

# Worldly Marxism

## *Rethinking Revolution from Pakistan's Peripheries*

Noaman G. Ali and Shozab Raza

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From 1968 to 1978, the Mazdoor Kisan Party (MKP) was arguably Pakistan's "largest and most militant party with a Marxist orientation."<sup>1</sup> The party led the country's most effective peasant rebellion, which erupted in the North-West Frontier Province (or Frontier, now called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) in 1970, resulting in de facto land and tenancy reforms, and subsequently expanded to South Punjab, where it confronted some of Pakistan's largest and most notorious landlords. MKP-connected cadres also organized in key industrial areas in cities like Karachi, Faisalabad, and Swat. We build on recent studies of the MKP by focusing on how party members grappled with Marxist theory to contend with the specificity of their conditions, and in doing so both drew on and contributed to a worldly Marxism.<sup>2</sup>

By *worldly Marxism*, we identify a larger project to construct a Marxism that is neither Eurocentric nor simply postcolonial. Rather, it is a Marxism that is constantly renewed as it exceeds its origins in Europe to extend across settler colonies, (post)colonies, and metropolises. As the Lebanese communist Mahdi Amel put it, while "the main Marxist conceptual apparatus [is] . . . a direct outcome of a specifically western historical experience,"<sup>3</sup> the "very process of theoretically understanding" postcolonial reality necessitated a critique of "pre-formed" Marxist thought.<sup>4</sup> This critique reinvents Marxist theory and contributes to Marxism's universalization. Even as early as the 1940s and 50s, communists in South Asia, like Indian Dalit R. B. More, expressed uneasiness with how the region's official communist parties adapted categories and strategies from European parties that did not adequately align with local realities. For More, the Communist Party of India failed to understand how class was coconstituted by caste and, as such, how anti-caste struggles were central to class struggle in India.<sup>5</sup> As we show below, the founders of the MKP had an analogous critique of communist orthodoxy, insisting that "the revolution for which they were striving would be neither like Peking nor like Moscow, but purely Pakistani."<sup>6</sup> By the 1960s and '70s, the MKP joined the Naxalites in India,<sup>7</sup> militant intellectuals in the Arab world,<sup>8</sup> indigenous activists in North America,<sup>9</sup> Black radicals in the US,<sup>10</sup> Maoists in France,<sup>11</sup> and revolutionaries in Cuba,<sup>12</sup> among others, to create a worldly Marxist theory and practice, one that acquired universal significance precisely through its attention to particular contexts.

Importantly, the worldly Marxism of the time was grounded in producing theory that was appropriate to the political tasks of anti-imperialism. As Amel argued, revolting against postcolonial underdevelopment necessitated a theoretical critique of underdevelopment.<sup>13</sup> Worldly Marxism thus entails theorizing in the conjuncture, that is, from a particular historical moment that poses a set of political problems.<sup>14</sup> Rather than a complete and comprehensive synthesis, conjunctural theorizing involves arranging multiple conceptual elements to clarify and understand the political task at hand. Not simply a philosophy, an economic or sociological theory, nor a historical method, worldly Marxism ultimately names that assembly of theoretical and practical tools required to "realize an egalitarian, rational figure of collective organization for which the name is 'communism.'"<sup>15</sup>

Worldly Marxism was also comparative, as political actors retheorized Marxism in explicit global dialogue. MKP members, for example, drew on the experiences of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Indian (specifically, Naxalite) revolutionaries, as well as Indian modes of production debates (as we discuss below). Scholars like Aijaz Ahmad intervened in their debates and helped edit Urdu translations of the works of African revolutionaries like Amílcar Cabral. Meanwhile, some of the MKP's writings were translated into English and circulated through journals like *Pakistan Forum* and the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*.<sup>16</sup> Similar engagement was in evidence when indigenous activists allied with Third World Maoists in the belief that land reclamation was revolutionary,<sup>17</sup> or when the Black Panther Party aligned with former colonized countries like Algeria on the theoretical understanding that African American communities, too, were a colony.<sup>18</sup> We flag and group under the banner of worldly Marxism these revolutionary experiments, conducted for local conditions but in global dialogue. Ultimately, we show how the worldly Marxism of the 1960s and 70s used its own tools to critique its limits and elaborate a Marxism always-in-the-making.

We situate the MKP's theoretical production in the framework of such a worldly Marxism. The party considered the political task of its conjuncture to be the achievement of a People's Democratic Revolution (which we elaborate on later). As the party organized workers and peasants, who had their own epistemologies and practices, it faced new questions that necessitated renewing Marxist theory for postcolonial realities. Whereas recent scholarship on postcolonial Marxisms focuses on the writings of intellectuals,<sup>19</sup> we follow Faye V. Harrison's approach, which "shift[s] from a valorization of theory as textualized product to 'theorizing' as a form of creative work performed in diverse dialogical contexts."<sup>20</sup> Central to this approach is the "concept of praxis,"<sup>21</sup> which emphasizes how theory is both immanent to and coconstitutive of practice. We pursue such an approach by supplementing written texts, drawn from previously unexplored state and party archives, with ethnography and oral history, conducted over a combined thirty-six months of fieldwork. We show how the dialogical and practical encounter of MKP leaders with workers and peasants opened up new theoretical possibilities that were not always written. While the party pursued some of these possibilities with greater rigor over others, they nonetheless connected the concrete struggles of workers and peasants in Pakistan to the global debates of a worldly Marxism.

In the following sections, we discuss how the MKP inhabited and developed this worldly Marxism through its engagement with agrarian transitions, religion, and gender in two peripheral regions of Pakistan: the Frontier and South Punjab. As the party confronted these three issues, it led to theoretical openings for a multilineal, vernacularized, and intersectional Marxism.<sup>22</sup> In the first section, we explain why the MKP broke from previous communist practice to elaborate a Marxism specific to Pakistani conditions. The party thus focused on building a united front of workers and peasants in the countryside, but realized that doing so entailed confronting class and caste-like contradictions within the alliance. In the second section, we show how the party's success in achieving land and tenancy reforms in parts of the Frontier enabled peasant upward mobility and a spatially uneven intensification of capitalism, sparking debates about agrarian transition out of "semi-feudalism."<sup>23</sup> Against teleological understandings of capitalist development, the party became open to the possibility of multiple paths of capitalist development, as well as multilineal logics of liberation, thus participating in global debates about transition that continue to this day.<sup>24</sup> In the third section, we show how the party's interaction with Islam, theoretically and in everyday practice, opened up the possibility for Marxism's articulation with non-Western ideologies and theories. In the fourth section, we consider how the MKP's engagement with gender points to the contradictions of its worldly Marxism.<sup>25</sup> In the 1970s conjuncture, the party leadership deprioritized gender because they believed concessions to patriarchy were necessary for the party's political survival. Still, the MKP's orientation to worldly Marxism did lay the foundation for some of its leaders to, in a different conjuncture, confront patriarchy more concertedly.

### The Pakistani Marxism of the MKP

The MKP inhabited a worldly Marxism by practicing a specifically Pakistani Marxism. The party emerged as a critique of Marxisms that privileged the historical agency of the industrial proletariat and bourgeoisie in Third World anti-imperialist struggles. Instead, the party argued "that the People's Democracy [in Pakistan] is neither bourgeois democracy, meaning a republic under bourgeois dictatorship, nor is it socialism, meaning a republic under proletarian dictatorship."<sup>26</sup> The People's Democratic Revolution involved building a "multi-class united front" based on a worker-peasant alliance, supported by patriotic and revolutionary mid-

dle classes, in order to liberate the country from semi-feudalism and imperialism as a prerequisite to establishing socialism. Rather than focusing predominantly on the industrial proletariat, the party turned to the rural majority and a politics of land-to-the-tiller, most spectacularly in the North-West Frontier Province. Party activists learned that, despite common opposition to landlords, worker-peasant solidarity could not be assumed, but had to be sutured together by confronting class and caste-like contradictions. Ironically, the success of this solidarity in defeating landlordism in the Frontier led to the alliance unraveling as upwardly mobile tenants no longer saw its utility and returned to discriminatory, anti-landless practices. As we explore in the next section, this unravelling set the stage for the MKP's debate on multilineal, regionally specific paths of capitalist development.

