Of Disposable People and Discarded Things
A Commentary on Sohail Zuberi's *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*[1]

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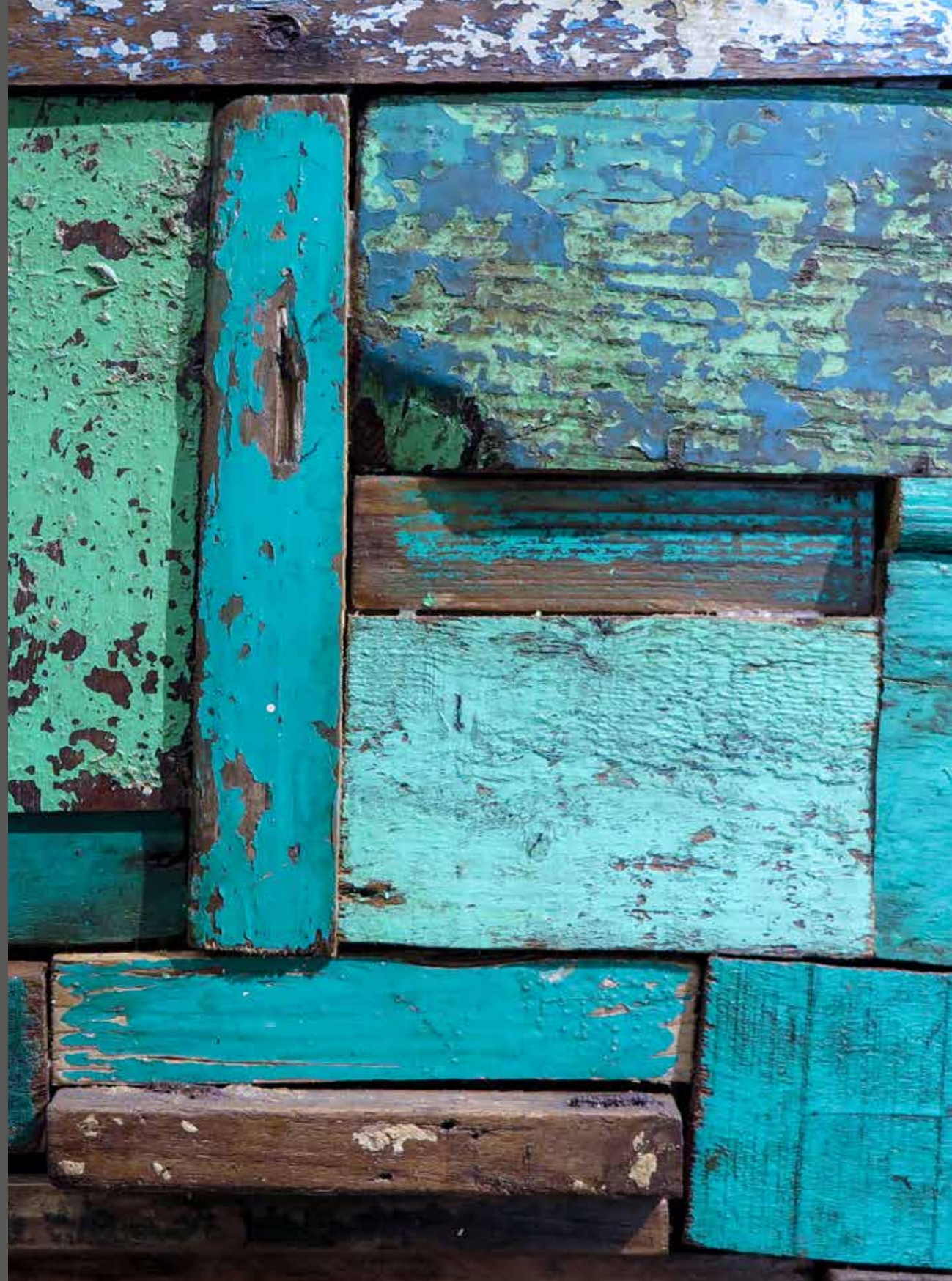


> Where fishers used to seek the fish
> the barren sand-dunes lie;
> Fish-sellers ruined, the river dry;
> and tax collector gone
>
> —Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai[2]

Like every other city, Karachi is a palimpsest of overlapping histories and disjointed temporalities, where each new claim to ownership threatens to obliterate past voices under a pile of rubble. Here, the tyranny of the present might only be a bit more uninhibited than usual. Just ask the dead in their last abode—these coveted pieces of land arousing the envy of ruthless developers. Even the founding mother of the city and her brave sons are not safe from these acts of erasure. While, according to legend, Mai Kolachi lays in a small graveyard in the Boulton Market area, the tombs of the seven brothers are barely surfacing at the feet of a flyover in Gulbai Chowk, ready to be devoured at any time by a foe even more formidable than the one defeated by the valiant Mororo. A few years ago, the seven tombs were demolished to make way for the said flyover. Various protesters—Sindhi nationalists, PPP leaders, fishermen, and other residents of fisherfolk communities from Ibrahim Hyderi to Keamari—then gathered at the roundabout to protest this "conspiracy" against Sindh's heritage. The mobilisation paid off and the graves were restored—a temporary respite until the next onslaught of developers erase all traces of the heroic fishermen.

The narrow stretch of beach where Karachi-based artist Sohail Zuberi has been collecting his "archaeological relics" over the past seven years is this palimpsest in miniature. Already a quasi-private space, earmarked for upscale urban "development" by the Defence Housing Authority (DHA), it is one of these sites where the triumphant narrative of the world-class city showcases itself on the ruins of dissenting life forms and pre-capitalist economies.

For Zuberi, what began as banal Sunday strolls gradually evolved into an inventory of the material and animal remains regurgitated by the sea, the leftovers of nocturnal libations, and other remnants of an urban civilisation choking on its own garbage. This process of weekly accumulation, initially haphazard and unsystematic, gradually became more ordered when he started classifying first the images taken with his cellphone, and later the found objects. This nomenclature of discarded things became the basis for his 2018 exhibition *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*, comprising photographs, artefacts, and installations organised around these classifications and thematic entries: pieces from capsized boats and snapshots of visiting crowds, alluding to the beach as a place of recreation and economic activity; liquor bottles, referring to the beach as a sanctuary for those escaping the stiff moral order of the city; images of religious texts, prayer caps, skulls of sacrificed cows and goats, talismans, Shia *alams*, pieces of silken cloth used to cover graves in shrines, *rehels* (wooden stands on which the Holy Quran is read), and other artefacts hinting at the importance of the sea as a burial site in Pakistani society; pictures of dead turtles, dolphins, stingrays, or jellyfish, exploring a conception of the sea as a place of death and decay; and photographs of the copious amount of rubbish littering the beach on an everyday basis, serving as a reminder that the sea is also a major place of garbage disposal in this great port city.

