

« We Are the Kind of People who Work within the State »: The Gangs of Lyari, from Criminal Brokerage to Political Patronage

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Against dominant approaches of organised crime and its allegedly corrosive effects for public institutions, some recent works have tried to uncover the contribution of criminal organisations to everyday politics, including in democratic contexts.¹ To date, this literature remains characterised by a certain fragmentation, though. To simplify (and let me emphasise that I'm only referring to urban forms of criminality, here), one can identify a first group of authors (mostly sociologists and anthropologists) concerned with the imbrications of the official and the unofficial economy (which includes illicit activities duly sanctioned by the state as well as « illegalisms » tolerated by state authorities).² A second batch of scholars focuses on the collusive transactions between politicians and violent entrepreneurs, which draw the contours of a « gray zone of politics ».³ A third terrain of investigation, which seems a priori more fit for anthropologists but which has also caught the attention of a handful of political scientists over the years⁴ concerns the social services provided by criminal groups to the residents of their locality, and in particular to the most economically deprived among them. These services, which help criminals build a clientele, cover a wide range of practices, from the adjudication of private disputes (through the resolution of domestic, property or commercial squabbles) to practices of intermediation straddling the boundary between the public and the

¹ Jean-Louis Briquet and Gilles Favarel-Garrigues (dir.), *Milieus criminels et pouvoirs politiques. Les ressorts illégitimes de l'Etat*, Paris, Karthala, coll. "Recherches internationales", 2008.

² Janet Roitman, "The Politics of Informal Markets in Sub-Saharan Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28 (4) Dec. 1990, pp. 671-696; Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs. The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 2002.

³ Javier Auyero, *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina. The Gray Zone of State Power*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007; Javier Auyero et Matthew Mahler, "Relations occultes et fondements de la violence collective", *Politix*, 2011/1, pp. 93-94.

⁴ Camille Goirand, « "Philanthropes" en concurrence dans les favelas de Rio », *Critique internationale*, n°4, été 1999, pp. 155-167.

private (through a facilitated access to public jobs or « bureaucratic goods » such as building permits, commercial licenses,...⁵).

To a few notable exceptions, these three domains of investigation have rarely been dialoguing with each other. This is all the more surprising that some transversal issues, such as clientelism or political notabilisation, seemed particularly fit for such a conversation. Indeed, the functions of intermediation briefly mentioned above provide a vivid illustration of the position of broker endorsed by some violent entrepreneurs, whose social surface is irreducible to their reputation or even to their legal status of criminals, even when their access to financial and coercive resources acquired through illicit means is integral to their position of influence. Because it is rooted in « illegitimate » violence, criminal intermediations differ significantly from more conventional forms of brokering, though. The hierarchical relations between patrons, brokers and clients are here characterized by a deep ambivalence. As Enrique Arias emphasises in his study of the relations between public agents, social workers and drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro, the unsettled social status of criminals - respected here, despised there, feared everywhere -, as well as their exteriority to the state, introduce a deep uncertainty in the statutory hierarchies between criminal brokers and their political patrons⁶. If the latter tend to have the last word when things go wrong - and they often do -, they cannot ignore the capacity of nuisance of their protégés in their everyday interactions with them. Moreover, the controversial and sometimes illicit nature of these relations constrain politicians to preserve a plausible deniability that implies maintaining a minimal distance of security with these actors. These two imperatives set the tone and draw the boundaries for the interactions unfolding in the « gray zone of politics », which in essence is the largely occult space where the illicit activities of the state meet with the « illegitimate » violence of society. Besides this instability of the relations between political patrons and criminal brokers, one needs to factor in the deeply ambivalent relationship with the state of the criminals aspiring to join the notability. While investing into the state, if only to neutralise it from within,⁷ these actors never renounce to contain it from without, through violent coercion or armed resistance.

⁵ Patrick Haenni, *L'ordre des caïds. Conjurer la dissidence urbaine au Caire*, Paris, Karthala, 2005, p. 136.

⁶ Enrique Desmond Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro. Trafficking, Social Networks and Public Security*, University of North Carolina Press, 2006, p. 5.

⁷ Christian Geffray, « Etat, richesse et criminels », *Mondes en développement*, 110, 2000.

The unsettled, continuously re-negotiated nature of these relations is exemplified by the interactions between the state, the political class and the gangsters of Lyari, Karachi's largest inner-city neighbourhood. A few months before resisting militarily a massive police operation, in April 2012, these gangsters still claimed that they were « the kind of people who work within the state » (*ham riyasat ke andar jed-o-jehed ke admi hain*).⁸ This projection was not fundamentally altered by their - successful - armed resistance to this police operation. Less than a year after these street battles, the same gangsters played an active role in the provincial and general elections of May 2013, to such an extent that most of the candidates of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) - the ruling party that had ordered the ill-fated April 2012 police operation - were selected by gang leaders themselves. These elections - during which all the candidates supported by the gangs won with a large margin - marked the culmination of the rise to political power of Lyari's most powerful gang leaders over the last decade or so, a process through which these violent entrepreneurs aimed at legitimating their dominance without relinquishing violence altogether, whether for political or economic gains. While appealing to tribal idioms of authority by projecting themselves as tribal chieftains (*sardars*), these gangsters constituted a large clientele through their liberalities, their enforcement of a « *pax traficana* », ⁹ their access to the state (and thus to its human and financial resources) and their rebooting of some public services (schools, hospitals,...). At the same time, these gangsters aspiring to respectability continued to use terror as a tool of intimidation and economic accumulation. More originally, these gangsters' violent performances were also a way to proclaim and enforce their de facto sovereignty over a neighbourhood that was deeply affected by the decline of class-based politics during the 1970s before bearing the brunt of neoliberal economic reforms from the 1990s onwards. To this dialectic of terror and generosity, which lays at the hearts of sovereign power,¹⁰ corresponded that of affection and revulsion among the residents of Lyari, who tried to cope with the rising political clout of local gangsters projecting themselves as « peace janissaries » (*aman ke janissar*), an oxymoron summing up the internal tensions of this political project.

⁸ Interview with Zafar Baloch, the brain of the Peoples Amn Committee (PAC), Karachi (Lyari), Dec. 2011.

⁹ Christian Geffray, « Etat, richesse et criminels », art. quoted, p. 22.

¹⁰ Thomas Blom Hansen, "Sovereigns Beyond the State: On Legality and Authority in Urban India", in Thomas Blom Hansen et Finn Stepputat (eds.), *States of Imagination, Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2001, p. 171.

The Emergence of Lyari's Competitive Clientelism

Conjuring Marginality

Often referred to by its residents as the « mother of Karachi » (*Karachi ki maan*), Lyari is one of the oldest neighbourhoods of this modern city, which was founded in 1729 by Hindu merchants (*banyas*) attracted by its natural port. Despite its geographic centrality - Lyari is located near the port but also near the financial district and the administrative centre of Karachi -, this degraded inner-city neighbourhood is characterised by its marginality. Demographically, the neighborhood stands out from a city where almost half of the population is thought to be Urdu-speaking and traces its roots to North India and the Deccan.¹¹ Although Lyari includes a few pockets of Urdu-speakers (which are concentrated on the western corner of the neighbourhood, in Agra Taj and Bihar colonies), it retains the largest concentration of « indigenous » populations in the city. While the Baloch may no longer be in a majority in the neighborhood, they remain the largest ethnic group, constituting around 40% of Lyari's total population. This Baloch population, as well as the smaller Kutchi community, have been supporting the PPP from the early 1970s onwards, which also singles out Lyari in a city otherwise dominated by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which draws the bulk of its voters and supporters from Urdu-speaking communities (the Mohajirs). Finally, Lyari suffers from economic marginalisation: it has been bearing the brunt of the restrictions to Pakistani immigration enforced by the Gulf countries at the beginning of the 1990s, as well as of successive neoliberal reforms, which have led to a lowering of customs duties and higher competition from imported manufactured goods, a rise in electricity tariffs (which hurt small family-based businesses), as well as the downsizing of public companies (which led to the closure of many « departments », the sports teams financed by public banks and companies, as well as to the abolition of the « son's quota », which guaranteed a public job to the children of public servants after their father's retirement, especially at the Karachi Port Trust). In recent years, Lyari's economy has also been disintegrating from the economy of the Old City, to which it was closely linked until then, following a rise in extortion on the part of Lyari's gangsters,

¹¹ The last Census was conducted in 1998 and showed that Urdu-speakers (also known as Mohajirs) were 49 % of the city's total population. This share has probably declined to 40-45 % today, following a massive influx of Pashtuns IDPs in recent years.

which led many traders from the wholesale markets of the Old City to relocate their activities in other parts of the city.

This marginalization is not new: during the colonial period, Lyari already stood out from the rest of the city demographically and its populations were already exposed to a logic of segregation. By 1886, with a population of 24,600, Lyari had become the largest of the 24 districts of Karachi, and the only one with a population over 8,000.¹² One of the most populated areas of Karachi (with the largest concentration of Muslims in a city demographically and economically dominated by non-Muslims), Lyari was also one of the most neglected in terms of development. The first developers of Karachi, the Hindu *banyas* from interior Sindh, were not particularly keen on investing in the infrastructures of this predominantly Muslim working-class area, which developed in a haphazard way around unplanned settlements of *jbuggis* (huts) or single-storey stone houses without access to sewerage and water. The British did not show much concern either for the appalling state of the neighbourhood, which degraded further in the late nineteenth century after Karachi's most polluting factories were relocated there. This structural neglect continued after Partition: the primary concern of Pakistan's ruling class was not with the living conditions of the indigenous labour force but with the resettlement of migrants from India. Thus, the two new planned colonies that were developed on the western corner of Lyari, Agra Taj Colony and Bihar Colony, were reserved to the Urdu-speaking *muhajirin*.

