

Development for whom? Forced evictions as a technology of neoliberal governmentality

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Abstract

Challenging the state's narrativization of forced displacement along the Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs as 'anti-encroachment' drives, we critically examine the vocabularies, aspirations, and bureaucratic processes of the state's technologies of control and governance over marginalized urban neighborhoods. Locally referred to as Katchi Abadis, these neighbourhoods exist in varying degrees of legality, regularization, and in/formality produced by the state. We illustrate how evictions in these settlements are a deeply destructive technology of governance that is routinely deployed in order to pursue anti-poor neoliberal development agendas by contextualizing the catastrophic violence in Katchi Abadis along Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs within particular forms of pandemic governmentalities that exploit public anxieties around health and cleanliness along with residents' inabilities to mobilize resistance. We examine the state's instrumentalisation of a putative rationale of 'anti-encroachment', a logic in flux of a politics of aesthetics that is yielded for the benefit of elite interests pursuing anti-poor and neoliberal development agendas. Consequently, it (dis)orders access to space, mobility, and opportunity for marginalized communities. These narratives of exclusion, while not unique to the displacements in Karachi, fill an important research gap, and shed new light on how narratives of exclusion are employed as a tool of governance to displace the urban poor in Karachi, and to deny them occupation and belonging in urban spaces.

Introduction

In August 2020, Karachi was hit by unprecedented rainfall, as per the Meteorological Office's annual calculations of 484 mm (19 inches), leading to an infrastructural collapse within the city. The ensuing urban flooding caused widespread damage to property and livelihoods. All parts of the city reported casualties and accidents, including up-scale neighborhoods, and the government declared a state of emergency advising city-dwellers to avoid leaving their homes. Arif Hasan has clearly outlined why Karachi floods: due to inadequate city-wide sewage and waste disposal infrastructure (Hasan, 2020). Sewage disposal by housing authorities and local government bodies has clogged the city's waterways.

The eviction and displacement of people from Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs was not directly related to flooding, but this long-standing issue was forced into the conversation in line with a pattern of evictions in Karachi's urban planning history. As early as 2007, building concrete roads along the Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs was under discussion. Eviction plans had been formulated to uproot the informal settlements with vague promises of resettling affectees many miles from their original place of residence (DAWN News, 2007).

This paper gives a brief history of urban planning in Karachi, followed by reflections on the biopolitics of the state and art of governmentality in a crisis as it relates to evictions of marginalized urban residents in the aftermath of widespread infrastructural breakdowns, and during a pandemic no less.

Methodology

We employed a mixed method approach, with 350 semi-structured surveys, secondary literature analysis, and affectees' and activists' social media posts. This approach was used to give a holistic picture of the ongoing effect of demolitions on Gujjar Nullah's affectees. We also focused on knowledge production involving the community, activists, and urban planning researchers through fortnightly meetings involving community organizers from Gujjar and Orangi Nullah Organizing committees. They also collected data and video reports from their localities which informed the knowledge creation process.

Survey

Our household survey comprised 24 questions aimed at assessing the economic and social risk to affectees through the demolition drive. We surveyed 350 people spanning 32 settlements from Gujjar Nullah. This survey was necessary because the NED survey and the EIA both employed faulty methodology that supported the government's narrative of demolitions, instead of exploring the extent to which demolitions affected the lives of the affectees, also known as *Mutasireen*.

The *Mutasireen* committees were directly involved in the survey along with the KBT data team. They set up camps which people from the localities visited, and were briefed on the forms before filling them out. Data was then cleaned up and analyzed.

We also wanted to understand the links between informality and legality. We determined that several people had leases (formal agreement between the issuing body such as KMC and the owner/renter). We concluded that almost all survey respondents had some form of documentation to prove that the state accepted their home's legality, despite the language being used by media, judiciary and politicians which did not take this into account.

We determined the multiple ways that governmentality and bureaucracy functions in day-to-day dealings between the affectees and the officials, and the harmful injustices Mutasireen experienced in their entanglement. We participated in the knowledge creation that challenged the government's narrative that the demolitions were a net positive to reduce the possibility of Karachi flooding.