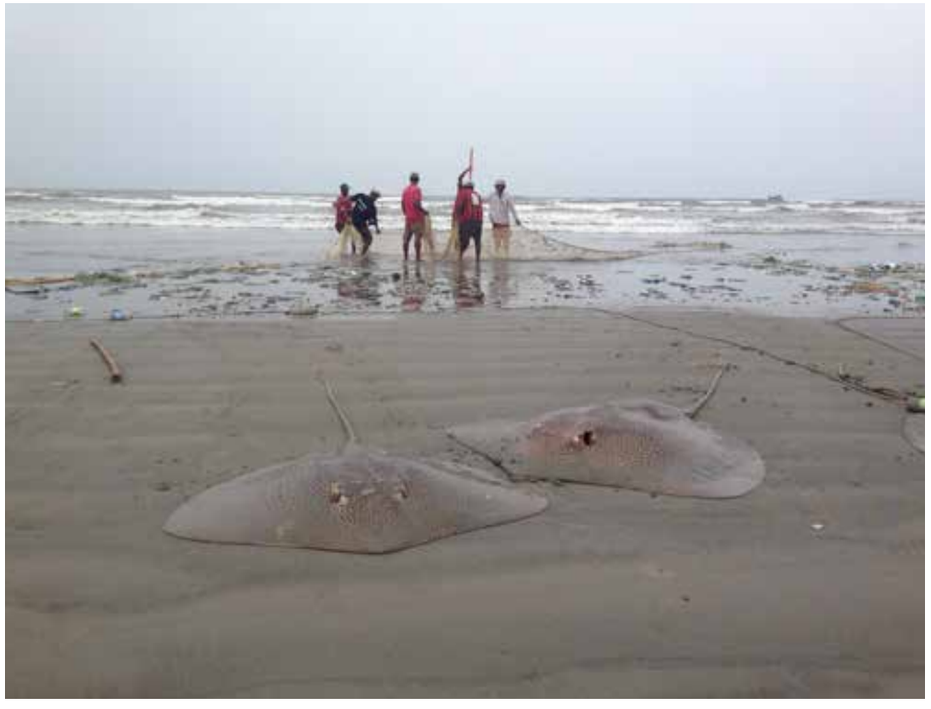
Nostalgic fantasies of urban cleansing, which so often inform the relationship of Karachi's elites with their city and its allegedly pristine past, are strikingly absent from Zuberi's work. Neither does this "archaeological" project amount to a melancholic engagement with the frailty of all things. By collecting and photographing these remains while documenting the rapid transformation of Karachi's coastal environment, Zuberi collapses temporalities, excavating the future of a lifeworld plagued by the sense of its own obsolescence. In Larissa Sansour's 2015 video work, *In the Future they Ate from the Finest Porcelain*, which explores a similarly paradoxical grammar, the "narrative terrorist" proclaims that:

> We are depositing facts in the ground for future archaeologists to excavate. These facts will confirm the existence of this people we are positing, and in turn support any descendants' claims to the land, de facto creating a nation.[3]

In Zuberi's work, the archaeological becoming of the present operates differently: tomorrow has a much more dystopian quality and garbage, as relic-in-the-making, anticipates the discarding and eventually the obliteration of entire populations unfit for the world-class city. This forensic archaeology of the future attests of an incipient death-world—a necropolitical order where the boundless violence of sovereignty encounters the power of erasure of capital to produce what Achille Mbembe describes as "a form of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead".[4]

The small-time fishermen setting their nets off Sahil Beach—most of them residents of Gizri—are already living on borrowed time. In days of waterfront redevelopment and industrial overfishing, they have been turned into an anachronism. During the past decade, the resources of the sea have been depleted by fishing trawlers sweeping the seabed with their wire nets and disrupting the marine food chain by trapping the smaller fish, which often ends up as poultry feed. Already, the *sua*, *mongra* and *surmaai*—local varieties of fish which used to be found in abundance in the waters of the Arabian Sea until recently—have nearly disappeared.[5] In his famous take on the legend of Mai Kolachi, the great Sindhi poet Shah Abdul Latif envisions a bazaar without fish-smell, where the buyers return empty-handed and the fishermen face starvation. This nightmarish vision could soon become a permanent reality against a background of general indifference.

Through glimpses of the city yet to come, Sohail Zuberi alerts us to a catastrophe in the making.



Sohail Zuberi, *2 October 2016* (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)

