the production of ideology through apparatuses controlled/dominated by the dominant class(es). However, an integral conception of ideology would link the “objective thought-forms” generated by the workings of the commodity-form with their (creative) uptake in everyday life and linkages with different institutional apparatuses. Such “a differentiated method of analysis” would involve a multi-level analysis, even while avoiding the subsumption of these different levels to a single logic (ibid: 51).

The Gramscian understanding of common sense – as the everyday, disjointed, and contradictory workings of ideology and consciousness – can serve us a fruitful terrain for linking these different strands (and levels) of ideology theory. While Gramsci himself does not elaborate on Marx’s critique of fetishism, his multi-level analysis – ranging from everyday life, politics of production, to the “global” levels of state and world-scale accumulation – makes it possible to “translate” his theorisation of hegemony for an immanent critique of both the commodity-mediated “objective thought-forms” and the materiality of the ideological (i.e. hegemonic apparatuses) (Rehmann, 2013: 144-6). Thus, for example, in his reading of *Capital Vol. 1*, Fredric Jameson suggestively links “‘the objective appearance’ of capitalism [i.e. the reification and fetishism of commodities], what one is tempted to call its existential dimension, [with] ‘Gramscian common sense’, or the ideological illusions of daily life” (Jameson, 2014: 43).

For our purposes here, the conceptualisation of “labour regimes” as a multi-level of articulation of the labour process, state-sectoral linkages, and the rhythms of reproduction, serves as a useful heuristic for linking the “objective thought-forms” of commodity society with the materiality of hegemonic apparatuses and the rhythms of incorporation, exclusion, and resistance (or lack thereof) therein. This integral conceptualisation of ideology – linking the everyday workings of the commodity-form with the

Like other subaltern groups, consciousness among chowk labourers is highly fragmented and disjointed. However, the particularities of the market despotic and ethnicised labour regime lend specificity to the form of consciousness among workers. The synchronic aspects of chowk labourers' consciousness are overdetermined by the conditions of the labour process and especially the mechanisms of recruitment. Here, a constant trope in conversations is one of *taqdeer* [predestination], *qismat* [fate], and *Allah ki marzi* [God's will]. The ability to procure work for the day is down to what is assigned in one's *taqdeer*: "we all have our own destiny" [*sab ki apni taqdeer hai*] (A. Hussain, fieldnotes, Jan 24, 2018). The irregularity and seasonality of work is seen both in terms of owners'/contractors' preferences regarding the very secular fluctuations of demand and supply, but also as a mechanism of divine balance between the needs of all workers: "Allah has pre-decided the share of His bounty for everyone" [*Allah ki taraf se sab ka rizq likha hota hai*], and "one fish cannot drink all the water in the sea" [*samandar ka saara paani aik machli tou nahi pi sakti*] (Kamran, fieldnotes Jan 24, 2018).

It is my contention here that this element of workers' common sense should be seen as a response to their highly atomised conditions of production. As alluded to above, the process of labour recruitment at the chowks is one where workers are most obviously turned into objects. Owners and contractors roam among the mass of labourers and pick out the ones they will need for the day. In turn, the products of labour power (housing schemes, apartments, roads etc.) are divorced from the bearers of labour power themselves, sometimes in the form of forced removal from those very thoroughfares, but most often in the form of their products' utter inaccessibility for the working class itself. Labour, which is the subject with volition, concreteness, and specificity, is turned into an object. The labour's product, themselves objects – commodities,

materiality of hegemonic practices/apparatuses – will also be useful in our exploration of student politics and the urban question, respectively, in later chapters.

markets etc. – turn into subjects and exercise an alienated power over labour. Object becomes subject, subject becomes object. An inversion takes place which is *both real and illusory*.

Marx once termed ideology a “camera obscura”, where “men [sic] and their circumstances appear upside-down... this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (Marx and Engels, 1846: 9). For chowk labourers, alienated from their means of production and as bearers simply of their labour power, the commodity and the market itself is “changed into something transcendent... [and] stands on its head” (Marx, 1906: 82). Things, commodities, become endowed with a life of their own, the market and employment “vary continually, independently of the will, foresight and action of the producers. To them, their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them” (ibid: 86). Marx terms this the “fetishism of commodities”. The vagaries of the market, the domination of the abstract time of value, the alienated power of labour in the form of the commodity, the inversion of subject into object and vice versa, is here understood by workers through conceptions of *taqdeer* and *qismat*. Attribution of the fluctuations of employment to God’s bounty and Will serves to “anthromorphising their subjugation” (Taussig, 1980: 18). In the absence of concrete mediations between owners/contractors and chowk labourers, the everyday coercion of the market is experienced as despotism. In conditions of such extreme atomisation and alienation, (market) coercion exercised often enough becomes hegemony. “The religious world,” as Marx reminds us, is after all “the reflex of the real world” (Marx, 1906: 91). Here – to channel Voltaire (and Robespierre) from a different context – if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him.

However, this synchronic aspect of consciousness and ideology within the labour process itself should not be taken as merely functional to the conditions of production. In fact, it is an active production by workers as a way of understanding the labour regime they are embedded in. Conceptions of God and Divine Will are not merely an accommodation to the alienated power of labour, commodity, and the market. While workers' time at the *adda* is dominated by the struggle to procure work for the day, discussions at *chai dhabas* in free time and after work also give clues to elements of consciousness which do not fit neatly with accommodations to the status quo. Here, an elderly worker called "*Faqeer baba*"¹¹² was often seen being listened to by workers with varying levels of interest. Faqeer hails from Moro (a town in upper/central Sindh) and has been coming seasonally to Karachi for work for last two decades. The younger workers refer to him with a mix of amusement and respect. Some half-seriously call out his "heretical" stories and ask him to concentrate on "*dua, namaz*" [prayer and salvation] at this late stage of his life. In another breath, the same workers would also refer to Faqeer as their "*ustaad*" [teacher] who had taken them under his wing and taught them the basics of digging, cutting, and masonry work (fieldnotes Jan 19, 2018).

Faqeer's stories were often all over the place, with a definite element of senility, but commanded a regular audience at the *chai dhaba* at the intersection of Kashmir Road and Shahrah-e-Quaideen. The specific elements of the stories varied and were disjointed, but were structured around tropes of God's judgement ("*Allah upar judge betha hai*"¹¹³), wrath against arrogance, and against the rich's breaking of trust/promise. Thus, in one story, Faqeer talked

¹¹² "Faqeer" was most likely not his real name, but the one by which he was referred to (including by himself). The name might also be allusion to Faqeer Baba's age and stories about Divine providence etc. Colloquially in Pakistan, *Faqeer* is the term often used for elderly men who "give up" the world and become part of mystical orders around religious saints or shrines. Sometimes, the word is also used derogatively for those seeking alms. In our case, workers' referred to Faqeer in both senses, with the former meaning (i.e. that of a mystic) dominating.

¹¹³ The word "judge" was used in English.

about the British coming into Sindh with their arrogance, but *Mola Hussain*¹¹⁴ protecting Sindh from storms during this time. The one story which Faqeer narrates with most clarity is about General Zia ul Haq and his arrogance. According to Faqeer, General Zia was arrogant in dealing with the poor and with the wider population. He made a promise of holding elections in ninety days after imposition of martial law which he reneged on: “I will return your trust to you” [*mein aap ko aap ki cheez waapis kar doon ga*]. However, Zia was arrogant and went on to rule for many years. He played a game of “deception with a faqeer” [*faqeer ke saath dhoka kiya*], but God the King was watching from his Throne [*Badhshah mimbar per betha dekh raha tha*]. The Faqeer in turn cursed Zia that “the arrogant man would neither be in Earth nor the Sky” [*maghroor na zameen mein ho ga na aasmaan per*]. General Zia was eventually blown up in the sky, true to form and the Faqeer’s curse, ending up “neither on Earth nor in the Sky”¹¹⁵. The powerful’s arrogance was no match in front of “Allah the judge” and the curse of the powerless (the faqeer) brought down divine wrath on the General. Incidentally, Faqeer’s hometown of Moro was the center of the anti-Zia Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) in the 1980s.

Here, the intermingling of fantasy and reality acts as a “creative response to an enormously deep-seated conflict” between desire and its frustration in the atomising conditions of production (Taussig, 1980: 21). The “coexistence of the aura of fantasy” with the desacralising world of

¹¹⁴ Hussain, son of Ali, was the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and has a mythic status in Islamic theology and mysticism after being martyred at Karbala (in modern Iraq) by the armies of the Caliph/usurper of the day, Yazid son of Muawiyya. Hussain’s martyrdom was the central impetus behind the split between Sunni and Shia Islam, and continues to be evocatively enacted all over the Muslim world during the Islamic month of Muharram. Hussain’s figure and legend continues to be a source of inspiration for various mystical orders, as a symbol of defiance against injustice, and as succour for “protection” of the oppressed.

¹¹⁵ General Zia along with several of his generals and the incumbent US Ambassador to Pakistan died in a mid-air plane explosion on 17 August, 1988. The plane explosion remains a subject of much speculation (and humour) in Pakistan even today.

exchange value and commodified labour power indicates that “the magic of production and the production of magic are inseparable in these circumstances” (ibid). The accounts of god and predestination therefore do not simply work as accommodations to the vagaries of the market. In fact, conceptions and actions around religiosity are shaped by workers’ specific conditions of production and are actively deployed for understanding, in a disjointed and fetishized manner, the prevailing conditions of alienation and atomisation. As such, the invocation of “tradition” or divinity is not simply an indication of the non-synchronicity of historical time and of the constitutive temporal unevenness of lived experience *ala* Ernst Bloch (Bloch, 1935/1977). But more importantly, the appeal to an older moral economy of divinity and power/humility may also serve as a “form of deferred action... in which the past produces itself retroactively in the present” and can, in certain conjunctures, become nodes for (alternative) socio-political practices and imaginaries (Harootunian, 2005: 47).

One day as I was sitting at the Pashtun workers’ *dera*, a group of *Tableeghi Jamaat* (TJ) members came to recruit workers for *dawat* [proselytising mission]¹¹⁶. Here, the Jamaat members attempted to persuade workers to become part of their congregation and join them at an upcoming mass gathering [*ijtima*] at Raiwind (a small town in Central Punjab). The Jamaat members invoked divine providence in determining profit and bounty, and “all man has to do is to make a pledge [to go forth in His way]” [*maal munafa Allah k haath mein hain, hamara kaam irada karna hai*] (fieldnotes, Feb 17, 2018). However, when the workers at the *dera* did not give a positive response, the Jamaat member switched to invoking “Pashtuns” as “special and close people of Allah”, “always at the forefront of Rawind *ijtima*”. This of course, ties into a longer

¹¹⁶ The Tableeghi Jamaat is a world-wide proselytising organisation with roots in Deobani Islam in India and Pakistan, but regular congregations and missions around the world. They are committed to peaceful reform of society through a focus on individual piety, ritual adherence, and face-to-face preaching (*dawat*) (Khan, 2016).

colonial and postcolonial history of tying Pashtuns as being especially – even fanatically – “devoted” to Islam and to Pashtuns’ self-conception of the place of Islam in *Pashtunwali* (the Pashtun “honour code”)¹¹⁷. This was, however, a kind of subversion of the usual “fanatic” or “fundamentalist” Pashtun Muslim, with a focus on spreading Islam through the virtue of peaceful proselytising and deed. After a ritual prayer [*dua*] for “Allah to give all of us courage and guidance [*hidayat* and *toufeeq*] to join the mission”, the TJ members got up to leave. At this point a young worker quipped that here they are asking us to commit for the next three months, when “we don’t even know where and how we will be in the next two weeks”.

Moreover, while the TJ member attempted to tie “ethnicity” to Islam, for Pashtuns at the *adda*, their ethnicity is very much tied to their status as hard working labourers. For example, one old Pashtun worker Abdul Rahim – while telling me about his seasonal migrations to Karachi and beyond for work – and said, “look at these [putting his tough, wizened hands in my lap – AM]; we Pashtuns go and work wherever the work takes us”. Thus, not only is there a recognition of being subject to the rhythms of the market, but – and crucially – *class here is lived and understood through difference* (in this case, Pashtun “ethnicity” and its association with hard work and migrations in search of work). As such, workers’ invocation of religiosity and religious tropes is very much defined (and circumscribed) by the uncertain and alienating conditions of the “market despotic” labour regime. Allah and *taqdeer* are invoked as anthropomorphic rationalisation of the objectifying conditions of the labour process and the uncertainty/powerlessness produced therein. However, this does not mean that workers’ commitment to religious tropes is wholesale or simply functional to the reproduction of the system. God as protector and judge against the powerful/arrogant mingles with the God of the market. The conditions of market despotism and

¹¹⁷ For more on *Pashtunwali* and Islam, see (Banerjee, 2000: 198-200).

alienation are marked in this discourse and in workers' relation to the wider urban space around them.

In fact, as recent migrants, workers' conception of the city and the urban was marked by related feelings of estrangement and alienation. Here, by "urban" is meant not just a passive space or a – technocratically defined – container of space, but an active confluence of social relations, processes, and inscribed meanings (Lefebvre, 1970). Workers' often referred to incidents that happened to/around them as examples of how "everyone is looking out for themselves and everyone is busy in their work": the labourer in question, Nehal, was a very recent migrant from Khyber Agency in FATA and was referring to a robbery he had witnessed a few days earlier where no one came to help the victim during or after the incident (fieldnotes, Jan 15, 2018). Thus, while migrant workers and especially the young among them like Nehal were enthused by being in Karachi, "the city of lights" [*roshnion ka shehr*], a bit of probing also reveals a yearning for "simpler" times. Another worker talked about how in "in older times, there was respect and reciprocity" [*izzat aur ehteraam tha*], but now everyone is looking out for themselves: "brother is trying to bring down brother" [*bhai bhai ke peechay hai aur neecha karnay ki koshish kar raha hai*]. Here, the glitz of the city, the pace of urban life, and its mediation by technology also reveals an underlying patriarchal moral economy. Among few workers, complaints about loss of reciprocity and familiar ties are intermingled with fears of technology such as proliferating mobile phones "eroding morals and weakening values", especially in relation to "the relation between man and woman" [*aurat aur mard ka rishta tabah ho gaya hai*].

At the receiving end of a regime of market despotism, the alienation and atomisation of urban life is understood in terms of the erosion of established norms of mutuality and reciprocity,

often undergirded by patriarchal arrangements¹¹⁸. For the recently migrated workers (as chowk labourers usually are), embedded in networks of spatially extended reproduction, the urban as lived experience is marked by deep ambivalence: on the one hand the glitz of technology and the (often, dashed) hopes of better, more regular employment; on the other hand, feelings of anxiety and anomie, a loss of the prevailing coordinates of social life. This is then expressed as spatial and temporal estrangement, either through invocation of them being “unfit” or “unsuited” to “city life” [“we are not city people”], and/or a yearning for a simpler time of “our grand-fathers and grandmothers” [*puranay time achay thei, hamara dada daadi ke*] (Nehal and Shafeeullah, fieldnotes, Mar 19, 2018). As such, the abstract domination of the market and the ambivalence of migration is re-articulated/inscribed in the spatial-social form of the urban, where “community and mutuality give way to personal self-interest, and commodities, not persons, dominate social being... [leading to] the most horrendous distortion of the principle of reciprocity” (Taussig, 1980: 37).

Therefore, we see how an overdetermined unity of factors shapes the labour regime of “market despotism, with ethnic segmentation” in which chowk mazdoor are embedded, and which in turn shapes determinate forms of consciousness and organisation. We saw how certain types of state regulation (i.e. in favour capital’s hyper- mobility) and multi-scalar rhythms of capital and geo-politics (such as the “War on Terror”) have led to a boom in the construction sector in Pakistan and produced it as an unregulated sink for speculative capital. This in turn has shaped the conditions of atomisation and uncertainty in which recently migrant labour in this sector finds itself. The low-skill nature of the labour process reinforces atomisation and uncertainty, while encouraging segmentation along occupational and linguistic/ethnic lines. This

¹¹⁸ In a coming section, we will shed detailed light on, what I term, the “patriarchal despotic” labour regime of home-based women workers.

segmentation is in turn reinforced by the conditions of reproduction of labour power, such as clustering of living spaces along lines of locality and ethnicity, and spatially extended networks of reproduction. Such a regime of market despotism with ethnic segmentation, then also shapes the forms of fragmented and disjointed consciousness among workers. This is marked by an active understanding of the alienated structures of market and value through an “anthromorphising of subjugation” in the shape of God and *taqdeer*. However, the popular common sense around God and pre-destination is not merely functional to the labour regime, but also entails diachronic elements of slippage and contradiction. In this market despotic regime, therefore, class is lived and produced through ethnicised and spatialized registers of alienation, mutuality, and contradiction.

Hegemonic Paternalism: Food Transport Workers

In this section, we will be detailing the labour regime which operates in the food transport sector especially in relation to a charity firm in Karachi, the Alamgir Welfare Trust (AWT). All the workers here are wage labourers and employed on a mix of formal and informal contracts. The AWT is one of a handful of charities involved in the making and distribution of food exclusively to the urban poor. My introduction to its food transport work was partially incidental. As mentioned in the last section, I had observed several chowk labourers going to charities for lunch. I therefore decided to visit these to delve more into the kinds of social imaginaries and subjectivities involved in workers’ interaction with such charities. Incidentally, my younger brother had done an internship at one such charity, the AWT, a few years ago as part of his university work. This led me to being introduced to the AWT who it turned out operate in a slightly different manner to other food distribution charities. In contrast to other charities, AWT

do not have set *dastarkhwan* centers (where people can gather and eat), but make and distribute food packets to different parts of the city, such as public hospitals and *katchi abadis* frequented by the poor. As a result, this was a good opportunity to embed myself within the process of production and distribution. The AWT food distribution management, while curious as to why a middle class academic like myself would want to take up this kind of work, were gracious enough to agree to my presence with their workers.

As such, for three months (between March and May 2018) I worked part-time as a worker-cum-supervisor with the food distribution arm of the AWT. The food distribution was a small but crucial part of the AWT's operation, which employed a total of 20-25 people depending on seasonal and other variations¹¹⁹. The food distribution service is a relatively autonomous part of the panoply of AWT activities for the urban poor. Other AWT activities include ration distribution, free medical services to the poor, arrangements for *Hajj* and *Umra* (Muslim pilgrimage), sacrificial services (*sadqa-e-jariya* and *aqeeqa*), and ambulance services in select areas of Karachi. During this time, I had a chance to observe the workings of the whole food distribution arm, from the procurement of raw materials (meat, spices, bread etc.) to the making and distribution of food. While I had a chance to talk to supervisors and managers who oversaw the food distribution, due to my role on the distribution side, I spent most of my time with workers who were involved in loading, packaging, and driving. The time here was spent at the AWT headquarters in Bahadurabad¹²⁰ where food loading, un-loading and packaging was carried out, and with workers driving around different parts of the city for food distribution. I also visited the AWT animal slaughtering and kitchen facilities in the Korangi industrial area.

¹¹⁹ The number includes workers within the food-making process, workers in the distribution process, and their supervisors.

¹²⁰ A central area of Karachi, with a mix of commercial and residential spaces, and with easy access to main thoroughfares leading to industrial areas of Karachi (such as Landhi-Korangi).

For reasons to be elaborated below, I characterise the labour regime in the food transport arm as one based on “*hegemonic paternalism*”. The charity sector and transport work generally are weakly regulated by the state, except in terms of taxation through both formal and informal means (the latter is usually in the form of “corruption” by state officials). Moreover, market competition in the sector is low to non-existent with few firms in the area that AWT is working in (food distribution). Labour turnover itself is low and recruitment is through a mix of formal and informal contracts. While wages are low, AWT offers its employees other services such as food rationing and medical insurance, and potentially plays a vital role in the reproduction of labour power. Moreover, there are determinate aspects of the labour process itself that help to mediate class conflict. These inter-class mediations are established through specific articulations and practices of paternalism within the organisation and in the labour process. Thus, as we will see below, while workers express dissatisfaction and alienation in various ways and elemental class solidarities are expressed in the workplace, these do not lead to any sustained organisation on the part of labour. Therefore, the labour regime is characterised by a combination of low competition, high levels of labour retention, and mediation of class conflict through the ideologies and practices generated within the labour process. As such, I characterise this labour regime as one of “*hegemonic paternalism*”, where there is a weak but real compromise between management and labour due to factors indicated above (and to be elaborated below).

The transport services sector has seen a major boom in Pakistan since the onset of economic re-structuring/shifts (identified in the last chapter). The sector employs up to 6% of the total labour force and the road transport sector is now almost wholly in private hands, due to decades of state divestment (Hisam, 2006: 2099; Sayeed et al., 2016). Conversely, with the onset of state divestment in social sectors and the vagaries of post-9/11 geopolitics, the NGO sector

(non-governmental organisations) has seen a massive increase over the last two decades. Thus, according to one study, the number of NGOs has increased ten-fold since 2001, and stands at upwards of 100,000 today (Shah, 2014 April). Here, NGOs are divided by sectors and function such as advocacy NGOs, service delivery NGOs etc. A subset of these are involved in charity work, and an even smaller subset are involved in the making and distribution of food. In fact, the AWT is one of five major food distribution charities in Karachi¹²¹. That 60% percent of Pakistan's population suffers from food insecurity and the country ranks highest on the hunger score in Asia after Afghanistan, makes the work of philanthropic organisations such as AWT both highly valuable and also prone to instances of corruption and profligacy (DAWN, 2018 Sept 17; Jamal, 2018 Jun 4).

However, regulation in this sector – especially for local charities like the AWT – is restricted to taxation and paperwork at higher levels; state intervention at the level of the production process is non-existent. In this sense, charities operate like any other medium-size firm in the economy. In fact, with the intra-organisational autonomy for each department, the food distribution service effectively functions as a small-to-medium enterprise by itself. Because the niche within the charity and transport sector that the AWT service occupies, the competition here is low and compounded by the fact of being a “charity”. Thus, while there is no pressure of accumulation as such, other pressures operate: restraints in daily food preparation and delivery, cost minimisation, and the “accumulation of piety” (especially in response to perception of financial corruption in NGOs and the concomitant drive for differentiation). The organisation also employs wage labour in various kinds of arrangements for its work and therefore, in most

¹²¹ The number and scale of operations of these philanthropic varies according to the time of the year. For example, during the Muslim holy month of Ramzan, charity donations sky rocket and existing organisations vastly expand their network, while more impromptu groups also emerge.

respects, acts as a capitalist firm in its dealings with labour. As we will see, all these factors have determinate effects on the consciousness of workers.

The labour process of the AWT food service entails several aspects, from the making of large batches of food in their kitchens in the Korangi industrial area, to transport to headquarters in Bahadurabad, packaging and loading/unloading of food onto distribution trucks, and distribution to various parts of Karachi including far-flung *katchi abadis*. The process starts early in the morning, at about 8am with the *deigs*¹²² from the previous day being transported to the kitchen in Mehran Town, Korangi, where it is received by Aijaz-ul-Huda (the kitchen head). A team varying from 3 to 8 persons is gathered through a *thekedaar* (contractor), called Babu *bhai*, who acts as a foreman/supervisor during the cooking process. The number can vary according to the amount of food which is being prepared for the day, as this can include – in addition to the usual distribution service – food prepared as “charity” for social functions of AWT employees’ relatives or any other person who has requested it (for marriages, funerals etc.). Between 8.30am and 10.30am, between 20 to 22 *deigs* of food are cooked at the Korangi AWT center (a total of 220kg of food). The Korangi center is comprised of three buildings/lots: one lot is for keeping animals (mostly goats), the other is for processing meat (such as skinning, cutting meat etc.), while the one in the middle is the kitchen. The kitchen itself is divided into three spaces: a storage area at the back, a large veranda which couples as a parking lot for loading/unloading, and a kitchen space with multiple burners and an accountant’s desk with computers and files to one side. In Karachi’s oppressive humidity, the kitchen space can get extremely hot, and during the Muslim month of Ramzan¹²³, workers have been known to faint during the cooking process.

¹²² *Deig* = Large pot used to cook and transport food.

¹²³ When many, but not all, Muslims fast from daybreak to sunset.

The food cooked here alternates between rice dishes (mostly *biryani*, but *pulao* on Fridays) and a curry dish (with naan bread). Goat meat is used for all the dishes, and sometimes beef kabab is added too. This food, in freshly made *deigs*, is loaded onto two trucks and then driven to the AWT Bahadurabad headquarters, about a 20- to 30-minute drive away. The aim is for the food to arrive at AWT between 11am and noon. Here, just beyond the headquarters building, AWT have put up a stall on the footpath with an umbrella for shade and some seats besides it. The trucks arrive at the stall, workers unload the *deigs*, and carry the food to a specially designed pot which fits into a compartment in the stall. Once installed in the stall, a group of four to five workers start loading the food into smaller packets. On an average day, between 1500 to 1600 packets of food are prepared, and then transferred to baskets each containing about 60 packets of food. 12 baskets of food packets are loaded into each of two trucks, which then set off for the journey to different parts of Karachi. The truck is accompanied by two workers (one driver, one distributor) and one worker-cum-supervisor (such as myself), who oversees the distribution.

The trucks alternate between different parts of the city: one day going to hospitals and *katchi abadis* in the northern part of the city (Liaquatabad, Orangi, Taiser Town etc.) and on another day towards southeastern parts (Korangi, Landhi, Ibrahim Hyderi etc.). The priority is to deliver food to public hospitals frequented by lower classes from Karachi and other parts of Sindh. This includes Rahat Kada cancer center in Korangi, Korangi No. 5 hospital, Indus Hospital, Liaquatabad Number 10 hospital, and Al-Khidmat hospital in Orangi. The AWT trucks are recognised by the security guards posted outside the hospitals, are ushered in, and spend about an hour between all the hospitals. Between 12noon and 1.30pm, distribution is carried out among the staff and caregivers who come to the truck to receive food packets. If there are packets left over (usually about half or just less than half of the packets), the trucks then head to

chosen *katchi abadis* in the area. Here, they go to different empty plots, honk horns in a distinctive manner, and household women, children, and elderly men gather around for receiving packets. Once done with this, around 3pm, the workers head back to AWT, stopping for about half an hour at a working class *dhaba* on the way back to have lunch. Workers usually avoid the AWT food, being either reluctant to eat “*sadqa*” (charity) food and bored with the same food items. Once back at AWT, the *deigs* are unloaded at the food stall, and drivers depart for any other tasks associated with the operation (such as procuring spices for the next day). The workers here sit in the shade, helping with other small tasks around the organisation, until 7pm when they get off.

The labour arrangements in the AWT food service are both formal and informal. Senior workers and managers are hired through job postings in newspapers, official contracts, with appointment letters and optional facilities, such as availing of AWT medical services, food ration programmes etc. The lower level workers, especially those involved in manual labour and driving, are employed through a mix of formal and informal/verbal contracts. After workers stay in the organisation for a certain length of time, they may be offered official appointment letters, with the option of availing the AWT facilities mentioned above. Here, the workers earn a minimum wage salary (about Rs. 16,000 per month) and are expected to be on-site 12 hours each day (from 7am to 7pm), 6 days a week. During Ramzan, the workload increases due to greater charity and distribution commitments, and workers only get a day off on alternate weeks.

In the kitchen, teams of 3 to 8 workers are hired through a *thekedaar* who also doubles as a supervisor/head cook. Here, the contract is verbal, and it is up to the *thekedaar* how many workers he needs each day. The payment here is at a rate of Rs. 25 per *deig* of food. Similar arrangements with regards to a different *thekedaar* are deployed in the *kambeili*

(slaughter-house) where animals are skinned, the meat cut, and divided for different purposes. Thus, as indicated before, formality-informality here is a differentiated continuum, and should be seen as different modalities of labour control. “Formality” and “informality” are in no way separate or distinct spheres, but fluid labour arrangements deployed by management depending on the kind of work, competition, and costing measures within a firm/organisation.

The specificities of the labour process within the food distribution work have determinate effects on workers’ consciousness. The element of alienation is strong and expressed most often through idioms of boredom and repetition of work. Workers complained to me about “not having much to do” and being “tired of doing the same things everyday” (Abdul Wahab, fieldnotes, Mar 14, 2018). This is especially so during the latter part of the day, after returning from food distribution rounds. The responses to such boredom and alienation from work are sought in different ways. During the food packaging and loading-unloading process at the stall, workers often sing songs in different languages. These are mostly love songs from Bollywood films or different kinds of romantic ballads from their own languages. Here, it is interesting to note that the workforce is multi-ethnic and – unlike the chowk labourers – there is no ethnic or linguistic segmentation within the workforce. Thus, while workers may crack jokes among themselves regarding their ethnicity or language – “oh, look at that guy, he is distributing food to his ‘own’ people”, “he only gives packets to those who come and ask him in Pashto!” – this is all done in good humour and is not a source of division or segmentation among workers.

Another way of handling alienation and repetition within the labour process is for workers to devise work games among themselves. These were often unspoken and spur of the moment, but participated in enthusiastically. These could entail anything from how fast loading/unloading of the heavy food *deigs* could be done, to how fast worker teams could move their hands with the

hot food and put it into the 1500 packets prepared every day. The most popular work game however was of drivers' racing among themselves. While this could turn out to be quite dangerous as the trucks had no seatbelts or any other passenger safety equipment, it was nonetheless a fun activity for workers. Because the two trucks would go to different parts of the city every day, the "race" would be reserved for the stretch of common road when departing for distribution and, in case the trucks are returning at the same time, for the last stretch of road on the way back to AWT in late afternoon. A Pashtun driver, Younis Khan (whose family is from Mardan in the KP province)¹²⁴, also took great pleasure in manipulating the truck's clutch and accelerator in such a way that black smoke would come out of the truck's silencer every time we passed a *police-wallah*. Working class Pashtuns, posited in mainstream discourse as overdetermined embodiments of religious fundamentalism and crime, face regular harassments at the hands of police and security forces in all parts of Pakistan.

Conversely, the tyranny of time is imposed upon the workers. In addition to boredom, workers feel the pressure of working long hours. After I had built up a rapport with the drivers and as we discussed their out of work activities, they often complained about the 12-hour long working days. The ensuing fatigue meant they have time neither for entertainment nor for the family once back home ("*ghar ja kar kuch karney ki himmat hi nahi hoti*") (Asim, fieldnotes, Mar 22, 2018). The tiredness and bodily fatigue is often compounded by the civic troubles faced by Karachi's middle and working-class residents, with some areas getting electricity for only half a day. The workers' relation with time is strictly regulated by management through various means. All workers have biometric identification cards which must be keyed in to a machine at the AWT headquarters' entrance in the morning and in the evening. This records the amount of

¹²⁴ One of Pakistan's legendary cricketers from Mardan is also named Younis Khan, and the AWT Younis often introduces himself as "Younis Khan from Mardan, same as the cricketer" (*cricket walay ki tarah!*).

time each worker spends “on the job” and is closely monitored for tardiness or absences. In the kitchens in Mehran Town, Korangi, there are cameras connected to a viewing system in the AWT headquarters. This combined with the vantage-point desk in the kitchen act as a surveillance mechanism on the workers: the “Director sahib likes to personally supervise/watch the food preparation, so that there is nothing unaccounted for” [*Director sahib khud dekhna pasand kartey hain, takay koi ghapla na ho*] (Aijaz ul Huda, fieldnotes, Apr 11, 2018).

Time logs of the arrival and departure of trucks from different tasks, along with records of the amount of fuel used each day, are meticulously maintained. The supervisors who accompany workers to the distribution are also expected to keep the workers in good time. This of course is difficult, as supervisors themselves are often workers too, and are themselves looking for ways to lessen boredom on the job. As such, I was often asked by workers not to tell management when we loitered around the distribution work. This could take the form of stopping by and having a cold soft drink with a friend who runs a small convenience store in a *katchi abadi* in Orangi, stopping at one or the other AWT ambulance kiosks to catch up with the workers there, or simply just spending prolonged time at the *dhaba* hotel where we would stop to have lunch after distribution. Once during my time at AWT, when a driver Siddiq was “caught” loitering with other workers by Irfan (the immediate overseer of the whole food distribution), he [Siddiq] was punished by being “banished” to the one of the AWT ambulance service centers. When I asked Irfan for an explanation, he just said that “this is a punishment, he will have nothing to do there and will just sit around all day, hardly two clients per day appear at that center” [*ye is ki saza hai, udhar betha rahay ga, din mein mushkil se dou gaahak atay hain udhar*]. As such, strategies are deployed – through mechanisms of surveillance and supervision – to impose the discipline of

time over workers, which is in turn resisted by various means, albeit in a limited and unorganised manner.

In addition to the surveillance, alienation, and tyranny of time, the primary lubricator of hegemony within this labour is the ideology of paternalism which is bred within the labour process itself. This takes many different avenues, from the cross-class distribution of work in primary parts of the packaging and distribution work, to the specific ideological effects of working for a “charity”. In my interaction with AWT management, there is a great emphasis on the “dignified” aspect of their charity work. Thus, for example, Nisar Ahmed (the coordinating head of different AWT activities) told me that the *modus operandi* of food distribution for the urban poor differs from other similar charities, as AWT does packed food instead of having sit-down *dastarkhwans* (dining tables). The philosophy behind this is that the *dastarkhwan* mechanism makes the poor “choosy and ungrateful”, while the packed lunches avoids creating “dependency” as the receivers can eat it in their own time and place, and thus “we promote freedom and do not want to create dependency” (N. Ahmed, fieldnotes, Mar 3, 2018). Similarly, Irfan Husain (overall head of food distribution) also mentioned that packaged foods avoid “indiscipline” [*badnazmi*] of the poor, while also acting as a way of “veiling” [*pardaposhi*] their need and maintaining their dignity [*izzat*]. For Nisar (and according to the AWT website), their mission is to maintain the poor’s dignity and “giving them a helping hand, [as] the famous Chinese proverb goes: ‘Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime’”. As such, the element of charity in the food distribution work is combined with definite elements of paternalism and disciplining the urban poor through tropes of “dignity” and avoiding “dependency”.

Supervisors such as Irfan often come and take part in different parts of the labour process, from the loading/unloading of food into the packaging stall, to the packaging and distribution itself. Here, they themselves become part of the humour and games that workers sometimes indulge in during the packaging process. For workers, this contributed to a sense of mitigating – though not eliminating – social distance because of the management and supervisors’ “friendly and accommodating manner” as they too become part of shared practices and meanings generated in the labour process (A. Wahab, fieldnotes, Mar 21, 2018). For supervisors, their involvement in different parts of the labour process is part of “sacrifice” and “contributing to this good deed [of charity]” [*kaar-e-khair mein hum bhi haath lagaein*]. For workers, the fact of working for a charity and handling food made from money which donors have contributed for various religious reasons, there is a sense of “honesty” and scrupulousness in the work. This is enforced by workers during the distribution process where they complain bitterly about the women in public hospitals who are there as patients’ attendees, and try to “trick” them in getting more than “their fair share” [i.e. one packet of food for each person]. For example, a manual worker, Abdul Wahab, was often getting angry at women in the hospital “who first come in a *burqa* (veil) [to get one packet of food] and then take off the *burqa* and come back for another round!” Thus, the fact of working in a charity trust and regular involvement of management within the labour process, was part of a certain moral economy of paternalism defined around tropes of “discipline” [*nazm-o-zabt*], “honesty” with charity money, and “sacrifice”. This in turn contributed to a kind of “psychological wage” and “job satisfaction” for workers.

In addition, along with the work games pointed to above, elementary class solidarities were also expressed in different ways within the labour process. This ranged from specific practices within the food distribution, interactions with other AWT and non-AWT workers, and gendered

nodes of solidarity among the workers. Acts and networks of class solidarity are formed regularly in the labour process; however, these are quite ephemeral and have not (yet) led to any sustained effort at workplace organising. For example, during our distribution drives, the drivers I was accompanying often used to stop at roadside AWT ambulance kiosks (which were often next to other charities' ambulance kiosks) to drop off some lunch packets for the workers sitting there. When asked why, one of the drivers Asim told me to not inform Irfan [the supervisor] about this, and said that the other charities' food is not good, "so these guys wait for Alamgir food when it comes. These are also our people, they labour here too, so they deserve this food too" [*ye bhi hamaray log hain, mehnat kartay hain, in ko bhi khana dena banta hai*] (Asim, fieldnotes, Mar 19, 2018). The same reason was given by workers when giving away extra packets of food to the security guards who would let us into various government hospitals.

Similarly, our distribution journeys to Orangi and Taiser Town in the north-western part of Karachi, would always culminate at the *dhaba* of a woman, simply known to workers as *Amma* [mother]. At Amma's *dhaba* we would get fresh naan and some vegetarian dish, have our lunch, and always be refused when we tried to pay here. Amma – who referred to the AWT workers visiting her *dhaba* as *beta* [son] – was desperately poor, her *dhaba* was no more than a shack at the very outskirts of the city where *katchi abadis* merge into thousands of acres of land held for the purpose real estate speculation. The AWT workers would leave 8 to 10 packets of food with Amma whenever we came here. Her husband, who suffered from various chest ailments, was asked by workers to come to the headquarters in Bahadurabad where they will make sure that he is taken care of by the AWT medical facilities. Moreover, as indicated above, the AWT workforce – at least at the lower levels – was multi-ethnic and these acts of class solidarity were part of other moments of shared practices and understandings among workers. In fact, many of

the long-standing workers at AWT were multi-lingual, speaking their mother tongue but also often understanding other common working class languages in Karachi (such as Pashto and Sindhi). Multi-linguality is one part of a diffusion of shared practices that I observed in many working-class groups during fieldwork in Karachi. Others including the sharing of *naswar* and other snuff-like substances, which are usually associated with Pashtuns but are partaken of among male workers generally.

These moments of solidarity, however, were also mediated by gendered articulations of class. Thus, for example, one worker named Ghulam Rasool but known as *Chacha*¹²⁵ among workers – a highly funny man – would often narrate to me his “run-ins” with “bad women” during his long driving career. Chacha used to work as a minibus driver before starting at AWT, and here he “discovered [that] women are a dangerous drug” [*aurat bura nasha hai*]. According to Chacha, women used to come and sit next to him while driving¹²⁶. He was then “tempted” by several “loose women” [*buri aurtein*] who used to touch him “suggestively” [here, Chacha would gesture with his hand over my thigh] (Chacha, fieldnotes, May 9, 2018). He was involved in “many affairs” during his time as a minibus driver [*boht chakkar chalaye*]. Once he got “caught” by his wife with one such woman [I did not dare to go into details of this getting “caught”], and then “swore off it for the future” [*hamesha k liye tauba kar li*]. Subsequently, Chacha took up the job at AWT but, later told me in a mischievous manner, still has a “*Mashooq*” [lover] on the “side”, whom he passes off as his *bhawaj* [brother’s wife] to strangers.

¹²⁵ While the literal meaning of *Chacha* is “Uncle”, the term is often used as a term for endearment and/or respect for elderly or senior persons. It is in this latter sense that Ghulam Rasool was known as *Chacha* among the AWT workers.

¹²⁶ Minibuses in Karachi have a small, separate women’s compartment at the front. While this is to give them “protection” from the male gaze and harassment, women often complain of men intruding into the female compartment and of harassment from the driver himself using his various, “strategically placed” viewing mirrors to ogle at travelling women. Chacha’s stories are, of course, a kind of inversion of the usual – and pervasive – stories of female harassment at the hands of men in public transport in Pakistan.

While there was no doubt an element of boasting involved in Chacha's tales, it was clear that his sense of being a worker was integrally related to a being a (virile) man, who is "proud" to "keep women on the side".