Limitations

Our survey was limited by time and a small volunteer data team. A larger, more extensive survey of Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs would shed greater insight into how people navigate these failures to plan affordable housing for lower socio-economic groups in Karachi.

History of Urban Planning in Karachi

Much of Karachi's urban planning, as in many Indian cities, can be explained from the perspective of failing to plan, which Bhan (2013) refers to as problematising failures of planning, where illegality becomes part of planning. The failure to plan extends to commercial or administrative buildings once allocated for a different purpose and now serving another, and has shaped Karachi in many ways.

The issue of formal housing started from the time of independence when Karachi's population grew several times due to the influx of refugees from India. People were settled in informal settlements, with plans for formal housing in the future. The government did not allocate land for adequate housing for the majority of citizens; this planning failure led to the need for informal settlements. Planning failures are evident in Karachi's urban development, resulting in so-called 'illegal' and 'legal' informally planned areas and formally planned areas. These distinctions are important to highlight as the resulting urban planning in Karachi can be analyzed and critiqued through this lens.

According to Gautam Bhan, a planned formal colony can only be built on areas marked specifically for its development. Unauthorized settlements, by contrast, can be formal (regularized) or informal (based on stamp paper, informal contracts) and are built for housing in areas which were not specifically marked for them. This does not mean that they are not legitimate or recognized; the Pakistani government has recognised Katchi Abadis' existence and has sought to formalize them through the Katchi Abadis Improvement and Regularization Program. The project's aim was to regularize 2350 Katchi Abadis since 1978. However, this process has been incredibly slow. (Hasan, 1996).

In 1958, a housing project was started when General Ayub Khan established military rule. A Refugee Housing scheme was created with the aim of alleviating shelterless populations' problems by creating satellite towns--one in Orangi, one in Korangi. These Greater Settlement Plans led to the removal of lower-income people from the city center and their subsequent settlement in the peripheries near industries and factories. The satellite towns are at least 25 kilometers away from Karachi's city center, which it's safe to assume was a space for a sizable population of these shelterless individuals to find work. Although satellite towns are considered self-contained towns with their own amenities, they are reliant on the main city for major municipal services. However, the state did not provide Orangi Town with basic sanitation, so the residents used bucket latrines and open sewers for human waste disposal, leading to accelerated transmission of water-borne diseases. Orangi Town residents paid for sanitation themselves through the community self-help project, Orangi Pilot Project, which began in 1980 (World Habitat Awards, 2001). Constantinos Apostolou Doxiadis, a Greek planner who was commissioned to draw up plans for Islamabad, was hired to prepare what is known as the Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan today (Soomro and Soomro, 2017).

Informal housing and its accompanying land agents' informal economy filled housing needs at the time (Gazdar and Mallah, 2011). This is why Karachi has largely grown through planning failures and why planned formal colonies--especially for lower socio-economic groups--are very rare. The formal sector only catered for less than 20% of Karachi's population by 1996 (Hasan, 1996). Scarcely any formal planned housing for lower socio-economic groups has been developed since then. To bridge the gap between a need for shelter for Karachi's working-class majority, a policy of informal settlements was pursued, resulting in the creation of the Sindh Katchi Abadi Act (SKAA, 1987).

Under 12% of the *Katchi Abadis* which existed before 1985 had been regularized and only 12% of the population's property was given formal approval (Hasan, 1988). The scale of disproportionality between regularized *katchi abadis* versus the total number of *katchi abadis* is immense; in 1987 alone, 539 *katchi abadis* were identified. After 1987, 389 new abadis were identified. These *katchi abadis* also only include the Notified Abadis that have been scheduled for regularization. The real number is likely much higher (Hasan, 2008).

The Sindh Assembly passed a law on unauthorized informal settlements' regularization in 2009, meaning that all *katchi abadis* up to 1997 would be awarded leasehold rights (First Amendment to SKAA, 1997). However, the regularization process has not been able to keep up with the need for regularization, while land available for settlement has been caught up in speculative bubbles.