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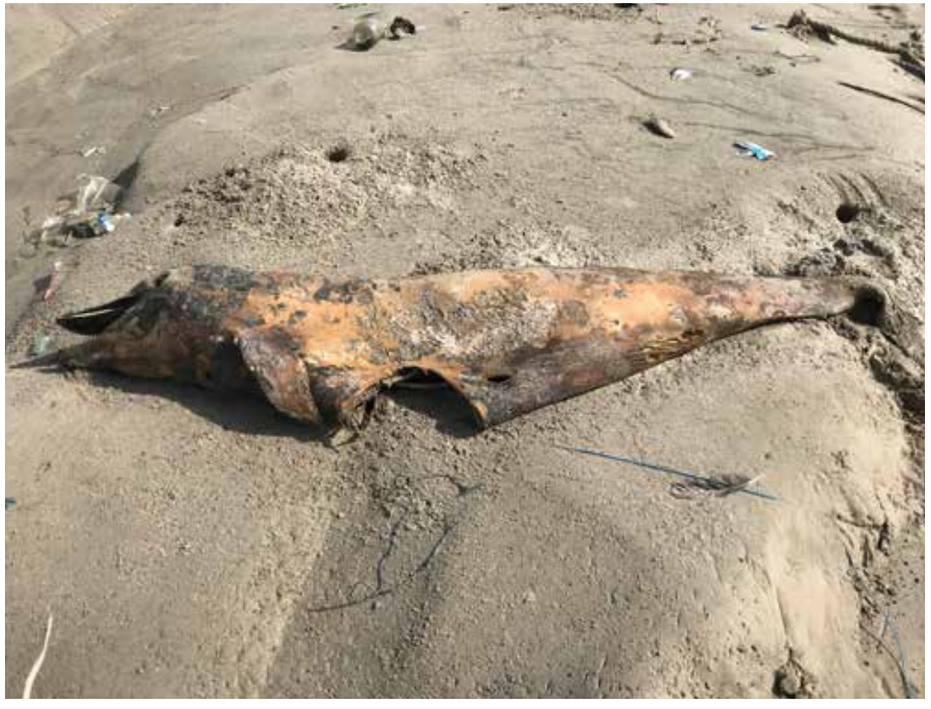
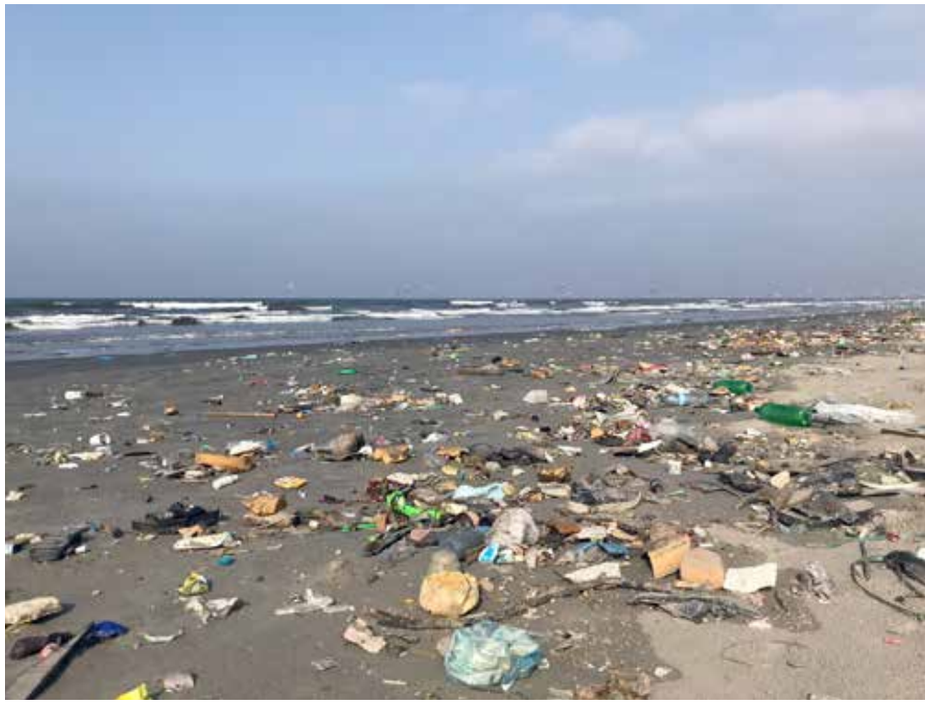
(Page 17) Detail of *Seascape*, Koel Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan

Credit: Sohail Zuberi, 2018, found painted wood (2013-2018), glue, and plywood with wooden frame, 91cm H x 183cm L x 10cm W. (Photo by Omer Wasim)



Sohail Zuberi, *5 March 2017* (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)

Sohail Zuberi, *20 November 2016* (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)



Sohail Zuberi, *15 October 2017* (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)

This will be a city of concrete, built on the aggregation of capital and coercion—a deadly mix that will only harden over time, wreaking havoc over the city's fragile ecology and dispossessing the most vulnerable populations of their lands and livelihoods. In this chronicle of Sahil Beach's foretold destruction, concrete is both a tangible aggregate, binding materials together to produce (infra)structures, and a powerful metaphor of urban processes. This palpable engagement with abstraction, along with its collapsing of temporalities and tonalities, infuses Zuberi's work with a fruitful tension. While winding through documentary and reverie, it never loses track of its central theme: the catastrophic instantiation of Karachi's future.

Of Refuge and Refuse

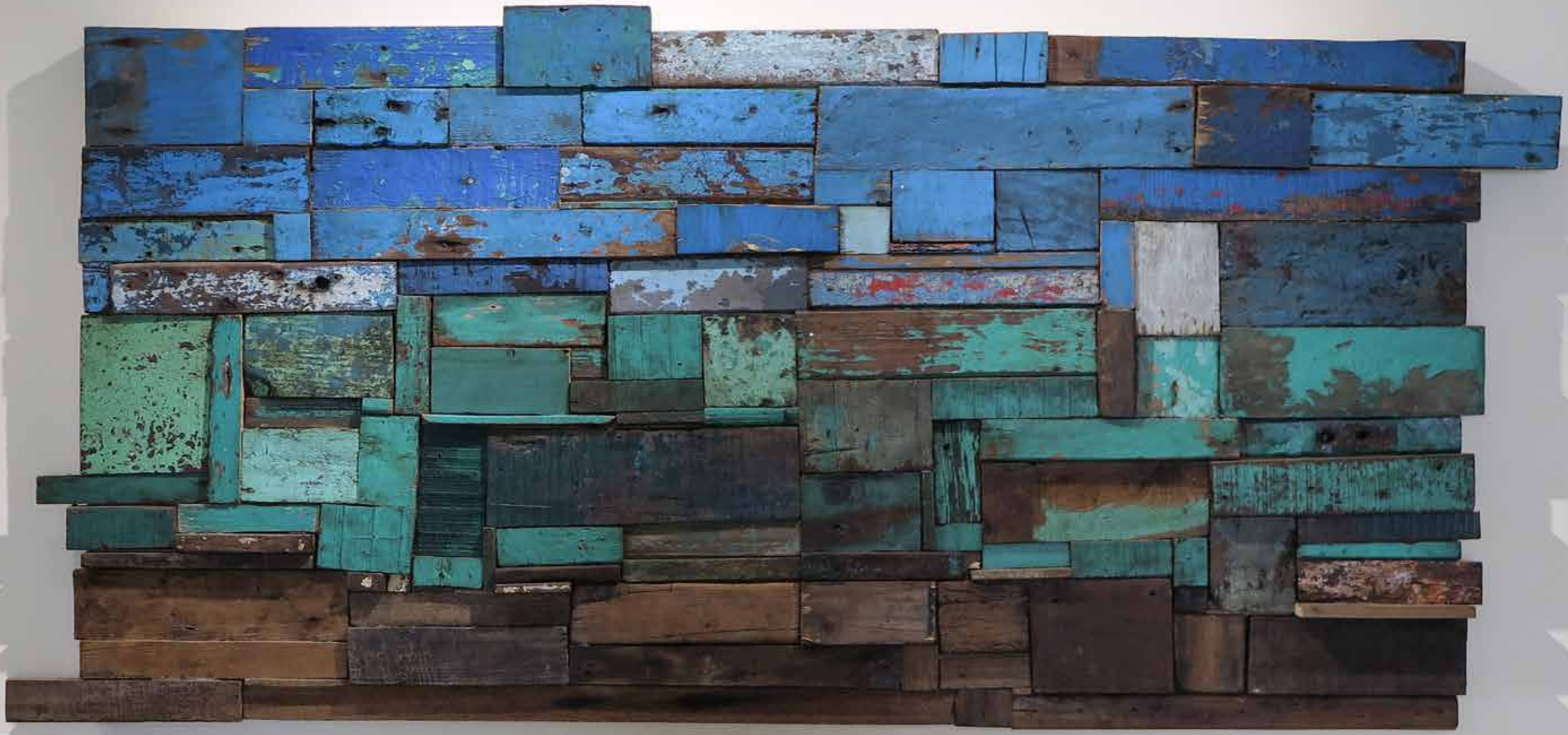
Located in the DHA Phase 8 area, next to the popular Seaview, Sahil Beach receives few visitors for most of the year. The monsoon season, however, brings families searching for fresh air, distraction, and possibly to escape perpetual power failures in their respective neighbourhoods. For mostly lower-income families, the beach is a rare place of respite in a city where public recreational spaces have continuously shrunk, while the density of the habitat continues to climb at a staggering rate. These seasonal visitors sustain a small service economy, from the vendors usually setting up shop on the nearby Seaview Beach, to the young men offering camel or horse rides. In this joyous celebration of the city-by-the-sea, the ethnic and sectarian divides that continue to structure interactions elsewhere seem largely irrelevant.