The masculinist lived experience of class was also apparent in an instance when we were called up by a new Medical Superintendent (MS) at the Korangi No. 5 hospital who wanted to inquire as to how we had "gotten permission" to distribute food there. While my class "outlook" – for example, as a speaker of "clean" Urdu – helped getting us out of any potential problems, Chacha came out of the interaction quite angry. Coming out of the MS's office, Chacha kept going on about contacting the Health Secretary of Sindh and some minister who "are our own people" [*hamara apna banda hai*], and that we are "not some run of the mill men, we can make some calls of our own" [*hum bhi koi aisay waisay aadmi nahi, call laga saktay hain*]. It turned out that Chacha was a local, neighbourhood level office-bearer of the Pir Pagara's Muslim League Functional (PML-F) party¹²⁷. For Chacha, "we [the party] are peaceful people, but can take out people's families if they mess with us". As such, Chacha's sense of belonging to the working class was integrally tied to a very masculinist sense of being a "big man", through his association with influential people and his "power" over women.

An even more revealing incident took place when I was out for distribution with two workers, (also incidentally named) Ayaz and the previously mentioned Younis Khan (fieldnotes, Apr 16, 2018). We had gone to the Altaf Nagar area (in Orangi) and had stopped in a small clearing near a small settlement of Sindhi-speaking persons. Incidentally, there was also a mobile registration van of the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) in the same

¹²⁷ The Pir Pagara is one of the biggest landlords-cum-spiritual leader in Sindh province. His ancestors had been involved in an armed struggle against the British before Independence, but since then subsequent Pir Pagaras have been loyal interlocutors of the Pakistani post-colonial state. Pagara's party PML-F is distinguished by always being on the right side of wealth, pilf, and power.

clearing, where a large group of people were gathered for registering for Computerised National ID Cards (CNICs)¹²⁸. As we were distributing food, a local person came and asked us to wait as “Madam” was coming. A woman then appeared from the NADRA van and proceeded to instruct us (in broken English) that she is the local councillor in-charge of this registration drive and wants to take a photo of the food distribution¹²⁹. My colleagues, Ayaz and Younis were visibly taken aback by her use of English. Grasping that her speaking English in front of so many working-class constituents and AWT workers was meant to establish both distance and authority, I – in an attempt to lessen the distance and so that my colleagues understood what was being discussed – replied to her in Urdu that there would be no need to take photos as this is charity work and no publicity drive. Of course, that did not stop Madam from taking photos anyway while we did our distribution.

However, as soon as we got back in our truck, Ayaz and Younis started – half-jokingly – expressing their disappointment to me that I did not reply to her in English. When I said that I wanted to include them in the conversation, Ayaz said that “she would not have talked back in English if you had also replied back in it; now she is going to think we are ‘*lallu*’ [good for nothing].” For the whole drive back to AWT – and then sporadically over the next few weeks – Ayaz and Younis kept pressing upon me (half-serious and half-jokingly) that as a man I should have shown the “Madam” that we could also speak English: “she showed us down even though she was a woman [*wo aurat ho kar humein neecha dikha gae*],” “we were waiting for you to reply to her in English [*hum intezaar kartay reh gaye k aap English mein jawab dein ge*],” and

¹²⁸ This incident took place in April 2018, around which time NADRA was carrying out a renewed CNIC registration drive as general elections were a few months away (in July 2018).

¹²⁹ Probably to project her “competence” with higher-ups in not just carrying out the registration in an outskirt of Karachi but, to boot, also “arranging” a food truck for the residents. Sycophancy within the Pakistani bureaucracy is a much-valued trait.

“if you had replied to her in English then we also would have walked around with our head held high! [*aap us ko English mein jawab dete tou hum bhi sir utha kr chaltay*],” and so on.

It was a significant event for two reasons. Firstly, it was part of my realisation of the distance between the workers and myself as a researcher of middle-class origin, despite my efforts at being cognisant of issues around positionality and class/researcher-subject relations during fieldwork. While on my part, I had tried to reduce distance by speaking Urdu during the encounter, the workers’ expectation was that I would deploy my English-speaking skills (and social distance) to “strike back” against what was perceived as a slight against their dignity. Secondly, it was also revealing of the enmeshment of class and masculinity in workers’ everyday experience, especially as lived through linguistic difference in a highly-stratified society like Pakistan. That Madam councillor’s English was itself barely understandable was of no importance to the workers, but that she as a woman had managed to “show them down” by a demonstration of linguistic differentiation. As such, class here was lived through self-conceptions of masculinity and differential access to linguistic competence. My mistake in not restoring the balance of the “normative” gendered order by refusing to reply in English, was taken as a slight on workers’ classed and masculine dignity. While I had deprived the workers the opportunity of “holding their head up high”, the event – and its simultaneous transgression and reinforcement of class and gender boundaries – also revealed normative assumptions and hierarchies which provided meaning to the lived experiences of class for the AWT workers. A gendered common sense of class and solidarity is therefore added to the paternalist aspects of ideology generated as lubricant for mediating class conflict/difference within the labour process.

Therefore, we see that an overdetermined unity of factors shapes forms of consciousness and organisation (or lack thereof) within the labour regime of “hegemonic paternalism”, in which

food distribution workers in AWT are embedded. Certain types of state regulation (or lack thereof), such as divestment from public transport and social services, has led to an increasing space for charities such as AWT. Different arms of the AWT in turn operate as semi-autonomous firms, with pressures of cost cutting, time discipline, and differentiation leading to varying labour arrangements within a single organisation. The specificities of the labour process – such as the involvement of management in manual work, surveillance, in addition to the disciplining conceptions around charity work – create an ideological basis of paternalism within the labour regime. Relatedly, AWT’s limited intervention within the conditions of reproduction – such as through food ration services and medical facilities for employees – also serves to shore up the paternalist regime. Practices of class solidarity-differentiation within the labour process, and in their general lived experience, are also mediated through gendered assumptions about normative hierarchy. While workers’ responses/resistance to alienation within the work take many different forms – such as work games and elementary practices of class solidarity – these are ephemeral and have not (yet) led to any organisation in the workplace. As such, lack of market/accumulation competition, practices and conceptions of paternalism, and provision of limited material-psychological gains through the work process, leads to mediation of class conflict and a labour regime of “hegemonic paternalism”.

Patriarchal Despotism: Home-Based Women Workers

In this section, I will be shedding detailed light on the labour regime which operates in home-based production of commodities, carried out overwhelmingly by women. The workers here work in various forms of open and “disguised” wage labour arrangements (such as piece rate work and “own account” work). My introduction to home-based women workers came

through activist and organisational experience with the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF). As mentioned previously, the NTUF is one of the largest independent trade union federations in Pakistan and is run by left-wing organisers. The federation also has a dedicated wing aimed at organising home-based women workers called the Home-Based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF). I have worked with NTUF in various capacities since my introduction to Left politics in Karachi. This has involved being part of meetings with workers, leading study circles, and contributing to their monthly newsletter and occasional edited volumes.

I had the opportunity to interview the NTUF and HBWWF leadership during my Masters fieldwork in 2013. For this PhD dissertation, I supplemented these interviews with detailed discussions and interviews with HBWWF organisers and workers between January and May 2018. I had the chance to attend HBWWF consultation/training sessions (such as on safety issues), taking part and leading their study circles for activists, and participating in various activities such as their May Day and Women's Day rallies. I also had a chance to visit and talk to HBWWF members and organisers in various parts of Karachi and Hyderabad (Karachi's neighbouring city, with a similar – though not identical – dynamic of political forces). In Karachi, interviews were conducted with workers in Godhra Colony (in New Karachi area), and Yousuf Goth and Fareedi Goth (in Gadap Town). The members were kind enough to invite my wife (Tayyaba Jiwani) and me, to their homes where we not only had a chance to observe the labour process, but also talk in detail about various aspects of organising, politics, and social reproduction. Therefore, I talked to and observed women workers individually and took part in group discussions with HBWWF organisers and members. Most of the women interviewed were engaged in work relating to the garments sector, while a smaller number were engaged in bangle-making work. Some of our conversations were audio-recorded, while for others – to

maintain the workers' comfort levels and the flow of conversation – I made written notes afterwards in consultation with Tayyaba.

For reasons to be elaborated below, I characterise the labour regime in which home-based workers are embedded as “*patriarchal despotism*”. Despite Pakistan being part of various ILO conventions which stipulate to the contrary, home-based work is a completely unregulated sector with minimal to no state intervention in the production process¹³⁰. In fact, the rhythms of the world market and state intervention favouring capital hyper-mobility in other parts of the garment and export sector has promoted tendencies towards subcontracting and spatial dispersal of production. Home-based workers (HBWs) are characterised by extremely low wages, precariousness, high levels of dependence on contractors/middlemen, and labour intensive and detail forms of work (amenable to parcellisation and outsourcing). The mediation and differentiation of labour in this sector is achieved through resort to patriarchal mechanisms, ranging from restriction of mobility, to normative ideologies of work/gender, and gendered barriers to organising. Moreover, as the workplace here coincides with the household, the politics of production is overdetermined by struggles over social reproduction, and relatedly, with the normative gendered expectations/pressures which come with the domain of social reproduction. Where patriarchy is the mode whereby hegemony is mediated within the process of production, efforts at class-based organising have to contend with patriarchal relations, ideologies, and practices. These factors shape the consciousness and forms of organisation of home-based women workers in determinate ways. Due to these reasons, to be elaborated further below, I

¹³⁰ As we will see below, this might be in the process of change as HBWWF's activism on this issue has led to adoption of a policy framework for integration of home-based work in the ambit of Sindh province's labour legislation. The extent to which this policy commitment is translated into a legal framework and then implemented, however, remains to be seen.

characterise the labour regime in this sector as one of market despotism, mediated/overdetermined by patriarchal relations: in short, “patriarchal despotism”.

State intervention with regards to home-based work in Pakistan has been minimal. If anything, the forms of state intervention – such as promotion of export-led growth and increased participation in global commodity and trade markets – has led to an increased tendency towards deployment of female labour especially in the garments and textile sector. In the decade of the 1980s alone, female employment in the non-agricultural sector almost doubled while overall female employment in the paid labour force has seen a consistently upward trend over the last three decades (ADB, 2016: 2). A majority of women workers are in the informal economy (by some estimates over 85%), while over 95% of home-based workers are women (Zhou, 2017: 24). The pressures of globalisation and growing integration into various international markets have increased the reliance of capital on home-based and subcontracted work, mostly employing women workers. This is particularly true for a country like Pakistan whose export products are concentrated in mostly low-value added and labour-intensive sectors. Pakistan’s garment and textile exports are also concentrated at the lower end of international markets, and thus face pressures of cost cutting and low margins at all levels of the supply chain network (ibid: 12). According to the 2017-18 Labour Force Survey, 97% of women workers in the textile sector work at below minimum wage, while the gender wage gap is up to 70% (GoP, 2018: 41).

Subcontracting through home-based work, and the concomitant feminisation of work, provides several advantages to manufacturers and contractors. In conditions of high labour supply, subcontracting offers an avenue of decreasing labour costs through “super-exploitation”. Decrease in running costs also takes place through avenues such as offloading costs of constant capital and avoiding labour regulations. In the case of Pakistan, state and non-state institutions

(such as the Labour Ministry, international donor/regulatory agencies such as the ILO and UNDP, and local actors such as NGOs) have facilitated the feminisation of labour in a context where Pakistan's share in global garment and textile export was threatening to decrease (Munir et al, 2018). Here, a contradictory ensemble of female docility, gender equity, and "empowerment" was fused with notions of modernisation, formalised production, and professional management (ibid: 576). As a result, there have been attempts to position changing demographics of the workforce as a response to globalised competitive pressure as "progressive" restructuring of the garments and textile sector. While Pakistani exports' long-term viability and capacity for graduating into higher-value market segments may not be guaranteed, what global structural changes have meant is increased resort to spatial dispersion, sub-contracting, and informalisation of production. As such, state intervention – through facilitation of globalised production networks – and Pakistani exports' low position in international markets have facilitated the proliferation of sub-contracted and home-based work.

The sub-contracting of production, especially in relation to home-based workers, has drawn upon female labour. In the garments sector in Karachi for example, almost all home-based workers (98%) are women (Zhou, 2017: 24). In fact, within the variety of sub-contracted and "informal" work carried out in the garment sector, the processes where women are involved are often the most labour-intensive and low-paid ones. Compounding this is the fact that even within the various markets into which informal garments and textile production is integrated, home-based women workers are almost exclusively confined to the lower-end of export markets (such as of products destined for GCC countries and the local market) (ibid: 13). However, as home-based women workers are usually employed through *thekedaars* (contractors) or middle-men, their relations with firms and markets tends to be indirect. Even if greater

remuneration is being received by actors “higher-up” in the supply chain network, home-based women workers rarely see this translate into higher wages. This is due to female workers’ minimal/non-existent access to markets, and dependence on (mostly male) intermediaries, which confines them to low-paid and detail work. Therefore, the specific workings of capital (and state) through patriarchal relations and concomitant restrictions on access and mobility serves to produce and reinforce differentiations within labour along gendered lines.

The confinement of women to home-based labour is made possible by general patriarchal domination of public space and associated problems with mobility outside the confines of culturally sanctioned spaces (such as the home, certain neighbourhoods, and relatives). While many working-class women do work outside of homes, the moral and cultural stigma attached to “free” mobility of women – associated with practices-ideologies of endogamy and sexual control – often means that “respectability” is associated with confining mobility to the home and other recognised spaces. While women do negotiate mobility through habitation and negotiation of various kinds of collectivities (such as the HBWWF, kinship groups etc.), the real problems faced in the “outside” world means that working class women express the desire to stop work outside the home as soon as financial conditions allow (PILER, undated). For example, over 90% of women working outside the home report facing some form of harassment at work or on the way to work (such as during use of public transport), which leads to feelings of depression, guilt, and insecurity. Some then reconsider their decision to pursue work outside the home (Brohi, 2000; ADB, 2016: 6). This is further compounded by the discomfort due to disapproval and rumours within family and neighbours, and the associated “network of streets under informal surveillance” within neighbourhoods whereby “cultural politics, gendered discrimination, and economic hierarchies are intertwined” (Ali, 2012: 594). The patriarchal hegemony of public

space and mobility means that “women’s ‘freedoms’ are read in terms of promiscuity by the dominant moral codes” (ibid: 595). Women’s “choice” of home-based work is thus conditioned by imbricated rhythms of space, capital, and culture. The spatial and occupational segmentation of women feed off each other, with home-based women workers placed in the lowest paying and lowest skill rung of industries like garments and bangle-making.

Capitalists (domestic and international), contractors, and *thekedaars* [middlemen] thus find in this labour pool of workers a massive “reserve army” which is vulnerable to super-exploitation. Women workers here are often confined to working for just one contractor (thus giving the lie to “free labour” in the capitalist market), on whom they were dependent for work, access to the market, and for the pickup and delivery of materials. The reliance on intermediaries and lack of access to other levels of the supply-chain network has three inter-related effects. Firstly, home-based women workers almost never know whether the material that they are working on is destined for the domestic and international market. As such, they have scarce idea of the profit margins being secured by the *thekedaar*, and cannot ask for more remuneration when they produce internationally-destined commodities (which fetch a higher price and higher margins). Second, the lack of access to higher levels of the supply network also means an inordinate dependence on the *thekedaar*, due to which any remonstrations or attempts to negotiate piece rates/wages is either unsuccessful or eschewed altogether (for fear of retaliation and/or withdrawal of work). Third, and related to above two consequences, is that the wages/piece rates home-based women workers receive are pitifully low. Thus, while wages can vary according to the type and source of work (such as from large factories, godowns, or through middlemen¹³¹), these invariably end up below the minimum wage.

¹³¹ The sources of work can vary. These can be large factories (in industrial areas), godowns, and *karkhanas* (smaller factories/workshops, these are often informally operated and are located in residential

Due to the above procurement methods, the home-based workers earn on average anywhere between one-third and one half of the stipulated minimum wage (Zhou, 2016: 30). As has been mentioned earlier, the stipulated minimum wage itself in Sindh is below the living wage. This is even though the average HBW works long hours (up to and over 12 hours per day) and that other household members, such as children and younger siblings, are also involved in the work. Home-based women workers thus easily fall into the category of the “super-exploited”. The procurement of work is seasonal, with certain times such as the month of Ramzan (in lead up to *Eid* festival) and around the wedding season being peak times for garment work. During these months, the amount of work can exceed 12 hours per day for all able members of the household (fieldnotes, May 30, 2018). The work itself is usually repetitive and physically hazardous. For example, the most common type of cropping work involves cutting loose threads from textile or garments. This is tedious work and is paid at piece rates (about Rs. 25 per 100 pieces), even though the intensity of work varies immensely (depending on the quality of the product and number of threads sticking out which need to cut). Moreover, due to the small rooms in which this work is carried out, the small piece of cut fabric hang in the air and cause irritation of the eyes and lungs. Similarly, bangle work is carried out on a flame which is highly hazardous for the eyes and for bare hands.

An integral aspect which distinguishes home-based work from other labour regimes discussed in this chapter, and shapes the forms of consciousness and organisation in determinate ways, is the coinciding here of the spaces of production and reproduction. This has several consequences for the conditions of production and labour processes of home-based women

areas). Factories and godowns then use their own employees or external contractors as middle men for outsourcing of labour intensive and cheap work. These middle men might even subcontract the work to middle-men lower down the supply chain. Home-based workers rarely have direct connections with factories and godowns, and rely on contractors or sub-contractors for work. As such, home-based workers are at the very end of this complex chain of contracting and sub-contracting.

workers. Firstly, with no spatial and temporal division between waged and unpaid domestic labour, the tyranny of time is felt even more keenly by home-based women workers. This is also due to the persistence of gendered labour divisions with regards to reproduction responsibilities. Cooking, cleaning, taking care of elderly and children means that women workers are hard-pressed to find the free time or mental energy to think about collective issues. Second, the confinement of both production and reproduction to the home tends to reinforce the atomisation and alienation of workers. Third, and crucially, an aspect of home-based work is that outsourcing of labour-intensive work processes saves capitalists the costs of fixed capital (such as on factory space, electricity etc.). As such, home-based work is particularly sensitive to the vagaries of provision of civic facilities such as water and electricity provision, which tends to be unreliable in working class localities of Karachi. As such, due to persistence of patriarchal division of labour and the coincidence of (waged) work and residential spaces, the politics of production here is very much overdetermined by the politics of reproduction (such as domestic disputes, civic problems). Atomisation and alienation, and the coincidence of production and reproduction, thus result from the functioning of market despotism/dependence through patriarchal hegemony i.e. a labour regime of “patriarchal despotism”.

The regime of patriarchal despotism and its combination of market embeddedness, labour process, and the spatial coincidence of production and reproduction, thus shapes the forms of consciousness and organisation (or lack thereof) among home-based women workers in determinate ways. The obstacles faced by workers and responses by organisers revolve around increasing workers’ association with each other and graduating this to other spheres/spaces of state and civil society for greater recognition. In this sense, the experiences of HBWWF organisers mirror those of the (much larger and well-established) Self-Employed Women’s

Association (SEWA) in neighbouring India, whose organisational efforts have revolved around two main strategies: “specific programs to help their members [such as cooperatives, insurance, microcredit schemes], and organisation to increase their voice in policy and regulation [such as lobbying for greater legal recognition]” (Jhabvala and Kanbur, 2004: 302). For the HBWWF, both these strategies have been crucial as the social and political invisibilisation of women generally and home-based workers particularly contributes to their immiseration. For example, as discussed in the last chapter, Pakistan’s labour laws defined “worker” through employment in a workplace owned/managed by an employer. Home-based women workers are not even recognised in the law as “workers” and thus, deprived of any welfare facilities such as social security, medical insurance etc. As will be further elaborated below, the struggle against invisibilisation has thus taken many forms, and the HBWWFs organising and activism has been a key driver for the passage of a Home-Based Workers Act by the Sindh provincial assembly in May 2018. While the formulation of rules and implementation of the law is still awaited, for the first time in Pakistan’s history, this has given recognition to home-based workers and entitled them to rights of unionisation and mandated provision of other facilities on employers such as contribution to social security and pension schemes (Ashfaq, 2019 Jan 13).

The key fulcrum of consciousness and organisation (or lack thereof) within the regime of patriarchal despotism revolves around invisibilisation and associated notions of *izzat*¹³². The invisibilisation of home-based women workers takes many routes. The lack of legal recognition and the confinement of work to the household have already been mentioned above. Alienation and atomisation are further compounded by the conditions of work and the obstacles to organisation. Thus, in almost all the areas where HBWWF members have attempted to organise,

¹³² A direct translation of *izzat* would be “respect”, but – especially in the case of women – this is also associated with patriarchal notions of “honour” through control of women’s sexuality and mobility.

they have faced resistance due to prevailing notions around women's mobility/visibility in public space, family and neighbourhood disapproval, and regarding the "proper" place of women in hierarchies of work and leadership. For example, the foremost obstacle faced is that of disapproval by family members (especially, men) and the informal networks of surveillance comprising family, neighbours etc. Here, HBWWF members report different types of strategies which prevent women from organising. For example, when HBWWF members established a meeting center in the Choori Para area in Hyderabad, a rumour began that the center is inhabited by women "who sell girls for lewd acts" (fieldnotes, May 31, 2018). Women workers report the "mental torture" exercised by socially conservative husbands or "snide remarks" [*tanay-baazi*] from other *mohalla-wallas* who "talk well when in front of you, but then behind our back, stop [women of their household] from meeting us" [*samnay achay se miltay hain, peechay se hum se milney se roktay hain*]. Physical abuse by household patriarchs was also not uncommon.

Such pressures are compounded by other forms of invisibilisation due to the nature of the work and existing forms of organisation in the neighbourhoods. For example, the Godhra colony neighbourhood has a *Godhra Muslim Anjuman* [Godhra Muslim Association] which acts as a civic organisation in the area. This is a community of Gujarati-speaking Muslims from the Godhra area of Gujarat province in India which migrated to Karachi in the first three decades after Partition. The Anjuman operates through autonomous organisation in different areas where there are high concentrations of persons of Godhra-origin. In the Godhra colony in New Karachi, the Anjuman operates two hospitals and a school, while also providing other kinds of social services such as providing rations in the month of Ramzan to the poor and widows, helping with daughters' dowries, and mediating in domestic disputes. However, while the Anjuman holds regular elections every two years, women of the community are not allowed to run or vote in

these. When I asked a former executive committee member of the Anjuman as to why this was the case, his response blamed women's "lack of judgement": "the problem was that women's cases for *talaq* [divorce] used to come, and women could not deal with it. Now if a person is a liar and swears on the Quran, we [men] of course would not believe him and look at the witnesses; but women, you know...." (fieldnotes, May 8, 2018). Here, women's personhood is belittled through notions of their faulty judgement and their "easy sway under emotions". Thus, women's exclusion from positions of authority and their confinement to the household sphere is perceived to be in the "greater good" of the community and beneficial for the *izzat* of the household.

The hazards of the labour process and normative gendered conceptions of work in spheres other than the immediate community also serve to invisibilise home-based women workers. For example, a home-based worker who had been participating in activities for the past many years, recalled that when they were standing outside the Karachi Press Club¹³³ or the Sindh Assembly, people (including reporters) would come and ask them: "Home-based workers? Which home-based workers? These are women who just work in their free time!" [*ghar mazdoor? Ye tou ghareiloo khwateen hain jo apne faarigh time mein kaam karti hain*]. The terms "ghar" [home] and "ghareiloo khwateen" [home-based women, house-wife] thus stood as metonyms for women who "only" indulged in house-work and thus were incapable of doing "productive", waged work.

Women's invisibilisation in public space is thus integrally coordinated with the naturalisation and invisibilisation of labour in the "private" space of the household. Concomitantly, the identification of women with certain forms of unpaid labour (domestic and

¹³³ The Karachi Press Club (KPC) is a popular location for protests, press conferences, and other activities in Karachi's central business district (Saddar). It has the advantage of being in the nerve center of the city, close to all the main governmental and administrative centers, newspaper headquarters etc.

reproductive) dovetails with their sequestration to certain forms of labour coded as “feminine”, “low skilled”, and (therefore) low-paid. For example, Ramamurthy’s account of cotton workers in Telugu, India shows how certain parts of the labour process – such as hybrid cross-pollination – are sexualised, gendered, and mapped onto the young female body (Ramamurthy, 2004: 760). In a cognate manner, the HBWs naturalisation-invisibilisation through low-paid work and patriarchal discourses and practices (such as around the idiom of *izzat*) “resonates in the ways in which space and time are gendered” (ibid: 761). These gendered divisions of space and time, along with the dialogical coding of terms and their connotations, also become objects of struggle and incipient class consciousness/organisation.

Relatedly, the vagaries of the labour process are also felt by women as a source of atomisation and invisibilisation. The hazards of the labour process – such as the health dangers and dependency on single contractors – contributed to feelings of alienation and “being alone”. For example, a bangle-joining¹³⁴ worker Urooj narrated how working on the hot flame with bare hands had damaged the ends of her fingers. So when the time came for making a CNIC (to vote in local elections), it was discovered that her fingerprints had disappeared; she had to leave bangle work for 6 months for the ends of her fingers (and fingerprints) to recover and then get an identity card made. The process of invisibilisation and alienation was aptly summed up by Urooj in a pithy phrase: “we even lose our *shanakht* in this line of work” [*apni shanakht bhi kho deta hai insaan is kaam mein*] (fieldnotes, May 30, 2018). While a direct rendering of “*shanakht*” in English might translate it simply as “identity”, in this context the term was used not just as a marker of identity (such as losing fingerprints), but in the much stronger sense of loss of self and non-recognition of one’s labour. The patriarchal despotism of the labour regime – and associated

¹³⁴ Whereby the two separate ends of a bangle are melted over a flame or hot plate and then joined together.

means of segmenting/keeping female labour “in its place” – is thus experienced as a loss of control over one’s labour and sense of self. Society is alienated from the worker; the worker is alienated from herself. The bodily effacement of the labour process dovetails into the erasure of the self by the regime of patriarchal despotism.

It is in this context of the overdetermination of the labour regime by issues of domestic/social reproduction, invisibilisation and effacement of the self, and the articulation of these around the idiom of “*izzat*”, that home-based women workers fashion complex responses of negotiation, assertion, and subversion. These processes of negotiation and subversion can take place through existing collectivities and through novel forms of organisation (such as the HBWWF). For example, while women are excluded from the higher echelons of the Godhra Anjuman, existing networks of sociality and locality built around the Anjuman provide bases for mobilisation around work and civic issues. In fact, as the lead HBWWF organiser in Godhra colony Saira put it, the Godhra residents’ neighbourhood serves as an extended space for (relatively) free mobility for women outside the homes: “Even if you come here at 3am you will feel like it is morning, we are going to each other’s houses, and there is *ronaq* [hustle bustle]” (Saira, fieldnotes, May 10, 2018). This extended sphere of mobility is then capitalised on by HBWWF members to organise and mobilise for civic and domestic issues. Thus, as a non-Godhra member Ainee remembered about mobilisations around water delivery some years ago, “the mohalla has a *khamba* [an electric pole] system. When the *khamba* is rung [using a large stone or a rolling pin], it is a signal that something is happening, and women come out” (Ainee, fieldnotes, May 21, 2018). In this case, locality networks were used by women workers to protest for the delivery of potable water in the *mohalla* by a daily occupation of a major road intersection just outside Godhra colony.

Similarly, loose networks formed around community and locality also serve the purpose of helping women procure work and, in some cases, organise together on issues of wages and work conditions. For example, middlemen often ask long-standing home-based workers to point them towards any other women looking for work, especially in seasons of high demand (such as the month of Ramzan). Conversely, if a woman is looking for work, they will ask more established household workers (such as Saira mentioned above), who will then put them in touch with contractors in the area and act as *zamanat* [guarantors] for the new workers. To look for new members to join the HBWWF, members also make use of local events such as a wedding function being held in the *mohalla*. Here, the women-only sections become a means of approaching workers who are not part of the Federation. Locality-centered networks are also important for mobilising around work issues. For example, if one contractor is providing work to several women in the area, this can potentially become a point for convergence and formation of union-like structures for the home-based workers. This is especially the case when the godown or *karkhana* [small factory] from where the contracts for middlemen originate from are nearby. In this case, the identification of the owner [*maalik*] can lead to collective action. This can take the form of all women receiving orders from the godown/factory banding together to visit the owner, or a group of women workers withholding the product. The latter tactic is especially effective during seasons when demand is high (such as Ramzan and wedding season), and where owners and contractors are under pressure to deliver products in time. A group of experienced workers can then use their relatively better bargaining position – due to being familiar with owners/contractors and their expertise at work – to obtain higher rates for their work.

It should be emphasised that while existing community networks (such as the Godhra Anjuman) play a key role in forming nuclei of organising, these often extend and bypass

pre-existing networks to organise around hereby neglected issues. Thus, when the Saira and other Federation members rented the verandah and upper floor of a two storey-house for regular meetings and other activities, these also became loci for home-based women workers in Godhra colony to come to them with problems of domestic abuse. In cases of particularly abusive relationships, women also come to the Center because of the lack of women's voices in the Anjuman's dispute resolution process. The Anjuman is reluctant in acting on issues of domestic abuse and separation as it is – by its very constitution – focussed on preserving the unity of the Godhra “community”, intimately tied to maintaining internal hierarchies with regards to women, endogamy etc. As Saira puts it: “The Anjuman-wallas just say ‘go and take care of/make peace in your household’ [*jaa ke ghar basao*]. The HBWWF center on the other hand is perceived as “fairer” due to the presence of women in decision-making and greater sensitivity with regards to issues of domestic violence. In cases such as these, a few senior members would band together and go to the concerned woman's house to talk to the husband who is abusive and/or thinking of separation. Here conversation is centered around making the men see sense as otherwise “your family will be destroyed” [*ghar ujarr jaye ga*] and “you will lose all respect” [*izzat ka tamasha hoga*]. Thus, the strictures of patriarchy are negotiated here through an appropriation-subversion of the meaning of *izzat*, whose emphasis this time is not on the bodily regulation of women, but on men behaving “in a responsible manner” with their families.

Similar negotiations occur when new women workers try to join the Federation. Thus, in an environment where (as mentioned previously) organisations such as HBWWF are seen as impinging on the moral and spatial economy of patriarchy, new members can often face strictures for participation in Federation activities and/or “staying out late”. In response, women workers endeavour to invite men to attend their monthly study circles to understand the

Federation's work. These study circles can be on various topics such as the importance of May Day (in April), the legislation with regards to home-based workers, and on health and safety issues. In fact, Federation members have even invited Anjuman executives to take part in their study circles. The Federation has also liaised with Anjuman members in setting up special medical camps for home-based workers and procuring medicine from Anjuman hospitals. To further counter propaganda around "selling girls", the center has also helped with collecting items for the dowries of members who are getting married. The center arranges vocational courses whereby new women workers and older children learn skills such as sewing and beading. The Federation women have also attempted to sell their product and obtain direct orders (without the mediation of middle-men) to the markets around the Colony. While these measures have been intermittent due to lack of capacity and of market traders' and shopkeepers' reluctance to deal directly with women, they have formed important loci for women to develop collective capacities and solidarities in their everyday negotiation with patriarchal arrangements of labour and domesticity. As such, the experience of exploitation and class consciousness is mediated here through practices of negotiating expectations about domesticity and patriarchal constraints.

In a sense then, processes of HBWWF mobilisation and organising through and alongside other collective arrangements (such as the Godhra Anjuman) demonstrate the contingency and malleability of the ties of kinship, locality and *biraderi* [clan]. New members from different backgrounds such as Zahida from Faisalabad, Punjab (one of the most prominent organisers in Godhra colony) also come to be integral parts of the new collectivity around the HBWWF. As such, while existing community arrangements structurally disadvantage and even exclude women from full and effective participation (such as in Godhra Anjuman elections), these can also provide organising nuclei for other kinds of collectivities (such as around issues of domestic

abuse, civic facilities, and labour arrangements). As Sarwat Viqar has shown in the case of the Gujarati Memon community of Kharadar area in Karachi, women's participation in different collectivities can serve as a point of departure for the formation of alternative networks of solidarity and mobility (Viqar, 2018: 423). While these associations may not accord with the "ideal type" of liberal, individual citizenship and "free" mobility, they do facilitate different kinds of mobility and visibility in public space which can then be mobilised for organising around class issues.

An important facet of the patriarchal labour regime is the coincidence of the spaces of production and reproduction. As pointed to above, while such a socio-spatial arrangement leads to imbrication of domestic issues with those of labour, it also means that crises in the wider sphere of reproduction translate directly into processes of production. Thus, problems over water and electricity are no longer just problems of social reproduction, but concretely impact efforts to make a living wage through home-based work. Thus, as indicated above and in addition to issues such as wages and procurement of work, the Federation's members have been active in mobilising over pressing issues around the locality. For example, Shamim Bano and Saira were recently involved in a campaign to have the Union Council¹³⁵ administration clean their street of the piles of rubbish thrown there by nearby godown-owners every day. In this case, mobility afforded due to their membership in different collective arrangements and the members' insistence by visiting and reminding the UC office monthly of their application paid off, and a team of municipal workers was assigned to clear the back alley every week.

Regular mobilisation on civic issues by Federation members leads to two things. Firstly, the coincidence of civic and labour mobilisation, production and reproduction issues, can yield

¹³⁵ The Union Council is the lowest level of local government in Pakistan. In the case of Karachi, these are often notoriously impotent due to jurisdictional conflicts with officials at other scales of government/bureaucracy. For example, see Haider (2019 February 01).

greater political consciousness among home-based workers. Interactions over civic issues and, therefore, with local governance inculcates the need to think about worker-focussed/working class-based political representation. Secondly, mobilisations over civic and labour issues also serve as a means for discovering collective capacities, overcoming alienation, and – most crucially – recovering a sense of self. Among these, it is arguably the second consequence of mobilisation and organisation by the HBWWF that is most significant for the forms of consciousness developed among women workers within the regime of patriarchal despotism. Thus, as seen earlier, where home-based women workers speak of the effacement and erasure of the self, organised workers of the Federation here talk glowingly in terms of their increased visibility and “*izzat*” (both in their wider community and in their own self-assessments).

In this regard, almost all women workers recall their first participation in a protest or other federation activity which involved stepping out of the neighbourhood. Their recollection of this is characterised by a mixture of trepidation and fear: fear of being out of the “assigned” public spaces for women, fear of being “alone” and looking stupid “standing alone to shout slogans”, and trepidation in speaking up in gatherings full of men (such as in seminars or rallies about home-based workers). Here, invariably women would look back at the time “when we were alone and could not even speak in front of men” to now where “our voice has even reached the Sindh Assembly”. For example, Zahida says that “now people know who we are, we have *izzat* when we go to the Press Club or to the Assembly; previously we wouldn’t even know where these buildings are, but know if you go with me I can tell you where the Sindh Secretariat or Sindh Assembly is” (Zahida, fieldnotes, May 2, 2018). *Izzat*, associated previously due to the strictures of state and society with the confinement of women’s bodies, is now rearticulated in terms of visibility and being known in public. Similarly, Saira recalled “shaking like a leaf”

[*mein tou bilkul kaanp rahi thi*] when having to speak on home-based workers' issues for the first time at a public seminar, but now willingly taking it upon herself to speak because "this is our work, if we do not represent ourselves then who will?" [*ye hamara kaam hai, hum nahi karein ge tou kon karay ga*]. Shakeela, a prominent member of the Federation in Hyderabad, says that through organising work she left behind her "shame" in talking to strangers [*sharam nikal gae hai*], and she is now so well respected that even "factory men" ask her to mediate in their disputes.

Moreover, it is not just through mobilising on (overtly) political, labour and civic issues that women workers have developed collective capacities. Home-based women workers in Godhra colony and in Gadap town now regularly organise social activities such as Eid parties, celebrating birthdays of members at the Center, and going window shopping at the many new malls that have now opened around the city. While new members are encouraged to study circles and rallies, these "apolitical" activities serve as additional nodes of sociality, discovering collective capacities, and overcoming alienation. Thus, the Hyderabad bangle-workers proudly narrated organising transport for a large contingent in the Working Women's Rally in Karachi organised by the NTUF on International Women's Day (8th March 2018), and going to the Aladin Park¹³⁶ afterwards. These acts of solidarity and collectivity – from visiting Aladin Park to having a *dharna* [sit-in] outside Sindh Assembly to demand passage of the bill for home-based workers – are remembered as moments transcending the strictures of home and individuated labour: "we had not even thought of how and why to get out of home. But here, we really forgot all our tensions" [*hum tou apni saari tensein hi bhool gaye*]. The home-based workers contrasted their emphasis on collectivity to the clientelistic expectations generated among by

¹³⁶ A popular, water-theme amusement park in Karachi, frequented by middle and working class persons.

political parties and NGOs who tried to recruit individual for “projects” and “rallies” around election time, respectively. Through the HBWWF they organise as “workers working for *our* rights” (emphasis by Ainee, fieldnotes, May 21, 2018). And it is through this organising that they “now have a voice”, listen to “issues which are our own” [*ye tou sab hamari apni baatein hain*], and gain recognition and *izzat*.

The struggles over extension of the legal framework to home-based workers should be seen in this context of contestations over mobility, recognition, and respectability tied into the concept of “*izzat*”. Where a detached view might see the passage of laws and amendment as a “narrowing” of struggle, a focus on workers’ own subjectivities and the determinate effects of the labour regime of patriarchal despotism opens up a wider vista of understanding. While laws in Pakistan – especially those relating to labour – are conspicuous only by their lack of implementation, the wider articulations of struggle around these laws are (arguably) more important than the narrow legalese. Determinate forms of consciousness and organisation (such as through negotiating and expanding existing networks of kin and locality) are generated by the labour regime of patriarchal despotism detailed here. Due to specific form of ideological and spatial practices, concepts such as “*izzat*” – tied to normative conceptions of respectability, honour, and recognition – become integral aspects of struggle within a dialogical force field. Theorists as varied as Gramsci, Bakhtin and Voloshinov, have alerted us to the *multi-accentuality* and *heteroglossia* of “signs” as arenas for the struggle between organised social groups; thus, meanings of words/concepts can change “as a result of the *struggle* around the chains of connotations and social practices” which (temporarily) “fixed” the given word/concept in the first place (Hall, 1985: 112, emphasis in original). In the case of home-based

women workers, the tensions and subversions around *izzat* therefore provide us with an avenue into a labour regime where languages of gender and class come to be integrally intertwined.