Far from accepting their fate, Lyari's working classes organised themselves early on. The Baloch and Makrani workforce (the Makranis, also known as « Sheedis », are the offspring of Black African slaves, who were sold on Karachi's markets until the end of the 19th century) were among the first to mobilise themselves for better working conditions, and the Karachi Port Workers Union emerged among the stevedores during a series of strikes in 1930.¹³ This activist tradition survived after independence and Lyari became a stronghold of the Left in Pakistan. Student activists and communists took shelter here when the military regime of Ayub Khan went after them, while some local trade unionists (most of them Baloch) became

¹² Yasmeen Lari and Mihail S. Lari, *The Dual City. Karachi During the Raj*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 67.

¹³ Zafar Shaheed, *The Labour Movement in Pakistan. Organization and Leadership in Karachi in the 1970s*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 16.

living legends of the Pakistani Left. This was the case, in particular, of Usman Baloch¹⁴. Growing up in a working class family with a long history of activism (his father was a trade unionist at the Greys Salt Company), Baloch completed his political education by reading Lenin. He played an active role during the 1963 strike - which was severely repressed by the military regime but which marked the beginning of a workers' movement that would only amplify in the following years - and in subsequent labour movements (the perturbation of Ayub Khan's visit to Karachi's shipyards in 1967, the creation of a union in Karachi's first nuclear plant, the occupation of the Valika textile mill in 1971, the agitation at the Feroz Sultan Mills in 1972,...). These labour movements will find their limits at the beginning of the 1970s, though. Paradoxically, after flourishing under the military regime of Ayub Khan, it is under the mandate of a government proclaiming its attachment to socialism that trade-unionism entered its twilight in Lyari, in Karachi, and in Pakistan at large.

While remaining on the forefront of every successive labour movement in Karachi, Lyari was also fertile ground for the display of patronage politics, on which the domination of the local notability is premised. Two families, in particular, stand out among these « big families » (*muaziz khandan*) - the Haroons and the Gabols, which have been contesting to each other the position of Lyari's political patrons since the early 20th century.

The Haroons belong to the trading community of the Memons and trace their roots to Kuch, in present-day Gujarat. The founder of this business and political dynasty, Abdullah Haroon, was born in Karachi in 1872 and had humble beginnings, before creating a financial empire. He began his career as a hawker, before opening a shop in Jodia Bazar, in Karachi's Old City. Initially specializing in second-hand clothing, he made his fortune in the sugar trade, which owed him the nickname of « sugar king » (*chimi ke badshah*). In Pakistan, however, it is primarily for its role in the media that the family made a name for itself, through the ownership of the English-speaking daily *Dawn* in particular. The family's political record is equally impressive. Abdullah Haroon's political career started in 1913, when he was elected to the Karachi Municipality. In 1917 he joined the Congress, and two years later became the president for Sindh of the Khilafat Movement. From 1924 to 1926 he was a member of the Bombay Legislative Council. As the movement for Pakistan was picking up pace, he joined the Muslim

¹⁴ The following developments on Usman Baloch rely upon Lal Khan, *Pakistan's Other Story. The 1968-69 Revolution*, Delhi, Akbar Books, 2009 ; accessible at : <http://www.marxist.com/pakistans-other-story-6.htm>

League and became its Sindh president in 1938. In the following years, the residence of the Haroons was the nerve centre of the Pakistan movement in Sindh. Abdullah Haroon breathed his last in 1942 and was buried in the same Khadda locality, in a college that he founded and to which he gave his name. Abdullah Haroon's sons carried his mantle and the family retained its political clout after 1947. In 1949-1950, Yusuf Haroon was the Chief Minister of Sindh, while his brother Mahmud Abdullah Haroon was the mayor of Karachi in 1954-1955.

The Haroons became Lyari's prime patrons during the 1920s. They provided employment to the working classes (starting with Abdullah Haroon, who « imported » large numbers of Kutchi workers from Gujarat), while redistributing some of their personal resources to Lyari's impoverished residents through their evergetic practices. Although the Baloch also benefited from the Haroons' munificence, these liberalities towards the poor targeted more specifically the Gujarati-speaking communities based in Lyari (Kutchis, Kathiawaris, Memons,...). Thus, many institutions opened by the Haroons were located in and around Khadda Market, which to this day remains associated with populations tracing their origins to Gujarat. Among these institutions were an orphanage (1923), a *madrassa* (1927), several Colleges, student hostels and mosques.¹⁵

This patronage system was consolidated in the first years after Independence, while undergoing an important transition. From then on, these local notables no longer tapped on their personal wealth to sustain their clientele - they increasingly turned to the state and its development funds. This transition began under the mandate of Mahmood Haroon at the head of Karachi's municipality (the Karachi Municipal Corporation - KMC), during which large chunks of the city's budget were allocated to the development of Lyari.

The PPP and the Transformation of Patronage Politics in Lyari

The rise of the PPP and its entrenchment in Lyari had a profound impact over local structures of mobilisation and patronage networks. While the strengthening of the PPP in Lyari did not erase class-based identifications, it substituted new networks of mobilisation to work-

¹⁵ Muhammad Usman Damohi, *Karāchī. Tarīkh ke Aīne mein* [Karachi. In the mirror of history], Karachi, 1996, p. 504.

ers organisations, to which Bhutto dealt the final blow by repressing brutally the labour movement that had emerged during the preceding decade. After co-opting several prominent figures of the students and workers movement, who were attracted by his commitment to « Islamic socialism », Bhutto crushed the labour movement in Karachi. On 10 February 1972, Bhutto presented his new labour policy, which included some incentives for the workers but which also aimed to put an end to labour unrest: in case labour leaders did not put an end to their agitation, Butto warned that « there will be a clash between the strength of the state and the strength of the street (*awam ki taqat*, lit. the strength of the people) ». ¹⁶ It was not long before the new regime put this threat into action : its repression of the labour movement culminated in an incident of police firing on 7 June 1972, which was followed by another similar incident the next day, during the funerals of one of the deceased workers. Ten people were killed on that day, which marked « the beginning of the end of one of the most protracted labour struggles in Pakistan's history ». ¹⁷

By dealing the final blow to workers organisations and class-based politics, Bhutto contributed to the maturing of a clientelist system relying upon local notables. However, these local notables would now be patronised by Bhutto himself and their political fortunes would depend on this patronage rather than on their own political, financial and moral clout. The beginning of the 1970s thus saw the decline of the Haroons to the benefit of a « new » political dynasty - that of the Gabols. Unlike the Haroons, who trace their origins to Gujarat, the Gabols belong to a Baloch tribe spread across Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh. Since the late 19th century, the head (*sardar*) of that prominent tribe has systematically been chosen among the Gabols of Karachi, starting with Sardar Khudadad Khan Gabol, followed by his son Allah Baksh Gabol (1895-1972), grandson Sardar Ahmed Khan Gabol and great-grandson Nabil Gabol (1962-...). The family initially made a name for itself as landowners - the Gabols were among the richest landlords of Karachi during the colonial period and in the 1930s the British had to impose a ban on further acquisitions of land by the family, « because at that time almost 70% of Karachi land was bought by the Gabol family », recalls proudly Nabeel

¹⁶ Kamran Asdar Ali, « Karachi mein, 1972 Mazdur Jad-o-jehed » (The Labour Struggle of 1972 in Karachi), in Dr. Syed Jafar Ahmed (ed.), *Pakistan ki Mazdur Tehriken. Nazrati aur Amli Masail* (Labour movements in Pakistan. Ideological and Pragmatic Problems), Karachi, PILER, 2012, p. 179.

¹⁷ Kamran Asdar Ali, « Strength of the State Meets Strength of the Street: The 1972 Labour Struggle in Karachi », in Naveeda Khan (ed.), *Beyond Crisis. Re-Evaluating Pakistan*, Delhi, Routledge, 2010, p. 210.

Gabol, the former representative of Lyari at the National Assembly.¹⁸ Like the Haroons, the Gabols entered the political fray during the late 1920s, as the colonial proto-democracy was gradually opening itself to indigenous elites. The founder of this political dynasty, Allah Bakhsh Gabol, began his political career at the Legislative Council of the Bombay Presidency in 1927, before becoming the first Deputy Speaker of the Sindh Assembly in 1937, after defeating Abdullah Haroon by playing the ethnic card to gather the Baloch of Lyari around him.¹⁹ Like the Haroons, the Gabols maintained a high profile after Partition and Allah Bakhsh was twice the mayor of Karachi (1951-1953 ; 1961-1962). The democratic interlude of the 1970s greatly benefited this other family of notables from Lyari. During the 1970 election, a Gabol (Abdul Sattar, one of the sons of Allah Bakhsh) was chosen by Bhutto as the PPP candidate in Lyari and defeated Mahmood Haroon with a wide margin, thus precipitating the political decline of Lyari's first political patrons. As Bhutto's Labour minister, Gabol was instrumental in stifling the labour movement. While projecting himself as an ally of the workers - just like his party and leader -, Lyari's representative was primarily concerned with safeguarding the interests of factory owners and weakening the most popular labour leaders, such as Usman Baloch. Following the return of Pakistan to democracy at the end of the 1980s, the leaders of the PPP (Benazir Bhutto in 1988, Asif Ali Zardari two years later) chose to contest elections from Lyari, the only Karachi constituency systematically returning a PPP candidate since the 1970s. When Asif Ali Zardari chose to contest the 2002 elections from another constituency, though, the party's leadership once again chose a Gabol to run from Lyari. This time, it was the turn of Nabeel Gabol (the grandson of Allah Bakhsh and a nephew of Abdul Sattar) to carry the family's mantle. The political heir of the Haroon family, for his part, was made Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Nations - a move which aimed to keep him away from Lyari's politics and which was only a partial success, as Hussein Haroon would consistently try to carve a space for himself in local politics by projecting himself as the patron of Lyari's Kutchi minority (a move which was consistent with the long tradition of patronage of the Kutchis by the Haroon family, although until then the ethnically-tainted nature of this patronage was never assumed in public, let alone brandished as a tool of political mobilisation).

