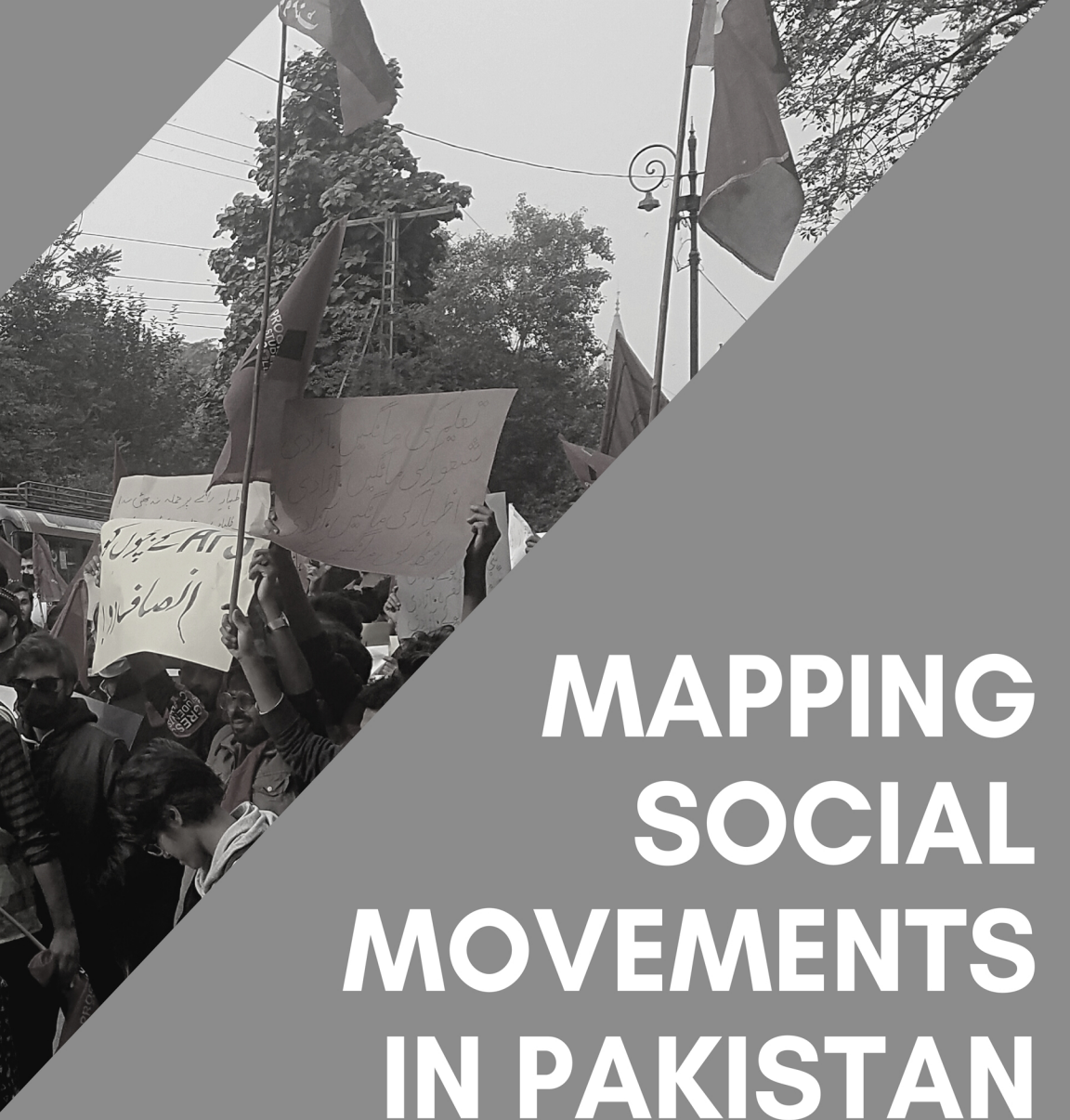

MAPPING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN PAKISTAN

HRCP

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Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

First printing February 2022.

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Acknowledgements

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is grateful to Umair Rasheed for writing this report based on a series of focus group discussions organised during October to November 2021. We would also like to thank all those who participated in these discussions and enriched our understanding of the social movements and the causes they continue to espouse—often in the face of violent opposition from state and non-state actors.

Introduction

The twenty-first century ushered in a new era in social movements globally, with anti-authoritarian and anti-austerity movements like the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street taking centre-stage. The rise of new media technologies helped these movements to mobilise in the online realm when they met with on-ground opposition, and garner support on an international level. Yet, in Pakistan—a country with a turbulent relationship with freedom of expression and movement, where resistance has historically been stifled, and surveillance has been the norm—the rise of large-scale social movements has been slow, albeit steady.

The first decade of the twenty-first century featured multiple forms of contentious politics: (i) the lawyers' movement for the restoration of the judiciary which culminated in a broad political movement against Pervez Musharraf's military dictatorship; (ii) the nation-wide campaigns against privatisation of public utilities (Pakistan Telecommunication Corporation Limited); (iii) the region- and city-specific peasant and labour mobilisations for agrarian land rights and improved wages; (iv) the struggles of public-sector employees for better service structures, and (v) the ethno-nationalist uprisings in peripheral regions away from central Punjab districts.

By and large, these social movements took place in isolation, without a broad-based network among activists and mobilisers which could synthesise the various particularistic struggles or social movements into a unified mass movement. Yet in the last ten years, and more particularly since the last five years, there is a conscious effort to link various social movements. This new effort features mobilisations by a new generation of tech-savvy, college-educated, and globally oriented activists. In linking struggles of peripheral actors and spaces to those in the centre, the demands or grievances raised in these mobilisations have encompassed a range of issues concerning, on the one hand, global capitalism and Pakistan's peripheral position in it (the anti-austerity aspect), and the country's neo-colonial political system (the anti-authoritarian aspect), on the other.

To assess this contentious politics manifested in the form of social movements and its relationship to the democratisation process, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan conducted a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) with activists and organisers of various ongoing struggles and with public intellectuals closely observing them. In all, there were eight FGDs (held between October and November 2021), seven of which were held online which allowed participation across Pakistan. The broad themes were the students' solidarity movement, the women's rights movement, enforced disappearances, victims of urban development, Pashtun Tahafuz Movement, public sector workers' collectives and role of social media in social movements. This report is a synthesis of major issues that emerged in these FGDs. The following sections

discuss: (i) the political-economic and cultural context for the various social movements; (ii) women's activism; (iii) students' politics; (iv) anti-war and anti-authoritarian activism; (v) right to the city struggles; and (vi) anti-austerity activism of public-sector workforce. Subsequently, the report concludes with key lessons offered for rights activism.