Therefore, we see that the overdetermined unity of production and reproduction shapes determinate forms of consciousness and organisation within the labour regime of “patriarchal despotism”, in which home-based women workers are embedded. Certain types of state regulation (or lack thereof) such as promotion of export-led growth, capital hyper-mobility, and competitive pressures generated due to trade liberalisation, has led to an increase in subcontracted and gendered home-based labour. State, (local and foreign) capital, and normative conceptions of domesticity and mobility, shape mediation of market hegemony through the strictures of patriarchy and the super-exploitation of female workers. The specificities of the labour process – such as dependence on single contractors, confinement to the household, lack of access to the market, and bodily hazards – lead to alienation and an erasure of the self among women workers. The overdetermination of production and reproduction, civic and domestic issues with those of (paid) labour, provide basis for determinate forms of mobilisation. These mobilisations build upon networks of kin and (most importantly) locality, and work through negotiation with existing arrangements of community and patriarchy. Thus, associations of solidarity work through contestation and negotiation of patriarchal norms and civic issues articulated through practices of mobility, recognition, discovery of voice/public space, and fostering of collective capacities. These are in turn expressed and concretised through dialogical struggles over terms such as “*izzat*”. As such, the mediation of market despotism through the politics of reproduction and patriarchal strictures fosters determinate forms of consciousness and organisation within a labour regime whereby gender and class come to be integrally linked i.e. a regime of “patriarchal despotism”.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have detailed the forms of consciousness and organisation (of lack thereof) in different sectors of the “informal economy”. Here, instead of resorting to overly homogenous conceptions of “informality” or the “need economy”, the determinate forms of consciousness and organisation were better understood through a heuristic of “labour regimes”. Understanding labour regimes as a confluence of labour processes, market embeddedness, and the rhythms of labour power reproduction, was seen to provide a superior heuristic to due to three reasons. Firstly, an analysis in terms of “labour regimes” sheds light on the unevenness and specificity of contradictions/mediations within different sectors of “informality”. Secondly, it also served to “provincialise informality” in demonstrating its concrete linkages to the “formal economy” and the rhythms of accumulation, state, and space. Third, as advocated by feminist political economy, a focus on “labour regimes” and the determined forms of consciousness and organisation generated therein, also helped move away from binaries of production-reproduction, household-market, and (in a different register) material-cultural/semiotic. As such, the deployment of labour regimes offers a promising way out of breaking the (state-centered) dichotomy of formal/informal, in favour of more situated investigations of different forms of labour control, organisation, and consciousness, and the potential of linkages therein.

In focussing on the specificities of subsumption in different labour regimes, we also move away from linear conceptions of capital’s development to an appreciation of more multi-variate trajectories. As Michael Lebowitz has shown in his reconstruction of a Marxian “political economy of the working class”, capital’s dictatorship over society is predicated on its mediatory function: between workers as sellers of labour power, between workers as producers and

consumers, and between producers and the means of production (Lebowitz, 2003: 94-5). Conversely, this translates into capital's dialectical tendency of differentiating and dividing workers even in the very moment they are brought together. Thus, the reconstitution of "primitive" forms of labour subsumption in the form of home-based or chowk labourers, is very much in line with capital's tendency of fostering atomisation and increasing its own mediatory hold over society as a whole (ibid: 93). The persistence of formal subsumption of labour and of "older" forms of oppression/social relations such as patriarchy or "ethnicity", are therefore not merely atavistic hang-overs that will eventually be overcome with a linear trajectory of capitalist development moving inexorably from "primitive" to "advanced" methods of production, from petty production and formal subsumption of labour to real subsumption. In fact, as shown in the first section, the rhythms of globalised accumulation, capital's need to reconstitute surplus value in the face of crisis, and the specificities of labour regimes reproduce supposedly "atavistic" forms of labour subsumption which work through "super-exploitation" of proletarians in the peripheral countries (such as home-based wage labour or chowk labourers). As such, instead of positing these different regimes of capital-labour relations (and associated social relations of difference) as indicators of "incomplete" modernisation or "transitional" forms of capitalist development, it is more useful to understand them as articulated and reproduced by the specific insertion of peripheral countries in world-scale capitalism and its imbrications with the rhythms of state, space, and hegemony.

The chapter has also demonstrated in the practical state our earlier theoretical exegesis of class as a lived relation, where consciousness is integrally imbricated with relations of/in production. Thus, we saw different labour regimes were associated with determinate forms of consciousness and organisation among different sectors of the working class. Here, class was

seen to be reproduced through articulations of gender and ethnicity, due to the linkages of the spheres of production and reproduction, and the segmentation-differentiation produced by the specific workings of capital and state. Moreover, in our investigation of different labour regimes, we also demonstrated the “a-synchronicity of the present” in the consciousness and lived experience of class. The focus on complexly-determined “labour regimes” and Gramscian explorations of hegemony, resistance, and common sense shed light on how everyday forms of reification-alienation due to commodification of labour power are articulated to institutions, relations, and processes of accumulation and difference. For example, in the synchronic and diachronic aspects of consciousness among chowk labourers, and the imbrication/reproduction of “older” alienated relations (such as forms of patriarchy and ethnicity) in the – very modern – workings of neoliberal capitalism, we saw the inhering of multiple historical times, social relations, and their articulation through the mediation of practice. The mediation of practice and the focus on relationality in the reproduction of class was also seen in the home-based women workers’ appropriation of “*izzat*” within a dialogical force field defined by the labour regime of patriarchal despotism. The tyranny of time and alienation was a constant theme in all the labour regimes investigated, though articulated differently with varied social relations and forms of labour control.

Our concrete investigation of class, consciousness, and organisation therefore moved beyond the (false) polarities of the merely functional (synchronic) or the merely teleological (historicist/diachronic); instead, it was simultaneously synchronic and diachronic through the mediation of practice. The focus on the “non-contemporaneity of historical time” makes us historicist, but without resort to deterministic or expressionist models of class. Additionally, a focus on the situatedness of contradiction and practice, makes us structuralist without falling into

functionalism. In true Gramscian (and Marxian) sense therefore, our investigation of class moves on both the synchronic and diachronic axes, and thus it is the limit case of both historicism (*ala* Lukacs) and structuralism (*ala* late Althusser). Class and its associated trajectories of struggle, organisation, and consciousness is investigated without guarantees, and in its immanent/integral relation to the rhythms of state, space, and hegemony. Such a focus on immanence/integral relations and on the “non-contemporaneity of historical time” also alerts us to the unevenness and contradiction within the working class, and avoids the pitfalls of an overly homogenous reading of the same.

The focus on unevenness, practice, and integral relations to different spheres-spaces of social life also brings us back to our conceptions of subalternity and passive revolution. Thus, uneven articulations of subalternity were demonstrated with varying levels of consciousness and homogeneity among different sectors of the working class. Moreover, their confinement (for now) to the sphere of civil society due to an inability to form integrally independent organisations, also demonstrated the containment/reproduction of subalternity within the ambit of the integral state i.e. the perpetuation of the passive revolution in Pakistan¹³⁷. The containment of subalternity/working class organisation and its confinement to certain spheres and spaces thus remains a key determinant of the passive revolution in Pakistan. It is with this focus on the spheres and spaces of containment that we will turn to our investigation of urban space in an upcoming chapter. However, before we turn to the rhythms of urban space and associated politics in Karachi, we will undertake a brief review of another social group which has

¹³⁷ The progress of the HBWWF in terms of legal recognition, and their incipient independent organisation, can of course be seen as a more “advanced” articulation of subalternity within the Gramscian problematic. However, the ambit of the organisation remains narrow and characterised by steady but slow progress for now. As such, even granting the progress within this sphere of workers, they remain – on the whole – very much overdetermined by the wider processes of subalternity and passive revolution.

historically played an oversized role in the left and working class politics of Pakistan i.e. students and youth. An investigation of student politics (and associated left cultures) is important in shedding light on the integral linkages through which an alternative, proletarian hegemony is established (or thwarted, as in the case of the passive revolution in Pakistan); and therefore, it is an important historical and sociological supplement to our study of working class politics in Karachi. Student politics and left cultures in Karachi specifically and Pakistan generally are therefore the subject of our next chapter.

5. (Missing) Mediations: Students, Youth, and Left Cultures

“The popular element ‘feels’ but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element ‘knows’ but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other.”

Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* (418)

This chapter will further our investigation of the evolution of working class politics in Karachi within the wider problematic of the integral state. Specifically, this chapter will shed detailed light on the role of youth and student politics in building an oppositional, alternative hegemonic project. Conversely, we will also focus on the subversion and decline of oppositional youth and student politics in Karachi through the phases of post-1970s passive revolution. Considering the close – almost symbiotic – relationship between the Left and student and youth politics in Pakistan, the suppression and decline of the latter will also serve as a segue into the intellectual and organisational aporias of the Left. As discussed in the chapter on trade unionism, the ebbs and flows of the student movement have been integrally linked to the labour movement and working class politics in Pakistan. College and university students became a crucial node of the politics of resistance during the high era of left politics in the 1960s and 1970s, forming linkages with labour, and precipitating a process of reciprocal radicalisation. In Karachi’s case, the institutionalisation of the post-1970s passive revolution blunted this crucial node of student politics through a mix of militarisation and commodification of campus spaces. This was combined with the changing spatial coordinates of politics in Karachi, and led to a decline of campus politics organised around an alternative hegemonic project. While there were sporadic

efforts by some left/youth groups in the 1980s to counter the creeping militarisation of urban space and politics, wider social-spatial changes in the city and pitfalls of organisational cultures within the Left put paid to any sustained challenges¹³⁸. As such, the 1980s were a crucial period where a spatial re-structuring of politics in Karachi was translated as a re-spatialisation of campus politics and its absorption into the wider rhythms of urban militarisation.

Today, while students remain one of the most policed social groups in Pakistan, the continuing legacy of campus militarisation and increasing commodification, hampers efforts towards rebuilding youth and student power. While the recurring crises of the historical bloc – and its reverberations among students and youth – offers tentative opportunities for rebuilding the devastated bases of student power, this is overdetermined by the intellectual, organisational, and generational cultures within the Left. As such, where student politics in the high era of working-class politics played crucial mediating roles within the ambit of the integral state, the overwhelming theme in the post-1970s era has been one of *missing mediations* – between students and workers, between student politics and campus spaces, between students, youth and earlier generations of left organisers/radicals, and between the intellectual and generational cultures within the broader Left. Therefore, it is the issue of (missing) mediations which will provide the leitmotiv for our investigation of students, youth, and wider left cultures in this chapter.

¹³⁸ The “militarisation of urban space” is of course the term used by Mike Davis to describe spatial changes in Los Angeles through the 1980s and 1990s (Davis, 1992). Here, the merging of architecture and the security-carceral apparatus “to an unprecedented degree” fed into the wider securitisation, sanitisation, and destruction of public and democratic space (ibid: 155).

While the sequestration of the urban poor and a heightened fear of crowds in 1980s LA were paralleled in cognate developments in the Karachi of the first and (especially) second phase of passive revolution, the differing historical genealogy of these socio-spatial changes must be kept in mind. It is this historical, social, and spatial genealogy of securitisation and enclavisation in Karachi which will be elaborated in greater detail in the next chapter.

The argument of the chapter will proceed in five sections. In the first section, we will briefly review Gramsci's theorisation of "traditional intellectuals" as a way of locating the strategic role of students and campus politics within the broader problematic of the integral state and passive revolution. In the second section, we will review the history of student politics in Karachi, its withering, and militarisation during the crucial period of the late 1970s and 1980s. In the third section, we will look at youth and student cultures in the current conjuncture and their overdetermination by ongoing histories of militarisation and commodification. In the last two sections, we will reflect on the organisational, intellectual, and generational cultures within the Left movement, specifically in their interaction with student and youth politics. In this regard, an account of the rise and decline of a significant movement of youth and students in Karachi of the 1980s – the *Lyari Naujawan Tehrik* [Lyari Youth Movement, LNT] – will serve to illustrate the organisational and intellectual valences of Left politics in this period and beyond. In many senses, the general degeneration of politics and culture during the General Zia dictatorship and the fall of the Soviet Union continue to haunt student politics specifically and the Left in Pakistan generally. Therefore, to understand the travails of working class organisation today, it is imperative to understand the historical arc of development of student politics and left cultures.

In doing so, I will be drawing upon fieldwork done in Karachi during the 2017-18 academic year and my association with left and student politics in the city. My own introduction to politics was through the movement against the Emergency imposed by General Musharraf in 2007 in which students played a crucial role. Over the years, I have maintained a close association with various left student groups both in public and private sector universities. During my time in Pakistan I have also been closely involved in efforts at student organising in Karachi and in other cities. During fieldwork, I was teaching at a private university in Karachi while

regularly visiting different universities for organisational work, political discussions, and educational lectures. In addition to the association with left politics in Karachi, I have myself studied in different educational systems (such as the madrassa system in Pakistan and academia abroad), which has helped in thinking through broader questions of intellectual cultures in Pakistan. I will also draw upon published and unpublished accounts of student organisers in Karachi from various eras, along with previously published literature on youth and students in Pakistan. While the main thrust of the chapter will be on students and youth from Karachi, I will also be drawing upon my experiences and conversations during teaching, lecturing, and visiting universities in other major cities (such as Lahore and Hyderabad). This is so because the insights gleaned have a general validity with regards to student politics in Pakistan, including Karachi. Based on these different sources and experiences, I aim for a reconstruction and evaluation of intellectual and organisational cultures within the Left and among youth. Moreover, in conversation with Gramsci, I will also place students and youth politics within our wider problematic of the integral state and post-1970s passive revolution in Pakistan. It is to this strategic theorisation of students and campus politics that I turn to in the first section.

On Traditional Intellectuals

While Gramsci's theorisation of organic intellectuals has been a source of fertile theoretical and empirical exegesis¹³⁹, his elaboration of the role of traditional intellectuals has arguably been less popularised and commented upon. A close reading of Gramsci's conceptualisations however demonstrates the crucial role of traditional intellectuals in both maintaining an incumbent hegemonic order and in the formation of a new one. In fact, one of Gramsci's crucial

¹³⁹ cf Patterson (1975) on blues and country music in the American mid-West and Morton (2007) on the role of Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia in the Zapatista/EZLN movements.

contributions in the *Prison Notebooks* is to have characterised the role of intellectuals both historically and in the expanded ambit of the integral state in the era of bourgeois state's consolidation. In this regard, it may be said that Gramsci historicises and socialises the political and "technical" (such as in spheres of culture, science etc.) role of intellectuals, while imbuing each with their respective technical and political imbrications, respectively. Such a historicisation and socialisation of the roles played by intellectuals also paved the way for a new terrain of intellectuality where – the traditionally separated – political, organisational, and technical capacities are combined in a new revolutionary subject: "the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone at a certain degree of development... [and] becomes the foundation of a new and integral conception of the world" (Gramsci, 1971: 9).

To begin with, Gramsci characterises "traditional intellectuals" as those which an ascendant social group finds "already in existence and which seem to indeed represent an historical continuity" (Gramsci, 1971: 7). Where "all men [sic] are intellectuals" in the sense of "participating in a conception of the world" and following conscious modes of thought and practice, traditional intellectuals are those who have the "function of intellectuals" in the wider ensemble of social relations. Thus, traditional intellectuals have ideological and political functions as organic intellectuals of a now hegemonic/consolidated historical bloc in its phase of ascendancy. By dint of such consolidation and the garb of "universality" worn by the particular interests of the given historical bloc, traditional intellectuals and their institutions (such as schools, universities, church etc.) seem to acquire a certain "neutrality" and independence with respect to socially dominant classes. As described by Marx and Engels in the *German Ideology*, ensconced in the division of mental and physical labour, traditional intellectuals become key disseminators/shapers of the ideological and political terrain that serves to maintain a prevailing

hegemonic order (Marx and Engels, 1846: 22). Here, seemingly disembodied and de-socialised ideas emanating from the “neutral” sphere of institutions (such as universities, the media, and religious institutions) take on the form of universality and trans-historical validity. The trick of ideology and the “continuity” of (traditional) intellectuals’ independence goes hand in hand.

Traditional intellectuals therefore become key mediators of a historical bloc’s hegemony and the maintenance of a given social order’s organicity. Embedded in “neutral” institutions with an element of historical continuity and a mutual *esprit de corps*, traditional intellectuals help elaborate, justify, and reproduce a given ethical-political hegemonic order through their intellectual, ideological, and political mediation. With the expansion and consolidation of the bourgeois integral state in the era of capitalist modernity, and its increasingly sophisticated imbrication of the spheres of civil and political society, “the importance of intellectual mediation... [emerges] as the key terrain in the age of mass politics” (Filippini, 2017: 70). It is thus that Gramsci characterises the formation of traditional intellectuals as “the most interesting problem historically” (Gramsci, 1971: 17). Relatedly, in times of crisis and upheaval, by their the “detach[ment] from the social grouping to which they have given hitherto, the highest, most comprehensive form”, traditional intellectuals perform “an act of incalculable historical significance; they are signalling and sanctioning the crisis of the state in its decisive form” (ibid: 270). As such, not only do traditional intellectuals mediate the reproduction of a hegemonic order, they can themselves precipitate crises of the said order by shifting their assistance/allegiance to alternative proto-hegemonic forces.

It is in this context that Gramsci traces the historical formation of traditional intellectuals in various social formations, stretching from medieval Italy and the Church, to revolutionary Russia, and the “resistant crystallisations” of Counter-reform ecclesiastics in Latin America

(Gramsci, 1971: 17-23). It is important to note that Gramsci's understanding of the technical and ideological functions of traditional intellectuals was intimately informed by his experiences in the nascent Soviet Union as the Italian Socialist (and later, Communist) Party's representative on the Comintern. While being involved in raging Soviet debates about hegemony and the growth of productive forces in the aftermath of the Civil War, Gramsci would have seen Lenin and the Bolsheviks struggle to get "traditional" intellectuals (such as scientists, technical specialists etc.) on side for the attempt to build a new society. Lenin's attempts to retain the services of the virulently anti-communist Nobel laureate Ivan Pavlov are instructive in this regard (see, Lenin, 1921 Jan 24). As such, Gramsci was acutely aware not only of the indispensable mediatory role of traditional intellectuals in an incumbent hegemonic order, but crucially (at least temporarily) in the building of a new society after the attainment of revolutionary power. Thus, any proto-hegemonic social class must "struggle to assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals'", and this process "is made quicker and more efficacious" the more said proto-hegemonic group is able to simultaneously elaborate its own organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971: 10).

To win over at least some traditional intellectuals is therefore indispensable for the building and institutionalisation of an alternative hegemonic project. For Gramsci, the political party is the institutional space where the elaboration of new intellectual and revolutionary subjectivity is formed: "the first cell in which there come together germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total" (Gramsci, 1971: 129). Crucially, while the party is the privileged institutional space for subaltern social groups' "elaborating their own category of organic intellectuals", a key task of the party is as a "mechanism which carries out in civil society the same function as the State carries out, more synthetically and over a larger scale, in political

society. In other words, it is responsible for *welding together* the organic intellectuals of a given group – the dominant one – and the traditional intellectuals” (ibid: 15, emphasis added). Thus, Gramsci emphasises the role of traditional intellectuals in incumbent and alternative hegemonic projects within the ambit of the integral state. Where the state – as the terrain whereby a complex unity of the ruling classes is formed – welds together traditional intellectuals with the dominant social group in political society, a proto-hegemonic group’s institutional apparatus (in this case, the political party) must seize the function of general reproduction of the social order through – at least, partly – winning over traditional intellectuals. Within the (expanding) ambit of the bourgeois integral state, for an incipient hegemonic group “to run the entire course of the mediations starting from the social group in question through to society and ultimately to the State, there is also a need to strike the organicity of society itself, which is innervated by various groups of traditional intellectuals” (Filippini, 2017: 71). And thus, winning over of traditional intellectuals and their welding them to subaltern social groups becomes a crucial step in the forging of an alternative hegemonic project.

Therefore, it is in the context of this expanding ambit of the integral state that Gramsci locates the strategic role of intellectuals. The consolidation of capitalist modernity and the associated “iron cage” of the bureaucratic state, gives rise to “an unprecedented expansion” of the category of intellectuals whose “great mass of functions... [is] justified by the political necessities of the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci, 1971: 13). It is here that Gramsci pinpoints the importance of educational institutions and schools as “the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated” (ibid: 10). In this sphere, “quantity cannot be separated from quality” and thus while mass generalisation of education can lead to crises of unemployment and absorption, this also provides “the widest base possible for the elaboration of

the top intellectual qualifications” for buttressing bourgeois hegemony (ibid: 11). At first glance, Gramsci’s analysis of schools and universities as sites par excellence for the production of traditional intellectuals dovetails with Althusser’s famous characterisation of schools and churches (among other institutions of “civil society”) as part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 1971). However, the emphasis on mediation through political practice within the ambit of the integral state also sets Gramsci apart from any functionalist notions with regards to the role of ideology and/or intellectuals. The organicity of a given hegemonic order is never a synchronic given (*ala* Althusser), but must always be *produced* through determinate material-ideological projects which traverse the differentiated unity of civil and political society (i.e. the integral state). In this sense then, institutes of higher education are beset by a “contradiction inherent in the dual function of the university – to contribute on the one hand to the development of the productive forces through the production and transmission of knowledge, and on the other, the reproduction of the relations of production by its adaptation to the division of labour and by the diffusion of the dominant ideology” (Bensaid, 2006). This contradiction between legitimation and absorption/adaptation to prevailing production relations can, in times of crisis and upheaval, assume explosive forms.

In fact, this contradiction between legitimation and absorption/adaptation is faced even more acutely in the case of colonial and postcolonial social formations like Pakistan. Here, the weakness and narrow social-economic base of the dominant classes, made for a greater reliance on state-bureaucratic apparatuses as a means of securing (an always tenuous) hegemony within the integral state. Thus, the function of bureaucrats, military personnel, religious institutions and media linked to the dominant classes assumed a disproportional role. In the case of Pakistan, the independence movement itself was hegemonised by Muslim *salariat* groups of northern India

based in petty bourgeoisie, professional, and state-linked occupations (Alavi, 1997) With its weak bourgeoisie and outsized role of the military-bureaucratic apparatus especially in the first few decades after independence, struggles within the terrain of the state (such as over employment quotas and state patronage for capitalist development) became crucial condensation points for the securing of hegemony. In this regard, the higher educational institutes, universities, and colleges – as spaces/institutions *par excellence* for the production of traditional intellectuals – become vital nodes for the condensation and reverberation of wider class struggles in the social formation.

It is in this context of the production of traditional intellectuals in a weakly hegemonic social order that the special importance of student politics and its wider reverberations in the state and social formation in Pakistan's history can be seen. It is also in this context that Frantz Fanon's exhortation to the radical intelligentsia becomes meaningful. In the national bourgeoisie's congenital weakness, their aborted project of organic mediations between state and civil society, their baleful imitation of the Western bourgeoisie in its decadent phase, Fanon sensed – prophetically – the degeneration of the post-/anti-colonial moment into a “rapturous communitarianism”, “a false decolonisation” in the name of a “mechanical solidarity” of race and nation, manifested in the form of an authoritarian, Bonapartist future (Sekyi-Otu 1996: 106; Fanon, 1967: 137). It is here that parts of the national bourgeoisie can redeem themselves through the critical role of the radical intelligentsia. Such an intelligentsia performs the role of a “critical interlocution” whereby the relation between intellectuals and people is “provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thus knowledge” (Gramsci, 1971: 418). As such, radical intellectuals can perform a critical, emancipatory function through securing “the intersubjective agreement of the assembled people” for an alternative

resolution to the postcolonial impasse: a hegemonic project of “true decolonisation”, whereby subaltern social groups become subjects in their passage from the sphere of subalternity to hegemony and the integral state (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 204).

Therefore, a reading of Gramsci inflected with Fanon’s analysis of post-colonial social formations, provides us with a crucial lever for locating the strategic role of traditional intellectuals in the struggle for hegemony. Thus, while liberal and pluralist accounts may emphasise – not completely incorrectly – the “inherent” or “moral” value of student politics as a means of fostering democratic participation and cultures, the intensity of campus politics in Pakistan must be placed in the wider strategic context of the (postcolonial) integral state elaborated above. Universities and campus politics are crucial nodes for the production of traditional intellectuals who then populate the bureaucracy, media, and other technical and ideological institutions. As such, and especially in the era of mass politics and the bourgeois integral state, institutes of higher education become crucial spaces for the mediation-reproduction of the wider social order. Cracks within the apparatus of the production of traditional intellectuals thus have the potential to strike at the incumbent hegemonic order itself. Beyond claims to democracy, participation, and pluralism, student politics becomes a vital node in the class struggle. In their struggle for hegemony, the working class and its organic intellectuals need to “conquer”, that is, assimilate, traditional intellectuals. Conversely, as in the case of Karachi, disconnecting student politics from subaltern social groups thus becomes an essential moment of the passive revolution and its associated perpetuation of subalternity for dominated social classes.

Student Politics and Militarisation

As discussed in the chapter on the trade union movement, the rhythms of student politics in Pakistan generally and Karachi specifically have been integrally linked to the labour movement. In fact, looking at the historical record and chronology of events, waves of student politics may even said to have prefigured the upsurge in labour radicalism protest through the 1950s to 1970s. While the founding party of the Pakistan, the Muslim League had effectively deployed its own student wing (Muslim Students' Federation, MSF) through the independence movement, the Muslim League and MSF had fallen away in the post-independence era. This was both due to their lack of social basis in the areas that eventually came to comprise Pakistan and increasing challenges from other constituencies such as labour and disenfranchised ethno-national groups. Student protests in East Bengal between 21st and 22nd February 1952 to make Bengali an official language were fired upon, resulting in considerable number of deaths. The date of 21st February was subsequently declared "Mother Language Day" by UNESCO.

It is in this context that the left-leaning Democratic Students Federation (DSF) was formed in 1950 and quickly gained in popularity in West Pakistan colleges. The DSF held a "Demands Day" on 7th January 1953 for better educational facilities (such as libraries, hostels, and classrooms), lesser tuition fees, a change in fee structure, and the establishment of a proper university in Karachi. The next day, police fired on a 10,000-strong procession and killed eight students and four passers-by. A three-day curfew was imposed in the city. A further nineteen people lost their lives over the next two days, with 400 injured and a 1000 arrested¹⁴⁰. Solidarity strikes and actions were carried out by students in educational institutes in both parts of

¹⁴⁰ A chronology of the events has been maintained by the daughter of Dr. Mohammad Sarwar, one of the founding leaders of the DSF, see Sarwar (2009 Nov 3).

Pakistan¹⁴¹. At this point, all the main colleges of Karachi were located in the Saddar area along with the major business and governmental buildings (Karachi was also the federal capital at the time). The protests and subsequent firing in January 1953 were also held in this nerve centre of the city. Several commentators and activists maintain that the future University of Karachi's location was subsequently shifted to the outskirts of the city partly as a response to the intensity of 1953 protests (Gayer, 2014: 59). The ruling classes were afraid that a University in the city centre increases the chance of "takeover" by students during times of unrest.

In February 1954, Pakistan joined the Baghdad Pact (CENTO), thus guaranteeing military aid in exchange for services to the US-led imperialist bloc. In March, the ruling Muslim League was routed in provincial elections in East Bengal by the Jugtu Front (United Front) of peasant and petty-bourgeoisie forces riding on a wave of popular anti-imperialist and democratic sentiment. Students played a key role in these elections, winning two seats as part of the Jugtu Front; one student candidate, Qamar uz Zaman, defeated the incumbent Chief Minister Nurul Amin. The panic of the West Pakistan-based ruling bloc came to a head in May 1954: the Jugtu Front Government was dismissed, Governor rule was imposed in East Pakistan, and the DSF was banned along with the Communist Party¹⁴² (Sarwar, 2009 Nov 3). A state-sponsored student organisation, the National Students' Federation (NSF), had been set up as an alternative and was mostly focussed on social welfare activities. Some of the less prominent former DSF members (such as Dr. Abdul Wudood) went into the NSF and changed the direction of the organisation (Khan, 2016 Nov 18). The government caught onto this at the time of the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 when 150,000 college, university, and school students marched through the streets of Lahore against Israeli, British, and French aggression (Ali, 2018 May 24). In 1958, martial law

¹⁴¹ 8th January is still commemorated as Martyrs' Day by politically active students in Pakistan.

¹⁴² This was done on the (false) basis that the DSF was CP's student wing.

and the ban of political activities (including student union elections) brought the labour and student movement to a halt.

When the ban on student union elections was partially lifted in 1960, NSF activities began again. In 1961, the NSF held popular protests against the CIA-sponsored killing of Congolese revolutionary Patrice Lumumba and against the anti-Muslim riots in Jabalpur, India. The early 60s agitations also saw the first time that prominent student radicals were banished from Karachi. This was to spectacularly backfire when popular student protests met the exiles in other cities, threatening to make the agitation countrywide. The momentum then carried forward into the agitation against the draconian Universities Ordinance by the Ayub junta and fed into the labour upsurge in Karachi of 1963-4. Students played a key role in the Presidential elections in 1964-5 that pitted Fatima Jinnah against Gen Ayub, and NSF candidates also won key Basic Democracy seats in central areas of Karachi (Durrani, 2016: 376)¹⁴³. While Ayub Khan won the elections through rigging, the student movement was gaining in momentum. When the regime decided to celebrate a “Decade of Development” in 1968, the NSF in turn announced a “Decade of Decadence”. NSF activities with regards to the Decade of Decadence began with processions in major Karachi colleges in October 1968, and in November 1968, police repression of students in Rawalpindi led to an explosion of anti-regime activity¹⁴⁴. Under pressure from students, workers, and political opposition in both parts of the country, Gen Ayub resigned. Under the Yahya Khan martial law, hundreds of student radicals were tried by military courts and thrown in jail.

While the NSF and radical student activism had received a great fillip with the fall of Ayub Khan, the rise of the PPP and Bhutto’s radical rhetoric, divisions within the left were also taking

¹⁴³ The NSF had put up these candidates independently of both Fatima Jinnah and Ayub’s candidates as an eventually successful show strength (Khan, 2016 Nov 18).

¹⁴⁴ These have been detailed earlier in the chapter on the trade union movement.

their toll. The Moscow-Beijing split within the international communist movement was translated into Pakistan's left through the Ayub-Jinnah elections, the Sino-Indian war, and the subsequent Indo-Pak war. In late 1965, the NSF too split in pro-China and pro-Soviet (NSF-Rasheed and NSF-Kazmi, respectively), with both factions centered in Karachi (Khan, 2013: 273). In the context of agitation against the One Unit, the pro-Soviet CP faction decided to dissolve a nation-wide student group and work through province-centered student organisations such as the Sindh National Students' Federation (SNSF), the Baloch Students' Organisation (BSO), and the Pakhtunkhwa Students' Federation (PkSF) (Kazmi, 2013). The pro-China NSF-Rasheed inherited the vast majority of the student movement, but also faced splits over questions of supporting Bhutto and the PPP in the aftermath of 1970 elections, and over the question of supporting Pakistan military with regards to the national liberation struggle in East Pakistan/Bangladesh in 1971¹⁴⁵. However, the pro-China NSF-Rasheed group remained very strong on campuses especially in Karachi, leading Bhutto to once quip that "the decisions of the world might be taken in Washington and Moscow, but the future of Pakistan's politics is decided in the canteen of Dow Medical College¹⁴⁶" (quoted by Khan, 2013: 277).

While Bhutto's repression of the Left beginning in 1972 took a great toll on the labour movement, the student movement remained relatively vibrant. Bhutto instituted a Student Union Ordinance in 1974, which streamlined union elections in colleges and universities. However, Machiavellian as ever, Bhutto initially tried to get NSF to affiliate as the PPP's official student wing, then attempted to prise away prominent NSF leaders through material incentives and

¹⁴⁵ According to Hassam ul Haq, a major leader of the NSF in Punjab and one of the main figures involved in the 1971 split, the divisions in 1971 had been simmering in both the pro-China CP and in the NSF since the intense debates over participating in the 1970 elections (see Haq, 2016: 419-21).

¹⁴⁶ The Dow Medical College (DMC) was a major stronghold of the NSF and the origin point of the anti-dictatorship movement in Karachi in 1968. The DMC is also where Dr. Rasheed Hassan Khan was enrolled for his medical degree. Rasheed was the leader of the pro-Beijing NSF group in the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet NSF split.

patronage. Failing in this endeavour, Bhutto oversaw the setting up of the People's Party's own student wing, the Peoples' Student Federation (PSF) as a way of both dividing and controlling the student movement (Haq, 2016: 419-20).

The developing divisions within the left-wing student movement also provided the space for the right-wing *Islami Jamiat Tulba* (Islamic Society of Students, IJT), the student wing of the Jamat-e-Islami (JI), to gain a foothold on campuses. The IJT had been formed shortly after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, but had initially only functioned as a missionary/evangelical movement among students and youth. However, the explosion of leftist student and labour politics in the aftermath of independence increasingly saw the IJT fashion itself "as a 'soldiers' brigade' fighting for the cause of Islam against its enemies – secularists and leftists inside and outside of the government" (Nasr, 1992: 63). In fact, as Vali Nasr has shown in his interviews with its founding members, combating the Left was the primary reason for the IJT's initial formation and Said Ramadan, the CIA-backed member of the Muslim Brotherhood who was living in Karachi at the time, was a key figure in setting up the organisational and intellectual structure of the IJT (ibid: 61). The IJT was involved in confrontations and agitations through the 1960s with the Left, and was officially patronised in this role by the Yahya Khan regime against the PPP campaign. The IJT also provided volunteer militias for the Pakistani military's genocidal campaign in 1971 against the Bengalis in East Pakistan. As such, the 1960s and 70s were a time of great ideological upheaval and contestation among students.

With the divisions in the NSF and patronage by the Yahya regime, the IJT managed to win student union elections in the key bastion of Karachi University between 1969 and 1971. This was often in the context of an – almost ridiculous – situation where there would often be four factions of the NSF competing in elections within the same campus: one pro-Moscow group and

anywhere from two to four pro-China groups (Chaudhry, 2013: 354-5). In the early 1970s, with the ascendancy of Bhutto in power, leftist groups managed to sweep student union elections in Karachi through forming united fronts such as the Progressive Students' Alliance (PSA). However, the IJT managed to retain its strength especially on major campuses such as the Punjab University (PU) and Karachi University (KU). The IJT played a central role in the anti-Ahmadiyya protests in 1974¹⁴⁷, and then in the anti-Bhutto campaign of the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) of which the JI was the main member, culminating in the military coup of 1977.

General Zia declared Martial Law and postponed elections indefinitely. The Soviet invasion of neighbouring Afghanistan gave the military regime the perfect opportunity to cement its tenuous hegemony as a “frontline” state in the US-Saudi sponsored “jihad”. The mix of petrodollars, Islam, aid, and weaponry for the jihad made for an explosive combination. Bhutto was hanged after a sham trial and General Zia carried out a brutal crackdown on the People's Party and leftist student groups such as the PSF and the various NSFs. Conversely, the JI, IJT, and other right-wing/religio-political figures and groups became the main interlocutors of the Zia regime in the realm of civil society. Javed Hashmi, a former President of the Punjab University Students' Union elected from the IJT's platform, became Zia's Minister for Culture. Reactionary clerics were patronised and given airtime on television to spread a hardline version of praetorian Islamist nationalism.

Even in the early years of the Zia regime, progressive groups managed to retain a strong foothold on campuses. Popular sympathy for Bhutto and the PPP in the face of harsh crackdown

¹⁴⁷ These protests were aimed at the excommunication of the minority Ahmadiyya sect of Islam. Bhutto, having cut the ground from underneath his feet due to suppression of left and labour, was forced to introduce a constitutional amendment to the effect of declaring Ahmadis a “heretical” and “non-Muslim” sect.

had resulted in victories for alliances of various left and liberal student groups in the union elections of 1978 (Paracha, 2014 Jul 03). In the 1979 local elections, PPP-backed candidates in Karachi registered major gains in Karachi, including from Urdu-speaking areas where the PPP had traditionally lost out to religio-political parties such as the JI and JUP (*Jamiat Ulema Pakistan*, Party of Islamic Scholars of Pakistan) (Qaim Khani, personal interview, Mar 6, 2018). Also in 1978, the All-Pakistan Mohajir Students' Organisation (APMSO) was formed by BA Pharmacy student Altaf Hussain in Karachi University, which was later to give birth to the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) claiming to represent Urdu-speaking migrants from North India in Karachi and other parts of urban Sindh. For now, the APMSO was a small group working within various left-liberal alliances against the IJT.

The militarisation of politics in Karachi began in earnest with the KU student union elections of 1979. The IJT had formed a "Thunder Squad" in the late 1960s to counter the street and campus power of leftist students. While the rare pre-martial law brawls between students involved incidents of fist-fighting, egging, and at most sticks, the late 70s and early 80s were to see a qualitative shift in the pattern of student politics. When the IJT's Thunder Squad appeared with Sten guns at the oath-taking ceremony of KU student office bearers in 1979, it was the first time that sophisticated weaponry was seen on campuses (Gayer, 2014: 61-2). As the major port terminal for supplies to the Afghan jihad, Karachi saw an increasing proliferation of guns and drugs. Sten guns, revolvers, and Klashnikovs proliferated. While violence in student politics saw an uptick, this also coincided with increasing opposition to the Zia regime. In early 1981, progressive and ethno-nationalist student groups at the KU formed the United Student Movement (USM), which decided to take on the IJT "more aggressively". The USM worked as an electoral alliance against the IJT and also procured weapons. By 1982, almost all student groups in the KU

had weapons stashed in hostels under their control, with reports of the IJT even having procured a couple of rocket launchers from Afghan *mujahideen*¹⁴⁸ (Gayer, 2014: 63; Paracha, 2014 July 03).

Through the early 1980s, student union elections in Karachi saw the IJT losing ground to alliances of left, liberal, and nationalist groups. In 1981, a militant organisation Al-Zulfiqar – led by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s exiled sons – had hijacked a Pakistan International Airlines plane, flown it to Kabul, shot a Pakistani bureaucrat on board, and gotten more than 50 political prisoners released (including several PSF, NSF, and student activists). In 1983, opposition parties had banded together and launched the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD). The MRD movement gained huge appeal in Sindh, where opposition was fuelled by the Zia junta’s hanging of Bhutto – a Sindhi, who was sentenced to death by a judicial bench comprised mostly of judges from the Punjab. Political workers gave voluntary arrests and, in the absence of PPP workers due to the harsh crackdown, left-wing political workers and discourse became extremely popular. Eventually, the army had to step in for a military operation in Sindh. Moreover, since the very early days of the 1977 coup, there had been an active journalists’ movement against the regime.

It is against this background that the upsurge in student resistance and campus gains against the IJT were perceived as a major threat by the regime. In both the Punjab and in Karachi, progressive alliances inflicted comprehensive losses on the IJT in the 1983 student union elections. The memory of the student movement and its role in toppling the Ayub regime was still fresh for the ruling bloc. Advisors to the Sindh Governor Lieutenant-General Abbasi were also quick to remind him of the potential of student opposition (Paracha, 2014 July 03). On 9th February 1984, on the pretext of preventing violence, General Zia banned student unions in all

¹⁴⁸ The JI and IJT, along with the Pakistani intelligence service ISI, were intimately involved in running the *jihad*-training camps along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Many IJT members, including some from my immediate family, also took part in the anti-Soviet *jihad*.

colleges and universities throughout the country. A key node of oppositional politics in Karachi and Pakistan was being extinguished through a concerted campaign of political suppression and fostering of militarisation¹⁴⁹.

It is important here to shed light on the sea change in the modes and technologies of student politics in the era of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and its impact on social, political, and spatial fabric of Karachi generally. Throughout the golden period of student politics in Pakistan from the 1950s and up to the 1970s, student organisations maintained organic linkages with labour and other spheres of civil society (such as neighbourhood organising and journalists). Here, the *modus operandi* of student groups such as the NSF involved working in schools and colleges through intellectual and social welfare activities which aimed to attract the brightest of students. For example, the NSF in the lower middle class and working class Urdu-speaking area of North Karachi used to work in conjunction with civil society organisations such as the *Qaumi Mazdoor Mahaz* (National Workers' Front), *Anjuman Muhibban-e-Watan* (Association of Lovers of the Nation), and *Anjuman-e-Mafad-e-Niswan* (Association for the Advancement of Women) (Zaidi, 2017: 411-2). These organisations meant that students had organic linkages with other subaltern sectors such as women and labour, while taking up activities such as raising issues of civic importance, organising informal tuition centers for school and college students in neighbourhoods where NSF members volunteered, and holding study circles in workers' colonies (Saeed, Skype interview, Dec 2, 2018). On admissions days and in the early days of each semester, NSF cadres would put up stalls outside colleges and schools for guidance with college life and for bolstering membership, put pamphlets in classrooms, and invite students to

¹⁴⁹ While this ban was lifted temporarily in 1989 with the restoration of formal democracy, it was subsequently re-instated by the Supreme Court citing incidents of violence. The ban on student unions remains in force to this day.

study circles through both word of mouth and posters. In neighbourhoods, activities such as poetry gatherings and debate competitions would be organised.