¹⁸ Entretien avec Nabil Gabol, Karachi (Defence Housing Authority), août 2012.

¹⁹ During the campaign, Gabol used the slogans « *Garite Balochan, vote bide Gabolan* » (A vote for the Baloch is a vote for Gabol) and « *Himat kane Balochon, voton madah banaton* » (Oh Baloch, don't sell your honour by accepting money for your votes); cf. Doulat Haroon Hidayatullah, *Haji Sir Abdullah Haroon*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 118.

As Patrick Haenni emphasizes in his ethnography of neighborhood « bosses » in Cairo, « clientelism amounts to (...) utilitarian networks functioning through a non-utilitarian language »²⁰. Recent works on patronage networks in South Asia, such as the essays collected in Anastasia Piliavsky's forthcoming edited volume, do not say otherwise. Thus, according to Piliavsky, the patronage networks upon which clientelism is premised do not merely amount to transactional networks but, more importantly, to a « moral form » drawing its appeal from a « logic of relatedness ».²¹ This attempt to ground patron-clients relationships into local idioms of public virtue is not merely formal - the point is not only to apply a moral and ideological polish to clientelistic relationships in order to make them more acceptable. The material underpinnings of patron-clients relationships are insufficient to sustain political linkages on the long run. In order to perpetuate themselves, these relationships must resonate with symbolic categories that inscribe these relationships into a historically situated moral landscape, an inscription that allows individuals to make sense of their relationships with their patrons and to justify their commitments, come election day and beyond.²² Thus, the relations between Lyari's residents and the PPP from the late 1960s onwards are irreducible to the populist rhetoric of the party's founder and, later on, to its redistributive policies. These relations were premised on an exchange of favours between the party's charismatic leadership and its voters, where the votes of the former « bought » support from the latter as far as housing, access to the job market or to basic public amenities was concerned. Despite its utilitarian foundations, this relationship of mutual obligation took a quasi-spiritual resonance. It was imagined and experienced through moral idioms of authority such as the highly codified system of interactions between Sufi masters and their disciples (*piri-muridi*). This analogy was actively pursued by Bhutto himself in the early days of the PPP. Meticulously staged, the party's first electoral meetings reached their paroxysm when Bhutto started dancing to the sound of *Dama dam mast qalandar*, a devotional chant dedicated to the saint-patron of Sindh, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, which the PPP made its electoral hymn.²³ While being predicated upon instrumental rationality, in the Weberian sense, the patron-clients relationship between the PPP's leadership and its Baloch, Sindhi and Kutchi voters matured on this spiritual breeding

²⁰ Patrick Haenni, *L'ordre des caïds*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

²¹ Anastasia Piliavsky, « Introduction: Patronage as the Politics of South Asia », in Anastasia Piliavsky (ed.), *Patronage as Politics in South Asia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

²² Jean-Louis Briquet, *La tradition en mouvement. Clientélisme et politique en Corse*, Paris, Belin, coll. « Socio-histoires », 1997, p. 13.

²³ Michel Boivin and Rémy Delage, « Benazir en odeur de sainteté : naissance d'un lieu de culte au Pakistan », *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 151, juillet-septembre 2010, p. 194.

ground, giving birth to a political culture of reciprocal sacrifice, where the radical commitment of the *jywalas* (supporters of the PPP, literally « those who shout ‘Long live Bhutto!’ »), who faced the risk of being jailed, tortured or even killed under the dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988), mirrored the martyrdom of political leaders equated with the great saints of the past, if not to Imam Hussein himself.²⁴

Because this reciprocal relationship was a personalised one between the *jywalas* and the Bhutto family, the authority of the party’s representatives has always been relative. Even when they hailed from « big families », like the Gabols, these notables could not pretend to get elected under another banner than that of the PPP, at least in Lyari (thus, when Nabeel Gabol defected from the PPP to join the MQM, a few months before the 2013 general elections, he had to contest from another constituency and, less than his name, it is his new political affiliation that got him elected²⁵). While their lineage proved insufficient to grant autonomy to these notables from party machines and to insulate them from public critiques²⁶, their redistributive capacities were premised on the arbitrations of the party’s leadership. These capacities were eroded further after the implementation of the local government ordinance of 2001, which transferred many prerogatives and resources formerly into the hands of the provincial government into the hands of the municipalities, paving the way for the emergence of a new blend of political brokers mediating between the state and urban populations. Moreover, while the distribution of favours to Lyariites often took place through these notables, the leadership of the PPP strove to retain a direct, unmediated relationship with the people of Lyari. Following his victory in the 1970 election, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto kept his promise to grant ownership rights to the residents of Lyari, a favour which would have unexpected perverse effects in terms of property speculation and inter-ethnic tensions in the neighbourhood.²⁷ Under Benazir Bhutto’s successive governments, Lyari was also promised special

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-200.

²⁵ Nabil Gabol will be reelected in 2013 in one of the bastions of the MQM, the NA-246 constituency, which includes Azizabad, where the headquarters of the MQM is located.

²⁶ In 1989, Najeeb Ahmad, the leader of the PSF (the student body of the PPP) slapped the new Chief Minister of Sind, Syed Qaim Ali Shah, in a public gathering.

²⁷ By granting ownership rights (in fact, a 99 years lease), the Bhutto government encouraged Lyari’s residents to resell their lease to real estate developers, who started constructing high-rise buildings from the pre-existing one- or two-storey houses. While transforming the neighbourhood’s landscape, this building fever led to an influx of non-Baloch populations into Lyari. The « ethnic » violence that affected the locality over the last few years drew its roots, among other factors (property speculation, competition over the market of protection, proxy wars between political parties,...), from the sentiment of Lyari’s Baloch to be marginalized by these outsiders.

development packages, such as an 800 million rupees grant under Benazir Bhutto's first tenure as Prime Minister (1988-1989). A massive housing scheme for Lyari's residents at Hawke's Bay and an additional grant of 700 million for the development of the neighbourhood were also budgeted by Benazir's first government but none of these promises materialised: the housing scheme at Hawke's Bay was delayed by administrative bottlenecks while large tracts of land were captured by PPP office-bearers. The additional amount of 700 million rupees, for its part, went to the KMC Zonal municipal committees (which were under the control of the MQM) after the dismissal of Benazir's government in 1989. Asif Ali Zardari, in turn, allocated huge sums to the development of Lyari during his tenure as President of Pakistan (2008-2013). This time, however, these funds no longer went to local notables but to gang leaders upon which the PPP had become increasingly dependent to maintain its hold over Lyari. In the process, the patronage system set up by the PPP during the 1970s entered into a new competitive logic, which for a while turned to the advantage of local gangsters.

The Emergence of Criminal Brokers in Lyari

From the Muscle Trade to Political Dirty Work

The Baloch of Karachi hail from a community reputed for its martial « traditions »²⁸, which has made a name for itself by providing muscle power to local business and political elites - first as guards at the Manora Fort, during the 18th century, and more recently as bouncers for cinemas and cabarets (that is, until the latter closed their doors in the late 1970s). The connections of the Zardari family with Baloch musclemen can thus be traced back to Hakim Ali Zardari's ownership of one of Karachi's most famous cinemas, the Bambino, which in its glory days drove huge crowds that had to be controlled by « linemen ». Asif Ali Zardari, who spent his childhood in the cinema's premises and continued to visit it frequently with his friends during his College years, would later be instrumental in the recruitment of young

²⁸ Less than their competence in the military profession, it the proclivities of Baloch militiamen to indiscipline and plundering that made their reputation. This explains that the traders of Karachi, who took charge of the defence of Karachi during the three successive sieges of the city by the Amir of Sindh, at the end of the 18th century, only accepted to deliver the keys of the city to him provided that his Baloch soldiers would camp outside the city walls; cf. Muhammad Usman Damohi, *Karāchī, op. cit.*, p. 53.

Baloch toughs from Lyari as bodyguards (*janissars*), a trend that was emulated by several leaders of the PPP during the last two decades.