The MKP emerged from a critique of the theory and practice of the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP, which operated officially from 1948 to 1954). Reflecting the CPP leadership's priorities, a recent literature has unearthed the party's activities in urban Pakistan, its engagement with the state and national culture, and its literary output through figures associated with the Progressive Writers' Association.<sup>27</sup> MKP founders, on the other hand, charted a distinctive theoretical and practical course from the CPP in three respects. First, as early as 1948, Eric Cyprian, a member of the CPP and later MKP founder who was inspired by the Chinese experience, argued that communists should focus more on the peasantry rather than the urban proletariat because the former were the "basis from which the most decisive blows can be struck at the ruling class."<sup>28</sup> Second, by focusing on the peasantry, Cyprian's group also distanced themselves from prevailing communist practices of aligning with "progressive" landlords and capitalists, whether in the mainstream Muslim League or in regional ethno-nationalist parties. The point, instead, was to organize "all the exploited sections of the people" under communist leadership, including those in peripheral parts of the country.<sup>29</sup> Third, following this arc, MKP founders were critical of the elite literary focus of the CPP leadership, whom they understood as "culturally alienated from the people of the soil,"<sup>30</sup> and sought instead to build a party oriented to the cultures and languages of the masses. Because the CPP was banned in 1954, these critiques could not be put into practice, and most communists sought refuge in the National Awami Party (NAP), which was an alliance between radicals and ethno-nationalist landlords. Nevertheless, by the

early 1960s, communists influenced by Cyprian's critiques began to coalesce into a "China-influenced" consultative group in the NAP.

Indeed, over a decade later, Cyprian's critiques informed the emergence of the MKP as a distinct political organization. In the context of a popular movement that deposed military ruler Ayub Khan in 1969 and a sharpening of strategic splits between the Chinese- and Soviet-aligned communist parties, communists in Pakistan raised questions about class alliances and state power. As early as 1965, Major (retired) Ishaq Muhammad, a key figure in the NAP and a founder of the MKP, argued that the Soviet Union was compromising with Third World capitalists in struggling against Western imperialism. Instead, he agreed with the Chinese Communist Party to argue that the "revolution must be led by the working class, supported by the great power of the peasantry, to travel the path of People's Democratic Revolution and then establish a socialist system."<sup>31</sup> In the Frontier, proponents of the Chinese line, notably lawyer Muhammad Afzal Bangash, oriented NAP communists to work in the Frontier Kisan (Peasant) Committee from 1963 to 1968. Their work among tenants, particularly in the Peshawar valley, increasingly threatened the landlords, who allied with communist proponents of the Soviet line to encourage the expulsion of the "Maoists" from the NAP. Thus, on May 1, 1968, led by Bangash and the lawyer Sher Ali Bacha, the erstwhile members of the Kisan Committee constituted a new political party, named the Mazdoor Kisan Party, which shifted from reticent collaboration to open confrontation with the landlords of the Frontier. Emerging student radicals like Imtiaz Alam soon joined the MKP, and led the expansion of the party to South Punjab, where peasants were also confronting the region's "feudal" landlords.

However, the MKP activists in the Frontier learned that, notwithstanding common struggles against the landlords, worker-peasant alliances were not given, but rather had to be sutured together by confronting class and caste-like contradictions. Tenants and agricultural laborers alike faced similar exactions from landlords—"*begar* [unpaid labor], [forced] guard duty, wedding taxes, evictions, extortion, coercion and tyranny, disrespect and desecration."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, until recently many of the agricultural laborers had been tenants, evicted because Green Revolution and mechanization technologies encouraged landowners to manage the lands themselves. But despite facing landlord exploitation, tenants were structurally superordinate to laborers: tenants

paid them low daily wages, confiscated the manure of cattle that laborers reared, took begar from them, and could even evict laborers from their homesteads located on lands leased by tenants. As Inzar Gul, an elder whose family used to be landless, put it in an interview, “If we were with the landlord, he would exploit us, and when the tenants came, they exploited us, too.” These class distinctions were coconstituted by caste-like practices: in 1972, MKP president Major Ishaq noted in a speech, “I heard today that when the peasants fasted in memory of the martyrs of [the movement], farm laborers were not allowed to fast. I want to warn you that if you do not stop [your own] oppression, you will never be able to eradicate oppression.”<sup>33</sup> The rural united front, therefore, had to be constructed by confronting these class and caste-like contradictions.

The MKP was able to negotiate a contingent alliance, not only because tenants and laborers had a common enemy in the landlords, but also because the tenants’ defense against evictions required the physical support of landless laborers. For example, in the village Ameerabad, only 7 families out of 113 possessed land in 1968, while the remainder had been ejected.<sup>34</sup> Landlords wanted to eject the remaining 7 families but could not overcome the unity of the village community and so sought to create divisions by highlighting the low wages tenants paid to their laborers. To maintain the united front, the MKP negotiated laborers’ wage increases and rights over manure, as well as security of homesteads.<sup>35</sup> The MKP’s open and collective meetings also undermined the cultural subordination of laborers, who could raise complaints about tenants. Soon, laborers demanded more than better wages and treatment, and wanted land. The MKP negotiated certain mechanisms of land redistribution; for example, a tenant who possessed four to six acres was expected to give half an acre to a laborer.<sup>36</sup> Henceforth, in any conflict with landlords, “the peasants and workers would collectively deal with [them]. The peasants also agreed in no uncertain terms that if the revolution succeeds, the land will again be redistributed and this time it will be an equal distribution.”<sup>37</sup>

However, the party’s line of “land-to-the-tiller” inadvertently precluded egalitarian redistribution, exacerbating tensions within the worker-peasant alliance, especially as tenants found alternative mechanisms to secure their possession. By 1973, after three years of MKP-led struggle, landlords in the Frontier had been shaken, changing the balance of forces in the countryside. In large areas, especially northern

Hashtnagar and Malakand, the movement had put an end to various forms of landlord dominance. Here, many tenants had not paid rent for three years, hanging on to the land through sheer force with the support of landless laborers. By November 1972, many richer peasants began negotiating secret deals with landlords, anxious about having to repay three years of unpaid rents if the movement ultimately failed.<sup>38</sup> This left a more numerous poor peasantry vulnerable and undermined peasant unity.

When the Pakistan People’s Party-backed government took over the province in 1973 and implemented a ban on ejectments, tenants no longer had an incentive to concede to laborers. Farm laborers petitioned “Party Elders,” complaining that well-to-do peasants were no longer heeding the party’s line: “Although they agree with the rights of farm laborers, they keep delaying implementation in the same way that courts keep adjourning for later dates.”<sup>39</sup> These better-off peasants were also increasing their overtures to mainstream parties, particularly the Pakistan People’s Party. MKP general secretary Sher Ali Bacha thus wrote, “One landlord was finished, but a hundred small landlords took birth and lost interest in the peasant movement.”<sup>40</sup> He was also concerned that rich peasants were leveraging their dominant position in MKP units to extract more surplus from landless laborers. These proto-capitalist peasants were undermining the united front and, given their leading role, bringing the movement to a rolling lull. Thus, the very success of workers and peasants in defeating landlordism led to their alliance unraveling as upwardly mobile tenants no longer saw its utility and returned to discriminatory, anti-landless practices.

