

The Author



Ayyaz Mallick

Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University

Contact

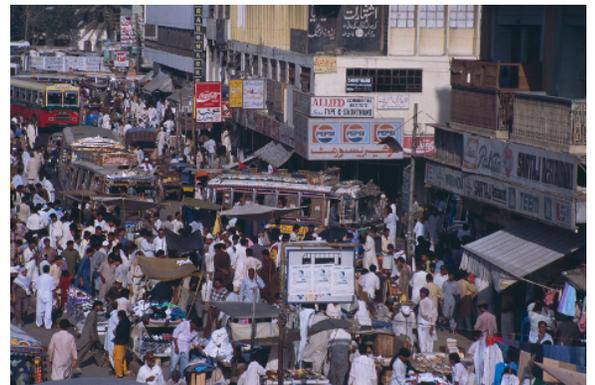
For further information on this research, please contact [Ayyaz Mallick](mailto:ayyaz.mallick@yorku.ca)

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

My dissertation aimed to understand the decline of Karachi's vibrant labour movement and the proliferation of exclusivist ethnic politics in the post-1970s era. I sought to carry out an immanent reconstruction of the Marxist and post-colonial theoretical traditions to develop an integral conception of class, state and civil society in post-colonial contexts. Such a theoretical-epistemological excavation was crucial for historicizing the increasing salience of "ethnicity" in Karachi, beyond any "primordialist" or top-down ("conspiracist") modes of explanation. In such a mobilization, "class" as a "universal" category or general social relation, is not ontologically opposed to, but is produced through the mediation of the particular(s) and the specific (such as relations of ethnicity, gender etc.). In this sense, a reformulated Marxism is not abstractly opposed to the post structuralist/linguistic turn in social theory and its emphasis on difference, 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. Crucially, such a mobilization of Marxist dialectics can provide a useful opening in—often polarized—contemporary theoretico-political debates that pit "class" against "identity politics," "Marxism" against "post-colonialism," and "universal politics/emancipation" against "particularistic demands."

I argue that the evolution of the working class in post-1970s Karachi must be understood in the context of two phases of passive revolution. These phases—the first stretching from the late 1970s to the 1980s and the second ongoing from the late 2000s onwards—have been characterized by changing contours of the urban question, 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 phases involved a dynamic dialectic of pacification and "enclosure" whereby the independent politics of the working class was suppressed and incorporated into the hegemonic rhythms of a changing ruling bloc.

The first phase had the deepest and most long-lasting effects. The intensity of coercion and the concertedness 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 peasant, 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



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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 organizational 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, historically developed faultlines with regards to the urban question, the "distinctions-within-unity" of the multi-ethnic working class, the aborted dialectic between the leaders and the led, and the severing of spatial social mediations of the working class with other key interlocutors (such as students and youth) became weaponized (pun intended) into (reified) difference and fractures.

The conjunctural punctuality of this phase was emphasized by massive social and demographic change 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 restructuring, this led to major changes in norms of association and in the negotiation of urban space. These developing contradictions of the urban question were then articulated to the production of "ethnicity" and, concomitantly, violent claims and enclavisations of space. From a city subject to proletarian takeovers in the early 1970s, Karachi was reconfigured into an archipelago of ethnicized enclaves.

The second phase of passive revolution began in the late 2000s with the crisis of the General Musharraf regime and an intensification of neoliberal globalization. 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 flexibilization of labour. Here, in critical conversation with Michael Burawoy's conception of "factory regimes" and feminist political economists, I developed a heuristic of "labour regimes" for understanding varying forms of labour control, organization and consciousness as a confluence of labour processes, state-market embeddedness, and the rhythms of reproduction. This heuristic helps to move us beyond the (state-centered) dichotomy of "formality/informality", to understand how spatial dispersion of production under conditions of neoliberal globalization has fed into differentiated forms of labour subsumption whereby the rhythms of hegemony are (re)produced through relations in production.

Today, the rhythms of working-class politics and organization 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, recurring crises of the ruling bloc, shifting articulations of the urban question, and contradictions within popular common sense (such as a submerged, but nonetheless discernible, utopic melancholia) offer openings for a renewed hegemonic praxis.