Lyari's underworld emerged during the 1960s among this community, otherwise reputed for its smuggling activities. For the Baloch, scattered across Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, smuggling is not only a source of revenue but a way of life and a relation to politics, which converts a constraint (frontiers between nation-states and the geographical dispersion of Baloch populations) into a resource.²⁹ Smuggling remains perceived as legitimate, and as a sign of dynamism and virility, by large sections of the Baloch.³⁰ In Karachi like elsewhere in the Baloch world, smuggling is often considered as an honourable alternative to manual work, which explains that the earlier kingpins of Lyari's underworld might have enjoyed some esteem from the local Baloch society. The first personality to emerge among these smugglers was Nabi Bakhsh, better known under his alias (*urfi*) of Kala Nag (the Black Serpent). In the early 1960s, Bakhsh made a fortune by providing the merchants of the Old City with smuggled goods.³¹ He died in 1967 while trying to escape a police raid and was replaced at the head of Lyari's burgeoning underworld by two of his former protégés, Dad Muhammad (alias Dadal) and Sher Muhammad (alias Sheru). The two brothers hailed from a relatively privileged family tracing its origins to the region of Afshan, in the Iranian province of Sistan Balochistan. To this day, the family still owns land in the Pakistani province of Balochistan (in Sakuran, district Lasbela), a proof of its relatively wealthy background and its persisting bonds with the Baloch hinterland. According to one of Dadal's nephews, it is this social standing that would have made Dadal, Sheru, and later on Rehman « Dakait » so attractive to successive generations of politicians. This claim is questionable, though. Most residents of Lyari would deny them the title of « *khandani log* » (high-born people), a honorific title reserved to more respected families, who cumulate a prestigious lineage, economic resources and political assets, the latter involving the memory of services rendered to the community by these prominent families as well as their capacities of mobilisation and redistribution, which derive from their networks of influence, within the state apparatus in particular.³² Thus,

²⁹ Just Boedeker, "Cross-border trade in the Afghan-Iranian border region", in Bettina Bruns, Judith Miggelbrink (eds.), *Subverting Borders. Doing Research on Smuggling and Small-scale Trade*, Wiesbaden, Springer, 2012, pp. 39-58.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Sohail Ahmad, « Lyārī ke gang aur gang wār' » [Les gangs de Lyari et la guerre des gangs], *BBCUrdu.com*, 17 mars 2013; http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/2013/03/130317_karachi_lyari_gangs_zs.shtml

³² Jean-Louis Briquet, *La tradition en mouvement, op. cit.*, p. 144.

Dadal and Sheru were less criminalised notables than petty criminals aspiring to join the notability. Many old-timers would argue that, in comparison with today's gangsters, Dadal and Sheru were some kind of social bandits, robbing the rich while sparing the poor, if not redistributing their ill-acquired wealth to them. An elderly *thelawala* from the Kutchi-dominated locality of Kalri thus told me that in 2013 that « (Dadal and Sheru) were miscreants, no doubt (*badmash to the*). They were thieves and extortionists all right, but they would only target the rich (*bare bare log*), they did not take anything from the poor ». ³³ However, these popular perceptions neglect the fact that, in order to elevate themselves, these alleged « social bandits » used their proximate if illegitimate relations with the rich and mighty. Their rapprochement with business and political elites started in the mid-1960s. While they were still playing second fiddle to Kala Nag, for whom they were peddling hashish, Dadal and Sheru were recruited by Mahmood Haroon to provide security to the electoral meetings of Ayub Khan's party, the Convention Muslim League (CML). Over the years, the services rendered by these Baloch *badmash* to the ruling party fast expanded from security duties to the party's dirty work, including the harassment of political opponents, the upsetting of their meetings, the intimidation of voters as well as the launching of punitive expeditions in the neighborhoods evading the military regime's grip (like in Liaquatabad in the aftermath of the 1964 presidential race). ³⁴ While putting their coercive resources to the service of the military regime, at least until their rallying to the PPP in the late 1960s, Dadal and Sheru were not its docile retainers, though. On some occasions, they showed a remarkable lack of discipline, for instance by allowing left-wing students to climb on stage during a meeting of the CML in Karachi on 12 September 1962. This breach of discipline led to a famous incident, as student activists used this opportunity to attack several dignitaries of the military regime (including Z.A. Bhutto, who was still a minister in Ayub Khan's government). ³⁵ The role of Lyari's kingpins in this incident remains unknown to the general public but also to Marxist historians who have otherwise

³³ Interview, Lyari, November 2013.

³⁴ In the aftermath of the 1964 presidential election, Karachi witnessed its first major « ethnic riots », following some coordinated attacks of Ayub Khan's thugs against Urdu-speakers in Liaquatabad (which, like most Mohajir-dominated localities in Karachi, had voted for Ayub's rival, Fatima Jinnah). Despite their obvious « ethnic » dimension (most of the assailants were Pashtun, while most of the victims were Mohajirs), these incidents are irreducible to ethnic hatreds. Not only did Lyari's criminals (most of them Baloch) seem to have been involved in them, but it is the arson attack against the shop of Ali Kausar, a Mohajir *badmash* (petty criminal), that provided the trigger of these confrontations.

³⁵ Interview with the student leader Mairaj Muhammad Khan, who organised this protest action, Karachi (Defence), 2009.

eulogised this event as a landmark in the student uprising of the late 1960s.³⁶ It deserves to be recalled as it underlines that the collusive relations between Lyari's notability, its underworld and the Pakistani political class have always retained a part of unpredictability, which derives from the indocility of these criminals and their propensity to use their political patrons to serve their own values and interests, licit and otherwise, instead of following blindly their directives. Thus, prior to the incident recalled above, Dadal and Sheru received the visit of a delegation of student activist that included two young women, who greatly embarrassed the two kingpins after they tried to touch their feet in sign of respect, an embarrassment to which the two brothers answered by agreeing « at once » to grant a five minute window to the students to climb on the stage and read a declaration.³⁷ Ayub Khan's project to displace the residents of Lyari at the periphery of the city might also have played in favour of the students, as it had alienated Lyari's residents, including the members of its burgeoning underworld. The chronic instability of these collusive arrangements goes against their « systematisation », in the sense given to the term by Paul Brass in his study of communal riots in North India (essentially that of an unproblematic partnership between violent specialists and political leaders, which can be activated at will, for electoral purposes in particular).³⁸ By distancing myself from these canonical works, which continue to set the terms of the debate on the « gray zone of politics », ³⁹ I argue that while being part and parcel of everyday forms of clientelism, these collusions between muscle power, the forces of capital and mainstream politicians are rarely sustainable on the long run and, in any case, do not follow the same rules as more conventional, that is, more legitimate forms of brokering. As the political careers of Lyari's criminals exemplify, neither the strategist notion of « instrumentalisation » nor institutionalist typologies in terms of « complementariness » or « accommodation » fully carry what is at stake here.⁴⁰ These relations are too unstable to become fully institutionalised and they leave a large part of autonomy, which tends to increase in the course of time, to criminal brokers. The

³⁶ Lal Khan, *Pakistan's Other Story. The 1968-9 Revolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

³⁷ Interview with Mairaj Muhammad Khan, Karachi (Defence), 2009.

³⁸ Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol. Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence*, Calcutta, Seagul, 1998 (1997), p. 9. For a recent appraisal by the author of his notion of 'institutionalized riot system', see Paul R. Brass, « The Development of an Institutionalized Riot System in Meerut city, 1961 to 1982 », in Ian Talbot (ed.), *The Deadly Embrace. Religion, Politics and Violence in India and Pakistan 1947-2002*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 81-107.

³⁹ Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 194-196; Javier Auyero & Matthew Mahler, « Relations occultes et fondements de la violence collective », *Politix*, 2011/1, pp. 93-94.

⁴⁰ For an example of such typologies, see Gretchn Helmke, Steven Levitsky, « Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics », art. quoted.

opposite scenarios of a « substitution » of criminal brokers to their political patrons or of a « competition » between them are not entirely convincing either. As Jean-Louis Briquet and Gilles Favarel-Garrigues underline, « violent entrepreneurs are very often satisfied with the existing rules of the political and economic game in which they move ». ⁴¹ Rather than uproot the state, most criminals aim to contain it while keeping it in place. ⁴² Just like « smugglers need borders », according to a (probably apocryphal) Baloch proverb, ⁴³ criminals need the state to prosper in its folds and ensure the sustainability of their trade. Without the law, crime would not pay. On the other hand, every criminal aims to neutralise the long arm of the law and, whenever possible, to make it subservient to his interests. Both Rehman Dakait and his successors, whose political careers I examine below, made such an attempt to form the state for themselves by containing it from within, before seizing and rebooting public institutions to establish their writ over Lyari.

If the history of the collusions between the PPP and the criminals of Lyari under the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) and during the two mandates of Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990 ; 1993-1997) remains to be written, it seems that these relations of connivence really took off under the regime of Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008), which saw an unprecedented escalation of criminal violence in Lyari. From its inception, this « gang war » - a term commonly used in Karachi, including in Urdu, to refer to the deadly conflicts between rival criminal groups but also to these groups themselves - had strong political underpinnings. It opposed two rival groups, which competed for the control of Lyari's criminal markets : the heroin trade, which developed during the 1980s in the wake of the Afghan Jihad, the gambling dens (*jue ka addas*), which became a lucrative market after the interdiction of gambling by Z.A. Bhutto in 1977, and the market of « protection » (*bhatta*), which primarily targeted transporters (whose trucks often transited via Lyari on their way to the port of Karachi), as well as the traders of Lyari and its vicinity (where most of the city's wholesale markets are located and which, by the volume of their transactions, constitute a prime target for all kinds

⁴¹ Jean-Louis Briquet & Gilles Favarel-Garrigues, « Introduction: Violence, Crime and Political Power », in Jean-Louis Briquet & Gilles Favarel-Garrigues (eds.), *Organized Crime and States*, New York, Palgrave, 2010, p. 4.

⁴² Christian Geffray, « Etat, richesse et criminels », art. quoted, p. 22.

