

**Title: Hydraulic Peace: Water and the Everyday Politics of Infrastructure in Karachi**

Why does access to water in Karachi, Pakistan's largest and most violent urban center, remain peaceful as the city becomes more susceptible to water shortages? Given its reputation as a city bedeviled by ethnic strife, weak rule of law, and inefficient state institutions, scholars, experts, and politicians predict Karachi's mounting water crisis will cause widespread inter communal violence. Puzzlingly, however, violence in the city has not escalated in tandem with regular and crippling water shortages. My research explains this puzzle by studying the everyday politics of water access in Karachi. Specifically, I shed light on the "formal" and "informal" practices everyday people employ to manage, distribute, and access water from the city's vast network of pipes. In doing so, this research shifts focus from the ethnic tensions and normalized bloodshed that have become synonymous with Karachi's daily life and politics. Instead, I explore how Karachi's residents employ specific discourses and practices around the city's water infrastructure to consciously and persistently control potential violence over this life-sustaining resource. By engaging with the burgeoning literatures on infrastructure and South Asian politics, the unique contribution of this research lies in highlighting the essential, yet amorphous role played by infrastructure in establishing pockets of peace in Pakistan's conflict-prone urban regions.

**Research Design:** Funds are requested to facilitate travel and living expenses during three months of fieldwork from June 1<sup>st</sup> through August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018, in Shireen Jinnah Colony (SJC), one of Karachi's so-called informal settlements. SJC is characterized by ethnic tensions, weak state institutions, and persistent water shortages, making it a likely candidate for water-related violence. But, based on preliminary research conducted in the area in 2017, such violence is notably absent in the settlement. As an area of the city where violence over water is expected, but does not occur, SJC provides a high degree of analytical leverage to understand Karachi's surprising hydraulic peace.

**Methods:** I will employ participant observation (PO) and in-depth interviews to collect the data required for this project. For the former, I will observe the daily practices SJC residents use to access water through the city's water infrastructure. PO will thus reveal the plethora of formal and informal practices, as well as the relationships, tools, and expertise, SJC residents employ to meet their daily water needs. I will also conduct sixty in-depth interviews of 45 minutes to an hour each. This will include 45 interviews with SJC households and community elders; 10 interviews with local plumbers and water technicians; and 5 interviews with local government officials and water board staff. Interviews will highlight the way these different actors interpret their efforts to get water, thereby revealing the distinct discourses and meanings that both undergird, and are formed through, quotidian interactions with the city's water infrastructure.

**Intellectual Merit:** This research seeks to explain why urban violence is avoided in circumstances where it is expected. It will therefore be of interest to an interdisciplinary scholarly community in Pakistan, the U.S., and beyond that is interested in studying contemporary urban politics. This research will also generate interest in the wider communities of the U.S. and Pakistan by highlighting an issue that is of key significance to national and economic stability in South Asia, and by spreading knowledge about the unique cultural and political context of Pakistan's largest and most vibrant city.

**Qualifications:** Currently in the final phase of defending my prospectus, receiving this AIPS will allow me to complete data collection for my dissertation by August 2018 and defend my dissertation by May 2019. Having conducted preliminary research in Karachi in 2017, I have developed a strong network of local contacts to facilitate my proposed fieldwork. These contacts include community leaders in SJC as well as Karachi water board staff. I am also in contact with Karachi-based scholars working on the city's water issues. I plan to use these contacts to establish an affiliation with NED University's Department of Architecture and Planning to ensure my fieldwork and the resulting dissertation facilitate a generative scholarly exchange between Pakistan and the United States.