In schools and colleges too, both NSF and IJT cadres would keep a close eye on students performing well in debates, poetry, and elocution gatherings. In fact, almost all prominent old NSF and PSF members whom I talked to, and others whose interviews are publicly available, recall that they were often approached by both NSF and IJT after a noticeable performance in some such school or neighbourhood gathering (A. Qaim Khani, personal interview, Mar 6, 2018; Rehman, 2016: 386; Nasr, 1992: 61). Student organisations from across the spectrum thus aimed at attracting the best and brightest of students, especially those who excelled in both academic and extra-curricular activities. The competition for gaining star students was part of the process of gaining legitimacy on campus and, through the examples of these intellectual and organisational lodestars, attracting other students to the organisations. As such, academic prowess, speaking ability, debating competence, knowledge of – and ability to quote – Urdu poetry were highly valued and a prime avenue for increasing membership of the organisation.

The pursuit of academic and intellectual excellence was also tied to a general sense of the autonomy and sanctity of academic spaces. While students actively debated and participated in the country's politics, there was a definite sense on all sides about the interference of state authorities in campus affairs and on campus spaces. Thus, for example, one of the biggest student protests in Sindh began on 4th March, 1967 when the Vice Chancellor of Sindh University was arbitrarily dismissed by the West Pakistani bureaucracy (Hussain, 2017 March 06). As this was done under the rules of the highly centralised One Unit arrangement which erased federal/provincial autonomy, these soon morphed into protests against the One Unit regime and were precursors for the later movement against Ayub Khan. Even more importantly,

student activists distinctly recall taking great pride in *not* allowing security forces ever to appear on campuses bearing uniforms and/or weapons. For example, Mehnaz Rehman who was a student in the Economics department at Karachi University during the 1968-69 movement recalls an incident involving Air Marshal Nur Khan who was the Governor of West Pakistan at the time (Rehman, 2016: 384). Mehnaz recalls the Air Marshal visited KU for some inspection and meetings along with his uniformed entourage and military jeep. The students were so incensed that they actually made a ring around the military jeep and one NSF activist Hasnain Kazmi hauled himself to stand on the jeep's bonnet to stop it from proceeding further in the campus. While the Air Marshall was, in this era of One Unit, undoubtedly one of the most powerful men in the West Pakistan, he recognised the situation and left the campus. As Rehman puts it: "there was absolutely no conception of uniformed guards and officers entering the campus in those days" (ibid).

An incident in a related vein was narrated to me by one of the prominent student radicals who the Zia regime had released in the aftermath of the 1981 plane hijacking, Akram Qaim Khani. Qaim Khani hailed from a lower middle class neighbourhood, Shah Faisal Colony, where he was courted as a school boy in the early 1970s by both IJT and NSF cadres in the area after being prominent in school debates and participating in class elections. Qaim Khani would go on to become a member of one of the pro-China NSF groups and would later join the PSF after Bhutto's hanging had made him sympathetic to the PPP and on the invitation of Bhutto's daughter Benazir Bhutto (A. Qaim Khani, personal interview, Mar 6, 2018). While Qaim Khani was "underground" for most of the early years of General Zia, the eventual reason for his arrest would be related to the presence of the army and police on campus. Even while underground and hiding from police during Zia's early years, Qaim Khani recalls regularly visiting NSF and PSF

comrades in KU and other colleges “as we knew no one would give us up there and the police, army etc. could never come into [educational] institutions at the time.” In February 1981, as Qaim Khani and other leftist student gathered on campus for a demonstration in another part of Karachi, news arrived that a Major of the Army was on campus with regards to his daughter’s admission. Qaim Khani and others took the presence of the Major on campus as a challenge and set the jeep on fire (after saving the driver). But IJT Thunder Squad members had spotted Qaim Khani on campus, roughed him up and handed him over to the army (Gayer, 2014: 67). Thus, all through the 1960s, 70s and up to the early 80s, student politics revolved around attracting the best and brightest of students, participating in student union elections, debating and organising on issues of collegial and national importance, all the while maintaining a critical autonomy for universities and colleges from state interference, especially by the security forces.

It is in this context of the critical role of student politics in the wider political milieu and the relatively autonomous position of campuses that the later militarisation of campus spaces must be understood. The ban on student politics was not just a way of killing campus democracy and depriving students from a say in collegial matters, although that was its most immediate effect. Migration of Urdu-speaking Biharis in the aftermath of the 1971 civil war in East Pakistan/Bangladesh and of war refugees from Pashtun areas due to the Afghan jihad were rapidly changing the demographics of the city. A million refugees from the Afghan conflict came to Karachi alone (Yusuf, 2012: 15). The world’s largest Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) station at the time was housed in Pakistan to coordinate the anti-Soviet jihad (Ahmed, 1997a: 177). Literature promoting armed jihad as “a duty” incumbent on able Muslim males proliferated in society. Lumpen elements from all over the Muslim world made their way through Karachi as the Pakistan-Afghanistan border became jihad central in the US-Saudi war effort, with Pakistani

generals serving as loyal middle-men. As the only sea port, Karachi's role as a central conduit in the circuit of guns and drugs was cemented. 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 Duyne, 2005: 38). Competing student groups traded arms with each other: between 1986 and 1989, the prices of guns went down by 50% in Karachi (Gayer, 2007: 530).

Awash with sophisticated weaponry, under martial law that suppressed general political activities, and with student unions banned, the culture of politics in Karachi, and especially of its campus politics, underwent a sea change. Elections and student unions had provided a mechanism of (non-violent) competition and debate among variant ideological groups while also privileging a certain type of student activist/organiser: the exam topper, the suave poet, and the rousing parliamentary debater. Now, military strength, skill in brandishing weaponry, and the ability to "get things done" through vertical linkages to insulated university administrators became the measure of vitality and relevance on campuses. The suppression of progressive and left groups by the regime was coupled with the direct and indirect patronage to student groups organised along religious and ethnic-linguistic lines, especially the IJT and the newly formed APMSO. Perhaps most crucially, politics in Pakistan had generally undergone a sea change in the aftermath of One Unit dissolution and the Bhutto era. With the zenith of the labour and student movement, the rise of Bhutto, and Pakistan's first general elections based on universal franchise, politics had moved from the drawing rooms of bureaucrats, landlords, and generals to the popular terrain of the mass, the neighbourhood, and the street. Relatedly, with the dissolution of One Unit and the independence of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), the "ethnic" or

“national” question had come to the fore in a major way. While this will be explored in greater detail in the context of Karachi in the next chapter, suffice it to say here that these developments did not leave the city’s politics untouched. Developments during the Bhutto era (such as changes in state employment quotas), the MRD movement in Sindh, the upheavals of the Afghan war, and demographic upheavals laid the basis for an ethnic articulation of Karachi’s civic crisis.

The suppression of student unions, the indirect state patronage of the IJT and APMSO, and the militarisation due to martial law and the Afghan jihad, thus laid the stage for a very different type of campus politics and student activist. The new student activist would have a background in petty criminality with “a militarised way of apprehending and practicing politics” (Gayer, 2014: 76). Student organisations took on the role of student militias, increasingly organised along lines of ethnicity, and “firearms became a fetish for a whole generation, i.e. objects which cease to be purely functional to take on an abstract power, an autonomous agency” (Gayer, 2007: 530). In the midst of generational changes, increasing social alienation, and disenfranchisement both on campuses and outside, spectacular violence whether in the form of religious/sectarian “jihad” or ethnic militancy offered “redemptive quality”, “a real and fantasised space of possibility for transforming personal insecurities, frustrations, and subjugated positions” (Khan, 2012: 581). The display of arms and the enacting of spectacular violence offered a way of sublating fractured masculinities, and “interweave[d] practices of social navigation with military navigation” (ibid: 575). Student unions were banned on the pretext of violence, but the militarisation of campuses led to even greater violence: there were three times more deaths due to campus-related violence in the four years following the ban than in the corresponding period before it (Gayer, 2014: 72). As such, the “massification” of the politics in the post-Bhutto

conjuncture was manifested as a paradoxical democratisation and plebianisation of political culture.

In Karachi, political organising and discourse moved from the halls of debating and student unions, and from the factory floor and labour unions, to the street, neighbourhood, and campus militant now armed with the sophisticated weaponry of a “holy” war against godless Soviets. The very social and spatial coordinates of the city’s politics were shifting. Student politics underwent a double spatial movement: its traditional social-spatial mediations with constituencies such as labour were severed, while it was absorbed into the rapidly changing – and increasingly violent – wider socio-spatial dynamics of Karachi’s politics. The militarisation of campuses was the mediatory moment around which this dialectic of spatial-social dismemberment and re-spatialisation was articulated.

The late 1970s and the early 1980s were thus a crucial moment for the institutionalisation of the post-Bhutto passive revolution. This first phase passive revolution had initially pacified labour and now devoured the other great node of oppositional politics in the country: students and campus politics. The higher echelons of the civil-military bureaucracy had never been comfortable with student activism and the threat that cracks in the apparatus of “traditional intellectuals” had historically posed to the power structure in Pakistan. In his account of incarceration during the Yahya martial law, Rasheed Hassan Khan recounts a visit of the then Commissioner of Karachi Masood Nabi Noor to the Central Jail and his launching into “a sermon” to the jailed student radicals there on the “negative and harmful effects” of campus politics (Khan, 2012a). The Zia martial law had not forgotten the role of campus radicals in the downfall of the Ayub regime. Targeted arrests, military courts, and jailing of prominent student leaders during the Ayub, Yahya, and Bhutto periods had given way to a total militarisation and

plebianisation of campus politics under the Zia regime. Labour already brought to heel through a mix of coercion and *trasformismo*, the passive revolution could brook no resistance from universities and colleges, the spaces *par excellence* for producing traditional intellectuals. The “boundary-traversing” modalities of the Zia-ist hegemonic project were transforming the internal articulations of the integral state and, concomitantly, the social-spatial boundaries of civil and political society: the militarisation of campuses and student politics being one of its primary manifestations and a crucial mediating moment.

While there was valiant resistance in the form of the MRD, and through other civil society movements such as the Women’s Action Forum (WAF) and the *Lyari Naujawan Tehrik* [Lyari Youth Movement, LNT]¹⁵⁰, a closure of action and imagination would take place in subsequent years. The closure of political practice and imagination would be reinforced through changes in the social-spatial fabric of Karachi generally and the intensified penetration of the commodity form through neo-liberal restructuring. While the changing social-spatial politics of Karachi will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter, it is to the increasing commodification of education and social experience – building upon the “permanent” militarisation of campuses – that we will turn to in the next section.

Youth Cultures Today

Where the first phase of passive revolution was marked by the militarisation of campus spaces, in the second, post-2000s phase of passive revolution, militarisation would bleed into an increasing commodification of the campus. Beginning from the late 1980s, and especially from the late 1990s onwards, the Pakistani ruling classes would implement a stop-start program of

¹⁵⁰ We will be looking briefly at the LNT in the second last section of this chapter.

structural adjustment and greater liberalisation of the economy. While some aspects of the adjustment program – such as privatisation of major state enterprises and bringing businesses into a rationalised tax regime – proceeded in fits and starts, the privatisation of education was carried out with concerted zeal. Where social spending rose only incrementally as proportion of the budget, defense and debt servicing increased steadily and now take up almost half of government expenditure (Hasanain, 2019 Sept 19). With the continuing ban on student organising, different forms of (anti-)politics have come to dominate campus life. These in turn have fed into a cycle of militarisation and varying intensities of violence. It is the proliferation of these alienated forms of consciousness and action among students and youth, in a context of increasing commodification and militarisation, that is the subject of this section.

Private universities had begun opening their doors after the Zia regime granted a charter to that effect in 1983. With public universities increasingly seen as unruly and violent, private universities offered securitised and sanitised spaces to a burgeoning middle class. With the onset of economic liberalisation under the General Musharraf regime in the 2000s, the privatisation of education gained pace. Formulated and funded by the World Bank, a Higher Education Commission (HEC) was founded in 2003 as an independent body to regulate and accredit all public and private sector universities. In the next decade, private universities flourished as a business with 42 new private universities opened in the first decade of HEC alone (Rajani and Malkani, 2018: 3). Today, Pakistan is in the midst of a “youth bulge”: 60% of the population of the country is under the age of 30, 30% between 15 and 29 years of age. With an increasingly service-sector oriented economy, de-industrialisation, and a growing middle class, demand for higher education is high while public funding for universities is on the decline. Just last year, the

HEC's development – already a meagre Rs. 80 billion (less than \$1bn) – was cut by more than half to Rs. 35 billion (PSC, 2018: 1).

While private colleges and universities proliferate, the HEC has forced public universities to cut down on maintenance, expenditures, and research, while focussing on enrolling more self-funded students. University amenities and property, such as parks, grounds, canteens, and parking spaces, are being given over to “private management” in a bid to facilitate and incentivise private investment in the education sector. To take just the case of the Karachi University, the second biggest public sector university in the country, nearly half of its budget is now self-funded while this figure was a mere 10% at the time of HEC establishment (Ahmed, 2016). The KU has implemented self-financing schemes and evening shift classes. For 25,000 regular students, there are only 200 hostel rooms, 21 buses which can accommodate only 3000 students at a time. There are 35 entire programs and faculties which often do not receive a single rupee of their budget for a semester, sometimes going onto a year (ibid). Professors are promoted on the basis of publications but with scant regard for quality, leading to a veritable epidemic of plagiarism and administrative corruption. Today, there are 163 universities all over Pakistan, 91 public and 72 private, while many public universities have outsourced “sub-campuses” as part of “public-private” partnerships to both generate revenue and cater to increasing demand (PSC, 2018: 1-2). In both public and private sector universities, prospective students sign a declaration not to take part in politics during their degree¹⁵¹. Students are serialised, compartmentalised, and quantified, part of a concerted effort to turn campuses into sanitised spaces to produce

¹⁵¹ Such a declaration goes against the Pakistani Constitution itself which guarantees citizens the right to associate. Ironically, it is the Supreme Court of Pakistan – the supposed guardian of the Constitution – which has declared against the reinstatement of student union. Of course, the ban and declaration are easier to explain when placed against the perennial threat of traditional intellectuals and the history of student activism in Pakistan, rather than through the wrangling over legal injunctions and Constitutional articles.

subservient wage labour for the (increasingly) ‘free’ market. Where privatisation and “independence” of the HEC was promoted in the name of academic autonomy, the effect has been to subject campuses to the dictates of the market and – in the absence of student unions – the whims of administrators: “under the guise of autonomy... a dual authoritarian heteronomy establishes itself in the university, of administrative supervision, and the requisites of the market” (Bensaid, 2006).

To this commodification and serialisation of the student body has been added the permanent militarisation of campus spaces. This is manifested both in curricula and the actual physical spaces of the university. All through the 1980s and 1990s, during and after the Afghan jihad, the ruling bloc instrumentalised and generalised a praetorian version of Islam and jihad as part of the ethical-moral hegemonic project in the realm of civil society. As seen previously, this was done through patronage of various religio-political movements and clerics, including the Islami Jamiat Tulaba (IJT) and other, even more extreme sectarian groupings both on campus and outside. In a situation of increasing disenfranchisement and concerted ideological conditioning at all levels of state and society, large numbers of youth and students found in the worlds of militancy (both, jihadist and “secular”) “an exhilarating social space of fantasy... one which reconfigure[d] locality in relation to the imaginings of a truer, more potent world” (Khan, 2012: 580).

In the post-9/11 environment, with the ruling bloc’s wholesale acquiescence to the US-led “War on Terror” (WoT), this Faustian bargain with various fundamentalist groups was put under strain. When the Pakistani state itself became (ostensibly at least) a part of the WoT, many of the fundamentalist brigades turned on their own former patrons. All through the 1990s, paramilitary forces had found an easy excuse to camp on university campuses in Karachi in a bid to prevent

“ethnic” violence between the likes of the MQM, PPP and the JI. In the WoT era, spectacular cases of university-educated suicide bombers and jihadi ideologues, gave another pretext to further militarise the campus. With militarism and physical strength having already become the dominant mode of student politics, campus violence, extremism and militarisation became caught up in a self-reinforcing cycle. Today, crossing the gates into a Pakistani university resembles entering a warzone. The para-military Rangers who first arrived at KU to deal with the last case of armed conflict in 1989, have now been stationed there for almost three decades. Every major intersection of the university is manned by armored vehicles with mounted and manned machine guns. The Rangers even have a mini headquarters in the university where students not toeing the line are often “guests” of the esteemed paramilitary personnel. Manned by armed guards, with ID cards checked on entry and exit, and guests not allowed without prior informing of the management, the entrances to private universities are no less militarised. One is reminded on entry of Frantz Fanon’s memorable description of the border between the colonial and the native town: it is “a world divided into compartments”, “a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers shown by barracks and police stations” (Fanon, 1967: 29-30). The student “is hemmed in”, “it is a world without spaciousness”.

In this context, students’ extra-curricular life is mediated through the “ethnic councils” and students wings of political parties (mainly the IJT) which have been patronised while meaningful student participation in politics is banned. Groups like the IJT recruit students by preying on those from financially vulnerable and/or culturally peripheral backgrounds (such as those from lower middle class and peri-urban/rural areas). They help students navigate the unfamiliar spaces of the university and the wider urban environment, get them access to increasingly scarce facilities (such as hostel rooms), with the aim of turning them into “ideological” footsoldiers in a

(trans-)national army. Students' expectations are reduced to getting close to those in power for a few crumbs from the tables of the high, the mighty, and the famous. The ethnically organised councils, on the other hand, are reduced to social and cultural activities devoid of any political content or a say in the students' own affairs. Their activities are circumscribed to helping students, especially students from peripheral areas, settle into university life through familiar linguistic and cultural codes. Sporadic bursts of student protests over facilities, fees, and quotas often break out through these councils and parties' student wings. But without student unions, these protests often undermine their own strength by being reduced to "ethnic" issues that concern mere fractions of students. Moreover, in the context of ethnicised and religious militarism, protests and conflicts between students often descend into violence along ethnic and sectarian lines. This in turn provides further grist to the state machinery of militarisation and depoliticisation.

With the onset of the second phase of passive revolution, the War on Terror, and massive Chinese investment, universities have more than ever become spaces for militarised knowledge production. The university and the media have both been cast as the new battlegrounds for counter-insurgency, constituting the "primary local institution[s] through which global corporate and imperial powers calibrate... [the university] in line with the demands and political vision of the emerging everywhere war" (Rajani and Malkani, 2018: 7). Army generals, police chiefs, and paramilitary personnel are regularly invited to campuses (and often invite themselves) to pontificate on the virtues of patriotism and working hard "while keeping your head down and out of trouble". In turn, any discussion on the effects of militarisation on campuses and society is brutally clamped down. With the current \$50bn China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) billed as the latest scheme for Pakistan's "transformation", Pakistani universities are being touted

as “an intellectual corridor” to complement the CPEC. The link between militarism, education, and development secured, the spaces and lives of the university and its students must be shaped by the trilogy of “patriotic correctness, consumerism, and militarisation” (ibid: 10).

For students from peripheral areas (such as Balochistan and other parts of Sindh province), the predicament of patriotic correctness and militarism is even greater. Any activities that demand cultural autonomy, express political dissent, or question “development” quickly invite the violence of goons associated with Islamist groups or state agencies. For these students, dissent on campuses and beyond is a one-way ticket to the depraved dungeons of the Pakistani state and its intelligence agencies. Hundreds of Baloch students, including many from various Karachi colleges, are among the thousands of “missing persons” in Pakistan. The lucky ones are released after a few months of “roughing up”; most remain in the agencies’ dungeons for years or end up in secret mass graves frequently discovered in Balochistan where hardly ten percent of corpses can even be identified due to their tortured states (BBC, 2019 Mar 13). One is reminded of the giant mine-pit Le Voreux (the voracious one) in Emile Zola’s *Germinal* whose voracious appetite for human bodies is never fulfilled: “a vicious beast of prey, snorting louder and longer, as if choking on its painful digestion of human flesh” (Zola, 1885/2008: 15). Thus, where the imperatives of jihad and pacification provided grist to militarisation of student politics in the first phase of passive revolution, the deepening of the commodity form in the social formation and the imperatives of “development” now facilitate a further militarisation of campus spaces, knowledge production, and the colonisation of action and consciousness.

It is in this context of the deepening penetration of capital, the commodification of education, and militarisation that new manifestations of consciousness, alienation, and politics/activism must be understood. The modes of operation (and pitfalls) of the ethnic councils

and religio-political organisations have already been touched upon above. More immediate forms of practice and thought among students are registered in varying manifestations of alienation, estrangement, and dehumanisation. In many of the private universities and colleges, due to over-enrolment, there are two to three shifts of classes every day. Sports and other extra-curricular activities are diminished as most of these campuses are built as degree-generating machines without consideration for students' mental and physical health. For example, Beaconhouse, the largest private school system in the country (which has now also moved into the higher education "business"), operate 65% of their schools on residential properties with no playgrounds and purpose-built facilities (Haque, 2015: 7). Students therefore suffer from high levels of stress and sleep disorders. The securitisation of campuses and the constant feeling of being watched leads to further stress. Moreover, not only are students treated as potential "threats" by both university administrations and state functionaries, but are also infantilised through various measures. This is especially so for female students who bear the double expectation of academic excellence and familial and national "honour". Curfews are imposed on girls' hostels from the early evening, in some cases as early as 5pm. The harassment of female students – mental, physical, and sexual - by staff, faculty and other campus denizens remains scarcely reported, and most institutions do not even have a policy to deal with harassment complaints.

For students who come from rural, lower middle class, or working class backgrounds, parents often take out loans on valuable assets to put them through increasingly expensive higher education. Exposure to the globalised media-verse through new technologies and the toxic pressure of getting good grades adds to mental stress, even depression. In an economy where growth (even by neoliberal standards) is anaemic and qualified labour is liable to be under- or

un-employed, graduates from middle and lower class backgrounds face a double bind. They cannot go back to the occupations and the economy where they came from (agrarian-based or informal, low wage employment), but the anaemic economy with its declining industrialisation and slow growth cannot absorb these graduates (Jan, 2018 Oct 10). By the third and fourth years of their degree, a large proportion of students – especially in public sector universities – become embroiled in self-doubt and often, extreme depression. In the last two years, there has been a veritable epidemic of suicides on college and university campuses. Not a fortnight goes by without the news of another student ending their life by jumping from a campus building, hanging themselves from ceiling fans, or dying from a drug overdose. A recent study among high school and early-year college students in Karachi found that more than one-third admit to having suicidal thoughts (Ilyas, 2018 Sept 16). This proportion is bound to be higher for students in upper years. The Progressive Students’ Collective (PSC) in Lahore put it succinctly in one of their briefs, “a fundamental contradiction confronts the student of today: on the one hand, there is the venerated avatar of a student on his [sic] quest for knowledge, the student himself is hung on delusions of institutional pride; on the other hand, system reduces the student to a client” (PSC Brief, 2018: 4). The lack of prospects, the serialisation of student life, the commodification of education, the burden of expectation: all these in turn produce cognitive, generational, and temporal dissonances whose harmful effects on students’ mental health is hard to put in words.

As such, college and university students in Pakistan today are atomised, infantilised, and “hemmed in” through a concatenation of the workings of neoliberal commodification and the highly militarised post-9/11 milieu. In such an environment, the fact that students turn to the (temporary) certainties of “ethnicity”, narrowly-defined religion, and/or spectacular masculinity and violence is not difficult to understand. In fact, as my friend and colleague Dr. Ammar Ali

Jan, who has been teaching at various public universities in Lahore, puts it: “it is not the religious, sectarian, or ethnic groups which are the largest *parties* on campus¹⁵². The largest party on campus is the *charsi party* [the hashish party]”. Today, more than two-thirds of university students in Pakistan are drug users, and there are huge rackets peddling drugs on campus, preying on the mental vulnerability of drug users and the financial precarity of drug sellers (DAWN, 2018 Jan 13). The presence of militant groups on campuses such as those around enforcement of gendered religious morality, Jan contends, should be seen “not as a presence, but as the absence of a presence” i.e. the presence of organised student power, especially that organised around progressive visions of social, economic and moral transformation.

Moreover, with the now decades-long ban on student unions, societal militarisation, and the general trends towards depoliticisation through various military dictatorships, students find it hard to imagine that a collective struggle for total societal transformation was once a great pursuit of Pakistani campuses. In fact, almost all students I taught found it hard to believe that there was once a time when it was inconceivable for uniformed soldiers and policemen to step into campuses. The closure of organised student power has entailed a concomitant loss of memory and a closure of imagination. Students understand their problems – such as those relating to fees, transport, harassment, and quality of pedagogy – but can scarcely imagine themselves as collective actors. Individualised solutions to collective problems thus abound: drugs here, loans there, a desperate struggle to clamber up the neoliberal pyramid through individual initiative, and silent acquiescence to exploitation by faculty and administrations.

The narrowing of consciousness and practice, the loss of historical awareness, and the individualization of action are of course not simply a product of the ruling bloc’s direct

¹⁵² “Parties” here is used in the Urdu meaning of the word designating not just formal political parties but also more informally organised groups such as around ethnicity, religion, or even hobby (such as cricket, debating etc).

occupation of physical and mental space. In fact, the very workings of the commodity form and the deepening penetration of (neoliberal) capital into the social formation tends towards atomisation in the guise of “empowerment”. Foremost among these are the NGO-ised forms of activism and engagement which have been peddled on campuses in the post-9/11 milieu. With youth increasingly posited as feral threats particularly amenable to religious extremism and violence, Western donors have poured funds into CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) programs all over Pakistan. With regards to students this has manifested in various types of social engagement, from “Youth Leadership” Conferences in Pakistan and abroad, to the importation of First World activities such as Model United Nations (MUNs).

A new generation of “activists” has come up through these Leadership conferences, and while an honourable few among them go on to do valuable work in human rights advocacy, the majority become “thought leaders” in the circuit of donor-sponsored seminars and TED talks. Not only do these types of activities fail to produce meaningful engagement with students’ concrete issues on campus (such as fee structures, campus democracy, the state of pedagogy etc.), they in fact “create an environment of alienation and depression for lower and middle class students” (Kumar, 2019 Jan 18). As Ammar Rashid, a student organiser and left political worker aptly puts it, in an era of mass de-politicisation and loss of historical imagination, “where political and military elites have run amok while students are told to ‘stay out of politics’ (in Pakistan’s case, through an absurd, now 30-year old student union ban) these NGO-led simulations of politics are far from harmless. They wean away students who should be asking actual questions of those in power and teach them that politics is not about challenging the status quo but engaging in elaborate parliamentary (or diplomatic) pantomime” (Rashid, 2016 Sept 16). In privileging (individualised) “activism” over (collective) organising, these forms of

engagement act more as conduits for personal brand-building than any serious attempt to build student democracy and increase the youth's voice in society and polity.

Even more insidiously, such forms of activism – and the concomitant fetters on imagination, practice, and historicity – dovetail almost perfectly with the mediatised forms of subjectivity produced in the conditions of late capitalism and the deepening penetration of the commodity form¹⁵³. As it stands there are 109.5 million cellular phone users in Pakistan, with close to 50% smart phone penetration and 47.5 million internet users. Close to 80% of all mobile phone users are between 21 and 30 years of age and there are 35 million users of social media platforms (such as Facebook and Twitter). As such, with physical/non-virtual avenues of participation and engagement closed off or circumscribed, mediatised forms of engagement and subjectivity have gained increasing popularity among the youth. While social media leads to a certain democratisation of political and social discourse, and – in the Marxian sense – a real illusion of empowerment, it often reinforces the logic of late, neoliberal capitalism through determinate forms of engagement and subjectivation.

Thus, where the sphere of social and political engagement expands in terms of absolute numbers, this is often through a concerted degradation of discourse with mechanisms of mimesis and kitsch dominating. The very medium of the screen produces images and quotes without context, the experience is always shifting shape and form, very much like the ephemerality of hyper-mobile capital itself. Without context, the image floats in the air (or on the screen), it is all surface and no depth. Images seem to talk to each other and produce themselves in a process of auto-generation. It is in fact, the very definition of Marx's definition of reification and fetishism:

¹⁵³ The analysis in the following paragraphs emerges through my reading of Fredric Jameson's pioneering work on postmodernism and cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson, 1984). While I do not quote Jameson here directly, his work on postmodernism forms the sub-text of my analysis of commodified-mediatised forms of subjectivity here and in the next chapter.

things and images are in conversation with other images and things, the human subject reduced to a mere object to the whims of the commodified image. In this reified sphere of images, subjectivity itself is reduced to the momentary stimulus of the present, a perverse orgasm of the present. It is the very personification (through digitalisation) of the experiences of the capitalist market, a festival of surface sensations.

In the sphere of social media then, we have the expression of discontent, but often with an erasure of its context. As Adam Turl puts it, “social media asserts a massive multi-subjectivity”, where users become curators of their own “brand” (Turl, 2019). While creative uses of the medium are common, most of the content reproduces the prevailing “common sense”. The subject is fragmented, but with the difference that there is an illusion of control. Each user is the manager of their own brand, and the reified sphere sucks in energy and creativity. The medium itself privileges individualised and “issue”-based forms of activism, often replacing reasoned deliberation and debate with toxic cultures of posturing. Constantly shape-shifting, constantly branding, constantly moving from one localised “issue” to another, such (individualised) activism then is not a politics at all. It is in fact an “anti-politics”, accountable to no one beyond the user’s own ego, the immediate *jouissance* of “likes” and retweets, and the algorithms of giant, monopoly corporations.

Of course, such a reified machinery of images does not remain without meaning for too long. The spectacle of images, the aestheticisation of politics, and the de-contextualisation of consciousness and practice, the fetters on historicity, are the classic pre-conditions weaponised by fascism. The Right, Walter Benjamin once reminded us, thrives on lack of context; the Left withers on its altar. Of course, that does not mean that the Internet or social media is fascist per se, that would require a determinate balance of forces in other spheres of civil and political

society. But the strictures on historicity, the surface quality of perception, and the erasure of context feeds into a momentary, individualised politics, easily articulated to reactionary ends. And in a context like Pakistan where regressive groups proliferate on campuses and outside, such a reactionary articulation of youth discontent is even more likely.

So, what hope then of an emancipatory subjectivity emerging from within these new media of subjectivation? What hope for an oppositional – dare I say, revolutionary – subject in the era of the dissolution of the subject itself? Here is where the uneven and combined development of capitalism especially in the peripheries, and the concomitant multi-subjectivity – or, in Gramscian terms, contradictory common sense – of the self comes in. For social media, Internet, and the machinery of images cannot simply remain suspended in the (proverbial) air. They are, after all, only the most advanced forms of communication and concomitant alienation of the most decadent forms of capitalism. For the (potential) subjects of emancipation, for their reified and curated selves on the Internet, the materiality of (re-)production asserts itself constantly. Social media and mediatised forms of subjectivity might promote an erasure of context and depth, but the messiness of the body, work, household, and the strictures of state and family constantly impinge on this reified sphere of images. It is in this clash between the erasure of context and the context of erasure, that the political finds itself, where the collective subject attempts to (re-)constitute itself.

From the incessant commodification of social life, the militarisation of space, the failing absorptive capacity of a peripheral capitalist economy, to changing gender-familial relations, the context of erasure constantly impinges upon the young in Pakistan today. Combined with this is the general ideological crisis of the ruling bloc as the complex of praetorianism and Islam institutionalised during the 1980s phase of passive revolution has fallen apart. While there is an

ongoing attempt to set up “development” and militarisation as the ideological-material nodes of a new hegemonic project, the narrow socio-economic basis of the ruling bloc and the workings of the commodity form constantly undercut this. It is in this context of crisis, erasure, and ephemerality that new movements and resistances have been sporadically and tentatively emerging in Karachi and beyond. The Progressive Students’ Collective (PSC), the Women’s Democratic Front (WDF), the popular and cross-class Women’s Marches in various cities, the mass anti-war Pashtun Tahafuz Movement [Pashtun Protection Movement, PTM], and even reactionary clerical groups like the Tehrik-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)¹⁵⁴: these are all symptoms of the situation, of a shifting political and organisational terrain, of the crisis of the ruling bloc in Pakistan today, and its lack of representation by an organised social force.

While these movements and collectives have shown impressive organisational creativity, it is important to note that they are all works in progress, tentatively combining organising in digital and non-digital spaces. In differing ways – and with the always present danger of internecine (and social mediatised) conflict – these movements and organisations are attempting to create a space for politics through creative reassertion of social contexts and historicity. As such, almost all these movements adopt a mix of digital campaigns, on-ground organising, and Benjaminian techniques of shock and awe in public space to “strip objects and experience of their aura”, to inscribe context where it has been erased, and expose context/historicity where it has been suppressed (Eagleton, 1976/2002: 59). This is done through both the creative use of social media such as Facebook live videos and Twitter storms, but – and most importantly – the patient work of organising on campuses, neighbourhoods, and through existing networks of

¹⁵⁴ The TLP is organised around the highly emotive issue of “blasphemy” against the Prophet, a “crime” punishable by death according to the Pakistan Penal Code. While having support in key sectors of the state and intelligence agencies, it has gained much street power and polled impressively in the recent general elections in 2018.

community, sociality, and activism. As such, in the fragmentation of experience, in the dissolution – nay, the essential non-homogeneity – of the subject, there is not just melancholia at the loss of supposed “wholeness” of a bygone era. In fact, in the expanded spheres and spaces of contradictions, there is the possibility of new articulations, and new sutures whereby the collective, revolutionary subject may be produced. However, as indicated above, these new movements too constantly find themselves working through the delicate dialectic of digital/non-digital organising, and all the dangers of fragmentation and reification of difference that the new mediated forms of engagement entail.

The emergence of these movements in public space – including, but not confined, to digital space – is therefore both a symptom of the situation and an attempt to give representation, an alternative resolution to an organic crisis of the ruling bloc. Shock and awe, a Benjaminian intervention to question sedimented common sense, the exposure of trans-historicity as institutionalised reification, the unmasking of universality as an imposed particularism: these seem to be the forms of oppositional subjectivation that a digitalised age lends itself to. However, as AK Thompson puts it in a recent discussion on the contemporary resonance of Benjamin’s “dialectical image”, the recovery of shock and mere disturbance of common sense is no substitute for the numbing deluge of images and montage, the closure of cognitive totality in late capitalism (Thompson, 2019). Beyond the synchronic insertion-inversion of images, age-old questions of process, duration, diachronicity, and totality remain moot. Thus, crucially, within this incipient generational upsurge towards left and oppositional politics, the question of sustaining and deepening oppositional subjectivities – i.e. the question of organisational forms and associated intellectual cultures – impresses itself even more forcefully. In fact, the uneasy generational, institutional, and intellectual valences of left organising in Pakistan today can be

traced back to the pivotal conjuncture of the late 1970s and early 1980s. These (missing) mediations of the first phase of passive revolution then are the traditions of long dead generations which, this time in their absence, weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living. It is to these missing mediations, these traditions which weigh upon our minds as the absence of a presence, that I turn to in the last two sections of this chapter.

Missing Mediations: The Naujawan Tehrik

As we have seen in the earlier sections of this chapter, the question of the changing social and spatial terrain of politics in Karachi had already begun coming to the fore with the decline of the labour movement beginning in the mid- to late-1970s. The language protests during the Bhutto era, the demographic and social-technological changes due to the Afghan war (such as the introduction of sophisticated weaponry), the suppression of student politics, and the wider terrain of mass politics under Gen Zia, all fed into the emerging salience of “ethnicity” as a major node of Karachi’s politics. That this was a time of a decline of working class-centred and progressive politics, and the consolidation of the Zia-ist passive revolution, is without doubt. However, even this era of decline was not without notable attempts at new forms of organisation by subaltern classes and left workers. While we will be looking in more detail at the socio-spatial aspects of Karachi’s politics in the next chapter, it is important to briefly note the emergence and decline of a movement of youth and left workers during this conjuncture, which attempted to make way for alternative resolutions to Karachi’s crises during the Zia era. Thus, these youth and civic movements – the *Lyari Naujawan Tehrik* (Lyari Youth Movement, LNT) and subsequently, the

Karachi Naujawan Tehrik (Karachi Youth Movement, KNT)¹⁵⁵ – are elaborated upon as valuable attempts to deal with the changing terrain of politics, and – crucially – a segue into the missing mediations which continue to overdetermine left politics in Karachi (and Pakistan).

Lyari is the oldest locality of Karachi, settled mostly by Balochi speakers from the neighbouring Balochistan area/province. During the 19th century (in the pre-colonial era), Lyari was one of several Baloch areas along the Makran coast that joined trade networks extending along the Gulf coast, southern Arabia, and down to eastern Africa. During this time, Lyari developed as a node for the local Arab trade in slaves and commodities such as dates (Ahmed, 1989). This history is still reflected in the substantial proportion of Baloch who have distinct African features (known as *sheedi*¹⁵⁶), and in the names of major Lyari localities such as *Baghdadi* (derived from Baghdad) and *Khajoor* Market (Date Market). Due to its place in trade networks, Lyari was a major cosmopolitan center of Karachi, with communities from parts of Central Asia, Pashtun areas, Sindh, Balochistan, and from Gujarat/Kathiawar areas of South-western India. Given its long history, the area is also known colloquially as “Karachi Ki Maa” (the Mother of Karachi). Lyari’s population eventually became a major source of Karachi’s working class when the adjacent area was developed as a port in the colonial era.

Due to its cosmopolitan and mainly lower middle-class and working-class character, Lyari has consistently been a center of oppositional politics. During the British era, Lyari was a hotbed

¹⁵⁵ My own introduction to the LNT and KNT came towards the end of my fieldwork. As a result, while I was able to interview key members and get a general idea of the movement in the short amount of time I had left in Karachi, a more detailed examination of the LNT and KNT, and a delineation of their linkages to the CP, remains a task for the future. As such, my account of the movement will be necessarily brief, and in relation to my wider focus in this chapter on social and organisational mediations in youth and left politics.

¹⁵⁶ There are both Baloch and Sindhi-speaking Sheedis in Pakistan, who retain many of rituals, festivals, and musical forms and instruments which can be traced back to African roots. General Hosh Muhammad, also known as “Hoshu Sheedi”, is part of local folklore due to his role in the fight against British forces when they annexed Sindh in 1843. “Sheedi” is understood to be a derivation of “Syedi”, designating the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (Ahmed, 1989).

of anti-colonial and nationalist politics, while in the post-colonial era it became a center of left and Baloch nationalist organisation (the one often merging into the other). The Madrassa Mazhar-al-Uloom in Lyari's Khadda neighbourhood produced many distinguished anti-colonial activists in the Reshmi Roomal Tehrik [The Silk Letter Movement] and the Khilafat Movement (Mujtaba, 1997). In the 1920s and 1930s, nationalist leaders and trade unionists became prominent. Several of them, including Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo and Ghulam Akbar Baloch¹⁵⁷ went on to play major roles in the Communist Party (CP) and the National Awami Party (NAP). It was also during this time, with the emergence of an Indian bourgeoisie based in trading and money lending, that the Haroon family from Katchi Memon¹⁵⁸ background came to dominate Lyari's politics. In the 1960s Ayub Khan attempted to develop a new housing colony in Lyari for migrants from India, which would have displaced locals. This presented an opening for oppositional parties and groups such as the NAP and NSF to gain a foothold in Lyari (Arqam, 2016). When Bhutto promised Lyari-ites formal tenure over their residential plots and other civic facilities, Lyari became a stronghold of the PPP in particular and left groups in general. While Lyari has generally remained underdeveloped and in later years gained a notorious reputation of being a center of drugs and crime, it remained a stronghold of the PPP for several decades. Only recently have there been signs of a shift in allegiances.