### **Agrarian Transitions and Multilineal Marxism**

The slowdown in the Frontier movement sparked a debate in the party over agrarian transitions that echoed modes of production debates in the Indian communist movement of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>41</sup> Three questions were at stake: (1) was the countryside semi-feudal or capitalist? (2) which classes belonged in the united front? and (3) which class should lead the united front as the principal revolutionary agent? The party’s initial position presupposed widespread “feudal” relations of production, the primary contradiction being between landlords and tenants, with the differentiation among the latter being of little immediate relevance. As a consequence, the party argued that “Pakistan’s [People’s] Democratic Revolution is fundamentally an agrarian revolution, meaning that the peasantry is its

main force.<sup>42</sup> However, as proto-capitalists emerged in Hashtnagar with the success of the land-to-the-tiler movement, party leaders recognized that capitalism was developing in the countryside, but maintained that it would lead to, following Lenin, increasing peasant differentiation, not displacement. Further, they also recognized that these processes would be regionally specific, thus also prefiguring more recent theorizations of the agrarian question, which emphasize “several different agrarian questions, driven by regionally disparate class constellations and development trajectories.”<sup>43</sup> For the party, what accounted for this regional specificity was how capitalist development was coconstituted by caste-like practices and “feudal” begar.

The party’s initial position that Pakistan was semi-feudal corresponded to the realities that its activists observed in South Punjab. Here, despite the importance of agrarian laborers, the vast estates of the landlords meant that even when they began to evict tenants to manage the land themselves, tenancy remained dominant. Compared to tenants, “the proportion of other classes—farm laborers and various artisanal classes—is very low”:<sup>44</sup> a situation quite different to that in Hashtnagar by the end of the 1960s. In South Punjab, despite some resistance, the landlord as a class had not been weakened. In other words, unlike in Hashtnagar, limitations on the upward mobility of tenants were still in place. For the party, the primary contradiction here was between the “feudal” landlords and the tenants.

Further, the party also interpreted the presence of begar in South Punjab as evidence of “feudal” relations. In an interview, the then Punjab provincial general secretary, Imtiaz Alam, argued that begar was a sign of “feudal bondage”—an “extra-economic form of surplus accumulation.” Landlords made widespread use of begar, for example, by forcing tenants to do unpaid construction work on their factories.<sup>45</sup> Local MKP leaders like Sufi Sibghatullah Mazari organized begar refusals. Landlords responded by besieging villages with the Border Military Police,<sup>46</sup> an official landlord-controlled paramilitary, and marshalling scab labor, whom Sibghatullah referred to as *gunday* (goons).<sup>47</sup> One landlord, for instance, dispatched around five to six hundred of his *gunday* with tractor-trolleys to forcibly retrieve the tenants’ crop.<sup>48</sup> These *gunday* consisted of both tenants and landless laborers, and were used by the landlord to fracture the MKP’s attempts at building a united front. Whereas initially Sibghatullah viewed scab labor as effectively coerced and organized to stop it, he increasingly came to see these laborers as willful agents

actively aligning with landlords to undermine the tenant movement. Alongside the prevalence of “feudal” landlord-tenant relations, this landlord-labor alliance led Sibghatullah to not prioritize organizing labor in South Punjab.

Bacha and his supporters, on the other hand, argued that, in the Frontier at least, the peasant movement had intensified capitalist relations of production, and this necessitated organizing labor separately. Capitalism was developing from above, as landlords and merchants invested in industry and cash crops; and from below, as limited land reforms (official and unofficial) and the rent freeze achieved by the movement enabled richer tenants to accumulate capital by investing in machinery and land.<sup>49</sup> If tenants and laborers continued in the same organization then it would be the interests of the now-dominant rich peasants that would be pursued over those of laborers.<sup>50</sup> Although Bacha cited Lenin’s and Mao’s emphasis on separate organizations of laborers, he drew more extensively on the Indian experience, where “peasant activists and leaders were often Brahmins or belonged to upper castes, and therefore did not give emphasis to a separate organization of landless laborers. The Kisan Sabhas were captured only by tenants and rich peasants, and these became Kulak Sabhas that were dominated by Congress’s influence, and the revolutionary activists’ influence was extinguished.”<sup>51</sup> The reference to upper castes implied that pre-capitalist modes of domination were not incompatible with the intensification of capitalist relations. And if the party was to continue to prioritize peasants over laborers, it was prioritizing the “capitalist road and [abandoning] the socialist road, whose axis is the proletariat,”<sup>52</sup> for agrarian laborers were part of the latter. Bacha, cognizant of the dynamics in areas like South Punjab, recognized that the broader social formation remained characterized by landed power, and so rich peasants would still be part of the united front. But given the intensification of capitalist relations, agricultural laborers—not peasants—would increasingly be leading the united front.

Bangash and his supporters, on the other hand, argued that capitalism had simply not developed, either in industry or in agriculture, to the point that warranted making agricultural laborers the leading class—a position appropriate for a direct socialist revolution, not for the prerequisite People’s Democratic Revolution. They argued that the intensification of capitalist relations in a few areas did not reflect broader changes in the mode of production. Even tenants who had legally become

laborers had not been freed from feudal relations as in Western Europe: “They often use their own means of production and rather than cash wages they are remunerated in kind. In some cases, they are even subjected to begar. What kind of capitalism is this?”<sup>53</sup> They argued that the “Trotskyite” line of capitalist development in Pakistan would confuse laborers, who would mistake a manufactured enemy, the peasants, for the real enemy, the landlords; and that this line would also alienate the peasants from any possible united front.<sup>54</sup> To Bangash, rich and middle-class tenants would play a leading role in the success of the revolution.

By 1976, the party arrived at an official compromise position, one that hinged on the possibility of multiple and regionally specific paths to agrarian transition and liberatory struggle. When Bacha initially published his concerns in 1974, the party maintained its position to not form separate organizations for laborers, but to keep them in the same units and committees as peasants. Overall, party members were directed to keep the rural poor united and prevent peasants and workers from fighting each other.<sup>55</sup> However, Bacha’s interventions influenced the party’s Punjab leaders. In 1975, Alam argued that increasing mechanization and evictions indicated an “increase of capitalism in agriculture,” due to which “the contradiction in the rural population, between farm laborers and a rural bourgeoisie, is increasing.”<sup>56</sup> He argued that “we need to advance the leadership of farm laborers and poor peasants. . . . Without this, we can’t ignite the People’s Democratic politics.”<sup>57</sup> That said, he noted the regionally uneven development of agrarian capitalism in Punjab: “In central Punjab, [capitalist production] has been intensifying for quite a while whereas in feudal areas [i.e., South Punjab] this process has intensified [only recently] as a consequence of the peasant movement.” This called for what Alam termed *class geographies* (*tabqati jaghrafyah*): “a class analysis and collect[ion] [of] clear facts, so that the party’s work will be on correct foundations.”<sup>58</sup> In 1976 the party thus arrived at an understanding of regional specificity: only in Hashtnagar and Malakand were agricultural laborers to be organized separately, so that “the opportunities wrested from landlords are received by agricultural laborers and poor peasants rather than rich peasants.”<sup>59</sup>

That said, the specificity of capitalist development was also coconstituted by the logics of liberation: whereas the success of the tenant movements in the Frontier led to a proto-capitalism “from below,” in South Punjab, the movement, though not successful,

led landlords to intensify capitalism “from above” as a deterrent. This called for regionally specific and differentiated political tactics, whereby the united front would have different and evolving organizational forms in different areas, all within a strategic unity oriented toward the People’s Democratic Revolution. In essence, the debate pointed toward the possibility not only of multiple paths of capitalist development but also multi-linear logics of liberation—a non-teleological and thus worldly Marxism.<sup>60</sup>

### Theories and Theologies of Liberation

The MKP’s engagement with local cultures, including over questions of Islam, also provided an opening to imagine complementary paths toward liberation. The party’s engagement with Islam demonstrates a commitment to a vernacularized and worldly Marxism, one that took seriously non-Western ideas and practices. While central party leaders made the two ideologies compatible in practice, local leaders like Sufi Sibghatullah Mazari, who would eventually become the vice president of the MKP’s Punjab branch, equated them in theory as well. He did so through the very struggle and categories of analysis that the party popularized. Indeed, unlike Pakistan’s other communists, the MKP did not view Islam merely as a preformed tool for ruling class hegemony but conceived of it as a religion open to other ideologies, including, implicitly, Marxism. The liberatory nature of Islam, however, had to be realized through organized class struggle on the terrain of both political economy and ideology.