Our research shows that residents in even non-regularized informal settlements still possess stamp paper based documentation, and therefore merit legitimization by the state. The state collects utility bills for the water, gas and electricity connections from the residents. Hence, these settlements cannot be simply categorized as informal and illegal encroachments. However, when these issues move to the public and judicial spheres, these categories are still invoked, ensuring that any settlements deemed necessary are dispossessed, or 'reclaimed', in order to enable projects of 'development'.

Technologies of Governance

The distinctions between formal and informal, legal and illegal, muddy the waters of Karachi's urban planning, and are therefore highly relevant to understanding the neoliberal model of urban post-partition development in Karachi. The use of terms like *Katchi Abadi*, which is a colloquial way to refer to informal settlements, is at times controversial, as it may refer to informal settlements that can be regularized, while at the same time give an impression of impermanence and marginalization (Gazdar and Mallah, 2011). The use of the word 'slums' also carries stigmatized connotations and associations with poverty and uncleanliness, and leads to them being viewed as encroachments by the middle classes, as well as the judiciary, who often do not recognize informal settlements are not necessarily illegitimate or unrecognized by the state, having instead resulted from a planning failure and lack of affordable housing in Karachi.

The word 'encroachment' has been used in similar ways: as a barrier standing in the way of 'development'. Encroachments are used to refer to informal settlements which need to be removed for public and societal good (Anwar and Anjum, 2021). In this way, the word 'encroachment' becomes decoupled from its original meaning, and instead exists as an argument against the existence of informal settlements in the city. We have come across several articles and members of the general middle-class public claiming that Gujjar and Orangi Nullah settlements are encroachments that must be removed. The government's and judiciary's narrative describes forced evictions as anti-encroachment drives. Framed in a positive light , these drives obfuscate the questioning about the sort of 'development' occurring, the role of the government, and who benefits from it all. It deems informal settlements and the people who live there as 'illegals' or 'others'.

The cloistering of the poor to homes around waste sites and the concurrent stigmatization of their proximity to waste further illuminate inherently classist vocabularies and prejudices through which the state has justified its rationale of violence and enforced displacement against communities living alongside the nullahs. In fact, the city has been organized such that the lower-income groups increasingly find themselves being relocated to the peripheries through demolitions and evictions. This restricts their access to education, health care, and job opportunities and breaks community bonds, making organization among residents against the government increasingly more difficult.

Contrary to assumptions about the participation of the governed in Foucauldian governmentality, forms of control and punishment have also been used. Affectees were told to leave their homes at little to no notice, often less than a few hours, at Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs (Hasan, 2020). Such loss of property, injuries and deaths are a means to coerce working-class persons through legal, judicial and policing systems. Affectees and activists alike have faced police brutality during protests.

During the pandemic, the state continued forced evictions and displacements. Affectees spent nights in the open, making them more vulnerable to the pandemic and to increased stress, resulting in documented instances of loss of life by KBT. This situation can be viewed through the lens of the necropolitics of pandemic governmentalities to uncover the ways in which discourses of war and crisis are used to push through structural changes that create a hierarchy wherein certain people are protected by putting others at risk (Dias and Deluchey, 2020).

Bureaucracies of paper

Technologies of governance are further controlled through extensive documentation (Hull, 2012). Governing via paper is essential to governing the city - a practice that has continued since colonial times. We discovered that the KMC was responsible for demolitions and would not hear petitions or requests by affectees for rehabilitation. Affectees were told to contact

other organizations for disbursement of cheques or rehabilitation. In interviews and discussions with us, several affectees have described their struggle to obtain cheques as going from one office to another for several days, leading to income loss and negligible progress on the matter of cheques due to paper bureaucracy. Petitions to request the government agencies to stop evictions have little value unless they go on the file and become part of the bureaucratic process. Affectees are limited in political organizing by having to pursue legal petitions and stay orders. They are denied avenues of protest through tools such as mass arrests of activists and affectees at the Bilawal House protest, and by KMC officials' threats and pressures (Faraz, 2021).