Social Movements: Political, Economic and Cultural Context

To historicise the more recent social movements, it is important to situate them within broader political-economic and cultural changes, set off by neoliberal policy regimes instituted in the country since the 1980s. Under the dictates of multilateral agencies like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, and in accordance with the interests of political elites and the military establishment, this policy regime featured a set of privatisation, deregulation, and liberalisation measures that explain the absence of organised labour and peasant activism. Combined with the persistence of authoritarian polity, this neoliberal policy regime has impacted urbanisation, education, and employment trends that reflect in the social movements, particularly in the last ten years.

Among these movements, the absence of organised labour and peasant activism relates to a flexible labour regime and changing agrarian land ownership patterns under neoliberal reforms. There was a sharp decline in the public sector workforce with secure employment, union rights, and regulated wage structures with privatisation of major utilities in telecommunication, banking, and power generation sectors (Munir et al. 2015, Eleazar and Khan 2018, Akhtar 2018). In addition to state retrenchment and the promotion of private investment in electronic media, housing and construction, education, and healthcare sectors, the decline of large manufacturing industries in textile and agro-processing sectors and the rise of urban services economy has led to a situation where the bulk of the country's workforce is now employed in the informal sector.[1] Even the formal economy operates on sub-contracting hiring techniques lacking employment security. Thus, the traditional working class of factory-based wage labour associated with the twentieth century labour movement is now just a fragment of the country's workforce. The vast majority is employed in precarious or bonded conditions making it difficult to organise disruptive collective action.

In the agriculture sector, there has been a simultaneous decline in big farms (above 50 acres constituted just 22 percent of the total farm area in the 2010 agrarian census) and continuous dispossession of agrarian communities in the face of rising urbanisation.[2] Thus, the ranks of the rural middle classes who own anywhere between 5–12.5-acre farms, besides leasing more land, has swelled (Jan 2019). Contrary to the traditional peasant concern for land rights and its articulation in the form of leftist politics—the Hashtnagar uprisings of the 1970 and 1980s and the AMP mobilisations in 2000s—the grievances of these new

[1] According to the Labour Force Survey 2018-19, at least three-fourths of the workforce is employed in the informal sector.

[2] Pakistan has the highest urbanization rate in the South Asian region, according to UNDP. The 2017 census data shows urban population to be 36 percent of total population

rural middle classes emerge from the post-1980s liberalisation and deregulation policies: removal of subsidies leading to a rise in cost of crop production (Kadirgamar et al. 2021). This was evident in the only farmer mobilisation to have emerged in the 2010–20 decade, Pakistan 'Kissan Ittehad', where demands concerned state protection against deregulated and liberalised agrarian markets.

Among the more recent social movements, the students and women's activism are rooted in transformations in education and employment trends. Partly because of the privatisation thrust, and partly due to the rising population of young people, tertiary level enrolment rates in the country have jumped from a mere 2.7 percent in 2003 to 12.2 percent in 2020. Thus, a significantly greater share of the 15-24 age cohort is entering the 1,659 degree colleges and 186 universities (up from a handful of 26 in 1998) every year. However, the promotion of education sector on the business model, and the accompanied influx of big capital, has bifurcated the sector into an elite group of institutions accessible to a minority of students entering the tertiary sector every year and the rest imparting lower quality education and preparing graduates who become un- and under-employed with college education.

In contrast, the cohort of students, including a significant proportion of women, proceeding to study abroad or at elite private institutions at home, is more likely to have been exposed to social sciences and humanities education, equipping them with knowledge and skills in critical social and political thought, cultural studies, political economy, alternative histories, and intersectionality of class-, gender- and race- based systems of oppression.[3] The contemporary wave of student activism is led by many from among this group, or by those in sustained interaction with this group as students in universities or colleagues in political parties and students and feminist organisations that have sprung as part of the nascent left-liberal revival in the country.

As a cumulative effect of these changes in the higher education landscape, urban women with college degrees are now thrice more likely than their counterparts with no college education to be in the labour force (World Bank Report). Additionally, 30-year-old women born in the 1990s and 1980s—the cohort leading the contemporary wave of women's activism—have a much higher proportion in the labour force, with 35 percent for the 1990s cohort and 25 percent for the 1980s cohort, compared to 15 percent for those born in the 1970s (the generation in between the currently active generation and the generation that provided the leadership of the 1980s women activism). In short, more women in general, and with college degrees in particular than ever before

[3] In 2019, 48 percent in the outgoing cohort of 159 Fulbright award winners were women, according to Fulbright Program website. According to a World Bank report, the number of students proceeding for higher education to international destinations—on scholarships, fellowships or self-financing—has jumped from 31,156 in 2007 to 51,023 in 2017 (World Bank).

in the country's history, are gainfully employed in a range of professions. This segment is leading the contemporary women's activism.

The struggles for affordable housing in major cities like Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad are rooted in new modes of capitalist accumulation by dispossession of communities from their traditional sources of living and livelihoods. This is a result of changing agrarian land tenures (mentioned above), market-led urbanisation as well as the post-9/11 war economy of formerly tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The dispossessed have amassed in informal and squatter settlements in major cities.

These social and economic changes have transpired alongside the continuity of a neo-colonial political system. In the post 9/11 context, the neo-colonial state structure has manifested in the form of increased securitisation and militarisation of everyday life in the peripheral tribal regions of the KP and Balochistan provinces. Drone strikes, security check-posts, arbitrary raids, continuation of FCR-based collective punishment regime, and enforced disappearances, alongside patronisation of Taliban factions and militias have collectively led to wiping out of traditional and customary political elites (maliks and khans), devastation of local economies, and displacements and internal migrations to urban regions of Punjab and Sindh (Mallick 2019). Resultantly, a new generation of Pushtun youth have come of age with the collective memory of war and its corrosive effects.

