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

Funds from the AIPS short-term research grant were used to conduct 3 months of fieldwork in Karachi, Pakistan, between May 2018 and August 2018. My fieldwork during this time revolved around three research activities. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews of 45 to 90 minutes each with local elders and residents in my fieldsite. Interviews were designed to gather data on the everyday experience of accessing water; specifically, as this relates to the kinds of practices and meanings people associate with this experience. Second, I conducted in-depth participant observation with water operators at my chosen fieldsite. This involved spending time at the local pumping station to ascertain how the city's water infrastructure works to provide water in a city suffering from a water crisis. Finally, I conducted – and continue to conduct – textual analysis of state planning documents and newspapers.

Currently in the data analysis phase of my project, my dissertation seeks to make scholarly contributions to Pakistan Studies from both methodological and substantive points of view. For the former, I seek to show through a chapter of my dissertation how in-depth participant observation at a single site (in this case, a single pumping station) is a generative practice for scholars of urban infrastructure. This chapter will be relevant to students of Pakistani urban politics, as well as scholars working on urban anthropology and sociology in Pakistan. Substantively, my dissertation seeks to contribute to the large body of scholarly work on Karachi and violence. While much of this work has focused on overt violence as a form of politics, my research focuses on how larger, structural forms of marginalization produce a conspicuous *lack* of violence in parts of the city. Secondly, I also focus on the results of the recent general elections. Specifically, I seek to show that the electoral sphere in urban areas like Karachi revolves less around rational-choice inspired strategies to access state resources – as much of the literature on Pakistan and similar post-colonial societies suggest – and more around meanings of a “moral politics.” These substantive contributions will add context and depth for scholars of Pakistan focusing on Karachi in general, and the impact of religion on the country's urban politics in particular.