It is in this context of a history of left ferment and organising that Lyari became the center of a movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s which would combine characteristics of a youth

¹⁵⁷ Ghulam Akbar Baloch was one of the leading CP cadres sent from Karachi to lead the Pat Feeder Movement in Temple Dera, Balochistan in the late Bhutto/early Zia eras (see chapter on Trade Union movement). Bizenjo was a Baloch nationalist leader and a major leader of the NAP. Bizenjo's son Hasil was a major student leader in the KU in the 1980s. Today, Hasil Bizenjo is President of the National Party (NP), one of the many splinter groups emerging from the break-up of NAP through the 1980s and 1990s, and has fully become part of Pakistan's elite, mainstream politics.

¹⁵⁸ Hailing from the Kutch area of Gujarat. The Haroons would eventually be key figures in the Muslim politics of the subcontinent and later, in the Muslim League which was the founding party of Pakistan.

self-help movement, a street movement for raising and resolving civic issues, and a united front of the left in Karachi in an era of terminal decline. In 1976, with the NAP banned by Bhutto, the student movement increasingly divided on campuses between different NSF and PSF factions, and the left facing a general crackdown, youth associated with different left groups and parties in Lyari decided to form an organisation which would agitate on civic issues affecting the area¹⁵⁹. In particular, activists of the PSF (the PPP student wing) and SNSF (the CP-Moscow's student wing) would get together along with youngsters of the area on 26 June 1976 at the Chakiwara Club to form the Lyari Naujawan Tehrik (LNT). The choice of location for the inauguration was emblematic: the Chakiwara Club functioned as both a boxing club and a football house¹⁶⁰, and in the coming years the LNT would combine creative use of community spaces such as this in their organising efforts. From the very beginning the LNT (and subsequently, the KNT) would function as a broad Left front organisation, with un-affiliated youth and young members of various left groups working together in conjunction. The founding members such as Saleem Jan Baloch (first President of LNT), Jabbar Khattak, Ghulam Akbar Baloch, and Khaliq Zadrán also lived in Lyari. Thus, the LNT's formation and activism very much drew upon existing networks of locality and sociality. Over the next few years, the LNT would become exceedingly popular both due to their activism around civic issues and, crucially, for their concrete organising with regards to pertinent issues facing the area.

¹⁵⁹ The following account of the Lyari Naujawan Tehrik and Karachi Naujawan Tehrik has been gathered through interviews and conversations with former CP, NSF, and SNSF members in Karachi. Of particular help were conversations with Tanvir Tahir (CP), Aslam Khwaja (CP and SNSF), Jabbar Khattak (CP, SNSF, and LNT), and Abdul Khaliq Zadrán (CP, LNT, and KNT). While I will only reference them directly in case of a direct quote, a general reference to their accounts is assumed in the following paragraphs.

¹⁶⁰ Unlike other parts of Karachi and Pakistan, football and boxing are the most popular sports in Lyari. This is a matter of great pride in the area and Lyari has produced several distinguished footballers and boxers who have represented Pakistan internationally (such as in the Olympics).

As Khaliq Zadran puts it, three issues were at the forefront of their organising and activism: “drugs, unemployment, and inflation” [*manshiyat, beyrozgaari, mehengai*]. Regular protests and meetings would be organised within the locality around these “non-political” issues, along with issuing statements to newspapers (the former especially became a particularly risky proposition during martial law). The onset of the Afghan war had led to an increasingly problem of hard drugs (such as heroin) and addiction in the area. Several strategies were deployed against this problem¹⁶¹. Firstly, educational meetings raised awareness about the problems of addiction. These educational meetings soon turned into LNT night schools and tuition centers in various areas. While the idea of the night schools built upon a longer tradition in Lyari (Yousafzai, 2018 Oct 8), the LNT mobilised youth and PSF/SNSF/CP members who could not be active on other fronts as volunteers for these centers. They also drew in existing community networks within Lyari and within the wider leftist community. The LNT set up medical camps in different neighbourhoods with the help of student volunteers from various progressive groups. These medical camps would concentrate on issues such as hygiene, sewage-borne disease, and even rehabilitation and counselling camps for drug users and addicts. In this regard, posters and banners would be set up in the area, along with using local mosques to announce the date, time, and location of an upcoming camp. The LNT’s actions against drug dealers were extremely popular: they took out large processions of school children against the *manshiyat-farosh* [drug dealers], and in the Kalakot and Baghdadi neighbourhoods, even fought street battles with those running drugs and crime dens (Mujtaba, 1997).

¹⁶¹ Khaliq Zadran has kept a valuable personal collection of newspaper cuttings with reports of various LNT and KNT activities through the 1970s and 1980s. I had a chance to look through these during my interview with him, and noted down many of the headlines and the issues that were reported on. The account of LNT/KNT activities given here is therefore obtained both through conversations with LNT/KNT organisers and newspaper clippings from Zadran’s personal collection.

In addition to these anti-addiction activities, the LNT's organising on educational and other civic issues caught the eye of not just Lyari residents but also other similar civil society and social welfare groups in Karachi. The LNT model was emulated elsewhere; similar Naujawan Tehrik groups were formed in other lower-middle class and working class areas of Karachi, including Orangi, New Karachi, Malir, and Trans-Lyari (also known as Old Golimar). On 6th May 1980, nineteen Naujawan Tehrik organisations from different parts of Karachi joined together in a convention at a young DSF¹⁶² comrade Zafar Baloch's home to form the Karachi Naujawan Tehrik (KNT, Karachi Youth Movement). Abdul Khaliq Zadrani of the CP (and formerly SNSF) was elected the first President. Some of these organisations included the Malir Naujawan Tehrik, the Orangi Naujawan Tehrik, the Pakhtun Welfare Jirga (Pakhtun Welfare Council), Majlis-e-Tanzeem North Karachi (Association of Organisers North Karachi), and Hafizabad Literary Organisation. By dint of the diversity of localities and communities represented, the Karachi Naujawan Tehrik came to represent a cross-ethnic and lower-middle class and working class organisation of left-inclined youth organising on civic issues. The KNT functioned as a federation; units had considerable autonomy with regards to organising in their localities. The KNT office bearers also worked to spread their work in other parts of the country (for example, a Mehran Naujawan Tehrik was formed in Sukkur, a city in northern Sindh).

The LNT remained the most active of these units with the longest standing organisational legacy and pool of activists. Through the early 1980s, LNT and other constituents of the KNT kept organising on issues such as *katchi abadi* ("informal" settlements) regularisation, library

¹⁶² CP associated students and youth re-formed the long-defunct Democratic Students' Federation in 1980. Its guiding light and first President, Nazir Abbasi, was arrested by the Zia regime while he was underground on 30th July 1980. He was brutally tortured by the intelligence agencies and died within a few days in custody. An official of the Edhi Foundation testified that Abbasi's corpse had so many injuries "it seemed as if someone had attacked every part of his body with a broken glass bottle" (Sangi, 2019 Aug 09). Abbasi was only 27 at the time of his murder.

facilities, the deteriorating state of hospitals, police violence and intrusion into homes at ungodly hours, against eviction of street hawkers and traders, and even the practice of corporal punishment in schools. A sense of “fun” and sociality among members was also built through activities. For example, the LNT organised football tournaments involving teams from Lyari and from KNT affiliates in other areas. The LNT and KNT’s foray into the sphere of politics was also characterised by a sense of adventure and “fun”. Through the late 1970s, some of the more “advanced” members who were already associated with the CP had participated in various anti-dictatorship conflagrations and movements. In late 1977 and through 1978, journalists around the country had announced protests and strikes against the Zia junta’s censorship and newspaper bans. Several of the young CP cadre associated with the LNT became part of the wave of activists giving voluntary arrests at the time, and some were forcibly picked up in the round-up against DSF and CP members in 1980.

In the aftermath of the MRD movement in 1983, which failed to dislodge the military regime despite massive popular support in Sindh, the LNT and KNT cadres forayed into anti-regime protests in Karachi. Zadran and other LNT members fondly recalled their *chhapa-maar muzahiray*. While a direct translation of *chhapa-maar muzahira* would be that of a “spot” or “spontaneous” protest, the term in fact conveys a sense of playfulness and adventure. “*Chhaapa*” is generally the term used in Urdu for the raids conducted – often late in the night – by police and/or intelligence agencies to pick up activists from their homes or hideouts. The LNT-KNT cadre appropriated the term for their daring protests at the height of the martial law regime where dissent of this kind would be punished by long sentences, flogging, and torture. The mechanism of the protest would be thus: one of the less recognisable LNT/KNT boys would go to the Karachi Press club and secretly persuade a reporter and photographer to come to a

particular spot in Lyari the next day (for the news value, through ideological persuasion, or sometimes, even a small bribe). As soon as the press men arrived, the boys would unfurl their banners for five to ten minutes, do a short round of spirited sloganeering, get their photos taken by the journalists, and make a run for their lives before police or army vans came along. Zadran recalls fondly, “*police wallon ki tou reirh lag jaati thi*”: “*reirh laga jana*” of police-wallahs is also a very Karachi-specific, street lingo for completely bamboozling and/or getting one up over someone. In this sense, while the *chhapa-maar* protests held great dangers for the young members, they also combined a sense of the forbidden and the ludic in asserting their autonomy and agency in the face of a brutal dictatorship.

Combining social welfare, community organising, and political adventure, the street power and credibility of the KNT, and especially the LNT had received a considerable boost. Due to being overwhelmingly a movement of lower class – often un- or under-employed – youth, the LNT and KNT never had membership fees or mandatory contributions to the Tehrik. In fact, besides the night schools and tuition centers, they did not even have a formal office so as not to expose themselves to the martial law regime. Instead they would collect voluntary donations from local shopkeepers when planning activities (such as medical camps or “secret” public meetings on civic issues); for Zadran, it is a matter of pride that “we never forced anyone to give *chanda* [donation], everyone would give what little they could give us, 1 rupee, 8 *ana* (half a rupee), 4 *ana*; in ten shopkeepers only one would refuse us¹⁶³” (A. Zadran, personal interview, May 11, 2018). They would invite local councillors and members of the provincial legislatures to their programs. The MNAs, MPAs and other local functionaries would even offer LNT cadres occasional jobs in the local administration and bureaucracies. In this case, the local unit of the

¹⁶³ The emphasis on “never forcing anyone” was most probably an oblique reference to the MQM’s style of politics in later years where their local units became notorious for gathering “protection money” [*bhatta*] from shopkeepers, traders, and even from big capitalists.

KNT that had received the job offer would ask around for a youngster who was most in need of employment. In case there was more than one candidate, the receiver of the job would be decided through drawing lots. In the mid- and late-1980s, the LNT in collaboration with other progressive student groups DSF and PSF also set up emergency camps for those displaced from other parts of Karachi and Sindh due to ethnicity-based riots and killings.

As such, a sense of community and sociality was built through a combination of collective acts both in public (such as the “fun” of sports and daring protests) and in private (such as sharing of employment opportunities). Sectarian differences among different left groups were dissolved in the course of organising a broad front of lower class youth across ethnicities and localities at a time when Karachi’s politics was becoming ever more parochial and circumscribed around ethnicity. Moreover, the dissolution of differences was also precipitated through the sense of “fun”, adventure, sociality, and local respect built up during the social and political activities organized by the LNT and KNT. During its peak in the late 70s and up to the mid-1980s, the LNT and KNT acted as valuable feeder groups to a range of left parties and organisations such as the Communist Party, PPP, and other related journalist and trade union organisations. Importantly, the LNT and KNT were incipiently successful attempts at organising within the changing socio-spatial terrain of Karachi’s politics. With campuses and trade unions being increasingly enclosed, and issues of civic deterioration gaining increasing importance due to factors such as migration and Afghan war¹⁶⁴, the LNT and KNT attempted to give shape to an alternative politics of the left, which was both embedded in neighbourhood and youth organising, and coordinated concretely with left formations in the sphere of political society.

¹⁶⁴ Issues around civic deterioration and their effect on Karachi’s politics in the 1980s will be elaborated upon in greater detail in the next chapter.

However, the changing terrain of the Pakistan and Karachi's politics, along with the organisational pitfalls of the CP, led to the decline of the LNT and KNT from the mid-1980s onwards. The influx of drugs and guns into Karachi and Lyari has already been mentioned above, and although the LNT cadre fought valiantly against these, the sheer firepower of urban militancy proved too much. In addition, and perhaps most crucially, there was the inability of the CP's upper echelons to understand the terrain of mass politics in this era. As mentioned in an earlier section, Pakistani politics had moved onto a decidedly mass terrain in the post-Bhutto conjuncture. This was especially so in Sindh during the era when the anti-dictatorship MRD movement was extremely popular and mobilised a sense of regional discrimination against the Punjabi-dominated military junta. In parts of Sindh outside Karachi, left-associated activists and second-tier cadre of left parties such as CPP had become central organisers of the MRD movement due to the regime's crackdown on the PPP (A. Khawaja interview, March 12th and April 9, 2018). Organisations such as the Haari Tehrik (Peasants' Movement), Sindhiyani Tehrik (Sindhi Women's Movement), and the Sindh Adabi Sangat (Sindhi Writers' Association) had increasingly taken on the character of mass fronts. The LNT and KNT, as we have seen above, were also functioning in a popular manner; in fact, talks were held to form a country-wide Pakistan Naujawan Tehrik (Pakistan Youth Movement) as a broad left youth front on civic issues (J. Khattak, personal interview, Apr 6, 2018).

However, with the relaxation of martial law and the release of CPP politburo members from prison, several political differences came to the fore. Primarily, there was much confusion among the leadership as to the work of mass fronts, their relationship to the party, the role of vanguardism in a changing political terrain, and the question of ethnic nationalities within Pakistan. As Aslam Khwaja, a historian and former member of the CP and SNSF put to me:

“when the leadership came out of prison in 1985-86, they were not used to operating as a mass organization, they were very used to working as an underground party and wanted to go back to that, but this was not best policy in the post-local election phase as politics and media had relatively opened up by then”. For Jabbar Khattak, bitter from his experiences of prison and later divisions, “the party leadership was too short-sighted... they sat behind ‘seven curtains’ [7 *pardon ke peechay*], and were always asking us to do this protest, court arrest etc. when we [LNT and KNT] should have been working in our own sphere i.e. students and youth”. The suspicion of mass politics and broad fronts of the LNT/KNT-type of course was not simply a moral or attitudinal problem. As we have discussed in the chapter on trade unions, long years of dictatorship, prison, and underground existence took a toll on the psychology and political style of the CP leadership. The formation of personality cults and splits of the party followed over divisions on issues such as the nationalities question, the future *modus operandi* of the party, and its relationship to organisations working on “unconventional” fronts such as civic/urban issues.

The result of the internal squabbling and splits of the CP that followed in the late 1980s took its toll on the LNT and KNT. The organisations survived until the 1990s, but they lost their *élan* with the severance of organic linkages to the Left, and slowly got absorbed or overtaken by the proliferating combination of NGO-isation and urban militarism. Prominent activists of the LNT and KNT themselves faced great disorientation. Zadrán remembers members such as Nadeem from the Korangi Naujawan Tehrik who “became mental patients [*nafisyati mareez ho gaye*]; they would sit at street corners and randomly shout ‘Inqilab Zindabad’ [Long Live Revolution!]”. Dispersed and disoriented activists found refuge wherever they could: some (like Zadrán and Khattak) went into journalism, some found refuge in the PPP, a few even joined the *Mohajir* ethnic party, the MQM. The last node of youth vitality and organising of the Left in

Karachi was lost. In subsequent years, Karachi's civic crisis would take on a toxic ethnic character, and melancholia would come to define the disposition of a whole generation when looking back at the era of the 1980s and 1990s (to be discussed in more detail in the next chapter).

Missing Mediations Today: Post-1980s Aporias

It is important to note that while the vicissitudes of the LNT/KNT were influenced by organisational crises of left parties, these themselves were overdetermined by the historical conjuncture and the intellectual cultures within the Left. The effects of dictatorship and long bouts of divorce from organisational cadres and mass politics have been discussed previously. At a higher level of abstraction, the pitfalls of organisational cultures may also be down to a misreading of the conjuncture by the worldwide Communist movement. As Prabhat Patnaik has described in a recent lecture, (a misreading of) the “Leninist” party model as one dominated by a top-heavy vanguard and iron discipline¹⁶⁵ was itself a product of the “Leninist conjuncture” i.e. one characterised by a general crisis of capitalism and brutal inter-imperialistic wars, which necessitated the capture of power by any means possible as a first step to prevent the slide into barbarism (Patnaik, 2016). The top-down and immanently activist (verging on the adventurist) reading of the model of political organisation was therefore a product of a crisis-ridden conjuncture and a belief in the arc of history bending inevitably on the side of the proletariat. However, where the post-war era gave way to a capital-labour compromise, decolonisation, and

¹⁶⁵ I term this a “mis-reading” because the Bolsheviks’ concrete political practice during the revolutionary years under Lenin was much more flexible and oriented towards broader social hegemony, than the more austere image which emerges from what is considered to be Lenin’s classic statement on party organisation, *What Is To Be Done* (itself published in 1902, a decade and a half before the Soviet revolution). Lenin’s intellectual-theoretical oeuvre is similarly misunderstood (we will discuss this more below).

the *dirigiste* state (the “post-Leninist conjuncture”), official communist parties remained – by and large – modelled on the Leninist conjuncture. In effect, what was in line with the requirement of the earlier conjuncture, became a source of organisational, political, and intellectual hindrance in the era of “the integral state” (in Gramscian terms) or the “post-Leninist conjuncture” (according to Patnaik). Dictatorship *of* the proletariat in the socialist countries became a dictatorship *over* the proletariat, and the tradition of intellectual brilliance and dissent within the Left – borne by luminaries such as Lenin, Lukacs, Luxemburg, and Gramsci – atrophied. Without a reading of the conjuncture and a rethinking of the party form, party officials and their modus operandi became quite isolated from the changing political terrain itself.

The atrophy of intellectual cultures can also be glimpsed in the failure to understand Lenin and his oeuvre in the fateful years before and after the first World War I. As Kevin Anderson has demonstrated in his study of Lenin during these years, Lenin’s reading of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* profoundly changed his understanding of dialectics and revolution (Anderson, 1995). For Lenin, Hegelian dialectics’ emphasis on contradiction, mutually-constitutive relations between subject-object/particular-universal, and the relative autonomy of thought (i.e. in contrast to Lenin’s earlier “reflection/mirror” model of the relation between thought and reality), meant that “intelligent idealism” with the historicity and internal relation of its categories was closer to a Marxist materialism than “unintelligent [i.e. vulgar] materialism”. This led Lenin to think through the specificity of the political, a greater emphasis on the role of imperialism and peripheral nations in revolutionary rupture, and a rethinking of the state in a post-revolutionary context. While Lenin himself moved towards a more dialectical understanding of materialism and the concomitant relation of structure-superstructure, and would portray these in his later writings such as *State and Revolution* and the pamphlet on *Imperialism*, he never got around to

explicitly explicating “a newer, more dialectical concept of [party] organization” in light of such a re-reading and the changing terrain (Anderson, 1995: 166-7). Thus, following his *Hegel Notebooks*, Lenin conceived of strategy and politics in expansive and flexible ways, which can be seen in the *practical state* through the Bolsheviks’ manoeuvrings during the fateful events of 1917 and in later debates over the NEP. However, these evolutions in Lenin’s thought and practice were never explicitly theorised before his death.

In later years, the ossification of the Stalinist orthodoxy and suppression of the *Hegel Notebooks*, would lead to a long hiatus before Lenin’s continually evolving project was unearthed. In the case of a peripheral country like Pakistan, the percolation of “orthodoxy” through official communist parties, was compounded by dictatorship and the related asphyxiation of intellectual cultures within the Left in particular and in Pakistani society in general. With the repression of the Zia era, the Left in Pakistan lost many of its brightest intellectuals, such as Feroz Ahmed and Aijaz Ahmad, due to dismissal, exile or repression. Critical intellectual activity faced brutal suppression both at the hands of the state and fascistic organisations in civil society. The violence faced by students on campuses has already been mentioned. General Zia’s Islamisation campaign became a ruse for labelling all critical thought as “atheistic”, “anti-Islam”, and by association, “anti-Pakistan”. Marxism became anathema within the Pakistani academy. In Punjab University, activists of the IJT took out books of Marx and on Marxism from various libraries and made a bonfire out of them (Kamran, 2018 May 13). Organisational cultures within the Left were already under strain and with intellectual cultures degenerating, theoretical and practical lessons that could have been gleaned from a serious reading of the oeuvre of Marxist thought and practice (in Lenin and beyond) were out of reach.

Parties in Pakistan had, by and large, operated with an organisational form (supposedly) suited more to the Leninist conjuncture than to the conjuncture of the integral state: rigid, bureaucratic organs with top-down leaderships, and communism invoked more as “a moral and abstract imperative” than as institutional forms for realising “a concrete phantasy”, with the party as “cell” of a new culture, new forms of intellectuality and association (Shah, 2017: 203-4). Consequently, with politics in Pakistan moving onto the mass terrain, the Zia-ist passive revolution in full force, and the collapse of Soviet Union within a few years, the weight of the post-Leninist conjuncture, the integral state, and the lack of mediations for the Left therein, were revealed in full: “when the illusion breaks the theoretical atrophy that had preceded makes the Party or its different fragments fall easy prey to the hegemony of bourgeois ideology” (Patnaik, 2016). Drove of intellectuals (or whatever was left of them after the Zia ravages), left workers, and party leaders renounced the Left or, more prosaically, simply adjusted themselves to the End of History, liberalism, and the NGOs which came to represent such a circumscribed imaginary of social change.

For those who remained associated with some form of left politics, the feeling was a mix of what Perry Anderson has described as “consolation” and “resignation”. For those against accommodating liberalism’s self-proclaimed End of History, “consolation” was a means whereby “earlier ideals are not abandoned, and may even be staunchly reaffirmed. But faced with daunting odds, there is a natural human tendency to try and find silver linings in what would otherwise seem an overwhelmingly hostile environment” (Anderson, 2000: 9-10). But for most of those who did not abandon the ship, an attitude of resignation and unbridled pessimism set in, “a lucid recognition of the nature and triumph of the system, without either adaptation or self-deception, but also without any belief in the chance of an alternative to it. A bitter

conclusion of this kind is, however, rarely articulated as a public position” (ibid: 9, fn5). In fact, both these positions – one veering towards an ultra-leftism and the other towards conservatism – were different sides of the same coin; ultimately the product of not just an inability to read the historical conjuncture but also of a failure to update the Left’s theoretical apparatus in Pakistan. In fact, it was Lenin himself who had once reminded a colleague that “we must be as radical as reality itself”. Without a reading of the conjuncture, every movement or stirring in society was either greeted as *the* moment of catharsis or with a suspicion as to its methods, demands, and aims. In the absence of viable theoretical and organisational apparatuses, the delicate dialectic of engagement, fantasy-projection, and building the Left’s own independent bases was abandoned. The opposite but complementary tendencies of tailing and disengaged criticism from above set in, isolating many in a sort of echo-chamber of “buts” and “what-ifs”. Consequently, many of the older generation of the Left ended up being more radical than reality itself: in the illusion that with their “scientific” analyses they are far ahead of the people, when in fact they were quite behind them. The failure to negotiate this dialectic, failure to take people and movements seriously on their own terms, made for bitterness and, paradoxically, attitudes which were anti-people and anti-emergent mass movements. That, the illusion of being “ahead” of the unwashed masses, is of course a sign of true conservatism.

The organizational disintegration of left parties induced by the Soviet Union’s fall and the misreading of the conjuncture were compounded by the suppression of critical and intellectual activity from the 1980s onwards. And with the closure of the spaces of labour and campus politics, forms of intellectual and generational continuity were lost: where all through Pakistan’s history, students and intellectuals had provided key sources of replenishment for parties of the Left, the 1990s and 2000s were characterised by a yawning gap. Left ideas were not only

discredited worldwide, in Pakistan the onslaught of dictatorial repression and state-sponsored Islam compounded the effect. Today, the absence of these generational and intellectual mediations can be glimpsed in many forms: especially in the culture within left parties, and in the intellectual-theoretical apparatuses for understanding (and changing society). In the late 2000s, the Lawyers' Movement against General Musharraf's military rule introduced a new generation of students and youth to political activism. The movement itself was ideologically promiscuous and succeeded in its immediate aim to restore (formal) democracy, and while most of the youth upsurge in later years was captured by the center-right populism of Imran Khan, many of the newly involved also veered towards the Left. Thus, while there was an incipient re-generation (pun intended) of the Left, party and organizational meetings often presented a strange sight: on the one hand young people in their twenties and early thirties (with often a good number of women), on the other hand there are the stalwarts of the 1970s and 1980s (invariably all men). It is what Antonio Negri, referring to the lost generation of the Italian Left due to the Lead Years' repression, has termed "a void, a determined emptiness" (quoted in DW, 2018).

Even more tellingly, this void is reflected in the intellectual and organisational valences of the new Left. As mentioned earlier, the repression of the first phase of passive revolution had highly detrimental effects on the intellectual milieu in Pakistan. Not just the study of Marxism but the social sciences in general withered at the hands of the onslaught of state, capital, and neo-fundamentalism (Zaidi, 2002). The quality of the social sciences in Pakistan declined precipitously, the only social scientists of note operating within Pakistan were economists increasingly tied to IFIs, and critical thinkers either moved to universities abroad or got absorbed in the circuit of international donors and NGO projects (Zaidi, 2016). With the accelerated liberalisation of the economy in the 2000s and the establishment of the HEC, thousands of

Pakistanis (including in the social sciences) were given scholarships for higher studies abroad. Here, the percolation of Anglo-American academic trends, and especially the influence of the cultural-linguistic turn, is strong. The older critical intellectual currents were very much influenced by a certain interpretation of Marxist materialism, with a close identification to the mainstream Enlightenment tradition and a consequently unproblematic affiliation to modernist currents of thought. With the collapse of the communist ideal and the Soviet Union, these trends of mechanical materialism often got straightforwardly absorbed into an uncritical modernism, liberalism, and a (reified) “scientificity”. On the other hand, the familiarity of globalised discourses due to the Internet and media technologies, and with the percolation (albeit with a lag) of Anglo-American academic-political trends, we have a new generation of activists and thinkers very much in touch with the intellectual and political valences borne out of the post-1968 moment in the advanced capitalist countries.

However, the intellectual mediations, the traditions of theoretical continuity and rupture, which gave rise to current debates in the Anglo-American academic and left political habitus are missing. Social science and humanities departments which until recently were teaching the classical texts of English literature have, in one fell swoop, shifted to post-colonial/post-structuralist theory, when the latter itself has passed its prime in the North (Kamran, 2018 May 13). It is as if they have jumped in one leap from Durkheim and Marx to Spivak and Butler, with the intervening lineage of critical/Marxist thinking stretching from Lukacs, the Frankfurt School, Gramsci, Althusser, Hall and others missing completely. In fact, one is reminded of the famous passage from *The History of the Russian Revolution* where Trotsky describes uneven and combined development with the diffusion of capitalism in the peripheries. The underdeveloped countries, “skipping a whole series of intermediate stages”, go

from “bows and arrows for rifles all at once” leading to a “peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process [as it unfolded in the advanced capitalist formations]” (Trotsky, 1932/2008: 4). Divergent modes of thought come to inhabit the same space, themselves conditioned by the uneven and combined rhythms of social development in which they are embedded. In such a situation, new theoretical trends adopted from different contexts “translate” to other situated contexts only with great difficulty.

In left formations too, one-sided debates between poles of “class-first” and “intersectionality” dominate, which roughly map onto generational divides. The intervening intellectual and theoretical mediations lost, every generation tries to reinvent and assert the Left in a void. “Today’s Marxists,” Sartre had once wryly commented on the insularity of post-war French Marxism, “behave as if Marxism did not exist and as if each one of them, in every intellectual act reinvented it, finding it each time exactly equal to itself.” (quoted by Sheehan, 2017: 741). Ultimately, in a strange sort of *déjà vu*, there is endless repetition of the old philosophical and political debates: objectivity versus subjectivity; the thing-in-itself versus the thing-as-it-appears; idealism versus materialism; particular versus universal; “experience” (coded as “female”) versus “science” (coded as “male”); “identity”/“difference” versus “class”; “feminism” versus “Marxism”¹⁶⁶. In the drive to go beyond (a supposedly) irredeemably

¹⁶⁶ The deployment of quotes around these terms is, of course, because the framework used here does not consider these as antinomies or ontological opposites. Difference, as we have demonstrated through this work, is constitutive of class (and vice versa); while particularity-universality and idealism-materialism are not antinomies, but are immanent/integrally related to each other as “distinctions-within-a-unity”. The fact that these antinomies are still discursively dominant ways of understanding the world is in many ways related to the dominance of the commodity form itself and its rupture of abstract-concrete through the mediation of value (Postone, 1993). However, as I have argued in this section, the failure to overcome these antinomies is also a matter of a determinate historical, political, and theoretical practice (or lack thereof).

The debate on feminism and “women’s organisation” within Left parties in Pakistan is of course just one vivid illustration of the above (false) antinomies. For a new generation of activists, the terrain of politics

“reductionist” Marx, thought and practice end up “going beyond Marx to pre-Marxism” (Sartre quoted by Anderson, 1995: xi). The old cannot forget, the young cannot remember. One is reminded of Gramsci’s review of Croce, Bukharin, and Kantian philosophy in his day: “in reality the reciprocally unilateral position contrasting materialism and idealism, criticised in the first thesis on Feuerbach, is being repeated, and now, as then, though at a more advanced moment of history, a synthesis remains necessary at a higher level of development of the philosophy of praxis” (Gramsci, 1971: 402).

In times of ideological crisis, and in the absence of the intellectual and generational mediations of yesteryear, thought and practice flail about in a desperate search for continuity. In fact, with the pastiche and bricolage forms of (post-)modernity, where there is a percolation of intellectual-theoretical trends from the North, the search for “tradition” also becomes a foremost battleground of politics today. A time of ideological disorientation has the young (and old) reaching out for the dredges of the past in order to give meaning to the present and to find signposts for the future (this “tradition” may be defined differently by different people: for some it is “Indus Valley Civilisation”, for others “Sufism”, most commonly it is some form of “Islam”). Of course, this has the potential to descend, as Fanon puts it, into “a banal search for exoticism”, a doomed attempt to “reunite with a people in a past where they no longer exist” (Fanon, 1967: 178). In its divorce from politics and from the mass, this is bound to be a failing endeavor. The “tradition” of yesterday was the rational response to the conditions of yesterday. And the “rationality” of yesterday was defined by and large, and despite all its contradictions, by

has changed. Fascism, commodification, oppressive labour regimes, and patriotic zeal: all bear out their ravages on the bodies of women. The feminist question has been posed and is being answered, in differing and creative ways by the young organisers of today (not least those who associate with the Left tradition). For an earlier generation, any attempt to address the “women’s question” outside the (narrowly proclaimed) bounds of the “class question” is hearsay. The question has been posed, and the clash in outlooks and theoretical apparatuses seems to be irredeemable; its “truth”, of course, will only be proved in practice.

the ruling classes of today and yesterday (who are ruling classes precisely because of the fact of their domination of the past and the present). The past and its “traditions” cannot be the Left or the working class’s terrain for one simple reason: because they lost. The domination over time, and the task of defining “tradition”, is not one that we are privy to today: it is the task of the ruling classes, who are ruling classes today precisely because they have won and have kept winning in the past. “Cultural heritage,” as Benjamin once put it, “are the spoils borne aloft in that triumphal parade [of the victors of history]” (Benjamin, 1940/2005).

The uneven and combined development of our intellectual and organizational cultures has thus left the Left with missing mediations, which contributes to a loss of memory and feelings of discontinuity and disorientation. The task confronting the new – youth-dominated – Left in Pakistan today then is exceedingly difficult, but two-fold. In one moment of our oeuvre, we must go back to the classics of our tradition, not as sterile “lessons” or “manuals to action”, but to discover them again in all their vitality, their conjunctural concreteness, and to shed light on the flexibility and expansiveness of the Left tradition itself. In short, we must see the classics and the politics of the classicals themselves *as creative acts and as resources to think about our present*¹⁶⁷. In the second – and perhaps most important – moment of this oeuvre, the task is to “translate” these to our context today (both in the literal and in the Gramscian sense). For not only is there a crucial need to translate the arc of Marxist thought and creativity into our vernacular languages¹⁶⁸, but also to link these to the people “in that fluctuating movement which

¹⁶⁷ Such as the example and “discovery” of a more “open” Lenin indicated earlier.

¹⁶⁸ While there has been a spate of translation work and a greater continuity of intellectual-political work in “peripheral” nationalities (especially in Sindhi), the critical theorising and intellectual work in Urdu and Pakistan’s vernacular languages has followed a similar trend. For example, a review of philosophical writings in Urdu states: “One has to admit that while in Urdu we find much material on old philosophies and old theorists, the area concerning modernism, postmodernism, structuralism and post-structuralism is, to a large extent, left unattended” (Parekh, 2014 October 13).

they are just giving shape to” (Fanon, 1967: 182). In this two-fold task, we suffer not only the pitfalls of underdevelopment and missing mediations, but also of potentially redeeming “the privilege of historical backwardness” i.e. one which affords the Left an opportunity to assimilate and gain from the experiences of past currents of thoughts, successes, and failures much more fully and rapidly in striking out towards the future.

The task therefore is one of translation, of re-establishing our missing mediations, of the Gramscian “synthesis at a higher level”. And the establishment of mediations cannot simply be a “translat[ion] into ideas and words-as-force. (This is the rational and intellectual way and is all too often fallacious.) Rather it is acquired by the collective organism... *through experience of immediate particulars*, through a system which one could call “living philology” (Gramsci, 1971: 429, emphasis added). This task of establishing mediations, and of “translation”, is thus not in any sterile sense simply a linguistic one or merely “learning” from the past, but in the Gramscian-Fanonist sense, it is that of creating a *living* tradition which not just establishes our continuity with the past, but also can effect an organic rupture with it. The point is therefore not just to change what exists (it always of course is that). But in an era defined by the loss of historicity and memory, by our missing mediations and the absence of their presence, one of the most urgent tasks is to dream the old dreams anew. While the social revolution of tomorrow “cannot take its poetry from the past but only the future”, it must also “strip away all superstition about the past” (Marx, 1852: 6). And to “let the dead bury the dead”, it cannot itself remain buried under the weight of the dead: to dream the old dreams anew, a reckoning of the void, a recovery of lost historicity, the (re-)making of missing mediations, is long overdue.

It is this weight of memory, the void of time and historicity, and the structures of feeling generated therein that will also be the subject of our next chapter. As we have indicated at various

points in this dissertation, the moment(s) of passive revolution were characterised by a shift in the socio-spatial terrain of politics, practice, and subjectivity. In Karachi's case, this was very pronounced due to the urban question, and the wider terrain of national and imperial politics, being constitutive of changing forms of association and the "structure of feeling". In the crucial moment of the late 1970s and 1980s, this was translated as a civic crisis and an "ethnicisation" of politics which heralded new forms of association and spatial demarcation. While these forms of association and demarcation have been touched upon above, it is to a fuller consideration of the changing socio-spatial coordinates of politics and experience that we turn to in our next chapter.

6. Melancholia: Urban Space and the Structure of Feeling

Chiraghon ke badley makaan jal rahey hain

Naya hai zamana, nayee roshni hai

Instead of lamps it is houses which are ablaze

This is the new light, of a new era

Khumar Barabankvi¹⁶⁹

As I had proceeded with interviews and meetings in Karachi during fieldwork in 2017-18, certain trends began to recur with regards to conversations about the 1980s and 1990s. Among the many different people I interacted with, from middle-class activists to working-class organisers and labourers in different sectors, recollections of the time were marked by a distinct sense of loss and mourning. This sense of melancholia would be registered in varied ways: some would lament the loss of a horizon of a different, more equal world; others would speak mournfully of the rise of ethnic divisions and violence in the city; and for others still, attempts to probe memory for those decades of Karachi would be met by silence, a minimal or no engagement/recall of the time which stood out even more in relation to their enthusiastic remembrances of the era of the 1960s and 1970s. Prominently, these feelings of loss and melancholia were expressed in combination with reflection on the changing coordinates of spatial experience in Karachi.

That this shift in the registers of memory and social-spatial experience coincides roughly with the onset of the first phase of revolution discussed previously is of course not incidental.

¹⁶⁹ Khumar Barabankvi was one of the great exponents of the classical *ghazal* form of Urdu poetry in the twentieth century. He hailed from Barabanki in Uttar Pradesh (UP), India, and was extremely popular on both sides of the Radcliffe Line for his diction and style of poetry.

However, while it was connected concretely to the rhythms of hegemony and pacification-absorption at the “global” level of the world economy, imperialism, and the state, the related-yet-distinct rhythms of the urban question in relation to Karachi lent these recollections, forms of experience and consciousness, a specificity which cannot be reduced to the former level(s). The second phase of passive revolution too has been integrally informed by the patterns of spatial differentiation, practice, and consciousness institutionalised in the first phase. However, with the increasing penetration of (transnational) capital in the social formation, new forms of exclusion, mediation, and *trasformismo* are also taking shape. Here, I draw upon recent work in global South urban contexts which have sought to understand the dialectics of exclusion and incorporation in the latest phase of neoliberal urbanisation. Thus, passive revolutionary impulses work via variegated socio-spatial relations, through not just exclusion but uneven and limited absorption/inclusion of subaltern groups. Not only historically-situated relations of difference but “aspirations [of upward mobility and consumptive modernity] serve as cultural terrains” for projects of urban hegemony (Doshi, 2019: 689). However, I also add to these debates on urban populisms by emphasising a non-ontological and social conception of space (drawing upon thinkers such as Raymond Williams and Henri Lefebvre). Thus, spatial imaginaries, practices, and demarcations become key mediators of ethnic populisms and, concomitantly, for producing the “urban”. As such, in both the first and second phase of passive revolutions in Karachi, material and discursive claims over space itself – in varying registers of, for example, “urbanity” and “modernity” – are integral parts of the contested terrain of hegemonic projects and urban populisms.

As such, this chapter aims to investigate the forms of consciousness and experience through which the changing coordinates of the urban question with regards to Karachi – the

dynamic imbrications of land, labour, and capital – were registered in the “structure of feeling” i.e. the values, perceptions, and ideas through which subjects understand and negotiate the social and spatial relations in which they are imbricated. The “structure of feeling” of course is the term used by Raymond Williams to designate how emergent meanings and values are “actively lived and felt... practical consciousness of a present kind”, which even without systematisation and definition “exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action” (Williams, 1977: 132). Relatedly, in his analysis of literary evolution during the capitalist transition in late-feudal and early-modern Britain, Williams deployed “structure of feeling” to designate the incipient (spatial) practices, claims, and imaginaries of urbanity, rurality, “city”, and “country” that came to mediate the proto-hegemonic projects of varied social groups (Williams, 1975). Williams’ concept thus serves us to move away from ontological conceptions of “space” and “city” towards the practices, imaginaries, and representations through which spaces are defined (and claimed) materially and discursively.