At night, the beach becomes a refuge for merry-makers and lonely moonlight guzzlers searching for a bit of privacy under the cover of the dark. The empty bottles discarded by nightly visitors are another hint of the liminality of the *sahil*, a space between the sea and the land, neither here nor there, outside the reach of oppressive affiliations, legal prescriptions, and moral injunctions. The apparent predilection of these drinkers for foreign brews—as attested by the remains of their libations—also connects them to the history of ethylic cosmopolitanism tracing its roots to inebriated encounters with foreign sailors and hippies, now perpetuating itself through more discreet practices of consumption thriving on maritime smuggling networks. These distractions from the stifling atmosphere of the city seem doomed to disappear in the near future, though. Once the *kaccha* fence cedes the way to concrete walls dotted with barbed wire and glass shards, the purge will begin. There is another "Operation Clean-up" in the making here, which, as always, will invoke property laws and the abomination of "encroachments" to repel undesirable plebs and misfits.

A sanctuary for populations struggling to find a place in the new economic and moral order of the metropolis, this beach is fast turning into a place of refuse, where disposable people are waiting to be rejected beyond the walls of the safe and civilised city, and where discarded

Detail of *Ropes*, Koel Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan

Credit: Sohail Zuberi, 2018, found ropes (2013-2018), nails, and plywood with wooden frame, 81cm H x 244cm L x 10cm W. (Photo by Omer Wasim)



things are being spat out by the sea. That is what the sea has been doing for as long as men can remember: spitting back at them. In the West, the development of bathing resorts and seaside activities during the 20th century has largely obliterated the representations of the sea that used to prevail until then, where feelings of repulsion towards coastal landscapes were the rule. For Greek and Roman scholars rediscovered during the Renaissance and inspiring these representations, the seashore is the repository of marine excreta, where the sea purges itself and vomits its monsters.[6] Thus, for the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca, "[i]t is in the nature of the sea to reject on the seashore every secretion and impurity [...] and these purges do not only happen when the storm lifts up the waves but also when a deep calm reigns".[7] Seventeen centuries later, the British poet William Diaper (ca. 1688–1717) uses similar terms to describe the pollution of foul shores, where agonising dolphins come to rot so as to spare the pristine air and waters of the high sea.[8] Even if these representations are informed by a peculiar history—and in particular by the tenets of neo-Hippocratic medicine, which remained prevalent until then and perceived the sea as an agent of putrefaction—there is something of that horror in the tale of Mororo, variations of which continue to be sung in the fishing communities of Karachi, especially in Lyari.

In those days, as the story goes, a monstrous creature plagued the sea and struck fear in the hearts of fishermen, preventing them from plying their trade. Mororo's brothers bravely overcame their fear of the mighty beast, never to return. With the help of fellow villagers, the physically challenged but cunning Mororo set out to trick the dreaded creature and recover the bodies of his brothers. The iron cage, in which he let himself be submerged, bristled with sharp blades, so when the monster tried to bite him, it impaled itself on the spikes. The villagers then pulled Mororo and the beast to the seashore. As a sign of gratitude, they made Mai Kolachi the head of the village, which was renamed in her honour. After all, her brave son had delivered the fishermen from the marine abomination, reviving the local economy in the process. In Shah Abdul Latif's rendering of the story, Mororo's ordeal is essentially an allegory of the spiritual struggle against the *nafs*, or lower impulsive self. In the words of Latif (rendered through Elsa Kazi's vivid translation),

Even the wise confounded got
and heroes lost their wits.
Those who went out to face the sea
were caught by current's plot;
Of 'Ebb and tide', they all forgot
what they had learnt before.

A power weird is in Kalach,
Lost is who enters there;
No one brings news who does ensnares
the nets and keeps them down.[9]

The young fisherman's descent into the whirlpool and his epic fight with the beast evoke the battle between reason (*'aql*) and desire, on the path to God's eternal truth. This spiritualism—which resonates with Sufi traditions from South Asia and beyond—does not deny documentary value to the poem, which provides vivid details on the gradual penetration of the market economy into these fishing communities in the first half of the 18th century. The return of Mororo and the subsequent extrication of his brothers' bodies from the belly of the beast also provides a striking image of those macabre excretions from the sea, which local fishermen have always been familiar with—the rotting flesh of stranded whales, the swollen bodies of the drowned, or the more allusive fragments of a boat's hull, signalling the probable loss of loved ones at sea.

Today, fragments of sunken boats occasionally wash ashore on Sahil Beach. It is those remains that set Zuberi's "archaeological" mission in motion as he tried to extract meaning from these seemingly unremarkable planks. This investigation eventually led him to Ibrahim Hyderi, Rehri Goth, and Lat Basti—fishing villages along the eastern coast of Karachi—where he talked with fishermen, taking along pieces of wood, ropes, and other objects in hopes of tallying them with actual boats. Soon enough, he came to realise that there was a tragedy behind each of these objects related to sea navigation which only wash up on the shore after a boat capsizes.

These days, however, what the sea most frequently spews out is untreated waste and industrial refuse. In 2001, the amount of municipal waste produced daily in Karachi was estimated between 6,000 and 7,000 tonnes—an amount almost double that of Delhi and among the highest in South Asian cities.[10] Over the next 15 years, this amount has doubled,[11] and does not include industrial waste, which remains largely undocumented. As always in Karachi, this problem of public interest falls under the responsibility of various government agencies and private actors—a reminder that this city is also a palimpsest of legalities, feeding a splintered geography of discontinuous and overlapping sovereignties. Besides the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board (SSWMB), Karachi's waste management involves the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) and Port Qasim authorities that are responsible for the collection of their own waste, as well as the corporate bodies watching over industrial estates, which have been granted a large autonomy over the management of their waste. Thus, when officials of the SSWMB rejoice that—currently—"only" five percent of Karachi's waste would be dumped into the sea,[12] this includes neither the frequent discharge of oil from the ports nor the dumping of industrial refuse and solid waste from industrial areas.

