

Waste and Its Infrastructures: Networks of Work in Contemporary Lahore

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Waste production on a mass scale constitutes what can be termed the “waste problem” for contemporary cities. Lahore is no exception. It produces an estimated 3,800 to 5,000 tons of waste on a daily basis. This problem occurs at different scales, as the movement of such materials is not simply a localized affair, and brings together distinct actors, from bureaucrats and supervisors to sanitation workers and informal waste collectors. What are the different and differentiated lifeworlds that emerge around and come to depend upon the circulation of waste in contemporary Lahore? It is not only a reformed municipal department and its private contractors in contemporary Lahore that organize themselves around this problem, and in doing so provide a service to the public, but also, an extensive network of “informal” actors (waste collectors, junkyards, and waste traders) that ensure the movement of this material and more. This paper traces the actors and kinds of work that enable the movement of waste from public and private spaces within the city elsewhere. In doing so, this paper compels to rethink how waste and the urban landscape are imagined and materialized as a problem in contemporary Lahore. Moreover, tracing the activities of these actors provides insight onto key political and social transformation that are ongoing in Pakistan related to bureaucracies, public services, and labor/work regimes.