Whereas widespread state repression led to a new wave of armed insurgency in Balochistan with a qualitatively different character (led by middle-class and educated youth from Makran coastal region), a parallel non-violent activism has emerged among relatives of the Baloch and others forcibly disappeared by intelligence and security agencies. The grievances of these families bring them in working alliances with similarly aggrieved relatives of those forcibly disappeared, leading to activism that combines exemplary protest with lobbying and advocacy for safe recovery of the disappeared. The impact of the neo-colonial political system continues to be felt most starkly among minority ethnicities in peripheral regions outside the central Punjab districts. However, the civilian-military contradiction has grown to the extent that neo-colonial practices like enforced disappearances and use of sedition and terrorism laws were extended in the 2010-20 decade to these central Punjab districts as well, evident in the extrajudicial detentions and enforced disappearances of bloggers, social media activists and academic activists.

Women's Activism: Disrupting Patriarchal Sensibilities

Until March 8, 2018, International Women's Day (IWD) celebrations had been firmly established in the country as an instance of contained collective action. A usual pre-2018 IWD would feature rallies, seminars, workshops, and assembly resolutions. These events, when organised and attended by rights-based organisations and women activists themselves, would feature commemoration of past achievements, identification of present concerns and vows for future work. This signified quietist and reformist struggles for incremental change. Important as these events were for organisers, activists, and participants, they lacked the power to disrupt and unsettle the various authorities that sustain patriarchal norms and structures.

Since 2018, however, the contained collective activities have given way to an innovative form of public protest and expression, combined with new feminist subjectivities, under the banners of 'Aurat and Aurat Azadi Marches' (AM and AAM). The scale and vibrancy of these marches has increased amid backlash from conservative and far-right segments.

At the FGD, the participants maintained that the post-2018 women's marches should not be seen just as a product of earlier waves of feminist activism or women's movements. While historicizing the marches was important, they noted that like earlier waves of women's activism, the emergence of the contemporary wave was related to issues in the current political environment as well. For instance, several highlighted how they became activists through their associations with leftist politics or that they approached feminism from a leftist perspective. "I was not working just for women, so I arrived at my feminism from a very different lens. I cannot talk about feminist politics without talking about my socialist politics," said an activist with AAM and AWP.

Though organisers and activists leading the current wave come from diverse political backgrounds, and the grievances are peculiar to the contemporary political moment, it is still instructive to note similarities and differences between the contemporary women's marches and the earlier waves of activism.

Firstly, despite generational differences, the organisers of AM/AAM share the same demographic background as the activists who founded the Women's Action Forum (WAF). Both waves were led primarily by the college-educated urban middle-class women—a cohort that has since increased in numbers. This cohort had been politicised against General Zia's discriminatory laws and policies that threatened net gains for women in the public sphere (Saigol 2020, Shaheed 2010, Rouse 1986). In effect, the Islamisation package was a set of legal and administrative tools to control and discipline women's bodies, challenging the personal freedom and dignity won and exercised (most effectively) by the urban educated middle-class women whose mobilisations culminated in WAF formation. Thanks in part to WAF and earlier women's activism and in part to

changing global political and cultural economy imperatives, many of the legal and administrative tools have been reformed over time, and issues like domestic violence and sexual harassment have become part of the policy agenda, with mixed successes (Shaheed 2010). The state-centric activism of WAF and the transnational linkages established between civil society actors like rights NGOs and the UN system has also enabled political reforms that have enhanced women's participation in key decision-making bodies.

Secondly, the AM/AAM has adopted an organisational structure and culture that is similar in ethos to that of the WAF, with differences of form that reflect in varying protest cultures. For instance, like the WAF, AM/AAM brings together non-affiliate individual activists and organisers with affiliated activists (those from hierarchical organisations like the socialist-feminist Women Democratic Front) in loose networks, pursuing a leaderless, horizontalist, and consensus-based decision-making model. Such a model is conducive for event-based annual mobilisations that led to the 8 March activities since it allows extensive deliberation, consultation, and consensus building. Like the WAF's working committee model, the volunteer-based organizing committees for AM and AAM are likely to ensure that those who feel strongly about a particular issue find (organisational) space to work on it, ensuring that the greatest possible grievances pertaining to gender and sexuality can be highlighted. This is evident in extensive and chapter-specific charters of demands or the range of slogans, covering gendered dimensions in topics ranging from trans and reproductive rights to child marriages and access to quality healthcare, public spaces, dignified work, and from social, economic, and environmental justice to an inclusive polity with an end to religious or ethno-nationalist persecution.

Whereas the AM/AAM organisational structure and culture resembles that of WAF in terms of participatory ethos, a key difference concerns varying protest cultures. While WAF working committees and general body meetings ensured participation, its national convention and informal networks for strategizing were similar in substance to the political party model where debate and deliberations among different ideological tendencies by and large remain internal, and only the prevailing views and opinions are made public in the form of press statements or demands from authorities. The lack of any organisational mechanism resembling the WAF national convention means that there is no formalised central authority to steer the strategic direction of internal debates and deliberations at AM/AAM organisational meetings and within its informal networks. So far, this lack of centralised authority has enabled an innovative and disruptive protest culture, enabling the participants at the 2018-onward marches to channelise personal moral shocks into publicly carried out protest performances.

Thus, while WAF activists strived to safeguard the advances in the public domain endangered at the hands of a regressive military-led regime, the AM/AAM mobilisations occur at a time where partially successful legal-political

reforms and public visibility (education, employment) exist in tension with social and cultural reproduction of prevalent patriarchal norms. Misogyny, sexism and attempts to discipline women's bodies have flourished from private TV dramas to university dorm and hostel policies and from workplaces and public spaces and squares to domestic spaces of bedrooms, TV lounges and kitchens, as noted by one of the FGD participants from AAM activists.

Despite the advances in education and employment opportunities or political representation that generate a sense of hope and aspiration for self-development, especially among urban educated middle-class women, the mismatch between expectations and reality leads to moral shock that encourages (AM/AAM) innovative and disruptive protest participation (Jasper, Goodwin and Polletta 2011). Whereas WAF activism was directed at safeguarding public gains, AM/AAM mobilisations have questioned the public-private binary itself. For instance, when women marchers raise slogans concerning sexism and misogyny in intimate and interpersonal affairs on streets and discuss these issues in media, they are not just highlighting grievances concerning the private domain of family and household, they are also signifying the dependence of the public domain of the capitalist economy and the neo-colonial political system on the private domain of the family.