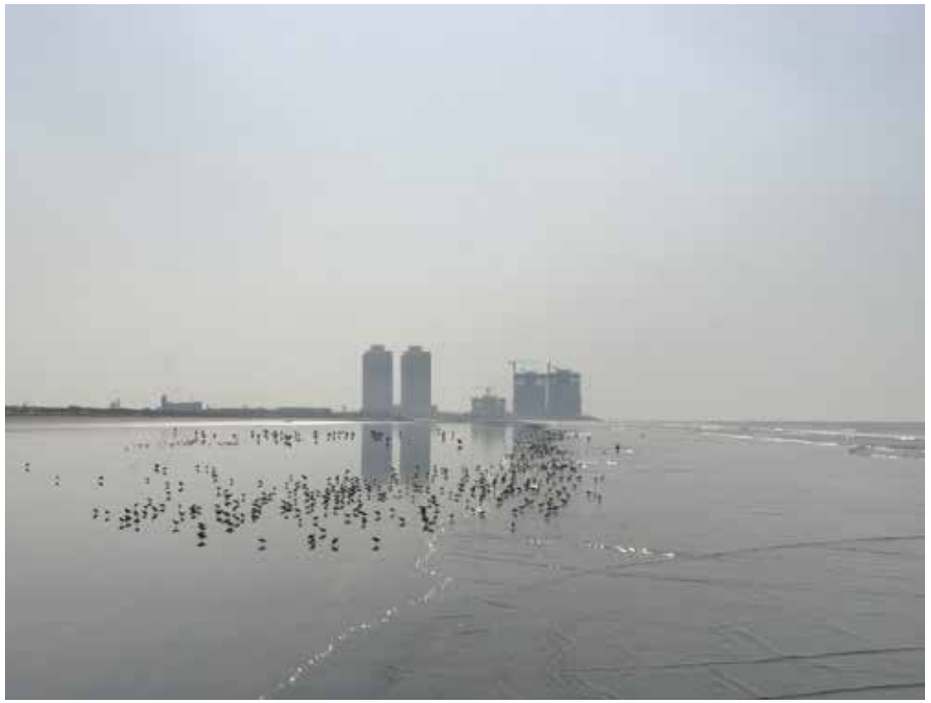
Concrete No-futures

The construction frenzy affecting Karachi at large is only adding to these woes. In Sohail Zuberi's photographs, the towers of the Emaar complex looming in the background of Sahil Beach act as a powerful signifier of yet another disaster in the making, while emphasising the vulnerability of the life forms struggling for survival on that tiny stretch of sand and beyond.

With their promise of an imminent privatisation of the beach for the benefit of a more exclusive crowd, these upscale construction projects are threatening the source of income of fisherfolk communities as well as the largely subaltern gatherings occurring on the beach. Zuberi's work is not oblivious of its larger urban context, however, and he insists that Sahil Beach be seen as a microcosm of much larger transformations.[13] Beyond the Seaview coastline, the entire Creek area has been sacrificed to upscale-yet-unplanned "development". Mangroves are fast disappearing while the flamingos that used to rest here during the winter months have already become a distant memory. The mushrooming of high-rise, ocean-front housing projects in DHA brings an additional burden on an already dilapidated environment. It increases the prospects of water pollution in the absence of any serious plan to treat sewage from newly constructed apartment blocks. It also threatens to weigh heavily on an already dramatically low water table.

These risks are well known to the powers-that-be. They have been extensively documented by environmentalists, town planners, and various members of the legal fraternity. This disaster-in-the-making is happening with full knowledge of the risks involved for the city at large. The preference for the present of all the "stakeholders" involved—and more prosaically their concern for fast and huge returns—has led them to consciously and deliberately ignore these warnings. Economic accumulation has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing.

In March 2017, the Supreme Court passed an interim order stopping the construction of buildings beyond ground-plus-two, after being convinced by environmental activists and town planners that high-rises were a heavy burden on the city's already dysfunctional water and sewerage system. This decision led to a mobilisation by the developers' lobby, represented by the Association of Builders and Developers of Pakistan (ABAD), which argued that the Court's decision was severely injurious to the construction industry. The counsel of the builders suggested, in particular, that newly commissioned high-rises would take at least two to three years to be completed and that by that time, the city's water and sewerage system would have improved significantly and would be ready to bear that additional burden.[14] These arguments seem to have convinced the SC Bench—which was presided by Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar—whose members passed a new judgment in January 2018 granting permission to builders to raise construction up to six commercial/residential floors in addition to the floors raised for parking. This ruling failed to content builders, however, and in the following months they



Sohail Zuberi, *28 January 2018* (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)

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(Pages 26-27) *Seascape*, Koel Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan

Credit: Sohail Zuberi, 2018, found painted wood (2013-2018), glue, and plywood with wooden frame, 91cm H x 183cm L x 10cm W. (Photo by Omer Wasim)

continued to lobby political and judicial authorities to obtain a complete lifting of the ban on high-rise constructions. This mobilisation paid off and in December 2018, the Supreme Court finally lifted its restrictions on new constructions across the city. Five hundred projects, which represented an investment worth Rs 1,000 billion, could resume in the metropolis. While passing this judgment, the Chief Justice of Pakistan seem to have primarily kept the interests of the builders and industrialists in mind as he emphasised that, "Along with the industry, Bahria Town will also benefit".[15] The recommendations of the Water Commission mandated by the Supreme Court in 2016 were conveniently set aside on this occasion. Under the chairmanship of Justice Kalhoro, this commission had unambiguously concluded that:

> Karachi is already witnessing shortage of potable water and suffering from deteriorating condition of sanitation. It is mockery therefore to allow more such buildings to come up without water to feed and a system to discharge sewage. If this situation is not timely checked, the problem may become unmanageable entirely. It is therefore proposed that a complete ban on the construction of high rise and multi-story buildings for the time being till the prevalent crisis-like situation is averted may be put in place.[16]

This construction frenzy is feeding a string of disasters across the city. While Sohail Zuberi warns us of the huge social and environmental costs of construction projects in the Creek area and around Seaview, this great concrete rush is leaving a much larger social and ecological footprint. This chain of disruptions is linking the city's more upscale localities with the unprivileged peripheries, which have provided the raw material for the emerging "world-class city" at a huge social and environmental cost. Much of this devastation can be traced to the emergence of a new alliance of capital and coercion, which operates as the brutal condition of possibility for upscale housing projects in the city's upcoming islets of wealth and privilege.