⁴³ Quoted by Olivier Roy, « Groupes de solidarité au Moyen-Orient et en Asie centrale: Etats, territoires et réseaux », *Cahiers du CERI*, 16, 1996, p. 3.

of racketeers⁴⁴). The gang war between Abdul Rehman, alias Rehman Dakait (Rehman « the bandit », the son of Dadal) and the group of Haji Lahu and his son Arshad Pappu, was irreducible to economic motives, though. It also amounted to a proxy war between the PPP and the MQM. Under the mandate of Pervez Musharraf (himself a Mohajir, the General-President allied himself with the MQM between 2002 and 2008), the MQM seemed close to fulfill its hegemonic ambitions by extending its control over Karachi at large. With the support of the army chief, the party consolidated its positions by capturing a local state whose prerogatives and resources were greatly enlarged by the devolution plan of 2001, which transferred a large part of the resources of the provincial bureaucracy (which remains dominated by the Sindhis and thus by the PPP) to local representatives. This reform benefited the MQM, as the demographic profile of Karachi and the delimitation of constituencies and municipalities (the city's 18 « Towns ») gave the advantage to Mohajirs against Sindhis and Baloch, whose presence is almost insignificant in the city, to the exception of a few Towns such as Lyari and, to a lesser extent, Malir. We will examine further in greater details the impact that this reform had on the maturation of practices of criminal brokering in Lyari. For now, suffice it to say that the MQM's grip over the city and its resources, both licit and illicit, remained incomplete. Besides some Pashtun-dominated localities, Lyari continued to resist the MQM's surge. However, the leadership of the MQM was determined to exploit its advantage and conquer this PPP stronghold at all cost, through military means if necessary. The MQM had a strong foothold in the Old City (the national assembly constituency covering the localities of Kharadar and Mithadar, NA-249, is one of its traditional bastions, due to the control of Karachi's former Mayor and MQM parliamentary leader Farooq Sattar over the Memons' vote there) and could rely on some pockets of support in Lyari itself (in particular in Agra Taj Colony and Bihar Colony, where Urdu-speaking Mohajirs are no longer in a majority but where they retain a significant presence). The leaders of the MQM were aware of these limitations: besides the fact that these pockets of influence were insufficient to take on the PPP in Lyari, the presence of criminal groups loyal to the PPP, such as Rehman Dakait's, prevented the party from expanding its activities in the neighbourhood. It is in this context that the MQM started approaching the rivals of Rehman, in exchange for its political protection - an offer that must have been particularly attractive to these gangsters as the MQM enjoyed the support of the party and was reputed to control the police, despite the fact that the

⁴⁴ The amount of the yearly business transactions in the Old City of Karachi has recently been evaluated at one billion dollars; cf. Khurram Husain, « Criminal economics », *Dawn.com*, 29 août 2013.

latter theoretically answered to the provincial government (of which the MQM was only a junior partner). By placing themselves under the protection of the MQM, Rehman's rivals also anticipated the possibility to access public jobs. This, at least, is what they promised to the residents of Gul Mohammad Lane, the locality of Lyari where the MQM held its first electoral meeting in 2004.⁴⁵

Competing for an access to the state

The access to public jobs - and, for gang leaders, the control of this important source of patronage, until then monopolized by local notables - was at the heart of Lyari's escalating conflicts during the 2000s. As these conflicts underline, accessing the state remains vital for Karachi's populations and the various groups claiming to represent them, including the violent entrepreneurs who violate the state's authority on an everyday basis. A series of interviews I conducted with the late Zafar Baloch in 2013 was particularly enlightening in this regard. Baloch grew up in a lower-middle-class family which, like most Baloch families of Lyari, supported heartily the PPP. Baloch himself became a PPP activist in his youth and was elected as a local councillor in 2001 (he was reelected to that post during the following local election in 2005), shortly after the implementation of Pervez Musharraf's devolution plan. His political rise was therefore a direct consequence of this reform of the local government, which aimed to rejuvenate Ayub Khan's old project of a non-partisan « basic democracy », unpolluted by corrupt, party-affiliated politicians. While remaining loyal to the PPP, he was attracted to the young « Don » of Lyari, Rehman Dakait, especially after the latter launched the Peoples Aman Committee (PAC) in 2008. The PAC initially aimed to bring an end to the gang war that had been raging in Lyari over the preceding years, but it quickly became the vehicle of Rehman's political ambitions. And as Rehman's political clout was growing in the neighbourhood, some disgruntled activists such as Zafar Baloch, who had little prospect of making it big in the ranks of a party tightly controlled by local notables and « feudal » interests from the interior of Sindh, probably saw an opportunity in this emerging political force propped up by resourceful gangsters. The fact that Baloch later on became the PPP's General Secretary for Karachi's District South (including Lyari) bears testimony to the high profile he acquired as the « brain » behind the PAC and the main intermediary between the gangs and the party's

⁴⁵ Syed Nabil Akhtar, « Lyārī bārūd ke dher par » [Lyari on a powder keg], *Jasārat*, 3 juillet 2011.

leadership. However, Baloch soon resigned after he developed some differences with the party's representatives from Lyari, Nabeel Gabol and Rafiq Engineer, two political leaders of whom more will be said later. For now, let us consider Zafar Baloch's perceptions of the political game he was evolving in, which would cost him his life a few months after I spent some time with him in 2013 (he was murdered, along with his bodyguard, in September 2013, allegedly on the order of the PAC's former military commander, Baba Ladla, who had broken with the political leadership of the PAC a few months earlier). Following Rehman's death in 2009, in an alleged « encounter » with the police, the leadership of the PAC went to one his relatives, Uzair Baloch, of whom Zafar Baloch became the right-hand man. More than Uzair, who lacked political acumen, it was Zafar who was the real artisan of the PAC's rising fortunes in the years following Rehman's death. He was instrumental, in particular, in sidelining the local notables of the PPP by contesting them the power of patronage on which the latter's authority was premised. More generally, the political project of the PAC, which brought it into direct conflict with PPP notables as well as with the MQM, was to gain direct access to the state, and in the process to neutralise it from within while maximising their redistributive capacities. According to him, « During these four years (2005-2009), they upgraded their area in a big way (*unhon ne apne elaqon ko babut up kiya*). (...) The MQM claims to speak for everyone but they won't give up their bias against others [*i.e.* non-Mohajirs] ». As this statement suggests, the conflict between the PAC and the MQM was not primarily of an ethnic nature. Although the PAC's politics could also be seen as the coming of age of an armed politics of autochthony in Karachi's oldest locality, it was fueled by a political rivalry over the « control » (Zafar Baloch often used the English term, while speaking in Urdu) of the local state that emerged in 2001. This access to local public resources was all the more pressing, for Baloch and other leaders of the PAC, that the Baloch of Lyari have been bearing the brunt of the downsizing of public companies and institutions, a complaint that I often heard in Lyari, from sportsmen (who saw their perspectives of titularisation fade away with the closure of the « departments ») to semi-educated candidates to government jobs. Zafar Baloch summed up this process: « The downsizing of [public] institutions is going on. Until recently, when your father had been working for 20, 25 years in a public office, it was customary that, when he got retired, you would replace him. This used to happen in all [public] institutions: the KPT [Karachi Port Trust], the KESC [Karachi Electrical Supply Corporation], the banks, the Steel Mill... But when downsizing started, you would no longer inherit your father's position ». Elaborating further on the impact of this estrangement of the Baloch of Lyari from

public institutions, Zafar Baloch pointed at a consistent desire to access the state, which he did not conceive as an ethnically blind apparatus distinct from society, but more realistically as a locus of power whose penetration by society he saw as the only way to redress social and ethnic inequalities. Ironically, Baloch—who used to head an organisation accused of harbouring some of the most hardened criminals of Karachi—used the example of the police to make his point:

Take the case of Mr Gulabi Samo, who was recruited as a DSP [Deputy Superintendent of Police]. Well, today he is a DIG [Deputy Inspector General; a one-star rank of the Police Service of Pakistan]. He has made the pride of his family and community. Now he can provide support to his children and offer them a good education. If, instead of only one, 20 young men had been made DSPs, today there would be 20 DIGs or AIGs [Assistant Inspector General; a two-star rank of the Police Service of Pakistan]. Then maybe the gang war, the infighting, the drug-trafficking and all other criminal activities would be under control. 20 DSPs can control crime and they can spread awareness, proving to the people that anyone with education can become an officer. Then, out of 20 DSPs, maybe 4, 6, 10 will be appointed assistant commissioner. Then, gradually, they will provide us with [state] support. Nowadays, why do these MQM-people, the Mohajirs, succeed? Because they are in the administration and can influence the policy-making.⁴⁶

Zafar Baloch's reference to the police, here, was not anecdotal: the control of postings in the police force has been at the heart of the conflicts between the gangsters of Lyari and the local notables of the PPP since the creation of the PAC. According to members of Rehman's entourage, the conflict between Nabeel Gabol and Rehman found its source in the allocation of jobs in the police force. After the formation of a PPP-led government in Sindh, it was decided to recruit 3000 new policemen in Karachi, 700 of them from Lyari. Allegedly, Gabol and the president of the PPP in District South would have allocated some of these jobs « reserved » to Lyariites to PPP workers from other localities. This would have infuriated Rehman, who was eager to control this important source of patronage and to extend his influence within Karachi's law and order forces. Nabeel Gabol flatly denied this allegation in front of me, only to argue that « the police quota was directly given to Rehman's supporters from the Home Minister side [Zulfikar Mirza's] ». Whatever the truth behind these allegations, all parties to the conflict agree that Rehman succeeded in infiltrating the police. And Gabol had good reasons to put the blame on Mirza: following Rehman's death in 2009, the Home minister of Sindh became the PAC's prime patron (ironically, it seems that Rehman's

⁴⁶ Interview with Zafar Baloch, Lyari, August 2012.

political heir, Uzair Baloch, was introduced to Mirza by Nabeel Gabol⁴⁷) and in the following years Mirza openly supported the gangsters of the PAC in order to carve a niche for himself in Lyari (a politician from interior Sindh, Mirza had no social base of his own in Karachi). During a controversial interview, Mirza would even claim that, during his tenure, he distributed 300,000 weapons licenses to « the people of Lyari » so that they could defend « their honour, their wealth and their properties » (*apni izzaton, mal aur jaedad ki hifazat kar saken*).⁴⁸ Less than his collusions with local gangsters - Gabol himself had hobnobbed with Rehman -, Lyari's representative at the National Assembly mainly reproached this intruder to have infringed upon his turf and to have marginalised him in the decision-making process on Lyari within the PPP.