Student Politics: Spectacular Mobilisations and Everyday Activism

Country-wide students' solidarity marches held in November 2019 under the platform of the Students Action Committee (SAC) had rekindled memories of earlier students' mobilisations which had proved precursors to the anti-Ayub and anti-Musharraf movements. However, the extraordinary mobilisations and nation-wide scale of the marches in 2019 remain unmatched by the subsequent marches held in 2020 and 2021. Part of the explanation concerns state-led crackdown on organisers and Covid-19-related precautions. However, the internal organisational structure of the campaign and the broader political-economic context also mattered.

The November 2019 marches took place in the backdrop of a revival of students' activism and campus co-curricular life dating back to the Musharraf-era emergency days. In its initial phase, as part of the broader movement for restoration of judiciary and democracy, private universities like Lahore's LUMS and FAST and public institutions like the National College of Arts (NCA) became hotbeds of democratic activism (Kalra 2017). Whereas the publicly visible activism disappeared with the return of democratic dispensation in 2008, organisational activities continued with efforts on the political left to revive the National Students Federation (NSF) or to form a new Democratic Students Alliance (DSA) more in tune with the global political environment of horizontalist and formally structureless organisations. Alongside, in the post-2008 political environment, organisational efforts have also taken place on the political right and centre with the establishment and reorganisation of students and youth wings of mainstream political parties like PTI, PML-N and PPP as well as the Islamist IJT (Javid 2019). The patronage and clientelist structures provided by their parent political organisations have ensured that these wings continue to reproduce themselves on campuses, often in cahoots with administrations (Javid 2019). Meanwhile, the nascent left-liberal revival continued, with NSF and DSA giving way to the Progressive Students Federation (PSF), an affiliate of the leftist Awami Workers Party (AWP), and the Progressive Students Collective (PSC), an affiliate of Haqooq-e-Khalq Movement (HKM), a loose coordinating platform for various struggles whose genesis goes back to the internal strategy and organisational debates within the AWP.[4] Representatives of these organisations attended the FGD on student activism.

The country-wide students solidarity marches of November 2019 signified a coming together of students' organisations on the political left, featuring PSC

[4] The AWP was formed in 2021 after a merger of three left-leaning parties. Since then, the party has proven instrumental in a nascent left-liberal revival combining electoral politics with social movements. As with any political activity, it has since led to offshoots like HKM in Lahore and the split of a faction that has joined Balochistan-based National Party.

and PSF alongside organisations with long political histories, formed across campuses around minority ethnic identities. The SAC formed as a result featured 28 organisations, coming together under the primary demand of restoration of students' unions, banned across university campuses since the General Zia era. Around this main demand, students expressed a range of grievances—from securitisation and militarisation of campuses, stifling of academic freedoms, criminalisation of cultural expression, and sexual harassment to systemic public divestment from higher education under IMF-mandated austerity, reflected in fee hikes and withdrawal of quotas and subsidies for students from marginalised ethnic backgrounds.

Unlike the SACs formed to coordinate students' efforts with wider struggles against Ayub and Musharraf dictatorial regimes, the SAC of November 2019 was formed in the context of a hybrid regime, when democratic rights and civil liberties exist de jure with de facto authoritarianism. Thus, in the absence of broad-based anti-dictatorship campaigns that its predecessors worked with, the SAC of November 2019 was tasked with building and sustaining a campaign singularly on its own, and in the context of authoritarianism of campus administrations and political regime. That it is a structurally difficult task for a coordinating body of students lacking patronage of the sort available to well-resourced student wings of mainstream and Islamist parties to sustain nation-wide mobilisations is a foregone conclusion. However, two additional factors militated against sustaining spectacular mobilisations of the kind witnessed in 2019. Firstly, the organisational structure of SACs as umbrella coordinating bodies requires extensive consultation and deliberation for consensus formation. Given the different mandates of the constituent organisations and their affiliates (hierarchical parties like AWP, loose con-federational structures like HKM, and ethnically identified student bodies with regional grievances), consultation and deliberation are bound to take place on tactics, strategy and ideological positionings. Secondly, state repression and the availability of everyday forms of activism to counter it and to build organisational capacities are likely to also divert campaigners' energies, impacting their ability to sustain spectacular mobilisations.

These factors were evident in the aftermath of the November marches when organisers faced backlash in the form of sedition charges (a colonial era law) and sacking from academic teaching jobs (an example of how neoliberal techniques like contractual hiring can be used to stifle constitutional freedoms). One of the organisers detained on sedition was bailed out after a concerted media and legal defence campaign that continued for four months until April 2020.[5] Alongside, campus-specific issues like fee hikes, withdrawal of quotas, online examination and other Covid-19-related concerns also transpired in the wake of the 2019

[5] https://www.dawn.com/news/1519531 and https://www.dawn.com/news/1661946

marches, requiring everyday forms of activism like protests, demonstrations, delegation visits and meetings with authorities, etc. Meanwhile, the constituent organisations that come together in the SAC have been holding study circles and cultural activities to build organisational capacities, and individual activists have been pursuing academic and professional (on graduation) excellence endeavours (at least one of the student organisers of the 2019 march and a university teacher sacked over participation in the march have since proceeded to pursue graduate education in North American universities on prestigious fellowships; several student organisers have since graduated and are now gainfully employed).

Thus, spectacular mobilisations of November 2019 were an outcome of specific institutional histories that dated back to the 2007-09 revival of student politics. As an immediate precursor, mass-scale collaborative and organisational efforts went underway to make the marches possible. The SAC formed as a result pursues the primary aim of restoration of students' unions, within the confines of its organisational structure of a national level coordinating body of 28 organisations, and alongside everyday forms of activism required to counter repressive tactics of authorities or to build organisational and individual capacities. Thus, the relative decline of mobilisation in the 2020 and 2021 marches is neither a sign of inactivity nor that of lack of popularity of the main demand. Rather, it is a testament to the long-drawn-out nature of such campaigns which remain active and alive through abeyance structures (constituent organisations and their network through the SAC) and everyday forms of activism and can re-mobilise again as long as the status quo continues to prevail.

Evictions and Displacements: Movements Reclaiming the Right to the City

On 12 December 2021, a climate action march in Karachi became newsworthy as paramilitary Rangers and police forces set up pickets, preventing participants from proceeding to the Bilawal House, the headquarters of the ruling Pakistan People's Party in the Sindh province. Among participants were activists from leftist political parties and civil society groups and alliances, whose grievances concerned mass evictions and displacements of human communities and erosion of natural and built habitats under the prevalent neoliberal urbanisation model.