Besides land and water, sand and gravel are the crux of the ongoing battles for Karachi. For years, the so-called "*reti-bajri* mafia" (sand and gravel mafia) has been feeding the city's construction frenzy while sustaining a new nexus of capital and coercion, reshaping Karachi in its image—ruthless, utterly contemptuous of the ecological environment, and entirely oblivious to the rights of its most vulnerable populations. The city's new skyline, which casts such an ominous shadow over Sahil Beach and other fragile ecosystems in the larger Karachi Division, finds its roots in the devastated bed of the Malir River. While the *dhakkas* (excavation sites) of Malir have been primarily catering to the needs of emerging mega-gated communities in the area (such as Bahria Town Karachi and DHA City), they have also served myriad construction projects, including those currently reshaping the city's coastline.

During the first six decades of Independence, sixty billion cubic feet of sand and gravel were drained from the river, according to architect and town planner Arif Hasan.[17] The pursuit of this illicit trade has led to the virtual destruction of Karachi's largest oasis. An area once known for its orchards and farmland—Malir, in Sindhi, translates as "green and fertile"—has been turned into a barren wasteland. Unregulated excavation of sand and gravel has led to soil erosion and desertification, with afferent risks of flash floods during rains. As of 2007, 500,000 farmers had already been made jobless by this ecological disaster. Meanwhile, the lowering of the water table has been making the already grim situation in many parts of the district even more critical. Finally, sand-lifting activities threaten the supply of water to the entire city of Karachi by damaging water conduits—a risk which led the Water Commission of Justice Kalhoro to request the District Management Malir, Irrigation Department, and Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) officials to take immediate measures to put a complete end to this illegal activity.[18]

This great concrete rush proceeds through the assemblage of bureaucratic and unlawful processes, state and non-state forces, capital and coercion—a highly heterogeneous mix that is in the process of crystalizing into a new economy of violence. Although the extraction of sand and gravel from the district was banned by the provincial government in 2010, it continued unabated as many actors of this lucrative business were influential political leaders. As often in Karachi, this illicit trade also benefited from the protection of the police. Until recently, each police station falling in SSP Malir's jurisdiction made Rs 400,000 to Rs 500,000 per night, with the SSP himself taking an even larger cut.[19] From Malir to DHA, men in uniform have also helped the new land barons consolidate their fiefdoms.

Now that political parties have been deprived of their muscle power, it is the professionals of coercion who secure land deals and housing projects, when they don't supervise these projects themselves. No surprise, then, that members of the city's security establishment take pride in the spectacular increase of real estate prices in the city since the launching of the so-called "Karachi Operation".[20] The "pacification" of the city has unleashed a new movement of accumulation by dispossession, where violent entrepreneurs backed by the security state have been using their coercive resources to make way for major real-estate projects, for instance by intimidating landowners unwilling to give away their ancestral lands to real estate developers. *Jiski lathi, uski bhains* (the buffalo belongs to the baton-wielder). In the *goths* of Malir, where thousands of acres were allotted to Bahria Town and DHA at concessional rates over the past few years, villagers have literally been deprived of their livestock by armed men. As the provincial Board of Revenue (BoR) cancelled the leases of several villages in the surroundings of DCK (DHA City Karachi) and allotted the land to developers, DHA officials started taking over part of the land while walling-in these villages, thus depriving them from access to pastures. In 2017, a resident of one these villages lamented to *Dawn* that, "When there was a wedding or a death in our family, these people would provide a dozen goats to feed the guests. Now they don't even own a chicken".[21]

As emphasised by the central role of BoR in the expropriation of Malir villagers to the benefit of DHA and Bahria Town, this process of accumulation by dispossession—which is so central

to the current reshaping of Karachi—does not only involve collusive transactions between the wielders of force and the holders of capital. It also proceeds through multiple interventions by provincial and municipal authorities, whose illegalities are so systematic that they amount to a peculiar form of government in and of itself—an irregular governmentality, which does not negate the existence of legal norms altogether but either circumvents them or turns them to the advantage of the dominants. This is exemplified by the cancellation of 30-year agricultural leases in Malir: under Section 24 of the Colonisation of Government Lands Act 1912, tenants are provided with protection against undue expropriation—a right to property which was clearly violated by officials of BoR and their clients in the course of the great land grab that occurred in Malir over the past few years. Besides, the Land Acquisition Act 1984 specifies that government authorities may only acquire land (after due compensation) for a "public purpose". This was clearly not the case in Malir, where the acquired land was transferred to private developers.[22]

This propensity of most public agencies involved in the "development" of the city to navigate between legalism and illegalities—or between official and unofficial modes of action—serves as a reminder that "informality" is not the sole prerogative of subaltern lawbreakers. Political, economic, and security elites are equally prone to resort to unofficial means while engaging with the urban environment. Their structural advantage, however, lies in the fact that their illegalities are rarely sanctioned and even more rarely stigmatised as a (thug) way of life.

Every new legal commission tasked with examining the predicament of the city's denizens has revealed the extent of these illegalities. In front of the judicial commission appointed by the Supreme Court in 2016 to look into the supply of contaminated water to consumers in Sindh, for instance, officials of the KWSB accused the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) of continuously approving thousands of multi-storied and high-rise buildings without obtaining mandatory NOCs from KWSB for ensured water supply—a charge that was probably less informed by a firm commitment to legalism than by pecuniary concerns, since the SBCA has also been reluctant to share the fees levied from builders for changes in land use brought to the city's Master Plan.[23] Officials of the KWSB, for their part, have been accused by builders of unofficially charging millions of rupees on under-construction buildings as well as on every new connection for high-rise buildings.[24]

Necrocapitalism and the Risk (mis)Management State

The new arrangements of capital and coercion enabling this great concrete rush are not merely feeding corruptive practices at every level of the state machinery. Sohail Zuberi's forensic "archaeology" invites us to confront an even grimmer reality: the consolidation in Pakistan's major economic hub of a new brand of capitalism bringing both wealth and death to the city—two forms of a gift that it distributes very unevenly across the social spectrum. With its upscale construction projects thriving on accumulation by dispossession, systematic violations of labour laws, and irreversible damage to the environment, this construction frenzy partakes in the formation of an unbridled regime of accumulation, sharing some attributes with the forms of "necrocapitalism" analysed by S. B. Banerjee. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's discussion of contemporary forms of "necropolitics",[25] Banerjee defines necrocapitalism as "practices of organisational accumulation that involve violence, dispossession, and death".[26] It refers to those political economies where the "sword of commerce" is creating death worlds—or "necroscapes", in Mbembe's terminology—through the subjugation of life to the destructive impulses of capital. For Banerjee, this subjugation of accumulation processes to the power of death—the power to let die or expose to potentially lethal physical harm—proceeds through collusive transactions between states and corporations. While Banerjee locates the origins of this configuration in colonial extractive economies, he also sees it thriving in contemporary post-colonial contexts characterised by a "necrocapitalist privatisation of sovereignty".