The access of Lyari's gangsters to positions of patronage was far from being a linear process: it was fraught with tensions and ruptures between the gangsters and the political class but also within the latter. These conflicts of intermediation - this is what was at stake, here: the control of the interface between the state and Lyari's populations - can be turned into the state's advantage, on the condition that a consensus emerges between the ruling party and public institutions (the police, the army and the judiciary, in particular). This is probably what cost Rehman his life. In the months following the launching of the PAC in 2008, Rehman succeeded in gathering against him most of the branches of a state otherwise characterised by its fragmentation and multi-vocality. He alienated the local notables of the PPP (especially Nabeel Gabol, who felt threatened by his tightening grip over the interface between the state and Lyari's voters), the national leadership of the party (in 2001, Benazir Bhutto herself had to interfere into the local elections, from her exile, to support the candidates of the PPP against Rehman's men of straw, although Rehman was more successful four years later, when he managed to get one of his protégés elected as Mayor of Lyari), the police (which worried about the drying up of their sources of income, after Rehman committed himself to regulate drug-trafficking in Lyari in order to improve his public image) and the army (which suspected Rehman to be conniving with Baloch nationalist guerrillas). These concerns were summed up by the PPP spokesperson Fauzia Wahab shortly after Rehman's death: « He was flying high

⁴⁷ Interview with Nabil Gabol, Karachi (Defence), août 2012.

⁴⁸ “Rehmān Dakait ko marwākar *ghalti* kī, thīk kam kar rahā thā” – Zulfikar Mirzā kā pachhtāwā’ [‘J’ai commis une erreur en faisant tuer Rehman Dakait, il faisait du bon travail” – la repentance de Zulfikar Mirza], *Jasarat*, 4 September 2011.

to become a self-proclaimed leader of the area. His ambitions were threatening everyone and he spoiled institutions, culture, peace and everything in the area ».⁴⁹

The attempt at notabilisation of Lyari's kingpins

The revival of the PAC, following Rehman's death, also provides evidence that « The existence of contending forces in society does not necessarily mean total loss of control on the part of the government ». Indeed, as Karen Barkey suggests in her study of the relations between bandits and the ruling elites of the Ottoman empire, « We need to analyse the type of contention and the solutions to this contention before we can make any generalisation about the breakdown of the state ».⁵⁰ Politico-criminal configurations, in particular, are never on a one-side track: they are fraught with structural tensions deriving from the aspiration to autonomy of the criminal side of the bargain, while political patrons are always wary of a loss of authority over their illegitimate protégés.

For several years (2009-2013), the rising political clout of the PAC in Lyari seemed to substantiate the thesis of a weakening of state institutions in the face of a resourceful and politically astute band of criminals. Their occasional confrontations with state forces often turned to their advantage, which only reinforced their dominant position in the neighbourhood, as these ruptures would systematically be followed by reconciliations that the gangsters would turn to their advantage by projecting them as tactical victories over a weakened state, both morally and practically. And because their political standing was never limited to their capacity to contain the state from without and extended to their ability to control it from within, the facilitated access they gained to public institutions after each new round of confrontation comforted them in the idea that strategic victory (that is, autonomy from patronising politicians, in both senses of the word) was at their fingertips. This is what happened in the aftermath of Rehman's death in 2009. After a few months of uncertainty - and deadly skirmishes - around Rehman's succession, Uzair Baloch managed to consolidate his authority by gathering around him most of Lyari's gang leaders. In the following years, the political clout of the

⁴⁹ Quoted in Imran Ayub, « Karachi: Lyari wonders how Rehman Dakait lost politicians' love », *Dawn online*, 12.10.2009; accessed on 31.05.2012.

⁵⁰ Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats. The Ottoman Route to State Centralization*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 19.

PAC only increased, with the support of Zulfikar Mirza but also of Asif Ali Zardari, by then the President of Pakistan, who entrusted Baloch *janissars* loyal to the PAC with the security arrangements at his Islamabad residence and at Bilawal House (the Bhutto-Zardari residence in Karachi). This practice is not new. When he was still officially wanted by the police (after escaping their custody for the second time, in 2006), Rehman Dakait had been asked by the PPP to ensure the security of Benazir Bhutto's return convoy from the airport to Bilawal House. When the convoy was the target of a massive attack (the bloodiest in Karachi's troubled history, which cost the lives of almost 200 people), the President of the PPP, who at that time was anticipated to become the next Prime minister, was transferred from her armored vehicle to a more anonymous vehicle where Rehman himself took the wheel. Following Benazir's brutal death two months later (December 2007) and that of Rehman two years later, the PPP no longer contented itself with recruiting its bodyguards among the PAC. Under the influence of Zulfikar Mirza, the idea that the PAC could be used as the PPP's armed wing in Karachi began to take hold among party leaders. Indeed, the PPP is the only ruling party in Karachi lacking an armed wing. While the Peoples Students Federation (PSF) did play that role during the 1980s, it did not survive the offensive of the MQM's fighters, who were in larger numbers and better armed than their PSF counterparts, in the following decade. The upgrading of the PAC's military capability by Mirza was not, therefore, an individual act but received the silent approbation of the party's top leadership. So much so that when street battles of unprecedented intensity, even by Karachi standards, took place in the city during the summer of 2011, following yet another episode of « broken negotiations »⁵¹ between the PPP and the MQM around the prerogatives of the local government, the fighters of the PAC did not content themselves with launching retaliatory attacks against the MQM and Mohajir civilians in Lyari and the Old City. They were deployed throughout Karachi to defend the urban villages (*goths*) where small Baloch and Sindhi communities are concentrated. Taking a foothold in these villages - which, incidentally, are at the heart of the battle for real estate in the city, as the agricultural lands that surround them are highly coveted -, the PAC will be strengthening its presence there in the years to come, thus spreading its influence well beyond its original bastion. Once again, this surge faced resistance from the state apparatus. The step-brother of Asif Zardari, Owais Muzafar « Tapi » (Hakim Ali Zardari's adopted son), started worrying about the growing political clout of Uzair Baloch in Lyari, especially as he was cred-

⁵¹ Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, chap. 9.

ited with the project of contesting the national assembly seat from Lyari, even though the President himself was more inclined to have his own son, Bilawal, contest from there. At the same time, the MQM - which went back to the fold and joined the government once again after receiving guarantees that the local government system put in place in 2001 would be preserved in Karachi and Hyderabad, its other stronghold in Sindh - was concerned about the expansion of the PAC's activities across «its» city. The PPP then came under increasing pressure from the MQM to clean up its act and disband the PAC. Despite the protests of Zulfikar Mirza (who was replaced as Sindh's Home Minister), the PAC was banned by the Sindh government in March 2011 and several «police operations» were launched by the police or the Rangers in Lyari, allegedly to bring the «extortion mafia» under control. These repressive operations culminated between April 27 and May 4 2012 with a week-long police operation against the PAC. The operation was supervised by Chaudhry Aslam Khan, a police officer with a sulfurous reputation, who dedicated most of his career to fight Lyari's criminals and who was in charge of the operation that allegedly cost Rehman his life in 2009. This impressive deployment of police personnel mobilised nearly 3000 men—as well as a few well-armed women—, who were guided into the maze of Lyari's lanes by masked men suspected to be members of Arshad Pappu's group. Though this police raid was projected as an «anti-extortion» operation, it singled out the militants of the PAC and the chain of events that precipitated it leaves no doubt about the political motives behind it. In the days preceding the operation, a local leader of the PPP, Malik Muhammad Khan (who a few months earlier had been kidnapped and tortured by criminals pressuring him to leave Lyari), was gunned down by henchmen suspected to be affiliated with the PAC. A few days later, the leaders of the PAC met with Ghaus Ali Shah, the provincial leader of the largest opposition party, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz). This meeting followed overtures by the PAC towards other parties than the PPP,⁵² which suggested that Uzair Baloch and his companions were considering dispensing themselves from the patronage of the PPP.

This operation turned out to be a disaster for the police, whose fire was returned with sub-machine guns, G3 rifles and RPGs. Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) could not find a way through Lyari's lanes and the jamming of cellular networks was largely inefficient as the

⁵² On March 2nd, 2012, leaders of the PAC invited representatives from all the parties of Karachi to attend the festivities accompanying Baloch Culture Day in Lyari. Among the chief guests was Ghaus Ali Shah, the leader of the PML (N) in Sindh; cf. Sameer Mandhro, «Lyari spins the wheel for its fortunes», *The Express Tribune*, March 7, 2012.

bandits used walkie-talkies. After seven days of intense fighting, the police withdrew its forces without any significant achievement to its credit—save for the deaths of five of its own (including an SHO) and, officially, 20 civilians (the police also claimed to have killed eight « miscreants » but none of the leaders and military commanders of the PAC were either killed or arrested). The number of casualties among the civilian population was probably much higher, though, and the deployment of « tanks » (as local residents call APCs) had a dramatic impact upon the population, who felt that Lyari had become « another Afghanistan » or « another Waziristan », as I often heard during my fieldwork there in August 2012. The incident that came to epitomise the « tyranny » (*zulm*) unleashed upon Lyariites during this police operation involved one of these « tanks », which ran over a ten-year old boy during a demonstration of local residents against the police. Three months later, the death of Amar was systematically mentioned by my respondents to show the injustice done to them. The memory of the whole operation was still looming large—graffitis abusing the police and Nabeel Gabol were ubiquitous, posters of police « atrocities » adorned the outside walls of local NGOs financed and protected by the PAC, and street corner sit-ins protesting the operation went on. While the entry of the police into Lyari was seen as an « invasion » by many residents, its blatant failure galvanised the supporters of the PAC and silenced its critics. As of August 2012, the general mood remained indignant if not belligerent, and the PAC appeared in control of the largest part of Lyari.