The hallmark of the neoliberal urbanisation model is that it is dictated by the market logic (Bayat 2013). Thus, urban land development for residential and other purposes occurs through influx of capital, reducing the role of public authorities like Karachi's various development authorities (DAs) to mere facilitators, that is when they are not themselves implicated with big capital as in the case of the military-owned Defence Housing Authorities (DHAs). Under such market logic, shelter and other basic needs are reduced to commodities to be traded in various markets at a price, and rights-bearing citizens become consumers, customers, or buyers in these markets (Brown 2017).

This state-as-facilitator model clashes with the state-as-guarantor-of-citizenship-rights, since urban development is bound to bring the interests of big capital and its beneficiaries among political and economic elites and upwardly mobile middle classes into conflict with the interests of the urban poor and disenfranchised groups. In Karachi, this clash of interests has recently played out on the following issues: revamping the city's sewage and drainage infrastructure, the construction of a circular city rail system, and expansion and development of road infrastructure like the Malir Expressway. Alongside these issues, the federal government plans to develop two islands off the city's coast that are central to the coastal mangrove ecosystem. The continuous process of urban sprawl, under an alliance of big capital and political classes, has also generated contention. The clash of various urban interests has been evident in the case of *katchi abadi* (slum settlement) evictions in Islamabad and Lahore as well.

The organisers of the 11 December climate march represented a nation-wide network of networked activists and organisations based across the urban and political hubs of Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad-Rawalpindi. The networks that comprise the wider inter-city network of urban activists features: (i) case- and site-specific networks of affected communities like the Malir Expressway Affected Committee, (ii) leftist political parties and coordinating platforms and their affiliate students and women's organisations that form the backbone of the Karachi Bachao Tehrik (KBT), (ii) new feminist initiatives like AM/AAM and climate change and environment related initiatives like Green Pakistan Coalition, (iii) institutionalised actors in civil society like rights-based NGOs or

philanthropic and charitable platforms that come together in the case of Karachi under a Joint Action Committee (JAC), and finally, (iv) individuals in journalism, academia, rights watchdogs. That such a network of networks exists is evident through the multi-sited campaigns underway to seek redress for communities affected from possible evictions in Gujjar, Orangi and Manzoor colonies along Karachi's various stormwater drains or those along the KCR and Malir Expressway routes. Firstly, these campaigns are underway in courts through public interest litigations (the AWP petition) or in suo motu proceedings (the SC action that led to mass evictions). Secondly, the affected communities, as part of the wider networks, have used physical public spaces of streets and squares, or cyberspaces of social media platforms to demonstrate their grievances and solidarity. Thirdly, the contemporary struggles against evictions and displacements or for affordable housing have featured a novel counter-power move, through knowledge generation and dissemination activities, facilitated by activist researchers, academics, and journalists. Contrary to the use of knowledge to govern populations, as noted by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, the knowledge generated through community-based surveys, mapping, and longform reporting in this instance, has been used in the service of ordinary people and communities.

In short, these multi-sited campaigns signify a series of contained and disruptive collective action that have over time continued to reform further the neo-colonial state institutions to create some legally and constitutionally sanctioned spaces for grievance redress. Examples of such reform are the 5-marla housing societies initiative of Bhutto era or the subsequent establishment of *katchi abadi* directorates, cells, or wings, tasked with regularisation of slums in cities like Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad.

Notwithstanding these incremental changes, the state continues to retain apparatuses (like development authorities) that follow the interests of big capital and political elites, on the one hand, and the neoliberal logic of urbanisation continues to be the dominant framework. This means that even when redress and relief may come through legal and constitutional channels in the form of resettlement or monetary compensations, it may end up dividing rather than uniting the affected communities, as mentioned by one of the participants at the FGD. An activist Zahid Farooq from the Urban Resource Centre maintained that organizing communities remained a challenge. He said, "We secured 50 signatures [from an affected settlement] on a petition submitted to the National Commission for Human Rights for housing rights. None of the signatories showed up at the day of the hearing."

It is important that the difficulty of organizing affected communities be understood as rooted in structural factors, like informal and precarious livelihood situations prevent many to take time out for activism beyond moments of imminent threat or the histories of dispossession that have brought

together these communities. Thus, divisions among affected communities must not be taken as natural or primordial, even when they are expressed through ethnic or linguistic identities as in the case of Karachi. Divisions emerge from structural logic of slum development. For instance, a common dynamic observed in slum development across global south cities is the presence of local thugs, strongmen, or gang leaders who engage in land grabbing and settling practices (Davis 2006). These strongmen use connections in low-level state bureaucracies to shield communities and populations from state action and enable them to seek incremental development of their shacks or huts into concrete structures without bare minimum amenities. Often, it is from these strongmen that patronage politicians emerge, bargaining vote banks for public services. Thus, rather than reflecting primordial differences, ethno-linguistic divisions emerge from very functionalist identification among local strongmen political patrons and their urban poor clientele.

That the neoliberal logic remains the dominant framework for urbanisation extends beyond state and patronage politics—into the realms of culture and economy. It has thus institutionalised speculative real estate markets that sustain a range of livelihoods in urban construction and consumer services sectors. These livelihoods range from developers and managers of real estate firms or owners of urban consumer service concerns like restaurants, chain stores, shopping malls on the top of the income and asset pyramid, to a whole array of actors like brokers, dealers, investors, construction contractors, interior designers, retail and wholesale traders, the army of manual workers at these establishments as well as the upwardly mobile or aspirational middle classes who pursue their home owning and dwelling dreams through speculative ventures. The material interests of these disparate segments are firmly tied to the neoliberal logic of urbanisation, and it is these interests that get expressed in cultures of conspicuous consumption or pursuit of desires cultivated through these cultures. Thus, political activists and human and natural communities and populations affected by evictions and displacements are faced not just with the coercive power of the state apparatus and big capital reflected in the bulldozers that raze settlements. Arguably more insidious aspect of evictions and displacements is the soft power of the neoliberal logic that works through cultivation of desires and sensibilities, which prevent vast segments of not just the middle classes but also those employed in precarious jobs in informal economies from associating with the plight of the urban poor communities.

It is against this backdrop, described in detail at the FGD, that the social movements that involve mass evictions and displacement of the urban poor must be seen.