Such a social, political, and de-ontologised conception of the urban and associated imaginaries and practices also signals a transition towards a Lefebvrian understanding of the same. As indicated above, space and the “urban” here are not merely, or even primarily, a (technocratically-defined) physical space or passive “container” of social relations. But in a Lefebvrian sense, the “urban” itself is a *process*: as both expression and mediation of the homogenising-differentiating dialectic of state and capital; of the historically-bound rule of the commodity-object fetishized as universal time and serialized space; as a site of encounter which encodes non-contemporaneous rhythms of space and time; and the (always tenuous) instantiation of material-ideological hegemony, which provides spaces for the production of an alternative hegemony and universality (Lefebvre, 1970/2003). Thus, where Lefebvre understands space in

capitalism as “a concrete abstraction” – i.e. the practices and representations through which space is homogenised, parcellised, and differentiated-hierarchised in the service of capital – such demarcations also (contingently) “fix” multiple rhythms of accumulation and encounter (Stanek, 2008). It is through this contingent spatial fixation that the imbrications of state, capital, and socio-spatial practices produce “minimal difference” i.e. reified and alienated forms of particularity tending towards “difference-as-sameness” and “formal identity” (such as naturalised conceptions of “race”, ethnicity etc.) (Kipfer, 2008: 201-202).

It is also this contingency of the “fixation” of space – and the varied imaginaries and practices ensconced therein – that creates spaces (literally and metaphorically) for challenges to its “concrete abstraction”. Thus, contradictions of everyday life – the “residue” left behind by the fragmentation-homogenisation of capital even while the alienated structures of state and capital integrally shape it – and practices of “maximal difference” therein may become the basis of a transformation of the urban and, through that, of the “global” (i.e. general) level of state and capital. In contrast to the reified-alienated particularity of minimal difference, “maximal difference” would entail practices of and in space which “point to festive, creative, affective, unalienated, fully lived forms of difference... defined by use-value relationships and generalised autogestion” (Kipfer, 2008: 203). Thus, a focus on the mediating role of the “urban”, and the fixation of alienated forms of particularity in and through space (minimal difference), dovetails well with Williams’ focus on the “structures of feeling” and how the emerging coordinates of experience are expressed in spatially-inflected forms. Urban space here becomes a central locus of claims and site of action, where “city” and “country”, “modernity” and “tradition”, and “urbanity” and “rurality”, serve not as civilizational-ontological markers but “as material grounds of historical blocs, products of the interaction of socio-political force, and

cultural-ideological component parts of hegemonic claims” (Kipfer, 2013: 98). This explication of the “urban” level, and its associated forms of practices and imaginaries, also provides a productive avenue for investigating and elaborating the melancholic structure of feeling which has come to characterise the life of working classes in Karachi, especially with regards to the crucial phases of the first phase of passive revolution. Moreover, as we will see, the inheritance of this structure of feeling and its associated spatial practices continue to weigh heavily in working class lives even as the coordinates of socio-spatial experience are undergoing a shift amid the neoliberal phase of passive revolution.

The argument of the chapter will proceed in four sections. In the first section, we will trace the development of the urban question with regards to Karachi in the post-Partition era up to the 1980s phase of passive revolution. This will involve an elaboration of the urban question in Karachi especially with regards to housing and migration, and in its integral relation to wider rhythms of state, space, and hegemony. This will then see us transition to the civic crisis in the 1980s and its mediation through spatial practices and imaginaries which (often violently) reified and demarcated “minimal difference” along the lines of “ethnicity”. The second and third sections will therefore see us focus on the rhythms of socio-spatial hegemony and the shifting coordinates of everyday life. These in turn were registered in an increasingly ethnicised and melancholic structure of feeling, especially in relation to middle and working classes. While melancholia may be seen as heralding indifference and resignation, its constitutive contradiction, especially its origins in a loss of utopian horizons must be kept in mind. Thus, the melancholic structure of feeling also contains within itself a “Utopian surplus”: a desire for a different and less alienated life through everyday practices of mutuality, association, and cooperation. This socio-spatial “fixation” and sense of melancholia (contingently) institutionalised in the crucial

decades of the 1980s and 1990s will also be seen to bear heavily, in the last section, on the latest phase of passive revolution. Here, we will also reflect upon the changing contours of the (neoliberal) urban question, the deepening penetration of the commodity form, and if its complex imbrication with (residual and emergent) structures of feeling may provide nodes of “common sense” for an alternative practice of the urban and a different hegemonic project. In this regard, the chapter will draw upon published academic literature, interviews with organisers and workers, ethnographic observations, and on selected literary texts to trace the changing coordinates of socio-spatial experience and imaginaries in Karachi.

The decision to draw upon literary texts for the third section of this chapter is not solely due to my personal interest in prose and literature. In fact, the evaluation of literary fiction will serve to fill (so to speak) a gap about an era – the decades of the 1980s and 1990s – which is often the subject of a studied silence and/or melancholic recollection in interlocutors’ recounting of their experiences in Karachi. Thus, a comparative analysis of key Urdu novels written in and about Karachi in the post-Partition era will serve to illuminate the dynamics of everyday life and the shifting socio-spatial coordinates of experience leading up to and during these crucial decades. In this regard, I will combine insights from Fredric Jameson’s pioneering work on the integral relation of form and content in literary criticism with Lefebvrian insights on “objectified”/abstract space as “concrete abstraction”. Thus, space (in its lived, perceived, and conceived aspects) will be seen to occupy a “constitutive” rather than simply a thematic place in the novels under consideration. As such, a focus on the integral linkages between the form and content of the literary text, as both expression of social-spatial contradictions and constitutive moments of the consciousness/attempted resolution of the same, will see us bypass the (one-sidedly) semiotic/deconstructionist and semantic/narrowly sociological methods of literary

criticism. However, before delving into literature and the melancholic structure of feeling, it is to the contours of the urban question in the post-Partition era that we turn to in the first section.

The Urban Question, Partition to the 1980s

As discussed in the preceding chapters on trade union politics and labour regimes, ethnic segmentation in Karachi's working class has remained an enduring reality, not least due to the differentiated manner in which capital, state, and uneven development have worked. However, such segmentation has also been integrally linked (and produced) by the evolution of urban planning and land struggles (including over housing) in the wider context of politics in Sindh. In many senses, ethnic-linguistic imbalances in state structures and uneven development have combined to produce differentiated access to land and housing in Karachi and beyond, thus contributing to overlaps, and even co-constitution, in the production of class and ethnicity. As discussed earlier (in Chapter 3) and will be elaborated below, patterns of economic, social, and spatial development in Karachi were critically informed by the socio-economic geography of colonialism and massive demographic changes due to Partition. These colonial antecedents not only integrally affected the rhythms of the labour movement and economic development in Karachi, the faultlines therein also lent themselves to the growing ethnicisation of Karachi's working class and politics, especially from the 1980s onwards. Moreover, Karachi's initial development as a base for British colonial military campaigns in Sindh and the wider region would also later feed into its role as a key node in US imperial networks of arms and militarism for the Afghan wars (during the Cold War and so-called "War on Terror" eras)¹⁷⁰. As such, it is crucial to understand the historical development of state and space in Karachi and Sindh, and

¹⁷⁰ I have also discussed the effect of changing technologies of political contestation and weaponisation, and its integral linkages to neo-imperial militarism, in the preceding chapter.

how these contributed towards the development of an urban question that was articulated in ethnic terms in the period under consideration.

Compared to the Muslim minority provinces of North India, the populations of Sindh were relatively late in joining Muslim nationalism in the colonial era. While Muslim minority provinces had started becoming centers of Muslim nationalism from the late nineteenth century onwards, in Sindh, a developing sense of local nationalism developed in tandem with articulations of Muslim nationalism in the inter-war period. Support for the Muslim League and for Pakistan in the 1940s itself was inflected through the class question as the moneyed and trading class, along with the local bureaucracy, was dominated by the Lohana Hindu caste (Ansari, 2005). Even while Muslim nationalism and the formation of Pakistan forged an incipient unity between Sindhi landlords and the peasantry, it is the former who benefitted greatly from the post-Partition exodus of Hindus, with close to 60% of the rural land taken over by chieftains. Conversely, the claims over urban evacuee properties were settled mainly in favour of incoming Urdu-speaking migrants from northern and western India.

While the formation of Pakistan had been by and large greeted with enthusiasm among native Sindhis, in the 1950s this was beginning to temper in the face of imbalances in the structure of power, differential access to resources, and unprecedented change in the ethnic, class, and demographic character of Sindh (and especially Karachi). Between 1941 and 1951, the population of Karachi increased three times (from less than half a million to close to 1.2million), the proportion of Sindhi-speakers decreased from 61.2% to 8.6%, the proportion of Urdu-speakers went from 6.3% to 50%, while the city became overwhelmingly Muslim (from 42% to 96%) (Hasan and Mohib, 2003: 3). Urdu-speaking migrants – by and large, from urban and middle class backgrounds in India – dominated the state bureaucracy: as late as 1956, 93 per

cent of the top positions in the federal government and state bureaucracy were held by West Pakistanis, mostly Punjabis and Urdu-speaking migrants. Urdu-speaking migrants alone accounted for 21 percent of positions even while only being three percent of the total population (Waseem, 2002). Other decisions such as the installment of Karachi as the federal capital and its separation from Sindh caused great consternation among the Sindhi middle and upper classes. “Public opinion in the province,” Eric Rahim (a journalist and member of the CP in Karachi) recalls, “was outraged” (Rahim, 2018). The provincial government was dismissed and newspapers editorialising against the separation of Karachi from Sindh were banned. Struggles within the local and provincial bureaucracies (such as within the police) between migrants and Sindhi-speakers had also begun (Ansari, 2014). With the imposition of One Unit, the extinguishing of provincial boundaries, and the later imposition of martial law heralding military-bureaucratic rule, the dominance of Urdu-speakers in Karachi and beyond was increasing.

This dominance of Urdu-speaking migrants in the state bureaucracy was also translated into claims over land and nationhood in Karachi and beyond through the 1950s and 1960s. Urban evacuee property in Sindh was allotted to Urdu-speaking migrants, while half a million acres of agricultural land in Sindh was also allotted to middle and upper class Urdu-speaking migrants (Ahmed, 1988: 107). Most often this was mediated by an appeal to the Urdu-speaking migrants’ “sacrifice” and *hijrat* [migration] for the cause of Pakistan. Specifically, the invocation of *hijrat* and self-fashioning as *Muhajirs*¹⁷¹ was an appeal to a practice of Islamic universality and a “model of extra-territorial solidarity... upheld in self-consciously moral and political terms as an alternative to the racial and linguistic particularism of European territorial nationalism [and

¹⁷¹ The idioms of *hijrat* and *Muhajir* both invoked identification with the Prophet Muhammad and early Muslims’ migration to Medina, fleeing persecution in Mecca.

developing ethnic nationalisms in East and West Pakistan]” (Naqvi, 2012: 475). It is important to note the *de-territorialised* claims on the “nation” – expressed in terms of mobility and migration – invoked by the post-Partition generation of Muslim migrants. As we will see later, this would undergo a decisive shift in the 1980s with the emergence of Muhajir ethnic nationalism and associated claims over urbanity and (urban) space.

Concretely, the moral claims over the “nation”, combined with dominance of state bureaucracy and the newly-developing intelligentsia of Pakistan, saw Urdu-speaking migrants become exemplars of Pakistani nationalism and prime beneficiaries of the incipient project of state (and space) building. Upper-class migrants in the bureaucracy and industry were allotted houses in areas which British civil servants or upper middle-class Hindu merchant families had just vacated in central areas (near the commercial and administrative hub of the city). In the 1950s, state subsidised conversion of agricultural to urban land in the northern areas of the city created stable, planned middle-class localities for middle class migrants (Hasan, 1999). These are known today as the Nazimabad and North Nazimabad areas in Districts Central and East. 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. In sum, the resolution of the “refugee problem” emerged as “the principal developmental objective of the postcolonial state and provided the material and discursive terrain for the organisation of its project of legitimacy” (Naqvi, 2012: 475).

Moreover, the migrant communities also settled in neighbourhoods (*bastis* and *mohallas*) where a kind of voluntary segregation along the lines of their places of origin (in India) became the norm. As such, by the end of 1950s, distinct differences had developed between “native” and Muhajir residents in Karachi in terms of spatial, class, and occupational segmentation. While

Muhajirs comprised half the population of Karachi, they accounted for close to two-thirds of professional jobs; in all social indicators – literacy rates, *pukka* [permanent] housing, median incomes, provision of urban amenities etc. – Muhajirs had an advantage over native Sindhi-speakers (Ahmed, 1972: 48). Thus, even while the settlement schemes for poorer refugees (such as in Korangi) failed, by and large, the Urdu-speaking community was accommodated in Karachi through formal mechanisms entailing state-sanctioned land designation and urban development. Moreover, Urdu-speaking migrants also dominated the media and intelligentsia in Karachi. Shabaan Baakda, the Sindhi-speaking trade unionist we encountered in an earlier chapter, distinctly remembers the “humiliation” he faced at the hands of Urdu-speaking teachers due to his poor grasp of Urdu, which contributed to his running away from school (S. Baakda, Feb 28, 2018). Eric Rahim’s recollection of Sindhi consternation over One Unit and Karachi’s separation from Sindh has already been mentioned above. With the Urdu-speaking domination of civil and political society, imbalances in state and spatial structures translated into material, linguistic, and cultural faultlines within Karachi’s emerging working class.

In contrast to this post-Partition wave of migration, up-country migration in the 1950s and 60s as a response to uneven development, agricultural Green Revolution, and industrialisation in Karachi produced a very different (non-)response from the state in terms of housing allocation and development. The influx of migrants from Punjab and north-western 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. Urban policies in Pakistan shifted from the state’s commitment to providing housing for the middle and lower classes towards provision of infrastructure, plots and housing

for government officials and beneficiaries of state patronage (Qadeer, 1996: 447-9). Between 1955 and 1970, the housing and planning allocation of development expenditures was halved. On the other hand, Karachi's population between 1961 and 1972 increased by 76.5% compared to the national average of 52.3% (Ahmed, 1988: 120). Consequently, the influx of working class migrants in the 1960s resulted in a proliferation of *katchi abadis* [informal settlements] in Karachi.

The character of *katchi abadis* themselves underwent a shift in the 1960s and 70s. In the 1950s, these settlements had been formed by the migrants from India nearer to the business and administrative hubs of Karachi. These had subsequently been regularised by the state or the Muhajirs had been settled in planned and semi-planned localities in other parts of the city. In the 1960s and 1970s, *katchi abadis* became pre-dominantly established in the peripheries of the city by non-Muhajir ethnic groups and through the involvement of influential patrons (Van der Linden et al, 1991: 68). While these were "illegal sub-divisions" of state lands, influential patrons in state and civil society protected the settlers against eviction. However, with the increasing shift towards market provision and the private sector, especially for working class housing, these "illegal sub-divisions" and the insecurity of tenure therein could be leveraged for capitalising on the rising market value of land.

In the 1970s, with the advent of the left-populist Bhutto government, there was a renewed commitment to state provision of urban housing for the poor. However, this too was translated not into public housing projects, but into suburban plots and public works development, along with regularisation and provision of proprietary rights to *katchi abadis* (Qadeer, 1996: 453-4). Thus, even while autonomous land development authorities were established in many cities, urban planning and housing policy with regards to working class and poor settlements, especially

in Karachi, was characterised by what Haris Gazdar has termed a “non-policy” entailing a drive to “settle now, regularise later” (Gazdar, 2005: 174). The Bhutto legacy of regularising informal settlements was continued by the General Zia regime, and institutionalised a divide between Partition and post-Partition migrants across the lines of (state-)planned and unplanned neighbourhoods. As Gazdar and Mallah have stated, considering the differing experience of these groups with regards to state-led housing initiatives (or lack thereof), the relationship between “migrant cohorts’ interaction with planning and informality was not incidental, but may have contributed to the construction of ethnic identities” (Gazdar and Mallah, 2013: 3103). Thus, occupational segmentation, urban planning practices, and the resultant division of space in turn also (tentatively) mapped onto ethnic-linguistic divides within middle and working class communities in Karachi.

While this was the heyday of Karachi’s Left, labour and student movement, as we have discussed previously, incipient faultlines also saw the light of day in disturbances between Urdu-speaking and Pashtun migrants in the aftermath of the Gen Ayub-Fatima Jinnah election in 1964-5, and then in the “language riots” between Urdu- and Sindhi-speakers in 1972. Following the 1972 riots, quotas were institutionalized along the lines of “urban” and “rural” Sindh in the 1973 Constitution. Here, the definitions of “urban” for allotment of job quotas differed from the census definition, and areas of Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur (defined as “urban”) were allotted roughly one-third more seats in the federal civil services than their population proportion (Ahmed, 1997b: 152). Thus, while the quotas did not substantially dent the Urdu-speaking dominance of the bureaucracy vis a vis other communities of Sindh, they did lead to a relative (if slight) decrease in the proportion of Urdu-speakers in the services. Even though Muhajirs were by and large living in urban areas of Sindh, Sindhis and other ethnic-linguistic communities also

lived in urban areas in large numbers: according to the 1981 census, 95% of Urdu-speakers lived in urban areas but comprised about half of the overall urban population in Sindh (ibid: 150). Crucially, however, by codifying the quotas in “urban-rural” terms, tendencies towards spatial identifications of different linguistic communities gained momentum (such as “Muhajirs and Sindhis coded as “urban” and “rural”, respectively).

In the 1970s and 80s, Karachi was to face a third wave of in-migration due to civil wars in East Pakistan and Afghanistan. The coincidence of this migration wave with the aforementioned decline of the labour movement, the establishment of martial law, and the increasing militarisation of student politics shaped the developing urban question in Karachi and Sindh. Firstly, there was the repatriation of Bihari refugees from Bangladesh. Urdu-speaking Biharis had mostly settled in East Pakistan at the time of Partition, and due to linguistic and ideological affiliations had supported the West Pakistani forces during Bangladesh’s brutal war of independence in 1971. As a result, in newly formed Bangladesh, close to half a million Biharis became refugees after ending up on the wrong side of the Bengali liberation struggle. While a hundred thousand Biharis were repatriated to Pakistan (mostly in Karachi) during the Bhutto government, this process was slow and by the late 1970s close to three hundred thousand Biharis were still stranded in sixty refugee camps in Bangladesh (Haq, 1995: 995). Importantly, unlike the existing Urdu-speaking community in Karachi, Biharis were mostly from poor and lower middle class backgrounds and considered a peripheral element of the “suave” and “urbane” Urdu-speaking community, if that. As such, the overwhelming majority of Biharis settled in informal settlements in Karachi such as the Orangi area in the north-west, which would eventually become the largest “slum” settlement in Asia.

The second related vein of migration in the 1980s was that of Afghan refugees (overwhelmingly Pashto-speaking) due to the anti-Soviet *jihad* sponsored by the US and Saudi Arabia, and carried out under the tutelage of the Pakistani military and intelligence services. Close to 3 million refugees were forced into Pakistan, the largest concentration of refugees anywhere in the world at the time (Gazdar, 2005: 167). While most Afghans settled in UN-sponsored camps and among kith and kin in Balochistan and KP province, over half a million also came to Karachi in search of employment, education, and due to existing kinship networks in the city. Again, these war-displaced refugees were overwhelmingly from poor backgrounds and were absorbed in the city's now burgeoning informal economy and settlements (such as the aforementioned Orangi area). For example, just between 1971 and 1981, Karachi's population grew by 66.3% compared to the national average of 29% (Ahmed, 1988: 120).

Crucially, it was shifts in Karachi's political economy and its integral linkages with wider socio-spatial changes that laid the basis for the urban militancy of the coming years. Martial law, suppression of the labour and student movements, had already closed avenues of democratic participation and contestation in the country. Moreover, while the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) evoked country-wide sympathy and support, it was strongest in the Sindh province where it was articulated, by and large, through the idiom of Sindhi nationalism (Kalra and Butt, 2019). Military operations in parts of Sindh province, while crushing the MRD, also increased feelings of alienation against a now increasingly Punjabi-dominated and militarised state. For the Urdu-speaking communities of Karachi and other parts of urban Sindh, the rise in Sindhi consciousness at this time accompanied the Urdu-speakers' decline within the militarising state relative to Punjabis and Pashtuns (who dominated the military). Moreover, the increasing incidence of ethnicity-based articulation in the post-Ayub era also meant that the Urdu-speakers'

normative self-identification with the Pakistani state and a unitary, Islam-based Pakistani nationalism came under increasing pressure.

The influx of drugs and guns in Karachi due to the Afghan war also created a Pashtun bourgeoisie in the transport sector involved in the war supply chain stretching from the Karachi port to the Afghanistan-Pakistan borders. This influx of drugs and guns, as we have seen, had also laid the ground for the increasing weaponisation of campus politics in Karachi. New informal settlements developed as illegal drug and arms smuggling money was laundered through investments in real estate and transport (Hasan et al, 2013: 73). In the 1970s, state divestment in Karachi's transport sector had also begun: trams were shut down in 1974, while the Karachi Circular Railway was decreasing its operations. While the number of public buses had increased in the 1970s, it decreased in the 1980s (Sayeed et al., 2016: 24). With the city's expanding socio-spatial fabric, the gap in public transit was filled by the private sector which helped absorb many Pashtun refugees. The privatisation and informalisation of public transit laid the basis for overcrowded and recklessly driven buses plying between the now rapidly expanding peripheries and city center, locally earning the unflattering nickname of "yellow devils" (Gayer, 2014: 45). Moreover, this period was also marked by increasing state divestment from welfare and consequent civic deterioration in Karachi: for example, in contrast to the rising military budget, expenditure on the city's civic amenities increased at a miserly 1.2% per year (Baig, 2008: 86). Due to the ethnic segmentation of labour, conceptions of a "Pashtun mafia" taking over key nodes of Karachi and its transport became popular, even though there had (and has) never been any hint of ethnicised collaboration/collective action within the highly fragmented structure of minibus ownership.

The influx of refugees and wider socio-spatial changes raised suspicions among Urdu-speakers who saw a decline in their relative dominance in Karachi and in the bureaucracy. For the Sindhis too, the large numbers of Biharis and Pashtuns coming into Karachi re-enforced existing fears of displacement, dispossession, and demographic replacement of “indigenous” peoples from their historical lands. Moreover, the largely working class and lower middle class backgrounds of Bihari and Pashtun migrants lent themselves to being stereotyped as *panah-guzeer* [refugee/asylum-seekers] associated with drugs, guns and violence. These stereotypes added to the effects of the suppression of martial law, the decline of labour and student organising, the historical socio-spatial cleavages with regards to housing, and the weaponisation of Karachi’s campus politics, which had already created a volatile situation.

Thus, the institutionalisation of the Zia-ist revolution in the case of Karachi proceeded through multiple, multi-scalar rhythms which had determinate effects on the developing urban question. This involved, among other things, the struggle against martial law at the national and (crucially) provincial scales, changing patterns of representation in the sphere of civil and political society, the onset of imperial warfare in the region, and escalating conflicts over land, housing, and civic amenities due to migration and state divestment. These multi-scalar processes in turn were to be articulated through spatial practices and imaginaries involving discursive and material claims over the urban. As Feroz Ahmed would recall a few years later: “by the mid-1980s Karachi was a powder keg, waiting to explode” (Ahmed, 1988: 121)

Ethnicisation and Enclaves

The fuse to the powder would be provided, tellingly, by a minibus accident on 15th April 1985. A minibus driver, while racing with a competitor, hit a group of students from Sir Syed Girls

College in Nazimabad killing one of them, Bushra Zaidi. When protests against Zaidi's death were repressed, some Urdu-speaking and Punjabi students set buses on fire, accusing police of collaborating with a reckless "transport mafia" (the charge of police collaboration, through bribes and other favours, was not entirely untrue). The violence soon escalated as a bus carrying mourners to Zaidi's funeral was attacked in Orangi at Banaras Chowk, "a strategic location at the 'interface' between Pashtun- and Mohajir-dominated localities" (Gayer, 2014: 45). What started out as protests against the transport problem in Karachi soon escalated into much deadlier battles in the informal settlements of Orangi pitting Bihari and Pashtun/Afghan migrants against each other. A week after Zaidi's death, the death toll had reached close to 50 and 300 people were injured (Imtiaz and Ahmed, 2012 Mar 8). In subsequent months, organised attacks would take place between Pashtun and Urdu-speaking militants in various parts of peripheral Karachi where newly arrived migrants lived in close proximity to each other. In December 1986, more than 200 people were killed in attacks on Biharis in Qasba and Aligarh colonies of Orangi Town.

The violence in turn was actively shaped by the newly formed *Muhajir Qaumi Movement* (MQM, Muhajir National Movement), which developed a narrative of Urdu-speaking migrants' marginalisation in Pakistan. The MQM had emerged out of the APMSO student group formed in 1978 in Karachi University to gather "Mohajir" students onto one platform and against the "Punjabi dominance" in the IJT (of which Altaf Husain, founder of the APMSO and later MQM had been a part) (Baig, 2008: 91). Urdu-speakers in urban Sindh had hitherto been involved in either Islamic nationalist parties (such as the JI and JUP) or in left formations such as the NSF, DSF, and CP. Thus, while there was an increasing assertion of ethnicity in Pakistani politics, Urdu-speaking migrants had continued to identify with formations that eschewed ethnicity and talked in terms of Pakistani and/or Muslim nationalism. However, the 1970s and 80s had seen

the decline of the labour and student movements, and a relative decrease in Urdu-speaking state functionaries relative to Punjabis and, more broadly speaking, a decrease in Urdu-speakers' hegemony in Karachi due to migration and civic crises.

Crucially, the influx of Bihari migrants after 1971 and their marginalisation had contributed to an increasing feeling of estrangement from mainstream Pakistani nationalism among Urdu speakers. The MQM had emerged through the 1980s agitating on a platform against the "quota" system in the bureaucracy and for the repatriation of Biharis. In fact, one of the more spectacular acts which had brought APMSO and its founder Altaf Husain into the public limelight was the burning of the Pakistani flag at the mausoleum of the country's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah on Independence Day August 14, 1979. Husain declared his flag burning a protest against the state's apathetic attitude towards the repatriation of Bihari refugees from Bangladesh. He was sent to jail (Baig, 2008: 91). The nascent "Mohajir" organisation was prestaging the Urdu-speakers' increasing alienation from their traditional vehicles of political representation and self-identification. New articulations of "Mohajirs" as the "fifth ethnicity" of Pakistan emerged, signalling a distinct shift in the previous self-identification of Urdu speakers as exemplars of Pakistani and Muslim nationalism.

Here, the crisis of absorption brought about by the influx of Bihari refugees into Karachi was an important moment of MQM's fashioning of the "new" Mohajir ethnicity. Previously, the politics of Urdu-speaking communities had been dominated by upper class/upper caste *Ashraf* groups from North India. However, the influx of poor Biharis and their assertion of the muscle-strength of the MQM during the Afghan war-induced militarisation, laid the basis for a kind of "subaltern" revolt among Urdu-speakers. For example, Karamat Ali, the labour organiser from the MMF, remembers talking to Altaf Husain at a private gathering in 1985 where he

[Altaf] declared to Ali that “these people [the many prominent Urdu-speaking intellectuals attending] are all upper caste. They have earned money and position [in the bureaucracy] in our [i.e. Muhajirs’] name, but did not do anything for the poor Muhajir [*ghareeb Mohajir ke liye kuch nahi kia*]. We won’t let them dominate over us now [*ab hum in ko apne sir per musallat nahi honay dein ge*]” (K. Ali, Mar 9, 2018). The term “Mohajir”, which had hitherto been used as a derogatory epithet for Indian migrants, was now appropriated to designate a new ethnicity on Pakistan’s political map, and centered around the poorer and lower middle class segments (such as Biharis). Thus, it is no coincidence that some of the top leaders of the MQM and APMSO were Biharis, that a major part of the MQM’s militant muscle originated from Bihar areas such as Orangi, and that the repatriation of all Biharis to Pakistan became one of the MQM’s major demands (Haq, 1995: 996).

An important aspect in this redefinition, even invention of a Mohajir ethnicity in urban Sindh’s politics were contingent claims over identity enacted through spatial practices, imaginaries, and representations. The majority of migrants from India were not Urdu-speaking and had moved from East to West Punjab at the time of Partition. A large proportion of those who had moved to urban Sindh from Muslim minority provinces of India were not Urdu-speaking but had been settled in Karachi since colonial days (such as Gujarati and Memon merchant communities). However, in laying a claim on all those who had performed *hijrat* [migration], the MQM came up against the problem of defining who exactly was a “Muhajir”¹⁷². This definition and (contingent) stabilisation of a “Mohajir” identity was enacted through various cultural, social, and spatial practices. Just as the claim to “Mohajir” was partially a subaltern upsurge within the incipient Urdu-speaking community by semi-peripheral groups (such as

¹⁷² The etymological root of both *Muhajir* and *hijrat* are the same: *hijr* [separation].

Biharis and lower middle classes), the new generation of Urdu-speakers also were enacting a revolt against the earlier generations' politics.

In this redefinition, creation, and articulation of “Mohajir” ethnicity, struggle and rebellion became a major trope. Where the earlier generation of migrants had identified with Pakistani nationalism through the idiom of Islam, in the 1970s and 1980s their identification started to emphasize the active aspect of struggle. In previous years, the Khilafat Movement of the 1920s was defined as a watershed movement of Muslim nationalism due to its migratory aspect in support of a pan-Islamic nationalism. Now the Khilafat Movement and the idiom of Karbala¹⁷³ were re-appropriated as part of Mohajir identity as moments of active rebellion rather than as expressions of a more narrowly defined and passive form of religious faith (Verkaaik, 1994: 71-2). Where the earlier generation identified with Islamic parties upholding a mainstream, unitary Pakistani nationalism, the generational revolt – especially in a context of active patronage of Islamist groups by the Zia regime – fashioned itself by moving away from an Islam-centered identity to one based on ethnicity and emphasising a “non-fundamentalist” reading of Islam.

An increased emphasis on Mohajirs' literacy, “modernity”, and urbanity underwrote a critique of the “quota-system” in the bureaucracy. The assertion of urbanity was especially important here as the MQM laid claims to the city (and especially on Karachi) as a bastion of Mohajirs against the surrounding decadent “feudal” – that is, “rural” – culture. Thus, when a “committee” was instituted in 1987 to define who qualifies as a “Mohajir”, it came up with this definition: “reasonably fluent in Urdu, city-dweller, [and] member of ‘oppressed middle class’ that shared a ‘common interest’” (quoted by Verkaaik, 1994: 14). Through such transformations

¹⁷³ The Prophet Muhammad's family, including his grandson Husain, and their small band of followers was massacred by the Umayyad Caliph Yazid's army at Karbala in 680AD. The tragic incident remains a watershed moment in Muslim history, and Husain is venerated among all Muslims (especially among the Shias) as a symbol of defiance against tyranny.

in inhabitants' identities, the civic crisis in Karachi was re-articulated in ethnicised form. This re-articulation was further cemented territorially, through (urban) spatial practices, imaginaries, and representations.

This spatialisation of Mohajir identity was a highly significant move. Ethnicity and associated (sub-)nationalisms in Pakistan had previously been articulated in relationship to historically formed linguistic-cultural communities in defined territories (such as Sindhis in Sindh and Baloch in Balochistan). In contrast, as we have mentioned previously, Urdu-speaking migrants had identified with a Muslim nationalism that was, in many senses, *extra-territorial* due to its emphasis on a pan-Islamic community. Now, however, in a context of the proliferation of other ethnic claims over territorial-linguistic autonomy, the MQM spatialized Mohajir identity. It proclaimed their attachment to the urban, describing "Karachi as a beleaguered [Mohajir] city that need to be defended" (Verkaaik, 2016: 853). Thus, the assertion of poor or recent migrant Urdu speakers, "middle class" modernity, and beleaguered ethnicity were articulated to the MQM's spatial populism i.e. through (rebellious) claims over urbanity and urban space.

In this regard, the MQM leader Altaf Husain came to attain a cult-like status exemplifying Mohajir "trials and tribulations", and the "internal cement" around which the MQM's urban, ethnic populism was concretised. Husain's lower middle class background and spells in jail meant that his struggle came to stand as a metonym for the assertion of the "middle class" Mohajir. Between 1987 and 1992, he gained complete control of the MQM, his home in the middle-class neighbourhood of Azizabad¹⁷⁴ became the party headquarters, and Husain himself

¹⁷⁴ One of the formally planned areas of Karachi where migrants from India were settled in a large majority.

was given title of the “Quaid” (leader)¹⁷⁵, and eventually – in a semi-parodic gesture – of “*pir* sahib” (saint or spiritual guide). The fashioning of Husain as a kind of “urban” *pir* was significant in a few respects. Firstly, it was an appropriation of popular and syncretic religious symbolism from “rural” Sindhi culture where *pirs*, often descendants of famous saints, often held an elevated social position (mostly due to a combination of spiritual pedigree and state patronage). By fashioning Altaf as an “urban, modern kind of *pir*” – and with some MQM leaders calling themselves “*new Sindhis*” – the move was geared towards “*both assimilating and demarcating Muhajirs into Sindh*” (Verkaaik, 1994: 65). In a second moment, by signalling a *piri-muridi* – i.e. saint-disciple/follower – relationship between Altaf and Muhajirs, Husain was set up as an “internal cement” for the party and for Muhajir identity generally. Importantly, the playful appropriation of the “*piri-muridi*” symbolism of a syncretic and “rural” Islam for the urban and “modern” Muhajirs was a crucial part of the MQM’s ludic aspect, especially for young Urdu-speakers and party cadres. Thus, Husain’s often playful asides in public gatherings – he once celebrated his birthday by using a sword to cut a cake! – were integral parts of the “fun” aspect of the MQM’s membership (Dadi, 2007: 24).

This ludic and “fun” aspect of the MQM helped forge its internal cultures of youth camaraderie and, crucially, violence. The MQM’s articulation of generational revolt, its subversion of established conventions of Urdu-speaking identity, and its emergence in the context of a shift in the technologies of political contestation (such as the use of sophisticated weaponry), lent its public gatherings and internal cultures a sense of spectacular transgression. Street cultures and youth alienation were combined with an anti-elitist sensibility and emphasis on physicality. MQM militants taking on nicknames such as “boxer”, “commando”, “dakait”

¹⁷⁵ It was of course not coincidental that this resonated with an earlier exemplar of Urdu-speakers’ self-identification with Muslim nationhood: the founder of Pakistan “Quaid-e-Azam” (Great Leader) Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

[dacoit], and “ghunda” [muscle man]. Against the image of a beleaguered Muhajir community being pushed out of “their city” and discriminated against by “outsiders” (such as Pashtuns and Sindhis), internal cultures of “fun” and transgression helped “change violence into an integrative force by preserving violence as an experience of solidarity” (Verkaaik, 2003: 21).

While the role of Husain’s cult, violence, and transgression within the MQM’s internal culture cannot be downplayed, it is important to understand what the adoption and proliferation of violence meant for the developing urban question of the 1980s in Karachi. In fact, the proliferation of violence and its adoption by the MQM was a constitutive moment in both the “creation” of Mohajirs as a “threatened” ethnicity in Pakistan and its claims over space and place in Karachi (and other parts of urban Sindh). As such, the complex rhythms of state, space, and hegemony which had contributed to the civic, political, and ideological crises of the 1980s, were re-articulated towards an ethnic populism through the coercive demarcation of spatial boundaries, practices, and imaginaries¹⁷⁶.

Therefore, the fractures of class, informality, and demographic change – working in Karachi through registers of ethnicity – were absorbed in developing projects of spatial populism and demarcation. Among others, Roy (2004), Menon (2013), and Doshi (2019) have shown how projects of neoliberal urbanism in India have worked not just through practices of spatial

¹⁷⁶ The account of Karachi’s ethnic politics elaborated in this section also moves us away from Hamza Alavi’s characterisation of ethnic politics in India and Pakistan as centered on the conflict among the salariat and middle class groups over white-collar employment, especially in the state apparatus (Alavi, 1989a: 225). While demands around the quota system were key to the MQM’s emergence, the formation of “Muhajir ethnicity” cannot be reduced to the former. As we have seen, this was a complex process traversing the socio-spatial spheres of the “integral state”.

As such, an understanding of “ethnicity” in Karachi (and Pakistan) centering simply around the salariat’s access to state employment, while not entirely untrue, does serve to obscure more than it reveals, especially with regards to the rhythms of material-ideological hegemony and the concomitant spatial practices and imaginaries. As we have discussed in the chapter on the Pakistani state, this is part of a wider pitfall in Alavi’s problematic whereby the differentiated unity of the integral state and processes of hegemony therein are given short shrift.

exclusion, but also through variegated forms of incorporation mobilising faultlines around masculinity, commodified aspiration, and/or ethno-religious redefinitions of citizenship. These important contributions thus focus our attention on the relations of difference which mediate hegemonic projects and, concomitantly, through which class is unevenly produced. However, in light of our discussion of Karachi and the MQM, it is pertinent to add to these accounts the integrality of space for such hegemonic projects. Space is thus not merely an ontological-physical container for social forces, but is itself *produced* through material, ideological, and discursive practices. In Karachi, post-Partition migrants' differentiated settlement patterns and MQM's material-discursive appropriations of space (including claims over "city-ness" and "modernity", and more coercive demarcations) are part of this social production of space as an integral component of hegemonic projects.

These practices of space- (and state-)making also reveal the limits to Chatterjee's civil society-political schema. Thus, *contra* Chatterjee, civil and political society, formality and informality, are not ontologically-defined or hermetically sealed spheres with merely conjunctural relations between the two. In fact, the focus is on the "boundary-traversing" practices across variegated spaces which tenuously anchor hegemonic projects within the integral state and urban space, and continuously redefine the boundaries of civil and political society, formal-informal, and, indeed of the "urban" itself. Crucially, the integrality of spatial imaginaries and claims in mediating class practices and consciousness is revealed in the shifts in the "structure of feeling" in Karachi detailed below.

In the wake of the MQM's hegemony among Muhajirs of urban Sindh¹⁷⁷, and a series of disjunctures between the MQM and subsequent governments at federal and provincial levels,

¹⁷⁷ In the period from mid-1980s to early 1990s, the MQM consistently won major electoral victories in Muhajir areas.

violence along the lines of ethnicity proliferated in Karachi (Baig, 2008: 108). From mid-1980s onwards, Karachi was engulfed in a never-ending cycle of urban militancy between a shifting array of groups: between the MQM and other ethnically exclusivist formations formed in its wake (such as the Punjabi-Pakhtun Ittehad [Punjabi-Pakhtun Alliance]), between the MQM and the state, and then between splinter groups of the MQM itself. Between 1992 and 1996, more than 5000 people were killed in “a guerrilla type civil war in Karachi” after a police, military, and para-military operation was begun against the MQM (ibid: 117). In 1995 alone, close to 2100 people were killed in Karachi including those from different MQM groups, “rival” ethnic groups, and state personnel. Reports of torture and extra-judicial killings by state personnel were met by retaliatory attacks and torture by MQM militants.