This success, which, at least temporarily, reinforced the position of Uzair Baloch in Lyari, was not a victory over the state. The decision of the government to send the police rather than the Rangers (paramilitary troupe under the authority of the federal government but under the direct command of army officers) came to substantiate a persisting rumour suggesting that the PAC was secretly be patronised by the army, in exchange for its intimidation of Baloch nationalists in Lyari. The deployment of the Rangers would probably have faced less resistance from the gangsters - as attacking the Rangers amounts to targeting the army itself - but it would have compromised this unofficial partnership between the PAC and the military, which was adamant to contain the spread of the Baloch insurgency in Karachi. Three months later, on independence day, the gangsters would confirm the existence of such a deal by commissioning posters adorning the walls of the neighbourhood, where Uzair Baloch could be seen presenting his « *salaams* » to the army and the Rangers, implicitly thanking them for having spared him and his organisation.

Far from consecrating the rupture between the PPP's and the PAC's leadership, this police operation allowed the latter to renegotiate to its advantage the contract with its political patrons. Following this « battle for Lyari », which has infuriated the local population while consolidating the image of « protectors » (*mehfuz karnewale*) of the gangsters, the leadership of the PPP started considering the possibility of an electoral defeat in Lyari, which could have a domino effect over the score of the party in the rest of the country. Not only were the PPP-affiliated local notables largely discredited for not having stood against the operation but they could not even access their constituency. Besides Nabeel Gabol, assailed by abuses and curses all over the walls of a neighborhood he long deserted, all the representatives from Lyari at the national and provincial level, as well as the local cadres of the party, were being intimidated by the gangsters and had to withdraw from the neighbourhood. The gangsters then fill in the vacuum left by the PPP's withdrawal and proclaim themselves the new rulers of Lyari. By turning to their advantage the asymmetrical relationship linking them to the PPP, they put pressure on the latter to select their own candidates for the election. And if the PPP had until then refused to present candidates with a criminal record, this time the President himself had to approve the choice of the PAC for the NA-248 constituency, Shah Jahan Baloch, a former local councillor accused of several murders, who contested - and won - the election from jail. The profile and the victory of the candidate of the PPP in PS-109, Saniya Naz, was also revealing of the rising political fortunes of the PAC. This young woman, aged 26, lacked any social or economic capital. Coming from a working class background (her father worked at the canteen of the Karachi Port Trust), she owed her spectacular rise to her involvement in various local NGOs but also, and more importantly, to her close association with Uzair Baloch.

By making a shift from the status of broker to that of patron, the leaders of the PAC endorse « traditional » signs of notability. They proclaim themselves to be *sardars* (lords), a title traditionally reserved to the heads of Baloch tribes, such as Nabeel Gabol. The intronisation of Uzair Baloch as the new « Don » of Lyari thus took the form of a *dastarbandi* ceremony, with Uzair being presented a traditional turban in the manner of a tribal chieftain. Although Nabeel Gabol looked contemptuously at these criminals from a low extraction and resented their attempt to proclaim themselves as *sardars*,⁵³ he attended the ceremony along with Rafiq Engineer, a PPP member of the provincial assembly. This would be their last participation to

⁵³ Interview, Karachi, 2013.

a public event in Lyari, though, as the leaders of the PAC were determined to evict the old guard of the PPP from « their » locality.

Since the launching of the PAC by Rehman, these aspirants to notability redistribute the manna of their criminal activities (drug trafficking, lang grabbing, extortion,...), as well as the resources generated by their proximity with the state, through evergetic practices (distribution of food rations during religious festivals, opening of schools and medical dispensaries, financial support to sports clubs and NGOs,...). If munificence is the primary attribute of the notable, across time and space, accessibility comes close in the construction of his public virtue. In Pakistan - but the same holds true for other South Asian countries and beyond -, public personalities are expected to be available to the general public and the best indicator of their influence is the number of their retainers lining up at the door of their office or reception room,⁵⁴ known as a *dera* in the case of Pakistani criminals aiming to showcase their social fibre and political clout. An evening spent with Uzair Baloch, in August 2012, was particularly enlightening in this regard. The access to his palatial mansion, which is located in Singhu Lane, at the heart of Lyari, was not obvious for non-residents: every *gali* leading to the house was guarded by heavily armed men, a military presence that became even more imposing as one got closer to the house. These security arrangements were only an obstacle for outsiders, though. Local residents for their part, and among them the poor and the destitute, were not subjected to the same restrictions and could easily access Uzair and his lieutenants. In his four-storey mansion with swimming pool and dernier cri interior design, guarded by dozens of heavily armed men, he held his *darbar* (court), receiving local residents of all social background, from tribal elders invited to discuss neighbourhood matters to an eunuch (*hijra*) accusing her relatives of trying to evict her and grab her property. Far from being afraid to move across Lyari, Uzair and his lieutenants continued to attend public events (*iftar* parties, football tournaments, cultural programmes...). Despite the threats against his life, Uzair drove himself his 4 wheeler—though with a pistol around the waist and heavy security arrangements, including an escort of armed teenagers on motorbikes. I accompanied him to an Iftar party in Nawa Lane on Independence Day and saw that bystanders, shopkeepers and children all saluted him as he drove through. Though it is difficult to determine whether these rather formal salutes were inspired by fear, respect or even affection for the new Don,

⁵⁴ Elise Massicard, « Entre l'intermédiaire et l'homme d'honneur'. Savoir-faire et dilemmes notabiliaires en Turquie », *Politix*, 17 (67), 2004, p. 109.

Uzair seemed to have become the most powerful public authority in Lyari, and as soon as he stepped out of his car, impoverished residents came to him to plead for help. Unlike more conventional politicians, Uzair listened patiently, without interrupting his or her interlocutor. Surrounded by his heavily armed guards, the young Don fully endorsed his vocation of problem solver, remaining silent until the last minute, when he promised to look into it.

Sovereign power and its counterfeiting

As I repeatedly emphasised, the patronage of political parties, the police or - even better - the army, remains crucial for the political survival of Lyari's gangsters, while their control of the local state is integral to their project of domination. Less than the « rhetoric of appeal » of tribalism,⁵⁵ which these gangsters turned to in order to legitimate their rule, it is their proximity with the political class, their rebooting of some public services (public schools, where teachers have been coerced into resuming their activities, as well as the Lyari General Hospital, from where PAC militants evicted goats, donkeys and the « worthless lot » [*mawalīs*] who used to come there to smoke hashish)⁵⁶, as well as their reining in of petty thieves, that gave them an advantage in the patronage war raging in Lyari. Thus, according to the chief coach of one of Lyari's most respected boxing clubs, which benefited from the patronage of the PAC,

Today, by the Grace of God, when the news of a firing incident spreads around, people come out of their houses and ask [the shooter]: « why are you firing? » Some time ago, we banned firing. Shooters will be admonished (*achha khaba remand lete hain*). [...] The people of the Aman Committee are closely monitoring the situation. In one of his speeches, Sardar Uzair Jan [Uzair Baloch] said that these things could no longer be tolerated... that the gang war should cede the way to a sports war... When the time of tournaments approaches, they all come and ask us, « What's going on? What are you lacking? » And when we organise summer and winter boxing camps, they search for the chief guests [political personalities], and they provide arrangements for refreshments.⁵⁷

The « *pax traficana* » which is alluded to here brings us back to Rehman. After launching the PAC in 2008, Rehman banned the open selling of narcotics, threatening drug peddlers with

⁵⁵ On tribalism as an ideology characterized by its « rhetoric of appeal », see Steven C. Caton, *Peaks of Yemen I Summon'. Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1990, p. 26.

⁵⁶ Interview avec Uzair Baloch, Karachi (Lyari), août 2012.

⁵⁷ Interview, Lyari, December 2011.

death, while forbidding aerial firing during marriage ceremonies (those breaching this rule would expose themselves to a 200,000 rupees fine). Rehman also started enforcing some Islamic-style punishments against criminals who operated without his approval, some residents of Lyari recalling how he cut the hand of a thief who had snatched a mobile phone from its rightful owner.⁵⁸ This repression of street crime and more generally this policing of the public space by prominent gangsters provides a vivid illustration of the frequent « counterfeiting of the culture of legality by the criminal underworld ». As John and Jean Comaroff suggest, such criminal architectures of legalities « feed the dialectic of law of disorder », for « once government begins seriously to outsource its services and to franchise force, and once extralegal organisations begin to mimic the state and the market by providing protection and dispensing justice, social order itself becomes like a hall of mirrors: at once there and not there, at once all too real and a palimpsest of images, at once visible, opaque and translucent ». The logical outcome of this « copresence of law and disorder » is the coming into being of a new geography: « a geography of discontinuous, overlapping sovereignties ».⁵⁹

This presence of the legal in criminal, counterfeited forms of sovereignty, never erases the possibility—the necessity, even—of the recourse to violence. As Thomas Blom Hansen underlines in his study of competing repertoires of authority in contemporary India, sovereign power is a fundamentally « unstable and precarious form of power », which finds its origins and sustains itself through « acts of violence characterized by excess—not merely in their brutality but also in their apparent lack of intention and moderation ».⁶⁰ This duality of sovereign power, which materialises itself in the dialectic of the legal and the lethal (in the Comaroff's terms) or in that of terror and generosity (in Hansen's terms), was at the heart of the system of domination enforced by the PAC in Lyari. At the peak of its power, following the victory of its candidates in the May 2013 general elections, the authority of the PAC manifested itself through welfare activities, offers of protection (against the violence of law and order forces but also against its own), the adjudication of family feuds and commercial disputes, and in a more coercive fashion through taxation and sanctions. The leadership of the PAC no longer contented itself with being Lyari's prime patrons but aspired to become its *de facto* sovereigns, that is, public authorities claiming « to exercise autonomous, exclusive control over the

⁵⁸ Salam Dharejo, « The godfather of Lyari », art. quoted, p. 68.