Anti-Austerity Struggles by Public-Sector Workers

Public-sector workers including clerical staff in federal and provincial bureaucracies, entry-level doctors and women health workers have a long tradition of associational work and activism, including going on strikes in support of better service structures including promotion rules, pay increases and pension concerns. From the organised fronts of the Young Doctors Association (YDA, formed following a country-wide strike in 2011), Lady Health Workers Associations (LHWA, active since 2010) and All Government Employees Grand Alliance and All Pakistan Clerks Association (APCA), these workers have taken to the streets and occupied public squares multiple times in the 2010-20 decade with sit-ins met with state coercion tactics like deployment of riot policing. These struggles are a direct consequence of the fiscal austerity policies imposed on the country in the backdrop of a bloated military budget and soaring public debt. With defence and debt repayment together taking up between 50-60 percent of the country's budget allocations, the fiscal space has progressively shrunk for key social sectors like public health and education or for paying salaries of public employees.

A key element underlying these disparate, yet interrelated, struggles of public-sector workers has been the unionisation right which unites these struggles in principle with the broader labour or trade union movement. As stated earlier, the labour movement in the country has suffered in the wake of the broader transition towards a neoliberal policy regime. The national economy has progressively shifted towards informal modes of operation with the decline of big manufacturing sector and the rise of the producer and consumer services sector. The workplaces in these latter services are a far cry from the prototypical factory, often located inside domestic spaces as in the case of home-based workers or in retail and wholesale markets. The scale of informality is compounded by the fact that the agriculture sector—the biggest employer of labour—continues to be treated as an essential service, barring workers in this sector from forming unions. In Sindh, however, an exception has been created to this legal norm by granting the unionisation right to workers of this sector (PILER report). Even within the formally recognised workplaces, including big industries, the employers deploy a range of tactics to prevent workers from forming unions, including flexible hiring arrangements through sub-contracting practices, and forming sham unions that exist on paper only or are manned by personal staff (Mallick 2020). Sub-contracting allows them to hire most workers on temporary contracts, keeping a very small number as permanent employees, a tactic that prevents workers from meeting the minimum numbers required for union formation. Whereas these tactics enable employers to evade legal provisions for workers' welfare, key legal mechanisms like labour inspections, that can allow state apparatuses concerned like Labour Departments to detect such wrongdoing, remain suspended for the most part (Akhtar 2011).

The political and economic tactics are often accompanied, particularly in home-based workplaces, with gendered tactics and divisions where women's work is valued less than that of men. The net result is that only about three percent of the country's workforce of 68.73 percent, as per the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2018-19, is unionised. Thus, contrary to how Pakistan Bureau of Statistics defines it or how it is understood in popular parlance, informal sector is neither about the number of workers formally employed nor about formal recognition of firms or workplaces. Instead, informality in this instance is better understood as a mode of economic management featuring class- and gender-based tactics and strategies under which employees and government officials collude to prevent workers from exercising the right to form unions (Roy 2005).

To make matters worse from the standpoint of labour as a collective actor, the fraction of the workplace that is unionised has been fragmented due to political party patronage or factionalism in union leadership. This is evident from the fact that there exist at least 25 federations across the various key labour force sectors (power utilities, railways, ports and shipping, textiles, etc.). These include the National Labour Federation affiliated with the Islamist Jamaat Islami and the National Trade Union Federation which has managed to remain independent of any mainstream party with an avowedly Marxist leadership cadre. Against these odds, it is hardly surprising that the most spectacular mobilisations on austerity policies in the 2010-20 decade have been undertaken by public-sector employees with organised power in the form of YDA, LHWA, and APCA.

Anti-Authoritarian Activism: The PTM and Activism Against Enforced Disappearances

The most spectacular and disruptive mobilisations in the year 2018 was by the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). Beginning as a modest long march towards Islamabad by Mehsud youth from Dera Ismail Khan, the numbers at the caravan grew exponentially after the news of extrajudicial killing of an aspiring social media model from Karachi, Naqeebullah Mehsud. At Islamabad, the march culminated in an 11-day sit-in that became a platform for expression of long-suppressed grievances of a war-torn people. The sit-in highlighted a key schism between an old generation 'tribal elders' and a new generation of young, educated middle and lower-middle class Pashtun men and women who were now in firm command of the mass gathered at the Islamabad Press Club. The young refused to end the sit-in on the call of the tribal elders, who left the gathering on the seventh day after meetings and verbal assurances from the government. The young and the mass in their command stayed back till the 11th day when the government agreed in writing to proceed against Naqeebullah's killer SSP Rao Anwar and to start working on removal of landmines left across the tribal districts' geography as a legacy of the war. Besides these two specific promises, the government offered generic assurances only.

Concluding the sit-in, the 22-year-old Manzoor Pashteen, who had by then emerged as the face of the PTM, maintained that they reserved the right to return [to protest] if the state does not deliver on the assurances. Indeed, Pashteen and the young Pushtun public returned to roads and public squares several times that year. Their gatherings in Lahore and Karachi became a battle of nerves between the state apparatuses and the mobilised Pushtun women and men.

Whereas Naqeebullah's extrajudicial killing became the key juncture for public expression of grievances around disappearances, dispossession, harassment, and violence from a decades-long war thrust upon their homelands, it was in the slow violence of the everyday life of displaced Pushtun communities in refugee settlements (for IDPs) and urban slum communities like Karachi's Sohrab Goth that these grievances shaped a new collective consciousness. "One of my [displaced] aunts could not survive the seclusion and the loneliness in exile because there was no one around her she could talk to in Pashtu," recalled by Pashteen during the FGD.

Away from their homelands where a straitjacketed state nationalism had brought war to their communities, these youth went to educational institutions and workplaces where their ethno-linguistic cultures were demonised. Well before the 2018 mobilisations, their disparate everyday experiences had brought these youth together in ethnic councils at university campuses, community-based mutual aid initiatives, or in online communities aided by the newfound ease of

communication through digital technologies and social media platforms. Faced with state repression through arrests, censorship in mainstream media and even killings, it was these on- and offline networks that kept together the young Pushtun public around a newfound collective consciousness.

