

Adeem Suhail

Report

The oral presentation and written chapter of my dissertation that I presented at this conference explored the intersections urban violence and political subjection. It was based on empirical and ethnographic research conducted in Lyari Town, Karachi, Pakistan. There is a tendency within scholarly works that interrogate this domain of knowledge to consider the Pakistani case as a 'geo-political' novelty. Much of this literature tends to emphasize on the religious and ethnic cleavages amongst 'communities' that inhabit Pakistani cities. Rather than explain elements of an 'urban' becoming, this literature often quite unwittingly reifies what are dynamic and contradictory modes of life. This reification is necessary to maintain the myth of Pakistani exceptionality, and specifically its exceptionality as a space where multiple vectors of violence persist.

My presentation and paper sought to problematize this discourse by holding the case of the infamous Lyari gang war in a comparative framework with the Chicago gang. The presentation sought to gauge the similarities as well as departures in the production of vectors of urban violence in these two cities that have very different historical lineages and trajectories yet have produced extremely similar forms of social formations that utilize physical violence as tool for reproduction of power.

The idea was to present this thesis to some of the most respectable social scientists in the US and test its viability. Outcomes have been encouraging and favorable. I believe it is a timely idea to begin to open up Pakistan Studies to inform the scholarship taking place in similar conditions in other parts of the world just as my work seeks to begin a productive engagement with scholars of Rio de Janeiro, Chicago and Managua.

Furthermore, it is also important to see that the problems that are made to appear as specific to Pakistani society may have precedents and even solutions in other contemporaneous human societies and to explore the depths of that affinity. That is what this presentation sought to do.