Though the MKP’s manifesto makes a case for Islam’s articulation with socialist politics, as we further elaborate below, much of it is devoted to tackling the hegemonic misuse of Islam by ruling classes:

Pakistan . . . has a semi-feudal culture. . . . This includes all those fatwa mongers who use the name of Islam to throttle the throats of toiling classes, and search for justifications for capitalism and feudalism in the name of Islam. . . . They conceal the presence of American imperialism in Asia while condemning wars and struggles of national liberation throughout the world, and seek to turn time backward and stop the evolution of history.<sup>61</sup>

The party believed that this misused Islam was upheld by American imperialism: “semi-colonial culture and semi-feudal culture . . . have formed a reactionary cultural alliance against Pakistan’s new culture, in which the former plays a leading role.”<sup>62</sup> For the MKP, Marxism-Leninism provided a space to critique the

coconstitution of capitalist-imperialism and hegemonic Islam.

This coconstitution was evident from the party's practical engagement in the countryside. Religious figures were not outside of the class system: they could be tenants and landless laborers dependent on landlords, or they could be the landlords themselves. One MKP activist in the Frontier explained in an interview that maulvis (or mullahs, broad terms for religious leaders and instructors) were the lackeys of the landlords because many of them received funds from the latter. Another said that the party's revolutionary land-to-the-tiller slogan initially faced ridicule: "We would tell people that God didn't give these lands [to the landlords], the English did. We will take it from them . . . [But] the maulvis would [cite the Qur'an to defend the landlords], '*wa tu'izzu man tasha'u wa tudhillu man tasha*'—if Allah wishes He will honor someone and if not He will dishonor them. . . . We had fatwas of *kufr* [disbelief] passed about us." In some cases, the landlord himself was the religious figure, a phenomenon that appeared to be far more politically consequential in South Punjab. There, Makhdoom landlords claimed common descent from Prophet Muhammad, using this genealogical assertion—the ideology of "Syedism"<sup>63</sup>—and their patronage of local Sufi shrines to legitimize their immense landholdings. Many peasants even "consider[ed] the Makhdoom alongside Allah."<sup>64</sup> Given these articulations of Islam with landlordism in both the Frontier and South Punjab, the party had to develop its own articulation.

Starting from its manifesto, the party put forward an alternative understanding of Islam as inherently open to transformation. One source for that change could be class struggle, and the manifesto narrates the fictional story of a proto-typical Pakistani village in which initially conservative maulvis come to accept and endorse radical social change, believing that young activists are "practicing the *sunnat* [model] of Muhammad (peace be upon him) of Arabia and his companions."<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the manifesto stresses Islam's long tradition of learning from multiple cultures, citing a Hadith (saying of Prophet Muhammad) that states, "seek knowledge even if it is in China." Those who opposed "foreign ideologies and thinking" in the name of religion, the manifesto declares, actually go against Islam: "Their philosophy and attitude to life is a remnant of the *zamana-e-jahiliat*" ("the age of ignorance," a reference to pre-Islamic Arabia). Ultimately, the party's manifesto conceived of an Islam whose "inquisitive and

creative nature" made it amenable to the "absorption" of foreign ideologies, including, implicitly, Marxism, and whose religious leaders could politically realign with escalating class struggle.<sup>66</sup>

One way the party put these ideas into practice was through "cultural positioning," that is, the strategic deployment of "symbolic resources . . . for purposes of political persuasion."<sup>67</sup> These practices must have struck renowned Pakistani Trotskyist Tariq Ali, who disparaged the party at the time for "begin[ning] its private and public meetings with recitations from the Koran!"<sup>68</sup> Major Ishaq even begins the MKP's manifesto with 786, the numerical form of the Basmalah, and a quotation from the Quran: "Say, 'Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing'" (17:81).<sup>69</sup> He goes on to imply that the working classes and the patriotic middle classes are the army of divine Truth (*Haq*, which as *Al Haq* is a name for God) engaged in "jihad" against the capitalists and landlords, who are the army of falsehood.<sup>70</sup> Party reports document other similar practices in passing: conducting a *jum'at alwida'* (Friday of farewell) for comrades killed in the struggle,<sup>71</sup> commemorating the fortieth day of the deaths of comrades, taking breaks to allow people to conduct their prayers, and raising "Allah-o-Akbar" chants at rallies.<sup>72</sup> In one speech in South Punjab, Major Ishaq repeated themes from the manifesto, likening the peasant struggle against landlords to Prophet Muhammad's fight against his enemies: "The people who scare us, and who martyr us, they are all Abu Jahal and Abu Lahab [the Prophet's enemies]."<sup>73</sup> But the party's engagement with Islam went beyond such subtle cultural positioning as they tried to actively engage and recruit religious figures.

Indeed, as the peasant movement exploded and came to saturate social life in the Frontier and South Punjab, the class struggle itself changed the opinions of some maulvis and everyday Muslims, just as the manifesto captured. In other words, many maulvis themselves stood to gain materially and symbolically from joining the struggle and saw no contradiction between Islam and confronting landlords. Inamullah Jan explained in an interview that although his family was one of mullahs, as tenants they joined the Frontier's peasant movement—and were known as the peasant mullahs. Hidayatullah, a landless laborer from a family also associated with the mullahs, explained how enthusiastic they were about the MKP's role in discouraging discrimination against landless laborers like themselves. Indeed, one of the MKP's founders in the

Frontier was Maulvi Muhammad Sadiq, a small landowner and trained Islamic scholar who considered “Islam to be the religion of the poor oppressed.”<sup>74</sup> The MKP bulletin notes that he strongly refuted the false fatwas of the right-wing mullahs, whom he considered the agents of capitalists and landlords.<sup>75</sup>

Several religious supporters of the MKP, including Maulvi Sadiq, drew inspiration from a revolutionary socialist strain of Deobandi Islam, whose origins lay in the writings of Shah Wali-Ullah.<sup>76</sup> One of the early propagators of this Deobandi socialism in the Frontier was Maulana Abdur Raheem Popalzai, the “Mufti of the Frontier,” who led tenant struggles against landlordism and colonialism in the same areas the MKP would later organize.<sup>77</sup> Maulvi Sadiq was inspired by Popalzai, as well as his religious studies in pre-partition Delhi, where he was exposed to Deobandi socialism and anti-colonial revolutionary ideas. In South Punjab, Sibghatullah Mazari also took inspiration from major figures of Deobandi socialism, especially Ubaidullah Sindhi, the “Imam of the Revolution,”<sup>78</sup> who grew up in South Punjab and had many followers there,<sup>79</sup> and Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, who, as president of the National Awami Party, was a major influence on MKP founders and toured South Punjab as well.<sup>80</sup>