Like women mobilisations discussed earlier, the PTM also faces the difficult task of sustaining mobilisation in the face of a status quo resistant to change; this includes a complete blackout on mainstream media. The difficulty is compounded by the peculiar combination of revolutionary mobilisations and reformatory methods for change, a trend evident in the contemporary global wave of anti-austerity and anti-authoritarian mobilisations (Bayat 2017). To clarify, the PTM's mobilisational repertoires have been revolutionary: sit-ins and protests organised in real time following instances of extrajudicial violence by security officials or militias, as well as spectacular marches and public assemblies involving battles of nerves with state functionaries. At these activities, a collective effervescence conducive for solidarity building is generated through slogans, anthems and testimonies that strike at the heart of the neo-colonial state and its complicity with the global imperial order. Faced with massive state repression and threat, the mobilisations have endured, evident in the way the charged public waited at the Karachi 'jalsa' in 2019 for over seven hours as Pashteen and other leaders drove across the country to get to the venue after their flight was cancelled, or in the way the young men and women cleared the Lahore rally venue (earlier that year) of filth and sewage water dumped into the compound as a last minute tactic by the authorities to stop the rally. And yet, this revolutionary mobilisation accompanies a reformatory approach to change insofar as the PTM leadership urges the state to reform itself by honouring the social contract (constitution) that ties it to the Pakistani people. This is where the state's internal contradictions become relevant insofar as the bulk of the grievances for which the PTM seeks redress are owed either to the military establishment's intervention in the political process, or to the civilian political elites' tacit compliance for the perpetuation of a political order under which the ex-FATA territories became exceptional spaces and battle zones. Redress in this instance would require nothing short of a radical rupture from the status quo, and modern state institutions are by design resistant to such radical ruptures. For instance, the criminal justice system of modern states is built around the principle of due process of law, which is at best suitable for redress of individual violations. In the case of PTM, we are dealing with systemic violations of human rights and commission of war crimes which require transitional justice mechanisms, evident in one of the PTM demands for constitution of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

With the year of spectacular mobilisations behind it, the PTM has since evolved into two distinct yet inter-related trajectories: one faction representing the voice of the lower-middle- and working-class youth in the PTM leadership seeks to continue the 'movement', while the other faction based upon the upper-middle

class segment of the leadership (from families of Maliks who resisted the Taliban and were brutalised by Taliban and state alike) seeks a political party form. Giving voice to the former tendency, Manzoor Pashteen insists, "We are a movement of the aggrieved Pashtun. If we form a political party, we will lose support of other parties. [Pashtun] national solidarity will get sidestepped by sectional interests." The latter faction highlights 'the tyranny of structure-lessness' that prevents nurturing of democracy internally and sustenance of collective action beyond phases of spectacular mobilisation. A PTM activist forced into exile in the US, highlighted, "We must assess our internal strengths and biases at this point. Is the PTM open to diversity within its ranks?" Are women welcome into the PTM only when they are victims or also when they are empowered and have critiques of issues like patriarchy and male dominance within our ranks?"

New Media Technologies: More Platforms and Voices, New Challenges

The mobilisations documented here have relied upon the new media and communication technologies for building solidarities and extending and strengthening their networks across aggrieved demographics. Yet, the organisers and activists have also noted new issues that emerge with the new media.

On the one hand, social media have been instrumental in mobilisations in the face of widespread censorship in mainstream media. This has been evident in live streams of protests watched by thousands of dispersed supporters and sympathisers or in efforts like community-based fund-raising. Besides, social media have also proved an avenue of accountability of authorities whose presence on these platforms can be leveraged to elicit responses in times of crisis or repression. To an extent, this was evident in the backlash faced by Aurat March activists but its most clear example comes from the disappearance of six bloggers and an activist from Lahore. The campaign for their safe return was helped by social media platforms. Lastly, notwithstanding the benefits for collective action of shared presence in physical space, the contemporary mobilisations are a product of a different time and space. Unlike their predecessors, the precarious youth and fragmented working classes discussed in the previous section are entangled in forms of employment that don't offer all of them the same opportunities to be together in physical spaces (like factories). Similarly, the transformed spatial characteristics of megacities like Karachi and Lahore and metropolitan regions like Islamabad and Rawalpindi have hampered mobility and accessibility for these precarious and fragmented classes. Social media platforms help bridge these gaps.

On the downside, activists and academics alike point to issues of clickbait activism, trolling and harassment, and exposure to authorities and opponents. Clickbait activism is prone to sensationalism and averse to serious debate and conversation. It may help with spontaneous mobilisations, but it is not ideal for sustaining the momentum of such mobilisations. Researchers on Occupy movements have noted how this attribute of social media platforms has prevented strengthening of solidarities beyond a core group of activists (Tufekci 2017). Clickbait activism combines with the issues of trolling and harassment in the rise of a new genre of sensational journalism, particularly among right-wing ideologues, as pointed out in the FGD on women's activism by a LUMS professor and Lahore AM activist. This form of journalism is thin on editorial oversight and operates as a vehicle for propaganda against those with opposing views and ideas. Finally, a lesser noted downside of social media concerns the unprecedent exposure it brings for activists and mobilisers. The structure of social media platforms is conducive to this insofar as these platforms breed on sharing of personal information.

The downsides of the new media ought not to lead to cynicism since the contemporary activism scene also features concerted efforts to confront issues like cyber harassment, trolling, security, etc., through the establishment of citizen-and activist-led regulatory oversight. Thus, following the lead of such activists, the new communication technologies enabled by social media platforms ought to be seen as new opportunities, requiring new norms and habits.

Organisational Models: Vanguard Party or Horizontalist Movement

Like elsewhere, activists and organisers in Pakistan face a key choice concerning intra-organisational structures and cultures. They confront the dilemma of picking between centralised-vanguardist organisations (resembling the traditional political party form) or decentralised-horizontalism (movements). This choice emerges in the backdrop of the twentieth century history of the political left. For much of the century, the political left had followed a vanguardist model which was instrumental for building dual power and state takeover in revolutionary episodes. A clear chain of command made these models suitable for swift action in times of regime crisis, enabling parties like Bolsheviks in Soviet Union or outfits like Sandinistas in Nicaragua to take over state power from crumbling regimes. However, and notwithstanding the impact of counter-revolutionary and imperialist forces, the centralizing tendencies of the vanguardist model were averse to a culture of openness, debate, and deliberation (Goodwin 2015). Thus, vanguardist organisation enabled state takeover and its use for social and economic welfare purposes. But this diversion of state institutions away from narrow elite interests came about with a stifling of the civil society. By and large, a narrow view of class cleavage (with a singular reference to factory labour) prevailed with complete disregard and worsening of gender and ethno-racial cleavages. Against this backdrop, horizontalist organisational frameworks became widespread since the 1960s global wave of students, women, environmental and LGBTQ activism.