The social and ecological devastation documented by Zuberi on Sahil Beach may seem iconic of such practices of accumulation, which "deny people access to resources that are essential to their health and lifestyle, destroy livelihoods, and dispossess communities". Moreover, in Karachi as in other economic death worlds, "race and class [...] determine who lives and who dies".[27] An endangered sanctuary for various undesirable populations, Sahil Beach is already a place of death and decay. Sohail Zuberi's work poignantly demonstrates how human and industrial pollution has turned it into a graveyard for marine life, with dead turtles, dolphins, stingrays, and jellyfish regularly washing ashore. Banerjee's argument can be slightly misleading in the case of Karachi, though. Besides Mbembe's creative take on Foucault's discussion of modern power, it is heavily indebted to Agamben's paradigm of the state of exception as the new rule of contemporary politics and it suggests that these practices of economic accumulation "occur in spaces that seem to be immune from legal, juridical, and political intervention, resulting in a suspension of sovereignty".[28] Let us recall that Agamben's conception of the state of exception draws on Carl Schmitt's definition of the sovereign as "he who decides on the state of exception". Expanding Schmitt's theory of sovereignty through a critical appraisal of Foucault's notion of biopower, Agamben understands contemporary states of exception as "the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension"—a "pure de facto rule" epitomised by the US Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, and its detainees "entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight". As a juridical order resting on the suspension of the law, the state of exception constitutes its threshold or "limit concept".[29] Agamben's paradigm is an essential point of reference for Banerjee and other proponents of "neoliberalism as exception", who observe the formation of market-oriented spaces—such as export-processing zones—where state forces and transnational capital jointly experiment with new technologies of exclusion and optimisation.[30]

At first sight, Agamben's argument does seem to resonate in a country like Pakistan, where the "doctrine of necessity" drawn from Hans Kelsen has served to legalise successive military regimes and where the politics of anti–terrorism have recently created enclaves of exception (such as military courts) within the juridical order. While space constraints do not allow me to enter further into this debate, let me only point out that this line of argument stands at odds with other trends in Pakistani legal and economic reforms of the past decades. Firstly, the attempts of both civilian and military elites to institutionalise a state of exception through political and legal reforms have to a large extent been thwarted by the judiciary, as exemplified by the fierce controversies of the 1990s around anti–terrorism and military courts.[31] As far as Pakistan's neoliberal reforms are concerned, now, it is worth remembering that Special Economic Zones (SEZs) retain a marginal place in Pakistan's manufacturing economy to date—which comes in stark contrast with India's own process of economic liberalisation, although the validity of the "neoliberalism as exception" thesis has also been questioned in the context of Indian SEZs.[32] While this might change in the context of CPEC and projected SEZs, for now Pakistan's economy and its society fit uneasily with theories of exceptionality (and, in fact, exhibit opposite trends in the case of FATA's recent political and juridical integration). In Karachi, both state and non-state forces remain accountable to legal conventions and judicial interventions, even if these are not consistent and constraining enough to qualify as a legal–rational set-up in the Weberian sense. And while large sections of Pakistani working classes have been deprived of labour rights through the generalisation of the so-called "third-party system" over the past decades, this process of disenfranchisement was not so much the outcome of legal reforms and sovereign decisions as it was the result of a largely unofficial process of casualisation, taking exception to the existing labour regime without suspending it altogether.[33] Last but not the least, the villagers of the city's peripheries, who have been robbed of their land at gunpoint, were not denizens formally stripped of juridical-political protections and, as such, condemned to "bare life".[34] Their actual capacity to exercise the rights conferred upon them by citizenship remains limited. Nonetheless, the sheer possibility of making such claims might prove critical for the future of those populations under threat of eviction from the world-class dream city.

This is not merely a matter of legal or philosophical niceties. On some occasions, Sindh's higher judiciary did provide support to disgruntled villagers who had seen their land leases cancelled by the provincial BoR. This has been the case, for instance, in Malir, where some of these villagers were able to retrieve their land after they filed a constitutional petition against DHA in the Sindh High Court, which ruled in their favour. Meanwhile, a series of industrial accidents and growing public awareness towards ecological or health hazards have inspired the formation of a risk management state aiming to document, measure and, whenever possible, prevent existential threats in the name of Karachi's citizenry. In conformity with the global risk culture, these public interventions at the initiative of civic, environmental or legal activists have been promoting the idea that measuring risks was already a way to contain threats.[35] These interventions have also been supported by legal conventions focusing on the conservation of the environment and the prevention of ecological and health hazards, starting with the Sindh Environmental Protection Act, 2014.

This emerging risk culture is not specific to civic organisations and sections of the legal fraternity but has also taken root in the corporate world, particularly among entrepreneurs manufacturing sensitive commodities (medicine, food products, etc.) for foreign markets. The preference for the present informing the most unbridled practices of local entrepreneurs, as well as their apparent negligence for safety and environmental norms, are not all there is to see to Karachi's new regime of economic accumulation. The problem, here, lies less with the archaic nature of this economy (its inclination towards primitive forms of accumulation, in the Marxist sense) than with the incapacity of whistleblowers to inspire actual regulatory mechanisms. While judicial activists—including some judges themselves—have been documenting extensively the existential threats to Karachi's future, while identifying a series of immediate remedies, they lack an efficient implementation apparatus that would take to task economic, political, and military elites found in violation of existing laws. Moreover, there have been inconsistencies in legal interventions in the economic field. Besides, judicial commissions have a tendency of "dividing the anger all over the place", as a senior legal practitioner involved in the Baldia Factory Fire case once told me.[36] At first sight, these commissions of enquiry may seem to be taking a bold stand against the powers-that-be. By incriminating everyone—if not the "entire system of Karachi", as Justice Alavi did in the case of the Baldia Factory Fire[37]—they make it difficult to locate one main culprit and prosecute him under Pakistani laws. The risk *mis*management state that we see emerging in the city thus presents the following paradox: over the years, it has contributed to the promotion of a new risk culture thriving on well-identified, calculable threats; however, it has compromised its potential for reforms through a strategy of all-sided incrimination that holds everyone guilty and, thus, fails to hold anyone accountable in the long run.

