

Panel theme title:

*Ethnography and History from the Margins of the State: Class, Media and Politics in Pakistan*

Paper title:

**'Marwa Na Dena': Reporting Between the Marginal and the Military**

Notorious for their sensationalist reporting, privatized television news channels have effectively transformed the nature of the national news culture in Pakistan. Fifteen years after the deregulation of the mass media, private news channels have established themselves as powerful players on the political spectrum, drawing both awe and disdain for their blistering critiques of politicians combined with their race for ratings. Despite their insistence on the "independent" nature of the electronic media, news media professionals are highly attentive to the ways in which their work remains bounded in general by the state and in particular, the deep state. Limited critical scholarship on the Pakistani military establishment has documented its penetration into virtually every sphere of public life, including the bureaucracy and the media, showing how through its allies, with both direct and indirect decision making, the military effectively dominates Pakistani society (Siddiqi 2007).

In this paper, I analyze the ways in which the shadow of the deep state featured in my dissertation fieldwork among news media professionals in Karachi and Islamabad. I focus on the shifts in tone, the anxious laughter and the lengthy pauses that verbose journalists adopted when they would perform an inarticulate critique of the military. Such enactments rest upon the very real dangers of straying past the limits of investigative inquiry in Pakistan, particularly when presented with the fate of their colleagues pursuing critical leads on military activities. How then do Pakistani news media professionals negotiate the tension between a principled commitment to protecting the independence of mass media and a cynical disavowal of its existing forms? While sensationalist media programming is of course not unique to Pakistani television, a specific problem emerges in this particular context: how do those in the television news industry, occupying diverse class positions in professional hierarchies, negotiate their journalistic ethics while operating in a climate of uncertainty that has both fed and threatened their daily work? Based on a series of in-depth interviews, this paper will analyze the politics of producing sensationalist news and the subsequent self-regulation that media professionals must practice in a volatile sociopolitical environment.