In this process of violence and counter-violence, the structure of feeling for Karachi’s middle and working classes underwent a decisive shift. The relatively homogenous *mohallas* of Karachi became the subject of military and police operations and surveillance. Among Mohajir youth, and especially those associated with MQM, superior skills and “street smartness” in navigating the rapidly expanding city became another element of their appropriation of the urban. Revelling in their control over motorcycles, speedy escapes, and manoeuvres, the young MQM activists set themselves up as masters of chaos and “virtuosi of inner city turmoil”. They did so in conscious contrast to the “rural simpletons” who served in the army or other “rural” ethnicities who migrated to the city (Verkaaik, 2009: 77). Thus, in a continuation of the appropriation of the material and discursive appropriation of the urban, the young MQM activists “subjected the heterogeneity of the city to the classification of ethnicity, class and generation” (ibid: 79). This in turn was not an affirmation of civic cosmopolitanism, but served to further demarcate the spatial and ethnic barriers which had started to entrench the experience of the city

from the 1980s onwards. For those not directly involved in the militancies of various sides – i.e. the vast majority of ordinary people – everyday life became characterised by a vigilance and aloofness in anticipation of violent confrontations: “bystander tactics... reproducing their own marginalization through a dense conjuncture of self-preservation, resilience and a lack of other options” (Ahmad, 2011: 3).

Thus, in earlier years, even though housing had already been spatially segmented due to historical patterns of settlement and state planning, there had also existed an ethic of mobility across spatial lines of class and ethnicity. Indeed, it is exactly these cross-spatial mobilities which had played a role in creating a relatively cosmopolitan culture in the post-Partition era (Hasan, 2002). Today, the cosmopolitan culture of the city is remembered mostly in association with the vibrant old colonial city center and upper-class entertainment districts in pre-Zia (i.e. pre-Islamisation) Karachi (cf Paracha, 2012 Feb 9). Workers and labour organisers however remember a different type of cosmopolitanism based on cross-ethnic solidarities, visiting different *mohallas* and *bastis* for left and trade union work, and often “taking over” central spaces through strikes, processions, and rallies. Thus, for example, as we passed through the Saddar business district during the International Women’s Day Rally in March 2018, Usman Baloch – a major leader of the labour movement in SITE in the 1970s – recounted to me that he could not remember himself accompanying such a large procession of labourers in this area since the heyday of the labour movement (fieldnotes, Mar 8, 2018). Karamat Ali, of the MMF, recalls how for him and his comrades there would be regular “comings and goings” [*aana jaana*] between different working class areas in the 1980s. Now, however, entering Pashtun *bastis* and Lyari “was like going to a different city; *mental distances* increased, physical distance increased”: an interesting concatenation of physical inaccessibility with a gap in cognitive

familiarity (K. Ali, personal interview, Mar 9, 2019; emphasis added). The fracturing of space and spatial experience fed into – and came to stand as a practical metonym for – the fragmentation of class consciousness.

Almost invariably, workers and organisers I interacted with – and those who were in Karachi in the 1980s and 1990s – talk very minimally about the era. Often, selective amnesia followed enthusiastic recounting of the high hopes and activism of the 1960s and 70s. On being pushed, all the workers I talked to could recall one or more incidents of militancy and violence, often along ethnic lines, involving themselves or someone they knew. Usman Swati recalled an incident in the late 1980s, after he had come back from a short stint in Saudi Arabia, where lumpen elements associated with gambling activities in the Bara Board area of Nazimabad¹⁷⁸ clashed along ethnic lines (U. Swati, personal interview, Mar 13, 2018). This eventually culminated in a shooting incident of Pashtun bystanders at a local bus stop, which in turn firmed up territorial divides and led to the creation of Muhajir and Pashtun enclaves in the area. Aijaz-ul-Huda, supervisor of daily cooking and procurement at the Alamgir Trust, recalled the constant curfews in a Lines Area neighbourhood where he and his family used to live in the 1990s (fieldnotes, Apr 11, 2018). While Lines Area is a predominantly Mohajir area, Huda's family were Hindko-speaking migrants from the northern Hazara region of KP. Lines Area was a focal point of military operations and MQM splinter groups' in-fighting during during the 1990s, and Huda recalls how even though his family were not harmed by Mohajir militants due to their long-standing neighbourly ties, they did eventually move out of the area to Korangi.

¹⁷⁸ Nazimabad and North Nazimabad are largely Urdu-speaking areas of Karachi and were strongholds of the MQM through the 1980s and 1990s. However, within this formally planned and overwhelmingly middle class area, there are small pockets of informal settlements which are ethnically heterogeneous comprising of Pashtun, Punjabi, and Bengali migrants.

Similarly, the father of Saira (of the HBWWF) recounted how the violence of the 1990s in their area and then again in the late 2000s meant that “neighbourhoods were divided and people did ‘hijrat’ after selling off their homes cheaply” (fieldnotes, May 8, 2018). Echoing a popular – and not entirely unfounded – notion of state intelligence agencies and institutions operating in the shadows behind ethnic militant organisations such as the MQM, he declared that “it was a third party which brought us to clashes [*teesri party ne tasadum kawayi*] in order to break our [i.e. people’s] unity”¹⁷⁹. Similar sentiments were echoed by Khaliq Zadrani of the LNT/KNT, who recalled how his sister – who was married to an Urdu-speaking person – was warned by MQM militants in Lalukhet Number 10, as she often listened to Balochi songs at home and used to buy her *huqqa* [smoking pipe] fillings from a Pashtun *taal*¹⁸⁰ across the street. Militants attacked and burned down the Pashtun labourers’ *taal*, and warned Zadrani’s brother-in-law about his wife “fraternising” with ethnic Others. Eventually, Zadrani’s sister and her family sold their house and left the area.

Thus, a whole generation of middle and working class Karachiites – those growing up in the decades of 1990s and early 2000s – lost the feel of the city as a whole and retreated into their “own” neighbourhoods which were now redefined almost exclusively in “ethnic” terms¹⁸¹. Historically formed spatial patterns of settlement and housing were turned into fixed ethnic

¹⁷⁹ MQM is widely understood to have received the Zia regime’s patronage during its initial emergence in the 1980s. It is believed that this was due to the Zia regime’s need to break resistance among student groups and also as an antidote to the anti-Zia MRD movement in Sindh province at the time. Altaf Husain’s return to Karachi from the US in the 1980s (where he had gone after the stint in jail), accounts of state institutions’ indifference to violence during the Qasba colony and Aligarh colony massacres, and even accusations of active training of MQM militants by intelligence agencies are brought up as evidence in this regard. Whatever the truth to these accusations, for our purposes, it is more interesting and useful to understand – as we have tried to do in preceding paragraphs – the complex and differentiated process whereby ethnic politics achieved socio-spatial hegemony in Karachi rather than attributing it simply to a “top-down” conspiracy/imposition.

¹⁸⁰ Small cabin doubling as both residence and shop.

¹⁸¹ I grew up in two such middle class *mohallas* [neighbourhoods] in the 1990s and 2000s, Golimaar and Kashmir Road PECHS. Both were dominated by the MQM electorally, and the former was one of the epicenters of MQM militancy and military operation in the 1990s.

enclaves. “Mental” and “physical” distances increased. The multi-scalar rhythms of state, capital, and (contingent) practices of socio-spatial hegemony, saw everyday life increasingly ordered around “minimal difference” (in the Lefebvrian sense) i.e. regional-linguistic differences were increasingly naturalised and thus took on reified and alienated forms of particularity. An ethnically divided structure of feeling took shape: the increasing serialisation and alienation of lived space, the violent demarcation of physical and cognitive boundaries, the loss of a “whole” experience of the city or, at least, the foreclosure of a hope of attaining such.

In the coming decades, such a fracturing of space and consciousness became institutionalised in the wake of the Zia-ist passive revolution; it weighed heavily on Karachi’s politics, undermining even modest hopes of unifying the working class. Middle and working class remembrances of the decades of the 1980s and 1990s came to be characterised by a deep melancholia: a sense of loss and control, the eclipse of an incipient ethic of solidarity and cosmopolitanism, and – quite often – a studied silence. Where state and capital strive to inscribe space with an empty linearity and homogeneity, this avoidance of recall, this “surgical amnesia” of individual and collective memory on part of popular classes may be characterised as what Fredric Jameson – in his review of similar lapses of memory in Marquez’s masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – has termed a “political realism”: “that archetypal repression which allows all of us to survive history’s immemorial nightmares, to live on happily despite ‘the slaughterhouse of history’ (Hegel)” (Jameson, 2017: 23).

A Shifting Structure of Feeling

The shift in lived experience, the increasingly violent demarcation of space, and a concomitant, enclave-like structure of feeling can be captured through a review of three major novels written

in and about post-Partition Karachi: *Khuda Ki Basti* (God's Own Land) by Shaukat Siddiqui, *Chakiwara Mein Visaal* (Love in Chakiwara) by Khalid Akhtar, and *Aagey Samandar Hai* (The Sea Lies Ahead) by Intizar Husain¹⁸². To concretely evaluate the experience of the urban in these novels, I propose to read them through the dialectical precepts regarding form and content outlined by Fredric Jameson in his pioneering work on literary criticism. Specifically, I draw upon Jameson's – and before him, though in a different register, Schiller and Lukacs' – insights on the “various possible permutations of the relationship between form and matter, between subject and object, between a henceforth isolated monad and the world from which it is estranged” as a key to understanding the constitutive role of space in art and literature (Jameson, 1974: 92). While Schiller and the early Lukacs' work on the divorce of subject and object are grounded in an idealist epistemology, leading to a fixation on ancient Greek literature as exemplar of a tendency towards “organic unity” (ibid: 179-180), Jameson has usefully grounded the divorce of subject-object and associated literary criticism in a more materialist register i.e. within the historical dynamic of the commodity form and capitalism. This in turn led Jameson to investigate the resonances between – seemingly disparate – artistic currents (such as Romanticism and Surrealism) as expressions of the uneven relationship between subjectivity and alienation in commodity society.

Moreover, and in addition to understanding content as expression and (attempted) resolution of socio-political and psychic contradictions, Jameson also directs our attention to the importance of “form”. Thus, literary forms themselves – the specific arrangement and combination of characters, narrative, and/or linguistic elements through which content is expressed – are to be comprehended “as sedimented content in their own right, as carrying

¹⁸² All three novels have been translated into English. I will however be proceeding from (and referencing) the Urdu originals. Any translations are my own.

ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works” (Jameson, 1981: 84). For example, in his analysis of Marquez’s *One Hundred Years* referenced above, Jameson proposes a focus on “temporality” as one – though not the only – productive avenue for such an investigation of the “content of form” (Jameson, 2017). Here, the temporality of the novel’s structure, the chronology of the narrative itself, offers clues to its historical, socio-political, and cognitive grounding. As such, Jameson moves beyond the polarities of semiotic/deconstructionist and semantic/sociological methods of literary criticism, to radically historicise and socialise both form and content.

These insights on the divorce of subject-object and its expression in literary form (and content) may be usefully combined with Lefebvre’s understanding of space as a “concrete abstraction” (Stanek, 2008). Space under capitalism is fragmented, homogenised, and hierarchised through material, ideological, and theoretical practices. As such, space is created through historically contingent practices, but increasingly takes on the character – like the commodity form itself – of “a sensual-suprasensual thing”, an alienated objectivity which comes to dominate the subject (and subjectivity) (ibid: 76). The concretely historicised and socialised divorce of subject-object and its expression in literary form and content in Jameson can thus be usefully read through Lefebvre’s understanding of space as objectified, “concrete abstraction” to investigate the constitutive role of spatial practices and imaginaries in literary works. The form and content of a novel may therefore be illuminated through its temporality and spatiality, with these expressing varying registers of alienation and subject-object relations.

Of course, alienation and objectification do not exhaust the role, potential, and lived experiences of space in capitalism: the “residue” of everyday life, practices of use-value centered on mutuality and their generalisation always have the potential to transform space at multiple

levels. And while everyday life and lived space include a “utopian surplus”, a tendency towards unalienated forms of practice and association, this needs to be uncovered through a determinate hermeneutic practice which considers both form and content integrally and historically. It is thus with such a constitutive – as opposed to simply a thematic – understanding of space (and time) that I propose to evaluate three Urdu novels based in and around Karachi. Here, through an analysis of both form and content, I will demonstrate how the perceptions, conceptions, and lived experiences of space shifted in post-Independence Karachi, culminating in an enclavised and melancholic structure of feeling during the crucial period of the 1980s, coinciding with the travails of the first phase of passive revolution.

To start with, *Khuda Ki Basti* (God’s Own Land) by Shaukat Siddiqui is set in the early 1950s, the immediate aftermath of Independence, in Karachi and a neighbouring city (Siddiqui, 1957/2016). The novel is considered one of the great classics of Urdu literature and prime exemplar of the neo-realist tradition popularised by progressive, socialist, and anti-colonial intellectuals through the Progressive Writers’ Movement in India-Pakistan. The novel’s title serves a double purpose: serving as an immediate metaphor for Pakistan itself (“Pakistan” means “land of the Pure” in Persian and was founded – in the mainstream view – in the name of religion), while also detailing the lives of the *bastis* (informal settlements) which had sprung up in metropolises like Karachi after Partition. It is thus that Siddiqui traces the fates of a handful of middle class, working class, and lumpen characters in their travails through the *bastis*, various underworlds, and public spaces of Karachi. Middle class characters attempt to make a life of radical activism and popular pedagogy in the new country, through social work and organising in the working class *bastis*. Young men of the *bastis* attempt to escape the cycle of poverty and alienation through a combination of employment, underworld activities, and (in desperation)

begging. Young women of the *bastis* attempt to escape the strictures of patriarchy and exploitation through cottage industry, home-based work, and (in desperation) through marriage to unscrupulous but rich men looking to prey on young girls and trophy wives.

While the novel ends on a note of unsuccessful upward mobility and defeat for the working-class characters, and concomitant consolidation and corruption of a state-connected bourgeoisie, it is the temporal, spatial, and social mediations of content and form which are interesting to note for our purposes. Siddiqui's chronological narrative is linear and without any breaks or joints. The story moves through the multiple spaces of the city – *bastis*, parks, Iranian tea houses, streets, and railway stations. The story traces the attempts to stake out a life of dignity and radical change by working class and middle class characters. There are setbacks on the way. Salman a young student is one of the founders of the *Koh Paiman* (Mountain Climbers') social organisation. But he is demoralised and dejectedly abandons the organisation when a local influential, "Khan Bahadur"¹⁸³ Farzand Ali, burns down their headquarters fearing Salman and his colleagues' popularity in the *bastis*. Shami from the *basti* attempts to escape the grind of poverty through work as a car mechanic and then flees to Karachi. Sultana from the *basti* is forced to marry her step-father Niaz after he has her mother killed in collusion with a corrupt doctor to lay hands on insurance money. However, after every setback, the characters attempt to bounce back. Shami finds himself attaining primary education under the wings of a math professor. *Koh Paiman* members (who call themselves "Sky Larks") convene again in new headquarters and expand their work in the *bastis* with free libraries, clinics, night schools, and cottage work-training as a means of building working class self-capacity and organisation.

¹⁸³ A colonial title bestowed upon particularly loyal subjects of the British Raj.

Sultana eventually escapes the corrupt Niaz after he is accidentally killed by her brother Nausha, and enrolls in a *Koh Paiman* work training center.

There is thus, in Siddiqui's narrative and the trajectories of his characters, a sense of hope and progress. The narrative is chronologically linear and the lived space of the urban is traversed through concrete cross-class and cross-spatial mediations. There is exploitation, petty crime, and prostitution, the reproduction of entrenched class inequalities, the inequities of state coercion, and (in a sign of things to come) the mobilisation of Islam and patriotism to delegitimise efforts at collective social action. But there is also a sense of hope and optimism: an open and often ludic negotiation of the spaces of the city, attempts at upward mobility through individual and collective initiative, and even flirtations with trade unionism and revolution. In both its content and form then, *Khuda Ki Basti* is the product of the immediate post-Independence era: an era where the horrors of praetorianism and imperialistic dependency still seem far away, where experiences of time and the urban are pregnant with the possibility of forging of a new nation out of the embers of Partition and its *bastis*. Karachi, while filled with the recently migrated *basti*-dwellers, is still an open space: for cross-class and cross-spatial mediations, for enjoying its vibrant colonial city center with its cosmopolitan bars, cinemas, and cafes, for dreams – even if often thwarted – of organised action. Thus, just as so many people now remember the *jazba* (enthusiasm) of the formation of Pakistan despite the horrors of the Partition (cf Ahmad, 1995), it is this horizon of openness and possibility that defines the times and spaces of *Khuda Ki Basti*.

The novel ends on a note of seeming failure. Sultana's brother Nausha is sentenced to a decade and a half in prison, Khan Bahadur is vying for a ministership and has amassed millions through corruption, property, and industry, and the Sky Larks are being threatened with arrest under the Public Safety Act for being "anti-nationals". However, even while the end of the story

may be read as an example of that “situational consciousness” which Jameson characterises as the allegorical destiny of all “third world literature”, the potential of the novel is not exhausted by this “whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself” (Jameson, 1986: 85-6). In contrast to the melancholia of closure, this is a moment where the dialectic of the subject and object, the opening for subjectivity against objectification, still holds potential for the former. The linear temporality and open spatiality of the narrative, the fate and resolve of its characters, militate against closure. They also give indication of that utopian surplus, that characteristic sense of possibility and of *making* history, of the immediate post-Independence era of which *Khuda Ki Basti* is both product and conscious expression.

With our second novel, *Chakwara Mein Visaal* (Love in Chakiwara) written by Khalid Akhtar and published in 1964, a slight shift in the experience of space can be discerned (Akhtar, 1964/2016). While nowhere near as famous in the annals of Urdu literature as *Khuda Ki Basti*, *Chakiwara* has retained a cult-classic status among critics and fans for its satiric mode of narration, and for its colourful depiction of the bustle and – crucially – hustle of the Karachi street. Set in the Chakiwara neighbourhood of Karachi’s Lyari area, the novel narrates the observations and experiences of Iqbal Changezi, the owner of a small bakery and obsessive collector of writers’ and poets’ autographs. In the course of his avid reading and seeking, Changezi strikes up a (quite one-sided) friendship with Qurban Ali Kattar, a popular writer of cheap, formulaic thrillers now suffering from a bad case of writers’ block. Kattar starts residing in Chakiwara, living off meagre royalties from previous stories and the generosity of Changezi, who eventually becomes his chief supplier for everything ranging from food to clothes and romantic advice.

In Chakiwara, Kattar falls in unexpected love (infatuation?) with Razia across the balcony. The problem is that Razia's father is a *qassab* [butcher] with an understandably ferocious reputation. And with Kattar's declining writing career and bohemian ways, he turns to various tricks and hacks to get the *qasab* to look upon him [Kattar] favourably. Changezi is Kattar's loyal confidant, co-conspirator, best man, and sponsor in this increasingly doomed endeavour. Kattar hatches various schemes to get Razia and her father's attention: including borrowing Changezi's three piece-suit (and cologne) to look "respectable"; traipsing around the *mohalla* in Changezi's graduation cap and gown and thus becoming the butt of all the street urchins' jokes; and getting Kattar to befriend Razia's father to talk up his friend, leading to a complicated, but tantalisingly unelaborated, love triangle between Kattar, Changezi, and Razia. In desperation and, one suspects, boredom, Kattar the famous conjurer of fiction turns to "Professor" Shahsawar Khan, an actual conjurer of magic tricks and *jinns* (spirits and genies). The "Professor" moves around town with a goat, a monkey, and a bear (the last named "Musafir", traveller), selling trinkets such as magical rings, and proclaiming an invisible entourage of *jinns* and spirits with whose help he promises to "deliver" Kattar's lover right into his arms. The story moves through highly entertaining accounts of Kattar's shenanigans, the bustle of Chakiwara's markets, the hustlers of the Karachi street. The story climaxes where the "Professor" takes off with Kattar's trust and money (the latter borrowed from Changezi, of course), and Kattar – in a hypnotic stupor – is left clutching onto Musafir the bear instead of Razia the balcony beauty.

In *Chakiwara*, a shift in the mode of narration and in the experience of space can be discerned compared to *Basti*. The hustle and bustle of the Karachi street is preserved even if the openness and (social/political) possibility seems to be closing. The streets of Chakiwara are familiar and spaces of centrality, of simultaneity and (unexpected) encounter, of unrequited love

and “magic”. The diverse characters inhabiting the urban flit in and out of Changezi’s life: besides Kattar the pining lover and the faith-healer/conjurer Shahsawar, there is Shedad Peshmi the failed writer who used to work as a grave-digger but now washes dishes at Changezi’s bakery; there is an apprentice to a Chinese dentist; and there is Dr. Ghareeb Muhammad who invents a “love meter” but ends up taking his own life. Space here is familiar yet at a certain remove, mediations are present, but the world seems increasingly distant. There is a developing divorce between subject and object, perhaps best symbolised in the distance between Kattar’s apartment and Razia’s balcony: the distance allows fascination and desire for the object (Razia’s love/approval/attention) on the subjects’ part, but it is ultimately insurmountable.

The incipient object-domination of space can be seen in its narrator. Changezi narrates, watches, wishes, and judges, but hardly ever intervenes. Objects, events, and processes flit in and out of his sight of vision and memory. Changezi is mostly a passive narrator: things happen *to* him, not *by* him. Chakiwara is thus a satiric narration, which captures the liveliness of Karachi’s street culture, but is marked by a distinct sense of habiting where things happen at a remove from the subject. The world is fallen, ultimately meaningless, a parody where Kattar and Changezi desire but cannot obtain. The consummation of the subject with object is beginning to be foreclosed. The subject still navigates with (relative) agency in space, but the sense of possibility and *making* are not open in the same way they were about a decade ago in *Khuda Ki Basti*.

It is however not until Intizar Husain’s *Agay Samandar Hai* (The Sea Lies Ahead), published in 1995 and set in Karachi, that we get the (seemingly) complete closure of subjectivity, the domination of serialised and fragmented space, and the enclavised melancholia that we have discussed above (Husain, 1995). *Samandar* is the third of Husain’s highly acclaimed trilogy dealing with Partition and migrants’ experiences of dislocation and longing in

the new country. The novel takes its title from General Ayub Khan's (in-)famous warning to Karachi's Muhajirs that unless they support him in the 1964-5 Presidential elections "the sea [is the only place that] lies ahead for them" [*Agay Samandar Hai*] (Raghavan, 2016). Husain uses the warning as an evocative metaphor for rootlessness, identity, and the search for meaning in an increasingly alien city.

Agay Samandar Hai traces the narrator Jawad's journey as a single migrant from North India in Karachi. He starts off in one of the post-Partition *bastis*, finds a job in a government office through Majju *bhai*, who becomes his close friend, benefactor, and house mate. Jawad's experiences and increasing alienation standing as metaphor for Karachi's evolution through the post-Independence years. When Jawad begins his job just after Independence, there is a real sense of possibility despite the threadbare offices of the new state bureaucracy. As Mr. Mirza (his boss) tells Jawad on his first day in the job, "work as if the building is being built and we are the builders" [*imarat ban rahi hai, hum is ke maimaar hain*] (Husain, 1995: 27). "It was a monumental era [*wo aik ehed-saaz dour tha*]," Jawad reminiscences in his narration (ibid: 15). Despite complaints about the loss of ancestral homes and "strangeness" of the new country, the migrants settle into *mohallas* mostly according to their regions/cities of origin in India: there is a *mohalla* for Lucknow-wallas, another for Meerut-wallas, and so on. The Muhajir *mohallas* serve as self-sufficient islands, but Majju *bhai* (and Jawad trailing behind him) move effortlessly between these different islands, attending *mushairas* (poetry gatherings), arranging marriages, and listening to the superior benefits of the sweet-meats of Lucknow versus the *pheni* (a vermicelli-type sweet) of Meerut.

Jawad experiences this heterogeneity of the city as familiar yet disjointed. He is "both involved in it and not involved in it"; he wonders to himself "how many cities have settled in this

one city... as if it is not a city but a sea [*samandar*] where each tributary of the subcontinent is falling in, but proclaiming itself to be a *samandar* on its own” (Husain, 1995: 69). But for Jawad, as the city expands, the memory of relations and promises left behind do not let him settle (he was betrothed to a cousin who was “left behind” in India). As time passes, the narrative constantly flits between scenes borrowed from Indic mythology and from Jawad’s recollections of his ancestral home in India. Here the image of a date tree props up consistently, and along with the mythological recollections, lends the narrative’s space and temporality a disjointed and non-chronological structure. The date tree stands as a metaphor for roots left behind, for loss, and the inability to forget a past which haunts the present at each turn.

As the story proceeds, Karachi, its social fabric, and its associated experiences undergo a marked shift. The city expands and its culture becomes increasingly vernacularized with the migration of working classes from all over the country. For some middle-class migrants from India, this class (and ethnic) differentiation is registered in patronising and fearful terms with regards to the loss of “respectability”: “one doesn’t feel like living in this city anymore. Hoodlums, dacoits, and terrorists are having a field day. There is no space for the ‘respectable’ [*shurfa*] anymore,” declares Jawad’s boss Mr. Mirza (Husain, 1995: 57). As the violence increases through the 1980s, the sense of foreboding is felt palpably in the negotiation of space. Night-time patrols are set up in neighbourhoods. Jawad and the house-help Naimat Khan often stay up nights worried about Majju *bhai* who is late from work or from one of his (now decreasing) social commitments.

The loss of control, shifts in associational culture, and in the technologies of violence is registered in both Jawad’s conversations and his narration. Where previously the conversation used to revolve around *mithai* [sweet meat], weddings, *mushairas*, and the homes left behind,

now these take on a morbid turn; Jawad and Majju *bhai*'s friend Rafiq declares "two things have been delivered by Pakistan's history: *mushairay* and Kalashnikov" (Husain, 1995: 174). In both form and content, the narrative of the novel becomes more disjointed, less chronological. Flashbacks and reminiscences now appear not just from Indic mythology and the ancestral homes left behind, but also from wider Muslim history: the fall of Cordoba and the routing of Muslim empire in the middle ages is remembered as prefiguring the present "fall" of Karachi. The sense of possibility and monumentalism of the early Independence days is now far away. The times of mythology and Muslim glory now mix with the times and spaces of the present in Jawad's narration. At one point, Jawad compares the curfews, the silence, and fear to Delhi during the Partition: "the *sannata* [stillness] was the same, but with a new terror [*dehshat*]" (Hussain, 1995: 183). The time is out of joint, a history of loss and mourning seems to repeat itself today, but now with an ever more intimate fear.

The spaces of Karachi become ever more circumscribed, inaccessible, and even unimaginable. Where previously the city, even if divided into islands, could be conceived and navigated as a whole (albeit made up of several particularities), now it cannot be thought of at all: "if you want to live in this city, then leave thinking about it, otherwise leave the city" [*is shehr mein rehna hai tou sochna chor dou, warna shehr chor dou*] (Husain, 1995: 185). The familiar spaces of the city now seem ever more remote. Even when accessible they are experienced differently. One day, as news of disturbances in a nearby area reaches them, Jawad and his driver Jamal Din aim to make a quick return from Rafiq's house. However, as he steps into the car, a feeling of strangeness overtakes Jawad. The same streets, shops, and petrol pumps which he has navigated countless times before, almost unthinkingly and by dint of habit on the way to Rafiq's house, now threaten to overwhelm him: "it was at that time that I felt these are

not just a few streets, this was a whole *web* [*jaal*] of streets. And it was like our car is stuck in this web” (Husain, 1995: 229, emphasis added). The urban is fragmented and inaccessible, objectified and serialised. Space is increasingly experienced as an alienated particularity, as reified and minimal difference: objectified space overwhelms the subject (and subjectivity).

As the novel approaches its tragic (and disjointed) climax, Majju *bhai* gets caught in a shooting while passing by some rally. He is in the hospital struggling for his life, while Jawad goes off on a walk wondering what city this really is, “if this is the same city [as previously] then I am not the same person. I have become a stranger in this familiar city” (Husain, 1995: 323). As Jawad walks on it is unclear where he is, the narrative flits quickly between Karachi, his ancestral home in India, and the destruction of Cordoba. The last scene/memory is of books being burned in Cordoba and Jawad hoping his steps will find a familiar way: everything is “disjointed, up in the air [*titar bittar*]” (ibid).

In Husain’s narration of Karachi then, the decisive shift in the structure of feeling, the evolving (and overwhelming) dialectic of object over subject is registered in both form and content. Time and history shift from a sense of possibility and the “monumental” in the aftermath of Independence, to one of repetition, *déjà vu*, and mourning. In contrast to the novels from earlier eras reviewed above, the story takes place almost entirely in the interiority of homes and offices. Space goes from navigable, malleable, new and yet familiar, to becoming inaccessible, overwhelming, cohering with the fears and strangeness of the past. The experience of both time and space becomes increasingly disjointed, the rootlessness and fears of the past now forming a seamless coherence with the present. The elegiac mode of narration signals the abandonment of the subject, a loss of control, and the closure of subjectivity by the objectification of space and time. The possibility of movement and *making* in space and history is foreclosed: space is

experienced as an overwhelming alienation, time seems to become an eternal present, the inescapable repetition of what has already happened and will keep happening.

Violence, partitioning, and objectification of space thus lends itself to a melancholic and enclave-like structure of feeling. The fragmentation of consciousness registers the alienation of everyday life. However, it would be a mistake to take this melancholic structure of feeling as heralding a final closure of subjectivity, as a total cancellation of the horizon of possibility. Even in the worst of times in *Agay Samandar Hai*, the residues of everyday life, the excess of association over fixation and alienation, peak through. Thus, for example, even as the neighbourhood faces a curfew and intermittent sounds of firing can be heard outside, Jawad and Majju *bhai* arrive at Rafiq's house to attend a *mushaira* [poetry gathering]. The contradiction (and resilience) of everyday life is captured succinctly in Mrs. Rafiq's exasperated and sarcastic comment: "Mushaira? Who are these unlucky people [*bakht-maray*]. There is a rain of bullets and they are holding a mushaira!" (Husain, 1995: 222). Spaces and imaginaries might be circumscribed and sedimented under melancholia and alienation, but there is always a desire for pursuit of the unalienated aspects of everyday life.

Moreover, it is also not as if imaginaries of belonging and identity have been permanently closed off. Even in the most violent and exclusive demarcations of spatial practices and imaginaries, there is a sedimented common sense of hope and solidarity. For example, even within the MQM, with its fascistic cult of the leader, exclusivist claims over space, and violence-mediated construction of ethnic identity, there is a constitutive moment of slippage – and therefore, of possibility. As Tahir Naqvi has demonstrated in his ethnographic investigation of the MQM, while re-articulating historical tropes of sacrifice, the new Muhajir identity and its (violent) territorialisation was also based on *the self-awareness of its contingency*. Thus, there is

no claim here to an ontological belonging to space, but an emphasis on *amal* i.e. on the *practice* and *making* of Muhajir identity, a constitutive sense of being in movement and ready to adapt (Naqvi, 2020: 82). Thus, claims over the urban and the adoption of ethnicity are not ontological markers of belonging (through territory or blood ties), but a recognition that Muhajir identity is contingent on its relation to other groups (and spaces). It is this emphasis on *amal*, on the contingency of *making* and *practice*, which has the “potential to undo previous forms of self-recognition”: a “primacy of action” over stabilization and fixity which can potentially cancel claims “over any essentialist narrative of *identity*” (ibid: 88, emphasis added).

It is this constitutive contradiction of ethnic identity in Karachi, this awareness of contingency and emphasis on *amal*, that I argue should be seen as a “utopian surplus” of enclavised melancholia, a possible opening to an alternative universality. It is telling, for example, that at the very beginning of his narration in *Samandar*, Jawad remembers Majju *bhai* telling him that “Karachi’s real era was that [of after Independence]. My dear, the Karachi of today has risen up from the *khameer* [yeast, essence] of the *jhuggi* [squatter settlements of the poor] ... The real Karachi-*wallah* is that who has spent time in the *jhuggis*” (Husain, 1995: 15). Thus, while Majju *bhai* is probably narrating this as *post-hoc* nostalgia for the loss of possibility and “new-ness” in the Partition years, there is also a constitutive slippage. An identification of Karachi with habiting in the *jhuggis* and *bastis* makes claims over belonging and space contingent and subject to *making*.

Where the majority of Karachi’s population even today lives in informal settlements, where the overwhelming majority of the working classes live in *bastis* (though slightly different in settlement patterns and political economy¹⁸⁴), such an open notion of belonging militates against

¹⁸⁴ We have discussed the differences in patterns of informal settlement in the previous section, and will elaborate some more on this in the next section.

the association of identity and melancholia with closure and eclipse of solidarity. Thus, even today, due to its cosmopolitan outlook and absorptive capacity, Karachi is vernacularly known as the “mother of the poor” [*ghareebon ki maa*]. This emphasis on *amal*, the identification of Karachi with its *jhuggis*, the centering of its multitude of the poor, may be taken as part of a contradictory common sense: those “disjointed and episodic” elements of popular consciousness which are “strangely composite: it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science” (Gramsci, 1971: 324). This is the element of contradictory common sense “which is implicit in his [sic i.e. the worker’s] activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and [opposed to the other] one, superficially explicit and verbal, which it has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed” (ibid: 333). It is this kernel of common sense, sedimented beneath alienated socio-spatial practices and imaginaries no doubt, that is persistent enough to peak through even the most melancholic of literary narrations, and – through its emphasis on *amal* – even in the most debased of ethnic chauvinisms.

Seen thus, mourning and melancholia are not indicative of fatalism and closure. They are instead “a kind of epistemological posture: a historical and allegorical insight into both society and history that tries to grasp the origins of their sorrow and collects the objects and images of the past waiting for redemption” (Traverso, 2016: 48). Melancholia is thus not simply about the past but also about the future. It is not just about loss, but due to its recognition of the *contingency* of the closure of the past, it is the very condition of hope. It is a sedimented node of common sense, the constitutive “excess” of everyday life over the strictures of alienation and fixation, a desire for and gesture towards Utopia which – even when buried under the “concrete

abstraction” of reified space and minimal difference – “may always be detected, no matter how faintly, by the instruments and apparatus of hope itself” (Jameson 1974: 120).

The Urban Question Revisited

What then of hope, melancholia, and the ethnicised structure of feeling today? What is the complex of spatial practices, imaginaries, and their contradictions that shapes working class and popular common sense today? What are the imbrications of land, labour, capital, and concomitant rhythms of socio-spatial hegemony in Karachi today, especially with regards to the working class? How have differentiated and contingent articulations of the neoliberal phase of passive revolution, the deepening penetration of the commodity form, come to generate new social, political, and spatial responses? What are their continuities with earlier forms of accumulation, exclusion, incorporation, and resistance (or lack thereof)? In short, what is the urban question in Karachi today? This will be the subject of our brief elaboration in this last section of the chapter.

As we have discussed in earlier chapters, Pakistani ruling classes have undertaken a process of stop-start economic liberalisation since the 1980s. This has entailed floating the exchange rate and greater integration of local production and consumption with global flows of commodities and capital. However, while this project of structural adjustment and liberalisation proceeded only in fits and starts through the 1990s, it was the onset of the 2000s that saw a concerted thrust towards marketization, privatisation, and deregulation. This greater drive towards economic liberalisation coincided with the onset of the military regime which took power through a coup in 1999; it represented a response to the Pakistani ruling classes’ lack of a sustainable accumulation project since the fall of East Pakistan and the exhaustion of the Import

Substitution Industrialisation project of the 1960s and 70s. Specifically, the social and economic foundations of the new regime were laid as Pakistan renewed its role as the US empire's primary client state in the region in the wake of the War on Terror.

With US military assistance and IFI aid flowing in, the economy was liberalised to facilitate greater capital mobility. This entailed privatisation of (among other sectors) banking and media, loosening controls on transnational capital flows, and an economy increasingly centered around import-led consumption. 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. Crucially for the level of the urban, and as a means for building its façade of “democratic” legitimacy, the military regime also undertook a project of concerted devolution of power to local governments. Such IFI-peddled programs of devolution dovetailed nicely with the search for new avenues of investment by international capital¹⁸⁵. Concomitantly, the military government passed the Sindh Local Government Ordinance 2001, which gave considerable powers to the newly elected Nazim (Mayor) of Karachi. The MQM, which had been facing military operations through the 1990s, was also brought back in from the cold storage and patronised by the military to legitimise the regime.

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,

¹⁸⁵ 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 (1995) and (1998). The military regime, not bound by even formal democratic limitations, pushed through these programs at the behest of IFIs.

heralded an era of neoliberal urbanism in Pakistan. New terms entered the lexicon of urban planning in Karachi: “world class city”, “investment-friendly infrastructure” and “public private partnerships” (Hasan, 2012 Mar). 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”. Additionally, in the absence of any sustainable project of accumulation, Pakistan’s upper and middle classes resorted to investment and speculation in real estate as a primary means of accumulation. With the shift towards economic liberalisation taking place in a post-9/11 conjuncture marked by increasing Islamophobia in advanced capitalist countries, the large Pakistani diaspora abroad also saw in the urban real estate sector, a safe avenue for investment for their savings. Consequently, in the years after 9/11, investment in real estate quadrupled: today Pakistan’s real estate market stands at an estimated value of \$400-\$700 billion; over just the past five years, urban plot prices have grown over 150% annually (even though average income has grown only 20%) (Rashid, 2019 Mar 23). Thus, the onset of neoliberal globalisation in Pakistan (and Karachi) was not simply a “top down” imposition of IFIs, MNCs, and/or metropolitan capital. In fact, it was a conjunctural alignment of a diverse and multi-scalar constellation of forces, and their concomitant projects of socio-spatial hegemony – such as the American imperium and War on Terror, hyper-mobile and transnational capital, the Pakistani military regime, and (in case of Karachi) the MQM.

Neoliberal urbanism in Karachi has also been shaped by a fourth round of migration¹⁸⁶. This 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 war and intensified Taliban

¹⁸⁶ The previous three rounds have been discussed in previous sections of this chapter: post-Partition, 1950s and 60s industrialisation/Green Revolution, and 1970s and 80s following East Pakistan war and Afghan jihad.

insurgency in north-western Pakistan since 2008. 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 20 million currently, stands out among other megacities of the world (Kotkin, 2013 Apr 08). Massive rural-to-urban migration, and lack of any absorption capacity in the economy, has led to a proliferation of informal modes of living both in the economy and in housing. While the demand for urban housing is close to 350,000 units per year, the supply from the formal sector is only 150,000 units per year (Hasan and Arif, 2018 Aug 19). Due to decades of state divestment in public housing and the vast profits to be made from private housing development for the middle and upper classes, more than 95% of the formal sector housing supply is inaccessible to the vast majority of the population (Rashid, 2019 Mar 23). As such, today more than half the population lives in under-serviced *katchi abadis*; the number of *katchi abadis* itself has increased about four-fold since the 1980s and has exceeded a total of 550. The top one-third of residents occupy close to three quarters of residential land, while the bottom two-thirds live on less than a quarter of the total residential land (Hasan, 2015: 224).

It is in the face of such a shortfall in housing, and with the real estate sector almost completely untaxed and unregulated, that housing has become a veritable gravy train for the complex of private developers, local muscle-men, civil bureaucrats, and military businesses. As a result, the “nexus of builders, politicians, police, and developers”, which began emerging in the 1980s in the wake of the investment of contraband money into urban real estate, has become further entrenched (Hasan et al., 2013: 71-2). In the era of devolution and deregulation, the peri-urban peripheries have become a prime location for “illegal” sub-division of government

land and settling of “preferred” ethnic communities by the political parties in power (a process vernacularly called “China-cutting”). These serve as a means of both consolidating vote-banks and, when the need arises, easy targets of eviction for “development” and speculation for elite housing colonies. These legally ambiguous but highly profitable transactions of land can range from transfers of agrarian to urban land to eviction of *katchi abadis*, justified in the name of city “beautification”, urban “regeneration”, and “development”.