By aligning themselves with Deobandi socialism, Sibghatullah and his cadres were able to widen their movements. They recruited many mullahs and established insurgent Islamic institutions that rivalled the Makhdooms’ Islamic landlordism. As they began their engagement, one maulvi was reported to have said “Your party’s work is good—and the *sawab* [divine blessing] you will get from this is more than from *namaz* [obligatory prayers].”<sup>81</sup> The MKP even defended peasants as they built their own mosques, independent from those patronized by landlords, which the latter tried to tear down. Reporting on the event, the party’s circular noted, “The landlord’s injustice has extended from the peasant’s home to the house of God, but those days aren’t far when, with the power of God, the peasant will destroy the landlord’s home.”<sup>82</sup> The culmination of these efforts were annual mullah congregations, held during Eid Milad un Nabi celebrations, where, as Alam recalled, mullahs “delivered fatwas against feudalism, quoting the Quran and Hadith. These were peasant mullahs, from the Ubaidullah Sindhi tradition, and over a thousand would come.” These engagements undermined the landlords’ grip on Islam and pointed to the class struggle in religion. When one Makhdoom landlord

demanded that Sibghatullah change his name (which literally meant “color of God”) so that the landlord could use it for his own grandson, peasants sided with Sibghatullah, insisting that “in our Sufi, ‘the color of God’ is pure.”<sup>83</sup>

Although the MKP engaged with this Deobandi socialism as part of its revolutionary practice, it never officially synthesized it in its theory because many of its leading members were areligious. Nevertheless, the party created the space for a plurality of approaches to Marxism, both religious and areligious, without siding with either. This enabled Sibghatullah, for instance, to theoretically bridge Marxism with Islam. His comrade Malik Akbar said in an interview that “when [Sibghatullah] understood Maoist philosophy . . . he became Sufi Sibghatullah, a Truth seeker (*Haqiqat-pasand*).” Contained within this aspiration for Truth, the comrade continued, was “a love for humanity, on feeling their pain,” which was equivalent to a love for God. But this Truth could only be arrived at through understanding class society, which caused human pain.

In his script for a play revolving around a fictional landlord’s efforts to clear a jungle for cultivation, Sibghatullah equated theological and theoretical poverty.<sup>84</sup> The landlord entices poor pastoralists to clear the land by promising them land and other monetary rewards, saying that, as their *pir* (spiritual guide), he cares about them. While villagers praise the landlord’s benevolence and generosity, one character, named “the revolutionary,” insists that the landlord is actually deceiving them. “There is the Quran in [the landlord’s] hand,” he says, “but a knife hidden under his arm.” Indeed, the landlord refuses to keep his promise once the land is reclaimed, expelling the farmers and replacing them with tractors and a few hired hands. The play concludes with villagers, now aware of the landlord’s deception, joining the revolution and launching a successful land-to-the-tiller movement. Theory enables the revolutionary to see past the apparent benevolence of the landlord to arrive at the Truth of class society: exploitation, undergirded by violence and covered up by the misuse of Islam.

However, Sibghatullah also juxtaposes this misuse of Islam with the Truth of Islam, one which necessitated overturning this class society. Villagers in the play justify their land claims in Islamic terms, saying that “for Muslims, tenancy is actually *makruh* (an Islamically disliked act) or possibly forbidden entirely (*haram*).” Right next to the script, Sibghatullah clarifies the villagers’ reasoning and, more generally, discusses his views on the relationship between Islam and land. He makes



two main, and somewhat contradictory, arguments, citing his conversations with “people’s imams” (a reference to Deobandi socialists). In one set of arguments, Sibghatullah asserts the right of the direct cultivator to possess land, claiming “[Prophet Muhammad] once said that whoever gives life to dead land, that land is theirs.” However this sort of argument was conventionally used by Hanafi scholars in reference to gentries not tillers, and Sibghatullah was rethinking Hanafi thought to favor the latter over the former.<sup>85</sup> Yet later, he goes on to challenge landed private property entirely, arguing that “most of Pakistan’s land belongs to the public treasury,” echoing the ambivalence of Deobandi socialists like Ubaidullah Sindhi and Maulana Bhashani.<sup>86</sup> Either way, for Sibghatullah, to overturn the class system—either by giving land back to the tiller or nationalizing landed property entirely—was to instantiate a set of relations that affirmed *Haqiqat*, that combined love for God and His reflections (humanity). As Malik Akbar put it, “the Sufism of Sufi [Sibghatullah]—which was about Truth and the love of humanity—ultimately found its expression in the class struggle.”

In addition to his prose, this imbrication of theory and theology was also evident in Sibghatullah’s practice at his mechanic repair shop, where he was the teacher (*ustad*) to many apprentices (*shagirds*). However, he expanded the pedagogical possibilities of the conventional teacher-student relation in a way that resembled the *pir-murid* relationship of Sufi orders, where *pirs* guide their disciples (*murids*) on a path toward the Truth that is God. While socialist Sufis in neighboring Sindh rejected the *pir-murid* relation, seeing it as inherently unequal,<sup>87</sup> Sibghatullah repurposed this relation for revolutionary socialism. He resembled Bhashani, who required his disciples to affirm a belief in socialism (alongside God and the Prophet) as part of his *bay’ah* (oath of allegiance).<sup>88</sup> Sibghatullah’s students were also encouraged, as part of their political training, to compose “revolutionary essays” and “revolutionary poems,” which were recited at local MKP meetings, prefacing their performances with recitations from the Quran.<sup>89</sup> His students would in turn go back to their villages to teach and organize others, establishing over forty peasant committees in the area.<sup>90</sup> Ata Muhammad Khalti (d. 2005), a peasant who joined the MKP in 1975 “under the leadership of Sufi Sibghatullah,” once described his training by one of Sibghatullah’s disciples: “He trained me politically. He was my guide (*murshid*). He was a very faithful person. Very truthful. Being close to him, I learnt a lot.”<sup>91</sup> Through these practices, which combined

Islam and revolutionary socialism, Sibghatullah ultimately affirmed that everything reflects a deeper Truth that is God Himself.

Though the MKP as a whole did not officially pursue a theological and theoretical reconciliation of Islam and Marxism, Sibghatullah’s own equivalence was made possible by the very struggle and categories of analysis that the party popularized. More broadly, the MKP’s engagement with Islam demonstrates a commitment to a vernacularized Marxism, one that took seriously non-Western ideas and practices. The liberatory nature of Islam had to be realized through organized class struggle on the terrain of both political economy and ideology.

### An Intersectional Insurgency?

Though the party’s worldly Marxism led to a sophisticated engagement with agrarian transitions and Islam, which opened the door for a multilineal and non-Eurocentric Marxism, it also meant the party did not develop a theory for confronting patriarchy. This was because, in the 1970s, the party prioritized the contradictions between landlords and peasants, as we discussed above, and consequently worried that tackling gender head on would alienate male peasants from the movement. Thus, the party’s very concern with practicing a worldly Marxism, one oriented toward building a united front rooted in local conditions, also led it, in one conjuncture, to deprioritizing gender. Yet as we show below, the proliferation of women’s activism in the 1980s, the continuing coconstitution of patriarchy and landlordism in South Punjab (unlike in Hashtnagar), and ironically the collapse of the MKP itself, altered the conjuncture in ways that enabled Sibghatullah to confront patriarchy directly. He did so, however, by deploying the party’s concepts, thus continuing on the tracks of a worldly Marxism.