Paper bureaucracies have also resulted in delayed or non-existent rehabilitation for affectees of demolitions along the Karachi Circular Railway, Lyari Expressway, Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs. Neoliberal policies and increased securitization has led to the emergence of gated communities and housing development projects in the form of securitized enclaves that have shaped Karachi (Sobia Kakar, 2015). This has led to the ghetto-isation of the informal settlements, which are usually viewed as dangerous, no-go areas (Kirmani, 2017) with people from lower socioeconomic areas characterized as unclean or uneducated. This leads to increased evictions without resettlement, even when there is no real use of the land in question (Bhan and Shivanand, 2013). For example, the roads that are being constructed by displacing Gujjar and Orangi Nullah residents ostensibly serve no real purpose. They connect areas that are otherwise easily accessible. It is an eviction for the removal of lower-income classes from urban centers.

In the Environmental Impact Assessment Report conducted on Gujjar, Orangi and Mehmoodabad Nullahs and brought out by Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), there were several references to Gujjar and Orangi Nullah residents as 'encroachers', and a blanket statement of unsatisfactory education levels. The latter was surmised without doing a proper survey and is in no way representative of actual education levels. The authors of the report were surmising residents' literacy levels based on their biases against marginalized communities.

Moreover, an EIA was only released by the Sindh Government in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Authority *after* 90% of the demolitions had taken place. This EIA was conducted to assess the impact of demolitions along Mehmoodabad, Gujjar Nullah, Orangi Nullah, Malir River, and Lyari River. The EIA itself had an extremely small sample size, with only "65 to 70" respondents in total from all these locations being asked about their opinions on the demolitions. The literature review for the 156-page EIA was one paragraph long. While listing disadvantages, the EIA stated, "A little disadvantage could be in [the] form of psychosocial effects." Elsewhere, the EIA states that the developmental project "will improve the [s]ocio-economic status of the area," and the "only major concern [affectees] showed was [that] they will lose their houses and some of them will lose their livelihoods" (Pak Green Enviro-Engineering, 2021). The language is deliberately selected to downplay the loss of homes, livelihoods, community, and well-being that affectees are currently facing.

Evictions, Neoliberalism, and the World Bank

We understand neoliberalism here as a retreat of the state from a mission of social and economic protection of its citizenry, simultaneously accompanied by a strengthening of the state's punitive and coercive capacities (Wacquant, 2010). This serves to mask the state's neglect by holding individual 'bad actors' responsible for structural failings, weaponizing the legal system against people already abandoned by the 'nurturing' arm of the state and promoting discourses of 'individual responsibility' and marketized solutions to problems such as the lack of access to education, dysfunctional infrastructure, and unaffordable housing. In the case of the demolitions and evictions along Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs, such a withdrawal of state care coupled with the deployment of legal discourses to justify destruction can be readily analyzed in the form of the 'anti-encroachment drive'.

This process is, in turn, coupled with developmental projects designed and financed with credit from the World Bank, purportedly to improve the city's drainage infrastructure. Such an institution's involvement provides political cover for the state to carry out 'megaprojects' with the dual benefit of potential kickbacks and corruption endemic to such projects while deferring the real costs to future tax revenue, all the while being able to point towards the World Bank to deflect questions about the necessity, planning, and implementation of the project. Furthermore, as we have seen elsewhere, such as in Delhi (Randeria and Grunder, 2011), the 'gold standard' developmental frameworks of the World Bank pertaining to socioeconomic impacts including resettlement are selectively implemented on the ground, serving mostly as an exercise in bureaucratic box-ticking. This is accomplished by cleverly separating parts of the project that would run counter to World Bank policies as independent enforcement actions carried out by the state, excluding it from World Bank jurisdiction at the same time that they form an integral part of the broader developmental project.