In the wake of the post-2008 global wave of protest, enough evidence is available for critical evaluation of the horizontalist framework too. It highlights that while formally structureless, horizontalist organisations are unlikely to remain over and above informal structures of power around friendship networks and core groups (Freeman 2013). Such internal groupings may not appear too harmful in the public protest phase of activism, where different groups can highlight their grievances and varying political tendencies (liberal vs socialist feminism, for instance) can work together. However, when it comes to picking one course of political action over another, or one campaign to focus collective energies over another, collectives must prioritise some grievances and political tendencies over other. This was evident in the WAF's relative lack of attention to the intersection of class and gender, or the class question in general (Saigol 2020), which has since the 1980s been taken up more directly by socialist-feminist organisations like the Home-Based Working Women's Federation (HBWWF).

Thus, rather than seeing it as a choice between the two models, a better approach may be to integrate their strengths and avoid their weaknesses. Firstly, notwithstanding the centralizing tendencies, a key strength of vanguardism was that it had an ideological vanguard of committed and core activists. Thus, shunning the centrism where decision-making power is concentrated among

insufficiently accountable organisational elites, contemporary mobilisations may benefit from democratisation of the vanguard itself and a combination of dual-power-for-state-takeover with dual-power-in-society. Such a strategy seeks to institute counter hegemony in societal institutions and psychic spaces, without losing sight of the important fact highlighted in our session with public intellectuals by academic-activist Dr Ammar Ali Jan that state institutions continue to matter. These tendencies are already evident among contemporary activists with the flourishing of activities like study circles where ideas are discussed and debated, and collective consciousness shaped. Secondly, horizontalist organisations have a clear advantage of allowing the widest possible grievances to come to the centre-stage. Dr Ali Raza a history professor at LUMS also participating in the session with public intellectuals, said, "I find it remarkable that contemporary struggles like the PTM feature aspects like democratisation of testimony. The aggrieved people have been able to share the platform at PTM gatherings to express their grievances themselves, rather than the leaders speaking on their behalf." Together, democratisation of the vanguard and dual power in society strategies can ensure that the organisational structures espouse a culture that values ideological commitment and strategic action without compromising on internal critique.

Spectacular Mobilisations and Everyday Struggles

As a legacy of twentieth 20th century political history, there is a tendency to dichotomise revolutionary and reformist politics as two distinct modes of political praxis. In this vein, revolutionary politics is reduced to spectacular mobilisations undertaken by vanguardist organisations or people's committees with an aim for state takeover. Reformism, on the other hand, is taken to mean gradual change through advocacy, lobbying, education, etc., from within the existing state and societal institutions. Contemporary spectacular mobilisations (in Pakistan and elsewhere) and disparate modes of everyday protest politics have shown that a dichotomous understanding may be beneficial from an analytical standpoint, but in the midst of struggles, the two modes have a dialectical relation, and they act in tandem (Bayat 2021). Spectacular mobilisations emerge out of everyday struggles, and in their ability to disrupt the routine and the status quo, these mobilisations may lead to social and political change which may render some struggles irrelevant (i.e., grievances are addressed), but the new political environment is bound to have new cleavages and their attendant forms of everyday struggles. Thus, the iconic 1983 protest of women activists against Zia's Hudood Ordinances in Lahore had emerged out of a threat felt by educated and gainfully employed women to their wellbeing (an everyday-life issue) from Islamisation policies. Subsequently, the formation of WAF and its peculiar strategies of incremental and institutionalised action has transformed the civil society landscape for women which is nothing short of revolutionary in its impact.

These achievements have rendered some struggles (formal political representation, for instance) redundant, while also generating possibilities for new struggles (to defend gains in the face of far-right backlash). In similar vein, the spectacular mobilisations that led to the rise of the PTM emerged from everyday experiences of marginalisation, harassment, war, and its violence. The dialectic of revolutionary mobilisation and everyday struggle is evident most clearly in the case of housing and workplace struggles of the urban precariat. Amid spatial segregation of their slum and squatter settlements and flexible modes of employment in informal economies, mobilisations are often tenable for the fragmented precariat only in the face of immediate threat of evictions and displacements. Apart from those extraordinary moments, the everyday of routine life has its own struggles around securing housing and maintaining utilities like power and piped water or retaining jobs. Even though trade unionism stands fundamentally altered in the wake of informalisation, any attempts at organizing the fragmented mass of urban precariat is going to necessarily require everyday forms of activism as well.

Connecting the Dots: From Progressive Movements to Progressive Change

The protagonists of the various social movements discussed here come neither from the traditional bases of the labour movements (factory workers) nor from that of peasants struggles (small peasantry). Instead, most spectacular social movements in the decade have been led by a new generation of educated youth resembling the precariat or middle-class poor categories (Bayat 2017, Standing 2007). The distinguishing aspect of this demographic is its middle-class aspirations without the attendant opportunities and environment to realise these aspirations. These youth are often pushed to activism in the backdrop of austerity-stricken economies, authoritarian states and patriarchal societies.

With those in the lead of mobilisations occupying a novel positionality resembling precarity or middle-class poverty, the mass that these activists and organisers have sought to mobilise has also transformed from the conventional understanding of the social bases of organised labour and peasantry. The widespread informality of the economy has fragmented the working class and its organisations (trade unions), leaving the revolutionary subject of the 19th and early 20th century struggles mostly with everyday forms of resistance or quiet encroachments (squatting, vending in streets, strategic compliance with economic and political patrons for survival). Herein lies the challenge for the contemporary anti-austerity and anti-authoritarian struggles: how to rethink the communication and organisational models and political action repertoires in ways that organically bind the educated middle-class yet precariat youth in the lead roles and the fragmented working classes in a unified struggle that offers cognitive and affective tools to articulate apparently distinct but actually closely inter-linked grievances—at workplaces and residential spaces, or of women, students, ethnic minorities, aggrieved families of forcibly disappeared, etc. Dr Jan's concluding remark at one of the FGDs echoed this imperative, "The status quo is itself changing rapidly. The point is what direction can we [the activists] give to it."

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