Though the party made scattered observations about gendered labor, it did not fully theorize or organize around this issue, in part because of its orientation toward building a united front against landlords. In 1972, MKP president Major Ishaq discussed landlord’s exploitation and oppression of (basically male) tenants in South Punjab but mentioned only in passing the gendered division of agricultural labor: “It is women who exclusively do the [cotton] picking.”<sup>92</sup> These women were likely paid by male tenants, which would raise questions about the fairness of gendered wages and working conditions. But he does not consider the full implications of these contradictions, probably because

if landlords, who paid tenants in cash, did not pay in a full and timely manner, tenants would not be able to pay these women workers. Moreover, many women agricultural laborers were also in a direct contradiction with landlords, as Sibghatullah noted in 1973: for the past three years, “the landlord is neither giving the share due to tenants, nor paying women cash for picking cotton.”<sup>93</sup> As a consequence, the party prioritized the contradiction between landlords, on one side, and tenants and laborers on the other, but minimized the contradictions between tenants and laborers and thus postponed a reckoning with gendered agricultural labor.

The subsumption of the women’s question into a generalized united front against landlordism took a slightly different form in the Frontier. Here, men and women, tenants and laborers alike, were frustrated by the particular form of patriarchy under what they called *khanism*, that is, the petty sovereignty of the landlords. In addition to their role in agricultural production and domestic labor, women were obligated to do the landlord’s *begar*, thus facing not a double but a triple burden. “They would work in the home, work in the fields, and work for the landlord,” a male tenant noted in an interview. *Begar* was also gender-specific: “They would clean the wheat crop, or clean the rooms of the landlord’s bungalow.” Landlords specifically required female labor for these tasks because they observed *pardah*—that is, they didn’t want women of their own household to interact with unrelated men, an important marker of honor—but in doing so, they violated the *pardah* of their tenants and laborers. *Begar* was frustrating for men, because it prevented them from allocating not only their own labor but also that of women in their households, cutting through questions of *pardah* and honor.

Landlords also oversaw, if only nominally, the marriage exchange of women among tenants and laborers and thus asserted their authority over reproduction. They required tenants to alert them upon weddings and pay a tax. As Charles Lindholm has noted for nearby Swat, landlords levied this marriage tax “as a surety against the [landlord] taking the girl for himself.”<sup>94</sup> Landlords, he further noted, frequently took “poor girls as their mistresses.” While we do not have evidence of this sexual abuse happening in Hashtnagar, the comparison with Swat is indicative of how degrading such taxation could be. It’s also possible that landlords presided over the practice of *swara*—also known as *watasata* in South Punjab—where *jirgas* (councils) decide to exchange women in place of blood money after a murder.<sup>95</sup> Landlords thus not only contributed to the triple

labor burden of women, but also regulated the control of reproduction more generally by restricting dependent males’ control of women’s bodies and labor. Thus, men and women, tenants and laborers alike, were frustrated by patriarchy under *khanism*.

When the peasant movement successfully ended *begar*, stopped evictions, withheld rent, and more generally undermined the petty sovereignty of landlords, the party recognized that the “peasant movement has had a pretty good effect on women,” albeit with limitations. Many women also subscribed to the normative Pakhtun ideal of *pardah* and were pleased that their upward mobility allowed them to replace their own field labor with hired hands. For others who did not experience the same level of prosperity, at least they were freed from the landlord’s *begar*. However, the party also recognized important limitations:

Aside from the feudal landlords, peasant proprietors and rich peasants of the Frontier, all the women of peasant households take equal part in work and labor with their men, but their problems are greater than those of men. Often a peasant marries solely with the intention that he not only receives a free agricultural laborer who can produce more hands and arms for him, but through her can also get comfort.<sup>96</sup>

In other words, the party recognized that tenants had their own form of patriarchy that, in effect, treated women as unpaid agricultural, domestic, and sexual labor. This realization could have opened up the possibility for a more intersectional analysis, one that explicitly recognized that tenant and laborer males’ frustrations with patriarchy under *khanism* had much to do with the fact that it was not *their* patriarchy.

However, the party did not pursue such an intersectional approach in its analysis: while the MKP recognized how the movement’s success could lead to class polarization and capitalism “from below,” it did not consider the gendered implications of these processes. First, *de facto* land reform allocated no specific land rights to women, and even those who had lost their husbands in battles had not received anything. This meant that women would continue to be dependent on men for income and status. Second, as tenants now held onto their surplus and some could increasingly afford to replace women’s field labor with male hired labor, women’s labor outside the home became less socially acceptable. As one male tenant noted in an interview, “[women’s farm labor] wasn’t even considered inappropriate back then because everyone in the village had

their women out working with them. Nowadays, people consider it somewhat inappropriate.” Although only some households could afford to replace women’s labor with male hired hands, the morality of the richer ones came to predominate. In essence, the morality once presided over by landlords—a morality that hinged on the regulation of women’s bodies and the protection of honor—increasingly came to be adjudicated and exemplified by richer peasants. In Hashtnagar, richer peasants now presided over practices like *swara* (the exchange of women in place of blood money) instead of landlords. Thus, worldly Marxism’s achievements in this conjuncture led, not to the weakening of patriarchy, but its rearticulation into a peasant patriarchy.<sup>97</sup>

Although the party did acknowledge that it had not raised “the class and political consciousness” of women in any significant way, it exteriorized the reasons for its failure to peasant culture and did not fully reckon with its own members’ patriarchy: “[Women] continue to take an indirect part in the struggle, but until now the party has not been able to organize them. Due to the particular social conditions in the Frontier, due to the cultural underdevelopment of the peasants, and due to the lack of women activists to do this work amongst women, this task has not yet been achieved.”<sup>98</sup> Further, implicit in the party’s view was a worry that, if it placed too much emphasis on women’s issues, male peasants would stop supporting the party. Indeed, it might even provoke open antagonization, which, as we’ll see, Sibghatullah later faced in South Punjab. However, the fact that, in the quotation above, the party characterized women’s role in the movement as “indirect,” even though scattered reports point to the centrality of their contributions,<sup>99</sup> hints at the prevalence of patriarchy among its own leadership.

This patriarchy also stifled women in the MKP who were actively trying to develop a theoretical and practical approach to women’s liberation. As early as 1970, the party’s newspaper *Sanobar* published an article by Kaneez Rasheed that analyzed the coconstitution of gender and class, arguing that women’s labor is crucial to both production and reproduction and is exploited by both landlords and husbands. She stressed the impossibility of revolution without women’s liberation.<sup>100</sup> She also criticized working class men for treating women like private property and preventing their participation in political work. However, the MKP did not take up this critique and in 1977, female leader Shamim Akhtar echoed Rasheed in criticizing male comrades for controlling women’s mobility and preventing political work:

“No doubt, in our absence, you are troubled: you don’t get your food on time, or people question you as to where your wife goes every day. So, comrades, we say that if you also want to destroy the oppressive, violent and exploitative system in our country, then you have to destroy your feudal thinking.”<sup>101</sup> That is, she pointed to how male comrades (husbands) practiced patriarchy to guarantee their social reproduction (e.g., food) and uphold their notions of honor. She also criticized the party itself for not doing more to push men in the correct direction. Damningly, she writes, “The party educates its activists concerning working amongst workers and peasants . . . but has not till today even written a single word concerning women.” Indeed, Amina Zaman, another female MKP leader, elaborated in an interview that although MKP president Major Ishaq encouraged her to form a women’s wing, male party leaders did not focus on training, strategizing, or follow-up. Although she and other women did organize initial discussion groups on women’s problems, these were restricted to the wives and daughters of educated families and did not reach the grass roots. Rasheed, Akhtar, and Zaman drew attention to how the patriarchy of male leaders led to the movement’s theoretical and practical poverty on the gender question. The party’s fragmentation in 1977 prevented any further possible development along these lines.