Conclusion

Sohail Zuberi's *Archaeologies of Tomorrow* is a chronicle of loss. It points at the scale of dispossession and immiseration in a new era of land grabs and enclosures.[38] It also captures the last hurrah of a subaltern cosmopolitanism where members of the city's menial classes could intermingle and build solidarities across denominational divides, or at least momentarily pretend that divisions engineered by politicians were of little concern to the people. Finally, by documenting the levelling of this pluralistic world under tons of concrete, it offers a glimpse of the emergent city of Karachi—a city where political strife has ceded the way to more structural forms of violence brought by a new alliance of capital and coercion. Rather than a lawless society, what is emerging on these still-smouldering ruins is an irregular form of governmentality proceeding through a "dense interweaving of arms and law".[39] And rather than

focusing its interventions towards the maximisation of life, this new architecture of domination and the ideology of "development" that fosters it are manufacturing social and ecological death-worlds on a grand scale—as grand as the construction projects rising across the city's devastated coastline and shrinking green belt.

This trend has not gone unopposed and some sections of the higher judiciary have, in particular, been keen to provide redress to disgruntled villagers expropriated by developers and their political or military backers. More originally, some sections of the legal fraternity have been promoting a risk culture that aimed to curb this unbridled process of economic "development" while putting back the preservation and maximisation of life at the heart of the state's mandate. In his constitutional petition against the Government of Sindh, where he denounced the denial of the fundamental right of the people of Sindh to have access to drinkable water, environmental activist and practicing lawyer Shahab Usto thus prayed that the people of the province were provided with "clean drinking water, public sanitation, and a hygienic environment", so that they may lead "a healthy, productive, and dignified life".[40] The so-called "Water Commission" of Justice Kalhoro, for its part, put it even more succinctly: "*water is life* and access to unpolluted water is the fundamental right of every citizen".[41] This attempt to preserve the right to life guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan (Article 9)—and more generally the biopolitical mandate of the state vs. the necropolitical proclivities of the market—has, however, been largely frustrated. More than by the frontal opposition of market forces, it has been emptied out of its reformist potential by the judiciary itself, which has so far avoided tackling the alliance of capital and coercion that sustains the production and expansion of these death-worlds.

Notes

1. A preliminary version of this essay was written to accompany Sohail Zuberi's show *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*, curated by Zarmeene Shah at Koel Gallery (Karachi) in May 2018. For further details and some visuals, see Rumana Husain, "Lost and Found," *The News on Sunday* (Lahore), 20 May 2018; Zehra Hamdani, "Time's push," *The Friday Times* (Lahore), 1 June 2018.
2. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, "Ghatu," in *Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif: Selections*, translated by Elsa Kazi (Hyderabad: Sindh Adabi Board), 1965.
3. *In the Future They Ate From the Finest Porcelain*, Directed by Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind, 2015 <https://vimeo.com/groups/331203/videos/203117078>.
4. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15 (1) (1 January 2003): pp. 11–40, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11>.
5. Basil Andrews, "A Karachi Fisherman's Tale—In Search of Lobsters and Livelihood," *Dawn* (Karachi), 16 November 2015 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1217456>.
6. Alain Corbin, Le territoire du vide. *L'Occident et le désir de rivage* (Paris: Flammarion, 2018 (1988)), p. 24.
7. Pierre de Latil and Jean Rivoire, *A la recherche du monde marin* (Paris: Plon, 1954), p. 16.
8. Alain Corbin, *Le territoire du vide*, *op. cit.* p. 25.
9. Bhittai, "Ghatu," in *Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif: Selections*, translated by Elsa Kazi, *op. cit.*
10. Maaheen Ahmed, "Karachi," in *Encyclopedia of Consumption and Waste: The Social Science of Garbage*, Carl A. Zimring and William L. Rathje (eds.) (Thousand Oaks (Cal.): Sage Publications Inc, 2012), p. 458.
11. Zofeen T. Ebrahim, "Lifting 10 years of garbage in Karachi," *Dawn*, 5 April 2018.
12. Ibid.
13. Conversations with Sohail Zuberi, Karachi, July 2019.
14. Supreme Court Order, 14 January 2018, in response to CP n°38 of 2016, pp. 5–6.
15. Quoted in "Karachi high-rises: SC allows construction beyond six floors," *The News*, 12 December 2018.
16. Report of Commission of Inquiry, Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro, 25 February 2017, p. 57.
17. Quoted in "Malir River ruthlessly plundered," *The News*, 11 April 2007.
18. Report of Commission of Inquiry, Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
19. Fahim Zaman and Naziha Syed Ali, "Gold sand racket," *Dawn*, 21 March 2018.
20. Interview with a top military officer, then heading one of the city's major law enforcement agencies, Karachi, July 2016.
21. Quoted in Fahim Zaman and Naziha Syed Ali, "The DHA City juggernaut rolls on in the name of development," *Dawn*, 19 December 2017.
22. Ibid.
23. Report of Commission of Inquiry, Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
24. Ibid., p. 57.
25. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," art. quoted.
26. Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, "Necrocapitalism," *Organization Studies*, 29 (12), 2008: p. 1,543.
27. Ibid., p. 1,551.
28. Ibid., p. 1,544.
29. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 3–4.
30. Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2006); Ong is in fact much less indebted to Agamben's legalistic perspective than Banerjee. Her conception of neoliberalism as a series of biopolitical transformations "[creating] conditions for diverse claims of human value that do not fit into a conventional notion of citizenship" (p. 7) is more in tune with the line of argument defended here.
31. Charles H. Kennedy, "The Creation and Development of Pakistan's Anti-terrorist Regime, 1997–2002," in Satu Limaye et al (eds.), *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia* (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2002), p. 388 sq.

32. Jamie Cross, "Neoliberalism as Unexceptional: Economic Zones and the Everyday Precariousness of Working Life in South India," *Critique of Anthropology*, 30 (4), 2010.
33. Obviously, the non-implementation of existing labour laws (especially viz. the illegal third-party system and the systematic use of "contract workers" for permanent tasks) is in itself a form of state intervention. This is clearly not the kind of governmentality that Agamben has in mind, however.
34. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
35. Michael Power, *Organized Uncertainty: Designing a World of Risk Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
36. Interview, Karachi, July 2017.
37. Tribunal's Report for Ascertaining the Circumstances and Cause Leading to the Fire and Subsequent Deaths and Injuries in the Incident That Took Place on 11. 09. 2012 in the Factory of M/S Ali Enterprises Located at Plot No. F-67 SITE Karachi, pp. 30–31.
38. For a critical discussion of David Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession" in the light of current movements of land acquisition in South Asia, see Katy Gardner and Eva Gerharz, "Introduction: Land, 'Development' and 'Security' in India and Bangladesh," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 13, 2016 <https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/4141>.
39. Michael Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), p. 92.
40. Supreme Court Order, 16 March 2017 in response to CP n°38 of 2016, p. 2.
41. Report of Commission of Inquiry, Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro, *op. cit.*, p. 39. My emphasis.