⁵⁹ John L. and Jean Comaroff, « Law and Disorder in the Postcolony », art. quoted, p. 34.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

lives, deaths, and conditions of existence of those who fall within a given purview, and to extend over them the jurisdiction of some kind of law », to use the definition of sovereignty recently proposed by Jean and John Comaroff, which draws upon the work of two other anthropologists, Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Steputat, who aimed to disentangle sovereign power from the state and point at the myriad forms of partial, often overlapping forms of sovereignty straddling the boundaries between state and society.

This unofficial power structure was not unique in Karachi and drew inspiration from the one put in place by the MQM in the course of the 1990s. It resembles it, in particular, by its counterfeiting of social government. On the one hand, these unofficial power structures are premised on a promise to « serve humanity » (*insaniyat ke nam par kbidmat*, in the words of Uzair Baloch, a formulation reminiscent of the *kbidmat-e-kehalq* [service of the people] guiding the MQM's philanthropic activities, which for its part found its inspiration in the Jama'at-e-Islami's social work). This promise is supposed to be actuated by the social work of these unofficial leaders, compensating for the deficiencies of the official state in various domains, from education to health, poverty reduction, sports and culture. These systems of domination might well be contractual - which system of domination isn't, at least *a minima?* -, while showcasing their social credentials, but they do not satisfy to the criteria of a community of citizens, that is, a fraternal collectivity whose members conceive themselves as « so many little masters participating of a common sovereignty, independent from any paternal incarnation of the law ». ⁶¹ Despite the universalistic professions of faith aiming to legitimate them, these unofficial power structures do not serve citizens entitled to a share of the common good, but subjects ethnically affiliated with their de facto sovereign, while this ethnicity does not entitle them to any right but merely makes them eligible for favours distributed in a discretionary manner by their de facto sovereign. This is what Murtaza, a Sindhi fisherman active in a local NGO, discovered after approaching Uzair Baloch to request his support in rebuilding a school in Khadda. His request was turned down by the PAC's leader, who suggested that his interlocutor was knocking on the wrong door: « I am not your [Sindhis'] patron » (*Main ne ap logon ka theka to nahin liya hai*), replied the young Don. For Lyari's self-proclaimed « social » bandits, not all the poor are created equal. ⁶²

⁶¹ On this figure of the *Imperator* and his replacement by the sovereign people, see Christian Geffray, « Etat, richesse et criminels », art. cité.

⁶² Interview, Lyari, 2013.

In such contexts, every attempt to upset public order amounts to a crime of lese-majesty. Because the threat of tyrannicide looms large over the social order, the hunt for dissidents is permanent and their punishment must be exemplary. More than in any other form of public order, the congenial violence of sovereign power here shows a propensity to excess. Thus, in April 2013, as it seemed to be winning the battle for hearts and minds in the neighbourhood through its social work and its control of street crime, the PAC organised a public execution which, even by Karachi standards, was unprecedented in its brutality. Following the capture of Arshad Pappu, the arch rival of the PAC's leadership (and the murderer of Uzair Baloch's father), the population of Lyari was invited through the loudspeakers of local mosques to take part in his « punishment ». Pappu was then tied to a car, dragged naked, beheaded, dismembered and finally burnt. This gruesome performance culminated with young armed men affiliated with the PAC playing football with his severed head. The whole event was videotaped and the film was circulated via cell-phones in the next few hours, thus enlarging the audience of this foundational moment of violence. From a political point of view, this macabre performance seemed counter-productive, as many residents of Lyari formerly sympathetic to the PAC started questioning their affiliation with such a brutal group.⁶³ However, this apparently senseless act of excessive violence was also a political statement of the strongest kind, publicising the absolute, unbound power of Lyari's new sovereigns. More than by its savagery, it is by its publicity that this execution singularised itself. This gruesome performance transformed into a festive event a massacre whose ritual nature, involving acts of torture and post-mortem mutilations, was not exceptional in Lyari. However, until then, such practices remained cantoned to basements or warehouses transformed into torture cells by local gangsters. Even more than the extreme nature of the violence displayed here, it is the publicising of these violent acts that provoked a sentiment of horror among the audience. The abject nature of the event was coterminous with self-loathing among its spectators, especially among the educated youths who, from now on, would no longer be able to pretend to ignore these atrocities. Even if unconsciously, it is probably what the organizers of the event had planned: the connivence of local populations, sealed by this blood pact.

⁶³ I am grateful to Nida Kirmani for relating to me the reactions of her respondents in Lyari, a few weeks after the events.

This statement did not go unnoticed by the official state. Confirming the commitment of the judiciary to restore the « writ of the state », the Sindh High Court ordered the arrest of Uzair Baloch and his lieutenants. In the following months, these court orders and the subsequent raids conducted by the police on Uzair's house failed to produce any result. The attempt of the judiciary to re-monopolise the right to kill and reclaim sovereignty for the state should be accounted for nonetheless, as it indicated that the fragmentation of authority at work in Karachi remained contested in principle, if not yet in practice.

What finally caused the fall of Uzair Baloch and the disbanding of the PAC, though, was not the late-coming reaction of the judiciary, but the internal power struggle within the PAC and its instrumentalisation by the ruling party and the state apparatus, which were determined to regain the ground lost to these over-ambitious gangsters. The main source of Uzair Baloch's public authority used to lay in his political connexions, which were managed by his right hand man, Zafar Baloch. Following the assassination of the latter, in September 2013, Uzair's hold on the myriad « commanders » of the PAC became increasingly tenuous. Thus, when the most powerful of these gang leaders, Baba Ladla, broke with the young « Don » the next month, the PAC imploded and a new gang war erupted in Lyari. Once again, former foes turned into circumstantial allies and, possibly with some encouragement from the security apparatus, Baba Ladla turned to his former arch rival, Ghaffar Zikri. While the truce between the two former foes remained fragile, it significantly weakened Uzair's forces' hold on large parts of Lyari. So much so that, by the end of November, Lyari's self-proclaimed *sardar* was but the shadow of his former self. Feeling that the ground was shifting, Uzair left for Europe and has not returned to Lyari since - a move which cost him dearly, as local residents took it as an act of cowardice and a renouncement to the grandeur he had laid a claim to over the past few years.

These recent developments serve as a reminder that the political survival of deviant aspirants to sovereignty is as much premised on their ability to secure the protection of some sections of the state (if only against other state agencies) as on their ability to stabilise their sovereign power by overcoming their own founding violence and bringing their most mercurial elements into the ambit of some legal order, official or otherwise—a rare feat that, in Karachi, has evaded every political force but the MQM.

Conclusion

Over the years, Lyari's gangsters have been practicing two forms of brokering. First, they put their social network and their coercive resources at the service of ruling parties (the CML and later on the PPP and the MQM), by mobilising voters and, come elections day, by ensuring that they voted in conformity with their prescriptions - all activities that contributed to securing these parties' vote-bank in this strategic neighbourhood. In the opposite direction, Lyari's gangsters have put their proximity with the state at the service of their protégés, in order to constitute their own clientèle. With the passage of time, these activities of brokering have been evolving into more ambitious forms of patronage. Instead of drawing a profit from their access to influential personalities, they have converted these « secondary » resources into « primary » ones (electoral mandates, access to public funds and jobs in the public sector,...). This transition from brokering to patronage is relatively classic in clientelist systems. It enables brokers to widen their social base but also presents a risk as it sustains higher expectations among these aspiring patrons' clientele. And when the credibility of the patron comes to decline, following his inability to hold his commitments, even his power of brokering starts being questioned.⁶⁴ Criminal brokers do have an advantage, here: their access to coercive resources enables them to compensate for their lackluster performance - especially in socio-economic terms - through intimidation. This compensation is rather precarious, though, as it is conditioned to the goodwill of these criminals' political patrons. More often than not, the latter are reluctant to see the terms of clientelistic exchange reversed to the advantage of their former criminal brokers, especially when these newly emerged petty patrons discredit themselves by their calamitous management of local affairs and even more so when they turn to violence to stifle the critiques that their misrule unavoidably nurtures. From mere competitors, these former brokers recently graduated to patronage then turn into major hazards for their political patrons. At this point, the terrain is ripe for a renegotiation of the contract between political patrons and their criminal protégés. The success of this renegotiation is however conditioned to the goodwill of law enforcement agencies, which are the only ones that can translate these ambitions into acts by dismantling the unofficial power structures set up by these criminals. This is precisely what happened in the first few months of 2014, after the PPP and the army came to the conclusion that Uzair Baloch as well as his main rival, Baba

⁶⁴ Jeremy Boissevain, *Friends of Friends. Networks, Manipulators, and Coalitions*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1974, p. 162.

Ladla, had to be reined in. This time, the Rangers were sent to Lyari to « restore the writ of the state », a task in which they proved remarkably successful. After a few months of uncertainty and violent escalation, both factions finally called it a day and deserted the neighbourhood. As of now, the gangsters only retain a nominal presence in Lyari, while the political vacuum left open by their retreat is yet to be filled. The patronage war is certainly not over but for now, at least, the guns have fallen silent.