That said, Sibghatullah confronted patriarchy at the grass roots years later by tackling its coconstitution with landlordism. In 1991, he founded the *Anjuman Banu Mazari*, a clan-based organization whose most significant campaign centered on oppressive gender relations. His decision to create this organization was shaped by the honor killing of his first wife by his brother, the wider proliferation of women’s activism in Pakistan in the 1980s,<sup>102</sup> and, ironically, the very failure of the 1970s land-to-the-tiller movement in South Punjab. That is, in the region’s tribal politics, patriarchal control not only subjugated women, but also, unlike in Hashtnagar, remained coconstitutive of landlord power, which in turn subordinated all tribal members, men and women alike. Land and women (*zameen* and *zan*) were central to most tribal disputes in South Punjab because, not unlike the Frontier, these were considered constitutive of a tribe’s integrity and honor, and could be subject to violations by others. Women’s sexuality was one site of potential transgression, whereby any extramarital sex led to women being labelled *kali* (dishonored) and punished through murder, being sold into slavery, or being exchanged (*wata-sata*), all in accordance with the

*kali qanun* (honor codes). The *kali qanun* were adjudicated through a *jirga*, headed by landlords who are also chiefs of the tribes and who legitimized the application of these codes through Islam. To confront these codes, as Sibghatullah would do, was, in effect, to challenge landlord authority.

*Anjuman Banu Mazari* bore traces of Sibghatullah's earlier experience with the MKP. The organization was not meant to be a parochial clan-centered organization, but drew on communist concepts, aiming to form a "united front" with other tribes to improve the conditions of all through social investigation or "census[es]," "criticism and self-criticism," and democratic centralism.<sup>103</sup> "He gave tribal politics a revolutionary direction," his comrade Malik Akbar said in an interview. "The language may have shifted, but at heart he was still a communist. By making this organization, Sibghatullah was ultimately still challenging tribal chiefs."

However, Sibghatullah's critique of the *kali qanun* was also driven by a broader commitment to Truth, which meant confronting the code's use anywhere, including among his own fellow peasants. He condemned how "under the cover of the *kali qanun*" men committed all sorts of violence against women: from murdering disliked wives in order to marry again, to punishing disobedient daughters.<sup>104</sup> He also condemned the fact that women did not even "have a right to provide explanation or have an investigation conducted," and argued that these practices have a place neither "in democracy nor in Islam," but belonged instead to the "*zamana-e-jahiliat*" (age of ignorance). In opposing these honor codes, and thereby challenging both landed authority and patriarchy, Sibghatullah ultimately aimed to restore Truth.

By challenging patriarchy in the countryside, Sibghatullah did something the MKP's male leaders feared to do. In fact, one former MKP leader continued to advise Sibghatullah not to confront this issue, for the consequences, he warned, could be severe. Indeed, Sibghatullah ended up paying for this campaign against the *kali qanun* with his own life. In 2000, after defending a woman whose husband accused her of being *kali*, Sibghatullah was hacked to death in broad daylight outside his home. Tribal chiefs were widely believed to be behind the murder, as they worried that his confrontation with patriarchy would challenge their tribal and landed authority.

Ultimately, while the MKP recognized gendered labor and its women leaders supplied theoretical resources to confront patriarchy, the party as a whole

did not take up this issue in the 1970s because it wanted to maintain (male) worker-peasant unity and because of its own internal patriarchy. However, this recognition and these resources did shape leaders like Sibghatullah, who later confronted patriarchy because he understood that it coconstituted and reproduced landed power. Thus, the party's overall approach to gender exposed the contradictions of its worldly Marxism: in one conjuncture, it was led to sideline gender; in another, a Marxism understood as always-in-the-making enabled an intersectional insurgency.

### Conclusion

In this article, we showed how the MKP's practice of Marxism in the periphery produced a worldly Marxism, that is, a theory that is inherently open to the possibility of its own retheorization: a Marxism always-in-the-making. Specifically, our study shows that the encounter of Marxist theory with questions of agrarian transition, religion, and gender in Pakistan led to openings for a multilineal, vernacularized, and intersectional Marxism—a worldly Marxism.

The party arrived at a multilineal Marxism because of its own practical interventions in the conjuncture, which changed the balance of forces and necessitated a critique and renewal of their previous categories of analysis. Specifically, as the party successfully defeated landlordism in the Frontier and saw the exacerbation of contradictions within the peasantry, its members grappled with the nature of the revolution they were pursuing. As the party drew comparisons with South Punjab and engaged with globally circulating theoretical debates on agrarian transition, it was propelled to renew its Marxism to make it more attentive to regional specificities, multilineal paths of capitalist development, and multilineal logics of liberation.

Moreover, the party's intervention in the conjuncture meant engaging in the cultural field, which raised epistemological questions about Marxism's relationship to other ideologies. The party contested the elite mobilization of Islam by rearticulating the religion with revolutionary socialism. While the MKP's central leaders forged a practical compatibility of Islam and Marxism through the use of Islamic idioms and the recruitment of religious leaders, local activists like Sibghatullah aimed for a theoretical equivalence. In pursuing such articulations, the party not only reimagined the boundaries and political possibilities of Islam, but also showcased how Marxism could engage with non-Western ideologies and practices.

However, the party's worldly Marxism failed to pursue certain possibilities: the balance of forces between contesting ideologies and material interests shaped which concepts became subject to theorization and retheorization in certain conjunctures. Because of patriarchy within and outside its own ranks, the party largely avoided confronting inegalitarian gender relations. This was despite the fact that women leaders began theorizing the coconstitution of class and gender, criticizing the chauvinism of male members, and insisting that revolution was impossible without women's liberation. What this suggests is that the availability of theoretical resources is not sufficient for them to be taken up for further development and practice. As women's activism in Pakistan became more salient in the 1980s, and as landlordism remained coconstituted by patriarchy, a new conjuncture enabled Sibghatullah to theorize and confront patriarchy in the country's peripheries. Ultimately, worldly Marxism is not an autonomous theoretical space but is shaped by the encounter between the forces of the conjuncture and the agency of the theorists.

Despite the MKP's contradictions, the conjunctures in which its party activists organized did energize them to treat Marxism in an unbounded way, whose core remained that of assembling theoretical and practical resources for subaltern emancipation. What the party's practice implies is that a different conjuncture, like that of today, would necessitate another retheorization of Marxism. Further, worldly Marxism also invites a rethinking of revolution itself. For if we understand revolution to be another conjuncture, one with its own political problems, struggles, and contradictions, then its arrival would mean not utopia but another point of departure necessitating, yet again, a renewal of Marxism.

**Noaman G. Ali** is assistant professor of political economy at the Lahore University of Management Sciences in Pakistan. His research and teaching concern the political economy of underdevelopment, particularly the relationship between rural movements, institutions, and agrarian change. Noaman has published in the *Journal of Agrarian Change* and *Rethinking Marxism*, and he has also written for *Tanqeed*.

**Shozab Raza** is a postdoctoral associate in the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University. His research focuses on imperialism, agrarian change, and radical politics in the global South, especially Pakistan. He has research articles published in *Comparative Studies in Soci-*

*ety and History* and *Ethnography*. He is also a founding editor of *Jamhoor*, a critical Left magazine on South Asia.