Thus, the “informality of the poor” (to obtain access to housing) is imbricated in complex and contradictory ways with the “informality of the rich”, involving illegal transfers of state land, corruption, and real estate speculation. Seen thus, the distinction between “formal” and “informal” becomes ambiguous, if not spurious: instead of being an *absence* of the state, informality is “an integral part of the territorial practices of state power” (Roy, 2009: 83-4). The state itself produces “informality” not as an *unregulated* space, but as spaces that are *deregulated*, through a “purposive action and planning... [which] creates a logic of resource allocation, accumulation and authority” (ibid: 83). Moreover, this ambiguity also means that “informality” itself is splintered in “fractal fashion” i.e. a multi-level network of actors in political and civil society – including incumbent agrarian elites, lower level bureaucrats, and party workers – often act in concert to produce these *deregulated* spaces for accumulation and speculation (Anwar, 2018: 53). Thus, informality itself becomes a site where class power is exercised in relation to wider projects of accumulation and production of space, militating against any simple identification of “informality” with the “poor”.

As we will see below, the constant negotiation of “formal-informal” spaces is integrally related to the *trasformismo*-like ideological and material effects of processes such as deepening commodity and spatial infrastructures. Such variegated hegemonic practices define what Sapaná

Doshi in the context of Mumbai has termed the “redevelopmental state”: “a conjunctural node in which social forces and ideologies coalesce and shape state spatial practice around urban welfare and dispossession” (Doshi, 2019: 691). Drawing upon Gillian Hart, Doshi specifies the practices of “D/development” whereby “suturing of the cultural politics of ethno-religious nationalism and aspiration with material struggles over urbanised accumulation and populist welfare” serves to both advance and (minimally) mitigate capital’s creative destruction (ibid: 13). Attention is therefore (re-)focussed on the differentiated spaces, social relations, and ideological terrains – including notions of belonging and aspiration – through which hegemonic projects are mediated. In contradistinction to the “subaltern” or “informality” being an “outside” or “excess” of modernity (cf Gidwani, 2008), uneven articulations of class and subalternity are integral to the “forging of hegemonic redevelopment rule” via contested practices of material accommodation, participation, and the “ideologically saturated spatial imaginaries that shape land politics” (Doshi, 2019: 700, 692).

It is also this “ambiguity” of informality that allows the state to resolve such ambiguity in favour of the dominant classes as required. Here, the measure of might becomes the measure of right. As discussed previously, the fractures within formality-informality (such as those mapped along lines of regional-linguistic origin) can lend themselves to particular forms of populism and/or molecular absorption into dynamic hegemonic projects of state, space, and nation, such as the left-populism of the Bhutto in 1970s Pakistan and ethnic populism of MQM in the 1980s. In more recent years, a new round of in-migration and speculative land investment, has coincided with the War on Terror. Where in the 1980s and 1990s, migration and civic crisis led to internecine ethnic warfare in Karachi, today the confluence of underdevelopment and migration

is expressed in the classed and ethnicised land-grabs that pull the “rural” and agrarian into an ever-expanding fabric of (neoliberal) urbanization.

On the one hand, this has led to an increasing fear of the ethnicised underclass, articulated in the familiar post-9/11 tropes of religious fundamentalism and extremism. For instance, Mustafa Kamal, the highly-acclaimed mayor of the MQM from 2005 to 2010, had no problems referring to Pashtun migrants – often displaced by war, floods and earthquakes – in the Sohrab Goth area of Karachi (one of the biggest informal settlements in the city) as: “These Pashtuns means like fundamentalist [sic] — religiously fundamentalist, religiously extremist... They are coming in. When it comes to ethnicity, when it comes to Islam they all are... the same... It’s [Sohrab Goth] a very strategic location, you see? The superhighway is there. They can control the whole highway... They had a master plan before me” (Kamal quoted by Inskeep, 2008 June 5). On the other hand, and as explained above, it is also in this expanding-differentiating urban fabric that the new frontier of accumulation and corruption is found. For example, just a few months earlier in November 2018, a 9000-acre land scam valued at \$2bn dollars involving military-linked private developers was unearthed in the peripheral Malir District of Karachi. The Supreme Court declared that the local municipal authority “acted as a property developer” (Soch, 2018 November; Jajja, 2019 May 06 DAWN). This is of course one of many such scams involving state corruption, private developers, and land dispossession for speculative real estate.

It is also in the same District Malir where the notorious SSP Rao Anwar operated for many years with the patronage of powerful groups in state and civil society. This very same SSP Anwar recently became (in-)famous as the police officer who killed Naqeebullah Mehsud in cold blood in early 2018. An aspiring Pashtun model and social media celebrity, Mehsud was one of the thousands of Pashtuns who had migrated to Karachi from the north-western “tribal” area due

to War on Terror-induced civil war. He became one of SSP Anwar's over 400 victims as part of "encounter" killings in urban-based "counter-terrorism" operations¹⁸⁷. His killing in turn proved a spark for the emergence of the ongoing and popular anti-war *Pashtun Tahafuz Movement* [Pashtun Protection Movement, PTM]. The PTM demands that the security state be delinked from the militarised/neo-imperial logic of permanent war and territorial domination.

It is precisely at the point where the violence of a militarised ruling bloc and its "counter-terror" operations meets its narrow accumulation machine that new articulations of the questions of class, ethnicity, and urbanity can be found in Karachi today. In Pakistan today, the urban question, that is the imbrication of land, labour, and capital, articulates and re-spatialises wider questions of imperialism, (militarised) state formation, and uneven development. In Karachi, with its long history of struggles over space and belonging refracted through "ethnicity", questions of underdevelopment and the periphery have seldom been those of "other" spaces removed from the physical and cognitive proximity of the core. Today, as the War on Terror is tied to new rounds of accumulation and land struggles, the "periphery" of Pakistan is exploding into the "core" in even more intimate ways, generating multi-variate responses in return. On the one hand, there is a fresh anti-war movement (such as the PTM) which is attempting to work through questions of ethnicity and underdevelopment¹⁸⁸. On the other hand, and more commonly (and prosaically) due to the historical fragmentation of working class experience and organisation, these new forms of dispossession result in localised forms of struggle on the periphery which are differentially absorbed through local networks of community, ethnicity, kinship, and patronage.

¹⁸⁷ Between 2011 and 2018, Senior Superintendent Police (SSP) of Malir District Rao Anwar killed 444 people in "encounters" according to the police's own records: "Not a single policeman was even injured, let alone killed, during the 745 encounters" (Zaman and Ali, 2019 March 12).

¹⁸⁸ I have written in greater detail about the PTM's emergence – and its articulation of the new urban question in Pakistan – in a forthcoming paper in *Antipode*.

Additionally, it is vital to consider the imbrications of working class subjectivity and consciousness with the deepening penetration of the commodity form in everyday life. We have already touched upon above how on-going histories of spatial transformation and dispossession (especially with regards to housing) generate responses such as assertions of ethnic identity, melancholia, localised struggle, and (sometimes) anti-war movements. However, the deepening of the commodity form, and concomitantly aestheticised productions of space in the latest phase of passive revolution, also have determinate effects on consciousness and subjectivity. Here with the boom in the consumer goods sector and services economy, “a new subjectivity based on a consuming Pakistani identity” is being institutionalized (Anwar, 2012: 615). Crucially, this is mediated through an increasingly mediatized environment, with that technological apparatus *par excellence* of late capitalism (and the attendant cultural logic of “postmodernism”) at the forefront: television. With the liberalization of the media-sphere in the 2000s, private broadcasting underwent a massive boom – “there were four television channels in 2003, nineteen in 2006 and ninety-one by 2013. In addition, twenty-eight foreign channels have landing rights,” plying the airwaves with a constant cycle of news, entertainment, info-tainment, cooking shows, celebrity interviews, and Islamic televangelism beeped 24/7 in homes almost all over Pakistan, especially in “core” urban areas such as Karachi (Sulehria, 2019: 247).

The boom in private media has itself been boosted by the increasing penetration of multi-nationals and their turn towards “‘vernacularizing’ the image and experience of their commodities” (Naqvi, 2005: 4316). TV commercials, billboard campaigns, and other advertising campaigns “tap into” – and often create – new “consumer segments” (such as youth, the working woman etc.). Here, “freedom” and democracy are conflated with the ability to perform “lifestyles” through the consumption of commodities. An aesthetic regime has taken shape “that links

democratizing and neo-liberal forms of power together” (ibid: 4318). Freedom of expression becomes equal to the freedom of consumption. The market becomes all-inclusive, “culture” increasingly absorbed and identified with the vagaries of commodities and capital, and lessening the gap between “high” and “low” cultures. A certain “levelling”, a debased democratization takes place through the commodity form. It is what Fredric Jameson (drawing upon Brecht) has termed “plebianisation”: not a cancellation of class inequality but an erasure of social difference through “equal” access to a seemingly “meritocratic” market. As such, the differentiations of a bygone era now seem dissolved “into the fantasmagoria of interchangeable status and aleatory mobility, in which no position in the social scale is ever irrevocably fixed” (Anderson, 1998: 111).

New cultural forms and commodities are constantly created and marketed. A certain ephemerality, a sense of footloose-ness takes hold. New products and tastes constantly created and destroyed. It is the epitome of commodity fetishism: the reification of the commodity-object, the occlusion of its historicity and exclusions, “the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense” (Jameson 1984: 60). The ephemerality of the object and its social experience mirroring the hyper-mobility of neoliberal capital itself, but also hiding itself in the festival of surface sensations: the very definition of ideology. The ephemerality of experience and re-definition/fragmentation of the subject feeds into the constant cycle of consumption and striving. Walter Benjamin once declared capitalism “a pure religious cult, perhaps the most extreme that ever was” (Benjamin, 1921/2005: 259). For Benjamin, capitalism’s uniqueness as a religious cult lies in its eschewal of expiation and the universalisation of “an enormous feeling of guilt not itself knowing how to repent” (ibid). The poor therefore, or those with a “lack”, are guilty without salvation. For they must struggle,

generation after generation, at the altar of the commodity for a satisfaction (“repenting”) which is precluded by the increasing commodification of everyday life, the ephemerality and constant shape-shifting of the commodity form itself. Capitalism is, therefore, “a blaming rather than a repenting cult”.

In fact, it is this levelling of social difference through access to the market, and the real illusion (i.e. ideology) of mobility and commodity fetishism, that is also key to its enormous power. It is this pseudo-democratisation, this seeming dissolution of cultural barriers, its limited incorporation of minimal difference (through, for example, “targeted” marketing to marginalized genders, youth etc.), that are its constitutive “utopian” surplus. Thus, for example, the enormous popularity in Karachi’s working and lower middle classes of a televangelist like Amir Liaquat Hussain. A product of Pakistan’s private media boom, Husain started off on the Geo Television channel as the host of a religious show staging debates between Islamic scholars from various sects. However, when a video leaked of him passing lewd remarks off stage, Husain changed gears. He started a popular religious “game show”, where prizes – cell phones, motorbikes, cars, cash, and now even plots of land – are awarded in response to correctly answering trivia questions about Islamic theology and history. The show is wildly popular, there are long queues and much wrangling for somehow getting onto it to avail the copious supply of religious blessings and commodity prizes. Instead of facing a dent in his popularity in the aftermath of the leaked video, Husain is now a mega-star, a law unto himself: in the holy month of Ramzan, he does daily marathon broadcasts early morning (at the beginning of the fast) and then in the evening. It is not channels who hire Husain anymore, but Husain who chooses which channel’s platform will be graced by his presence during that Ramzan. Recently, he also won an election of

the National Assembly from Karachi on the ticket of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

Much reviled by the urbane middle and upper classes of Pakistan for his “commercialization” and “profanation” of religion, Husain’s appeal is easy to see grasp if seen concretely in relation to Pakistan’s class differentiations and developing cultures of consumption. For in the presence of a decadent upper class and middle classes whose conspicuous consumption is articulated through differentiated registers of “modernity”, “rationality”, and “Islam”, and in conscious opposition to the “backward” and “mindless” religious fanaticism of the masses (cf Maqsood, 2014), Husain is a vehicle for gratification and “levelling” through the commodity form. Combining the ludic, the conservative, and the aspirational, Husain’s Islamic info-tainment and generous distribution of commodities of conspicuous consumption (such as smartphones), makes him a vehicle of fulfillment and desire for the popular classes. Here, the religion of capitalism meets the capitalism of religion. A particularly “pastiche” form of religion disseminates through Husain’s game shows, a “blank parody” and plebianisation of religious discourse and religiosity, all mediated through the commodity form itself. All that is solid melts into the air, all that is holy is rendered profane.

Husain’s character shifts themselves are instructive. He started off as a religious show host, a *naat-khwan* (singer of devotional hymns to the Prophet), and was briefly made minister of religious affairs in the military regime of General Musharraf. But after the leaked video, Husain has taken on many other guises: a religious variety show host, public evangelist (uniquely, for different – often opposed – Islamic sects), a singer of patriotic songs, starring as a model in music videos, host of a late night political talk show and a cooking show, a member of the National Assembly, and (if persistent rumours are to be believed) soon a star on the big screen,

too. Large boutiques sponsor his dresses during the Ramzan shows. The man, his body, his ephemerality, and his constant shape-shifting, are therefore the very embodiment of the hyper-mobility of capital itself in the neoliberal era.

Husain's playfulness, his self-fashioning as a "man of the masses", as vehicle for aspiration and partaking in commodity culture, thus embodies a double move: in the same moment, he debunks and asserts class boundaries, subverts and reinforces hyper-consumptive capitalism. Frantz Fanon once characterised the national bourgeoisie in post-colonial countries as coming into their own and identifying with the Western bourgeoisie in the latter's decadent phase of conspicuous consumption (i.e. having skipped the creative, industrious phase): the national bourgeoisie therefore is weakly hegemonic and "is in fact beginning at the end" (Fanon, 1967: 123). With his (pseudo-)challenge to the upper classes through facilitation of conspicuous consumption among popular classes, Amir Liaquat Husain is the mirror of Pakistan's upper classes and their interminable decadence (and thus, also their instinctive revulsion of him). Husain's great popularity among working classes and the urban poor, the popular clamour to get onto his religious game shows, is thus an indication of both the positive sublimation and the disjuncture at the heart of the cultural logic of late capitalism in the specific conditions of a peripheral country like Pakistan. It was Gramsci who once called the great Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce "a realizer of passive revolution" in the post-Risorgimento era, "a kind of lay pope and an extremely efficient instrument of hegemony – even if at times he may find himself in disagreement with one government or another" (Gramsci, 1971: p56 fn5). One is tempted, in the simultaneously transgressive and plebianised cultural context of late capitalism, to term Amir Liaquat Husain "a lay pope of the neoliberal passive revolution" in Pakistan, whose function it is

to incorporate subaltern social groups into the neoliberal historical bloc through the mediation of religious pastiche and hyper-consumptive capitalism¹⁸⁹.

So whence the contradiction then? If historicity is effaced, depth cancelled, sensitivity overloaded, subjectivity dispersed, and passive revolution mediated through conspicuous consumption, what hope or even possibility for a different urban form, for a political practice of the working class? Of course, one cannot indulge simply in a sterile moral condemnation of the commodity form. The clocks of history cannot be turned back. And the unified subject of modernism, if there ever was one, cannot be brought back through an ideological “refusal” of postmodernism. In fact, a determinate criticism (and political practice) cannot but afford to completely – i.e. dialectically – work through new forms of subjectivity, consciousness, and their material grounds in order to emerge thoroughly transformed (and equipped) on the other side.

Here, we must also focus our lens on the specificity of the spatial articulation of (post-)modernity in a peripheral context like Karachi. For in addition to the struggles over land and housing detailed above, the urban form as a whole is undergoing a sea-change under what may be termed “infrastructural populism”. As part of the emerging spatial dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, there has been the proliferation of high-profile infrastructure projects which displace marginalised communities at a mass scale. The glitz and glamour of these high-profile infrastructure projects — ranging from high-rise luxury apartments to smooth, six-lane speedways, and “revitalised” historic sites — is promoted by city authorities (and often sponsored by IFIs such as the World Bank) as emblems of Pakistan's “arrival” on the world stage

¹⁸⁹ It is also at this joint – where the ephemeral, depthless, and hyper-mobile commodity form of late capitalism meets the institutional apparatuses of Pakistan’s neoliberal passive revolution – that we can again see the meeting of the two strands of ideology-critique in the Marxist tradition (earlier discussed in fn111). Thus, in everyday practice and common sense, the reification-fetish of the commodity form is mediated through new media and religious pastiche (i.e. the hegemonic apparatuses of neoliberal passive revolution).

(Anwar, 2012: 606). 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 an increasingly globalised media universe.

Identifying infrastructure with modernity and nation-building of course draws upon a longer history of “infrastructure populism” and contestation. As Majed Akhter has shown in the context of 1960s Pakistan, hydraulic infrastructure (such as dams and barrages on the Indus River) became a major locus of contesting visions of “modernising” nationalism within the state bureaucracy (Akhter, 2015). Where the social bases of the middle class have evolved beyond state institutions, the social and spatial articulation of its hegemonic aspirations are also being expressed through the “modernising” infrastructure erected for hyper-mobile capital and for the promotion of a culture of conspicuous consumption. These political processes of spatial purification, combined with the glamorous “mega-projects” (such as the Emaar coastline “re-development” and Lyari Expressway in Karachi), have thus been instrumental in producing the vision of an “exclusionary form of cultural citizenship” (Fernandes, 2004: 2416).

Urban space itself has thus become ideological in a double (or triple) sense: as mediation and as illusion/allusion (Goonewardena, 2005: 52, 63). The urban is now a *mediating* level of the totality through which global capital and state are reproduced and colonise everyday life. As representation and ideology, urban space is also an “illusion/allusion” whereby the aestheticisation and purification of space serves both to *allude* to the exclusionary practices of the ruling classes, and – through displacement or, often literally, through building freeways, “signal-free” traffic corridors, and malls – to *hide* the debris of neoliberal capital-space. In Gayatri Menon’s evocative rendering of the urban poor’s vulnerability to state violence in Mumbai, which is relevant to “world-class” Karachi too, here the “deprivation of the poor

mutates into evidence of their depravation” (Menon, 2013: 162). Space in postmodernity thus serves an ideological purpose, an “alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment”, an analogue of the subject’s incapacity to grasp (and change) the totality (Jameson, 1984: 84).

It is this concatenation of the dilemmas of combined and uneven development in the periphery with the material-ideological effects of late capitalism and space which is producing new articulations of class, ethnicity, and the urban today in Karachi (and Pakistan). For in conditions of (post-)colonial development, the relationship between the bourgeoisie and landed elites has not been one of opposition or contradiction. Capitalist modernity here never had its antinomy in feudalism, but a mutual co-existence and imbrication under the tutelage of metropolitan capital and the Bonapartist state. It is thus, that the post-colonial ruling elite (those who, for Fanon, are “unable to constitute themselves as a class”) never formed a vigorous “national culture” of their own. In these shortcuts to hegemony, the translation of ideas, practices, capital, and spatial forms from the core becomes an (unstable) means of disseminating hegemony. The fetish of the “mega-project”, the glamour of gated colonies with stylised Eiffel Towers and (ironically) Statues of Liberty, the glitz of shopping malls, the temples of hyper-consumption, thus serve not just as sinks for capital and machines of accumulation, but also as ideological forms for an infrastructural populism.

In a now famous essay on the *Origins of Postmodernity*, Perry Anderson characterised the transition from modernist to post-modernist art as one of a shift “from the images of machinery to the machinery of images” (Anderson, 1998: 88). In Pakistan, with the worship of the machinery (and the closely associated “mega-project”) and the fetish/mediatised rule of the image, there is a peculiar combination of the two. It is a strange spectacle: the curious

amalgamation of the modernist élan of the megaproject with the postmodernist fetish and flattening out of its image. A very concrete expression of the peculiar dilemma of combined and uneven development: great poverty on one side, dazzling affluence on the other; the conditions of 19th century Europe and of 21st century North America side by side; enclaves of the First World amidst an ocean of the Third World; disembodied “development” in the midst of proliferating zones of exception and exclusion. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm, “civilisation works its miracles and civilised man [sic] is turned back almost into a savage”.

It is thus that uneven and combined development of post-modern forms of capital and space, the militarised depravations of the permanent War on/of Terror, the narrow accumulation machine of the neoliberal ruling bloc, and the ideological functions of the commodity form and of the urban, all act to produce a dialectic of inclusion-exclusion which is the terrain of the new urban question in Karachi. The historical production of spatial enclaves, the fragmentation of consciousness and organisation, the melancholic and enclosed structures of feeling operate today too and are articulated by capital and state in new forms. Where older forms of socio-spatial differentiation were violently territorialised in terms of ethnicity, new forms of exclusion-inclusion are being materially and discursively mapped onto the expanding and differentiating terrain of the urban. On the one hand, as we have seen in the chapter on labour regimes, capital itself (re-)produces difference in the sphere of production through re-articulating older patterns of uneven development (such as along lines of ethnicity and gender) with sectoral segmentation and wage differentials. The production of (neoliberal) space through dispossession and state practices of “fixation” works to both differentiate and homogenise the working class. Additionally, the vagaries of the commodity form produce their own determinate effects on

consciousness: the fragmentation of subjectivity, the loss of depth, the erasure of historicity, and an increasing incapacity to grasp the alienated totality of decentred and plural late capitalism.

But with a new generation of migrant workers in Karachi, an incipient structure of feeling of cosmopolitanism and urban habiting has developed too. In some sectors, for example the food transport workers discussed above, a substratum of common experiences of alienation and incipient solidarity is mediated through a popular multi-lingualism (quite in contrast to received notions of “unbridgeable” ethnic difference). Thus, while practices of dispossession and exclusion constitutively differentiate workers, and the weight of historical exclusions and segregations weighs heavily on the minds of the living, there is a common substratum of everyday experience and of the urban which may yet form the basis of a popular political practice provided it is “articulated-in-difference”.

As the anti-war PTM movement has shown, such a popular practice will have to work through the dialectic of homogenisation-differentiation produced through state, capital, and (alienated) everyday life. This, if forged, will be a political practice of “concrete universality”. Here, the ground of immediacy, the particularity of existence, belies an immediately transparent universality. However, the situated and differentiated – but shared – experiences of multi-scalar projects of dispossession at the hands of the praetorian ruling bloc may *potentially* serve as the ground for a concrete/dialectical unity. And thus, while the ruling bloc attempts to constrain the subaltern in a walled particularism, the forging of an alternative universality cannot but take this moment of particularity, this ground of immediacy, as its point of departure. It is this ground of immediacy, not as destiny but as history, and in mutual constitution with other moments of immediacy, that is the departure point for the *practical struggle* of “a universal which embraces within itself the wealth of the particular” (Hegel quoted by Anderson, 1995: 34).

The urban question in Karachi today concentrates all the contradictions, all the historic failures of Pakistan's decadent ruling classes: their subservience to imperialism, their recurrent crises of hegemony, their distinct lack of imagination, and their congenital inability to escape the material horizons of their own subjective idealism. It is a ruling bloc which is, literally, good for nothing. The Angel of History, Walter Benjamin poignantly reminds us, has its face turned towards the past. The debris of that past, the disjointedness of the present, and the trust of future generations demand redemption, which can only be accomplished by the greatest, most diverse proletariat of the country. Karachi's once mighty working class cannot, and indeed must not, remain quiescent forever. The Angel of History, a mighty act of (collective) will, awaits.

Conclusion: Looking Back, Looking Forward

“There the phrase went beyond the content, now the content goes beyond the phrase.”

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (6)

Nodes of Engagement

In the preceding chapters, we have traced the evolution of Karachi’s working class, its making and unmaking, over the past four decades. We have argued that this dialectic of making and unmaking, the thrusts towards unification and dispersal, are best understood in the context of two phases of revolution and related shifts in the urban question. These phases of passive revolution – the first stretching from the 1970s and through the 1980s, and the second on-going from the late-2000s onwards – have been characterised by shifting articulations within the integral state (the differentiated unity of civil and political society) and, concomitantly, shifts in material-ideological mechanisms of consent, *trasformismo*, and coercion. These iterations of passive revolution therefore involved a dynamic dialectic of pacification and “enclosure” whereby an integral politics of the working class was suppressed and incorporated into the hegemonic rhythms of a changing ruling bloc. We have also traced the joints of this pacified absorption that have produced intense violence and fragmentations of social space, practice, and consciousness. However, these uneasy suturings of multiple spatio-temporal rhythms have also produced contradictions within common sense and a popular melancholia, which hold potentials for a renewed hegemonic praxis of the working class in Karachi.

In doing so, we have opened nodes of engagement with multiple disciplines and (sub-)fields. Some of the implications of the argument presented here, especially with regards to lines of future research on Karachi and Pakistan, have already been presented in the Introduction.

Here, I will briefly cover the more disciplinary and theoretical-thematic debates to which this dissertation has contributed, and where the need for further refinement/deepening lies.

First, and foremost, I have engaged with the problematic of class within the Marxist tradition specifically – and various sociological and historiographical debates surrounding this – to elaborate an integral and processual conception of class. Such an integral conception of class has been developed through the originary debates between Marxism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism, and through an engagement with the evolution of economics, politics, and culture in Karachi in the last four decades. Class is seen to be a historical ensemble of different spheres of social practice, where “politics” and “culture” inhere within the “economic”, the objective is mutually constituted by the subjective, and forces and relations of/in production are traversed by the rhythms and relations of reproduction. Such a conception also helps us move beyond debates between which pit “class” against “identity” or “difference”, falling into one-dimensional views of the same. In our case, it is this processual understanding of the “differentiated unity” of class which helps to understand how, for example, the production/entrenchment of ethnicity and gender in Karachi is integrally linked to the differentiated rhythms of the labour process, the uneven articulation of labour regimes with wider processes of accumulation, and the urban question. As such, this *processual* and differentiated conception of class offers a productive vantage point to grasp the totality of a social formation in all its distinction *and* unity, its multi-level complexity, as “a complex whole structured in dominance” (Althusser, 1965/69: 201).

The integral conception of class also led us into reflections on the state and political economy of Pakistan specifically and post-colonial social formations generally. Here, reconstitution of a Marxian-Gramscian problematic, “stretched” to the (post-)colony via Frantz

Fanon, moved us beyond abstract and idealised divisions between the (over-developed) state and society, between civil and political society, to a conception of the dialectical unity of the same i.e. the integral state. With the help of Frantz Fanon, Gramsci's conceptualisation of the integral state and the multi-level and multi-scalar concretisations of passive revolution were usefully "stretched" to the metropole-dependent and racialised contexts of post-colonial social formations.

Such a differentiated, multi-level, and multi-scalar conceptualisation of the integral state and passive revolution provides useful comparative openings. Iterations of populism – such as the Islamist praetorianism of General Zia and neoliberal securitisation in second phase of passive revolution – were thus understood as emerging from the crises of limited hegemonic projects, crucially dependent on multi-scalar forces including shifts in the global property regime, the regional machinations of the US imperium, historical and uneven development of spatio-temporal contradictions in Karachi (and beyond), and their (contingent) concretisation in social, physical, and mental spaces. The conjunctural, relational, and strategic approach to the integral state and passive revolution elaborated here also feeds into debates on comparison in human geography and beyond (as illustrated by, among others, Gillian Hart). Thus, culturally-inflected populisms are revealed as as conjunctural socio-spatial projects produced in co-constitution with multi-scalar forces, which connect them to regional and world-wide flows (of capital, labour, ideational complexes etc.). Moving beyond both the strictures of methodological nationalism and culturalised readings of "difference" and/or Bonapartism in the global South, spaces (such as that of the "national", "urban" etc.) are seen as mutually-constituted "nodes" of hierarchically-ordered and unevenly-developing multi-scalar rhythms. Moreover, I also briefly engaged with debates on modes of production which, even

while largely anachronistic in this era of late capitalism, brought our focus onto upward and downward linkages, the specific modalities of dependency, capital accumulation, and relations of/in production in post-colonial social formations.

This focus on the specific mechanisms of multi-scalar articulations and relations of/in production led to an engagement with debates over “informality” which have taken place in several sub-fields and disciplines such as development studies, political economy, and urban geography. My review of (South Asian) genealogies of understanding “informality”, especially through the cognate conceptualisations of Partha Chatterjee and Kalyan Sanyal, revealed key limitations to sectoral-ontological modes of thinking with regards to forms of labour subsumption and, concomitantly, socio-political articulation. Here, instead of resorting to overly homogenous conceptions of “informality” or the “need economy”, I demonstrated that determinate forms of consciousness and organisation are better understood through a heuristic of “labour regimes” (an adaptation of Michael Burawoy’s “factory regimes”). Understanding labour regimes as a confluence of labour processes, market embeddedness, and the rhythms of labour power reproduction, provided an extremely useful heuristic for understanding labour organisation and consciousness among daily-wage construction workers, home-based women workers, and food transport workers. In conversation with insights from feminist political economists and their programmatic calls for moving beyond dichotomies of production/reproduction and household/market, the heuristic of labour regimes brings our focus onto the fractures and differentiations within spaces of production and reproduction, and is thus a productive vantage point for understanding the production of class in integral relation with other social relations of difference (such as gender and ethnicity). In focussing on the specificities of subsumption in different labour regimes, I also move away from linear conceptions of capitalist

development – such as, for example, the effacement of “primordial” identities and/or the eclipse of “atavistic” forms of labour control – to an appreciation of more multi-variate trajectories. Moreover, the deployment of labour regimes also offers a promising avenue for breaking the (state-centered) dichotomy of formal/informal, in favour of more situated investigations of different forms of labour control, organisation, and consciousness, and the potential of linkages therein.

The focus on multi-spatial linkages and overdetermination of forms of practice, subsumption, and consciousness also brought us in conversation with debates in human geography over urban populisms in the global South and beyond. An elaboration of passive revolutions in Karachi revealed how mechanisms of coercion, disaggregation, and *trasformismo* worked through the severing of multiple socio-spatial mediations which are crucial for an integral hegemonic project of subaltern social groups. In Karachi’s case, these circumscribing rhythms worked through severing of the intellectual-organisational linkages between the labour movement and student movement, and between residential and workplace organising. These severed mediations, the historical and socio-spatial fractures within the working class, fed into the parallel rise of ethno-spatial populisms. Urban populisms, and concomitant projects of neoliberal socio-spatial restructuring, were themselves seen to work through a differentiated dialectic of absorption and exclusion. Crucially, relations of difference (such as around ethnicity) were mobilised – and even “created” – in integral relation to material and discursive appropriations, enclavisations, and claims over space, such as through idioms of “urbanity” and (commodified) aspirations to “modernity”. Here, space is not just a *tabula rasa*, an inert container in which contesting social forces stake their hegemonic claims. In fact, appropriations and imaginaries of space are central loci of action, where “city” and “urbanity, “modernity” and

“tradition”, serve not as civilizational-ontological markers but as the very grounds for forging historical blocs. Space was thus demonstrated to be produced as a *constitutive* part of the material, ideological, and cultural components of projects of hegemony and urban populisms.

In elaborating the constitutive role of space in hegemonic projects, I also engaged with the lived experiences of space and spatial imaginaries through ethnographic accounts and, crucially, literary productions. To complement ethnographic encounters of melancholic silence, drawing upon major literary texts produced in/about Karachi provided a productive avenue of methodological extension for understanding shifts in norms of association, practice, and consciousness in the face of “the slaughterhouse of history”. The traces of melancholic utopia traced through this methodological extension (and recovery) were crucial in delineating both the fragmentations of class consciousness but also the nodes of popular common sense which may yet lend themselves to an alternative hegemonic practice. Crucially, I (tentatively) developed a method of understanding space as *constitutive* – as opposed to simply thematic – in literary texts through bringing together the insights of Raymond Williams (on “structures of feeling”), Fredric Jameson (on form and content) and Henri Lefebvre (on the “concrete abstraction” of space and minimal difference in capitalism). The deployment of literary texts as a source, and the heuristic for (spatially) reading literature, can provide productive avenues of methodological and epistemological extension for social investigation in other contexts as well.

As part of developing a dialectical and open Marxist method, through an immanent critique of post-structuralist/post-colonial viewpoints, I have also – directly and indirectly – elaborated on various epistemological and methodological debates within the Marxist tradition, such as between class/difference, universality/particularity, and structuralism/historicism. For example, the active, relational, and differentiated conception of class developed here moves beyond the

structuralist/expressivist and synchronic/diachronic poles in Marxist theory. With an emphasis on the production of class *through practice in determinate conjunctures*, our conceptualisation moves on *both* synchronic and diachronic axes, taking account of the differentiated structure of relations within a specific conjuncture, while also investigating and keeping in sight their historical rhythms and spatio-temporal specificity. Relatedly, through this integral conception of class, the focus on everyday life, and the cognate conceptualisation of “labour regimes”, I tentatively offered some proposals for bringing together two oft-separated strands of the Marxist theory of ideology: one developing Marx’s insights into reification and fetishism of the commodity form (in *Capital Vol. I*), and the other on mystifying conceptions of the world disseminated by reigning/ascendant historical blocs via hegemonic apparatuses (indicated, for example, in *The German Ideology*)¹⁹⁰. The elaborations of the multi-scalar determination of everyday life and popular common sense may yet offer a productive meeting point for these viewpoints. The semiotic, symbolic, and discursive are here integral *moments* of everyday life, in the production of class, and in the reproduction of social formations.

In fact, as I contend with my discussions of labour regimes and of commodity cultures, a peripheral social formation like Pakistan offers an extremely suggestive geographical “seat” for developing these strands of ideology theory and their potential points of integration. This is the joint where the ephemeral, depthless, and hyper-mobile commodity form of late capitalism is unevenly articulated by the institutional apparatuses of Pakistan’s neoliberal passive revolution (such as the culture industry, forms of conspicuous consumption and religious pastiche). Here, the conditions of combined and uneven development, the inhering of plural and integrally related spatio-temporal rhythms, the deepening penetration of capital at all levels of the social

¹⁹⁰ These two strands have also been unevenly coded as Leninist/“Eastern”/“strategic” and Hegelian-Lukacsian/“Western”/“cultural” Marxisms, respectively (Rehmann, 2013).

formation, and the “privilege” of historical backwardness in an increasingly globalised world, combine to give questions of fetishism-reification, everyday life, and the fractures of popular common sense, an urgent – and often, explosive – theoretical and political valence. Therefore, the unevenly developing character of (late) capitalism in peripheral social formations – in its uneasy concatenations of space, temporality, and aspiration – offers a potentially productive vantage point for theoretical and practical elaborations of the problematic of ideology and consciousness in Marxist theory.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

As indicated in the last section, and indeed throughout this dissertation, I have gone back to some of the originating debates between Marxism and contending strands of social theory to develop a more open and dialectical Marxist problematic for today. This act of return – to Marx, Gramsci, Hall, and others – has also been induced by the need to “stretch” and elaborate the theoretical-conjunctural validity of Marxism for post-colonial social formations. As we have seen (for example, in the Introduction and Chapter 5), this task acquires great theoretical and political urgency in Pakistan due to the severing of our organisational, intellectual, and generational mediations and the ensuing long eclipse of critical Marxist perspectives. The return to some of these originary debates – such as between structuralism and historicism/humanism, Althusser and Gramsci – and their (direct and indirect) elaboration here has served to elucidate the continuing validity and vitality of a Marxist problematic for Pakistan (and beyond). It is in this sense that my return to the “classics” is, in the very same moment, also a point of departure for the future: a looking back to look forward.

In its attention to the complex and historical conditioning of conjunctures, to the potential of (organised) socio-political practice to intervene in history and structure, my account of the working class in Karachi moves beyond the pitfalls of essentialism, (idealist) historicism, and/or Eurocentrism. It is therefore neither a simple historicist rendering which makes the analysis of the “non-West” a temporal beholden to (a hyper-real) “Europe”; nor one whose self-enclosed particularity uneasily conceals a civilizational-ontological essentialism. Our account works in both structural and historical registers with a view to developing a conjunctural and comparative method. Such a method focuses on the *relational and complex* singularity of conjunctures which, instead of eschewing comparison altogether, opens the conjuncture (and comparison) to alternative and emancipatory horizons.

Therefore, we have dealt here with those punctual moments, where opposing forces clash and struggle, those moments of crisis which are also moments of reconstruction, where the sutures of an exhausted hegemonic order are no longer enough to hold together festering wounds and contradictions. Here homogenous and empty time threatens to give way to the plural temporalities of the damned and the degraded. These are the moments of insurgency and passive revolution, where “conflicting forces are formed, are assembled and take up their positions; the moment in which one ethical-political system dissolves and another is formed by fire and steel” (Gramsci, 1971: 119).

And thus it is that our account of working class history and politics is no linear chronology. There is no immanent or “objective” causality here which is also not at the same time an account of clashing subjectivities and moments of force. Passive revolution is our designation of that punctuality and multi-linearity of history, of moments of force which break or threaten to break the sterile homogeneity of bourgeois time. In doing so, and even in their defeat, they leave traces

of their happening, fragments of memory to be vivified and revived in later moments when the sutures come off, and when the false universality of the ruling classes is revealed for what it is: the conceit of particularity.

The owl of Minerva only takes flight with the fall of twilight. Now, with the space of a few decades between us, was perhaps a good time to look back at the clashes and defeats which continue to shape our present in Karachi and Pakistan. To be sure, this is no exercise in sterile judgement, the post-event hindsight that Kristin Ross – in an interview about the spatio-temporal travels of the Paris Commune – calls an “after-the-fact-theoretical superiority [which] is both inane and profoundly ahistorical” (Ross, 2015). For as much as possible, and except where the participants themselves look back at events with the judgement of hindsight, the aim here was “to attend ‘violently’, with all the ‘pessimism of the intellect’ at our command, to the ‘discipline of the conjuncture’” (Hall, 1988: 162). This is that moment of fury, where “History shifts gears”, where multiple levels with their distinct temporalities come into crisis, and that delicate and shifting balance of forces arrays with material-ideological weapons, to either restore the old order or construct a new one.

Thus, I deploy passive revolution not as an account of linear time, but of punctuality. It is this “violent discipline of the conjuncture”, which prevents us from simply gleaning “lessons” from the past for an (enclosed) present. No formal similarity will here do. It is the discipline of the conjuncture that forces us to work in and beyond the phrase, to discover the content of form, to disentangle the suturing threads of a situation, in order to uncover and transcend the phrase.

We have strived to see how traces of the vanquished past live on in the now, to use conjunctures as “resources” to think about the present. The chapters were therefore not laid out in any simple chronological manner. Within them, we flitted between eras, arraying and rubbing

different conjunctures against each other, using one as a resource to think about the other, in an attempt to open up not just the past but also “the field of possible futures” (Ross, *ibid*). This work is therefore an historical account, but not one which is the simple historicism of a homogenous and empty time. It is structuralist/synchronic without falling into functionalism, historicist/diachronic without reducing time to a homogenous contemporaneity. Our attention has been on the constitutive moment of political practice, to the balance of forces, to the joints and contradictions of a conjuncture, to understand the conjuncture in all its synchronic complexity, but – and in the same moment – in its essential a-synchronicity, its contradictory cohering/articulation of diachronicity, the non-contemporaneous rhythms of historical time.

For when all is said and done, the fragments of past tragedies, the murmur of paths not taken, live on in our present as melancholia, but also as so many gestures towards Utopia. Those exacting defeats and their *living* in registers of loss and melancholia have been here recounted in the spirit of vivifying memory and critical self-reflexivity. And in the Hope, if I may challenge the master, that the next time need not be farce.

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