### Notes

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1. Ahmed, "Afzal Bangash," 2219.
2. For recent studies of the MKP, see Kalra and Butt, "In One Hand a Pen in the Other a Gun"; Ali, "Agrarian Class Struggle"; and Raza, "The Sufi and the Sickle."
3. Amel, *Arab Marxism*, 18.
4. Amel, *Arab Marxism*, 17. Analogous to Elleni Centime Zeleke criticizing the positivistic application of social science categories to the understanding of Ethiopian realities. See Zeleke, *Ethiopia in Theory*.
5. More, *Memoirs*.
6. Special Branch, Punjab, "The Fortnightly Police Abstract of Intelligence, Punjab: For the 2nd Half of February 1976," Abstract of Intelligence, May 10, 1976, nos. 6535-6593/GSB. Library of the Special Branch Punjab.
7. Shah, *Nightmarch*.
8. Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment*; Amel, *Arab Marxism*.
9. Coulthard, "Once Were Maoists."
10. Bloom and Martin, *Black against Empire*.
11. Wolin, *Wind from the East*.
12. Farber, *Cuba since the Revolution*.
13. Amel, *Arab Marxism*, 20.
14. Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*.
15. Badiou, *Rebirth of History*, 9.
16. For example, see Bangash, "Afzal Bangash Speaks" and Muhammad, "Preliminary Analysis" in *Pakistan Forum* and Muhammad, "Pakistan: Statement" in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*.
17. Coulthard, "Once Were Maoists."
18. Bloom and Martin, *Black against Empire*.
19. For instance, Fadi Bardawil's study of Lebanese socialism in the 1960s and 70s centers the writings of "the internationalist militant intellectual/translator." Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment*, 15.
20. Harrison, "Theorizing," 172.
21. Harrison, "Theorizing," 172.
22. Opposing the juxtaposition of intersectionality and Marxism, a recent literature has sought to reclaim the former for the latter. For a review, see Campbell, "Dialectics over Positivism for an Intersectional Marxism."
23. With the term "semi-feudalism," MKP referred to a social formation dominated by landlords and the widespread existence of

tenancy. In the Frontier, this social formation was also called *khanism*; in South Punjab, *jagirdari*.

24. For recent debates on transition in the global North and South respectively, see Varoufakis, "Techno-Feudalism"; and Li, "To Make Live or Let Die?"

25. The party was also limited in its engagements with ethno-nationalism, but, given space limitations, we don't attend to this here.

26. Pakistan Mazdoor Kisan Party, *Dastur*.

27. Ali, *Communism in Pakistan*; Malik, "Alternative Politics"; Toor, *State of Islam*.

28. Ali, *Communist Party*, 1:239.

29. Ali, *Communist Party*, 1:249.

30. Qtd. in Leghari, "Socialist Movement," 73–74.

31. Muhammad, *Jaddojahad Ke Panc Sal*, 6.

32. "Mazdoor Kisan Party aur Sarhad Kisan Tahrik," 46.

33. Muhammad, "Matun Taqirir."

34. Bangash, "Afzal Bangash Speaks," 15.

35. Bangash, "Afzal Bangash Speaks," 16.

36. Bangash, "Afzal Bangash Speaks," 16.

37. Bangash, "Afzal Bangash Speaks," 16.

38. Bacha, "Ijarah Ya Batai Ki Bandish."

39. Muhammad, "Jhokan Thesan Abadol," 3.

40. Bacha, "Ijarah Ya Batai Ki Bandish," 14.

41. See Lerche, Shah, and Harriss-White, "Introduction"; Patnaik, *Agrarian Relations*.

42. Alam, "Kisan Tahrik Ka Masla Awami Jumhuri Inqilab Ka Bunyadi Masla Hai," 6.

43. Shah and Harriss-White, "Resurrecting Scholarship," 17.

44. "Sonmiani Ki Tahqiqati Report."

45. Mazari, "Zulm Ki Tarik Wadio Main Safar."

46. "Jagirdar-Police Gathjor."

47. Mazari, "Personal Notebooks."

48. Mazari, "Kisano Ke Shab-o-Roz."

49. Bacha, "Inqilab Keliye," 3–5.

50. Bacha, "Inqilab Keliye," 6.

51. Bacha, "Inqilab Keliye," 9.

52. Bacha, "Inqilab Keliye," 7.

53. Ahmed, "Kia Zara'at Men Sarmayah Dari Arahi Hai?"

54. Muhammad, "Zar'ai Sarmayah Dari," 27.

55. Muhammad, "Inqilab Keliye," 54.

56. Alam, "Report," 7.

57. Alam, "Report," 7.

58. Alam, "Report," 7.

59. "Sarhad Kisan Tahrik."

60. Ultimately, the party could not establish these regionally specific united fronts and realize these multilineal possibilities. Bangash wanted to uphold the party's previous policy of not antagonizing rich peasants against rural workers, a position that eventually contributed to the party's fragmentation in late 1977.

61. Muhammad, *Manshur*, 63.

62. Muhammad, *Manshur*, 63.

63. Verkaaik, "Reforming Mysticism," 76.

64. Muhammad, "Pakistan Ke Tarik-Tarin Alaqa."

65. Muhammad, *Manshur*, 13.

66. Muhammad, *Manshur*, 50.

67. Perry, *Anyuan*, 4. The party also engaged with Pakhtun and Punjabi folk traditions and languages. See Kalra and Butt, "In One Hand a Pen in the Other a Gun."

68. Ali, "Pakistan and Bangladesh," 31.

69. Nasr et al., *Study Quran*, 17:81.

70. Muhammad, *Manshur*, 37.

71. "Pehla Ijlas," 4.

72. "Aj Shahid Ke."

73. "Aj Shahid Ke," 22.

74. Bacha, *Kisan Daftar*, 235.

75. Yusuf, "Mera Lahu," 10.

76. See Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought*, 227.

77. See Haroon, "Rise of Deobandi Islam."

78. Anjum, "Voice from the Margins," 162.

79. See Kamran, "Ubaidullah Sindhi as a Revolutionary."

80. For a fuller treatment of the genealogy and substance of Sibghatullah's theory and practice, see Raza, "The Sufi and the Sickle."

81. Mazari, "Zulm Ki Tarik Wadio."

82. "Kisano Ka Ghar Dhane Wale."

83. Mian, "Punjab Ke Bete Betian."

84. Mazari, "Personal Notebooks."

85. See Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought*, 241.

86. Bhashani elaborated a defense of land-to-the-tiller movements but later "declared to nationalize all sources of income in the name of Rabul-Aalamin (Lord of the Universe)." Special Branch, West Pakistan, "The Fortnightly Police Abstract of Intelligence, West Pakistan: For the 2nd Half of March 1970," Abstract of Intelligence, April 22, 1970, nos. 6429–6550/GSB. Library of the Special Branch Punjab.

87. Verkaaik, "Reforming Mysticism," 81–82.

88. Uddin, "Mao-Lana Bhashani."

89. Mazari, "Personal Notebooks."

90. Khalti, "Personal Diaries."

91. Khalti, "Personal Diaries."

92. Muhammad, "Pakistan Ke Tarik-Tarin Alaqa," 3.

93. Mazari, "Zulm Ki Tarik Wadio."
94. Lindholm, *Generosity and Jealousy*, 109.
95. Murders often originate from disputes over land, irrigation water, or women.
96. Pakistan Mazdoor Party, "Pakistan Mazdoor Party," 15.
97. See also Toor, "Moral Regulation."
98. Pakistan Mazdoor Party, "Pakistan Mazdoor Party," 15.
99. Scattered reports suggest women actually played an important role in the struggle, delivering food or ammunition to the front lines of battle, and even selling their gold to finance the purchase of arms and the legal fees of arrested tenants. See Mazari, "Zulm Ki Tarik Wadio." Also, Afzal Khamosh, interview with the author, May 26 2013, Shakur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
100. Rasheed, "Aurat Siyasi Bedari."
101. Akhtar, "Tanqidi Khat Banam-i Sathiyani," 87.
102. Toor, *State of Islam*.
103. Mazari, "Nasb Al'ain Anjuman Banu Mazari."
104. Mazari, "Tuman Mazari."

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