Such a state of affairs follows similar patterns across many countries: constituting a vision of spectacular development that is 'global' in orientation, seeking to create 'world-class' cities replete with Olympic facilities, high rise apartments, beautification projects including what Baviskar terms 'bourgeois environmentalism', and iconic, 'record-setting' architecture (Baviskar, 2003, 2011; Shin, 2012). This involves catering to international tourism at the expense of local industry and a process of urban regeneration via large-scale infrastructure projects. However, the construction of flyovers, underpasses and bridges undermines the immediate need to re-evaluate the car-centric city model due to which transportation issues and congestion arise. These issues are only exacerbated by the diverting of resources from truly accessible public transport that serves the majority of the city's population's needs (Hasan, 2021). Housing geared towards the provision of shelter to the non-elite urban classes often fails to secure funding in this paradigm because they are not perceived to be 'investment-friendly'. Combined with the absence of a state-subsidized social housing sector in Karachi, this means a complete lack of affordable formal housing. Contradictory situations emerge where environmental concern may occur at the cost of evictions in *Katchi Abadis*. KMC official Bashir Siddiqui's

remarks on the beautification of Gujjar Nullah amply demonstrate this in their extolling the creation of new green spaces in the city while remaining silent about the thousands of families to be evicted without rehabilitation (Chaltay Phirtay, 2021).

This determined pursuit of a 'world-class cities' development ideology particularly emerged in the 2000s during General Musharraf's rule. It has interfered with land use and development for affordable housing projects and made the city very 'poor-unfriendly'. This increases pressure on the relatively little land available for informal settlements of various kinds (*goths*, *villages*, *katchi abadis*). Historically, from the 1990s to 2009 there was a steep increase in land prices per square meter in katchi abadis. In 1991 the cost was 1.7 times the daily wage; in 2009 it rose to 40 times. The same was true for rent. The rent per month in 1991 was 3.5 times the daily wage; in 2009 it became 10 times. Moreover, the construction cost per square meter in 1991 was 6.6 times the daily wage, in 2009 it had risen to 20 times, rendering the working-class unable to afford their homes (Hasan, 2009).

These costs are going to be much higher in 2022 due to rising inflation, and the precarity of daily wage labor, which is the main occupation of people who live in *katchi abadis*, made even more fragile by the pandemic. This 'poor-unfriendly' model has emerged due to a large real-estate speculation market, which the state has responded to by demolishing informal settlements to make space for profitable housing and development schemes (Hasan, 2009). Land use in Karachi is entirely dependent on land value. Low-cost commercial spaces such as warehouses, workshops, and wholesale markets are increasingly only available in areas where Katchi Abadis are situated, leading to massive displacement of working-class communities (Hasan, 2006).

While the Karachi 2020 Master Plan addresses the dire need for the development of katchi abadis and low-income housing in general, it highlights no framework for the realistic achievement of this plan in the coming years. Therefore, it serves no actionable motion because the provision of social housing--an undertaking that produces no revenue--is not on the agenda of the "World-Class City" concept. The Plan's vision is to work "towards becoming a world class city and attractive economic center". Therein lies the foundation of the cities' neoliberalisation: organizing city space as the stage for unfettered, unregulated, market-oriented economic growth. "Growth" on the urban level here means that land is zoned according to market value, instead of social or environmental value. Areas zoned as "highest-priced land" in the Plan that fall into the Central, East and South districts of Karachi are subject to demands created by real-estate development that will inevitably attract foreign developers. The Plan is clear that housing is outsourced to foreign investors for high-income residential subdivisions in Karachi.

For low-income housing, it states that katchi abadis must be regularized within 5 years. In its cost and financing section for regularization, the plan states that "The real estate sector can provide much of the capital for developing new land if the legal, institutional and incentive framework are suitable. NGOs and charities can be expected to provide some basic public

services in katchi abadis, although their ultimate reach is rarely extensive and any successes are to some extent a reflection of inadequacy of the government and utilities to deliver low-cost affordable services to low-income areas" (Master Plan Group of Offices et al, 2007). This shows that the state is painfully aware of the consequence of this urban-economic sphere's liberalization. However, it continues to provide idealistic visions for low-income housing crises to be resolved through regularization that takes place one day or through the vague promotion of mixed-use land where people will be nearer to their employment.

Informal businesses and hawkers are excluded from the "retail" that the government wants to encourage in the city center since securing a space for commerce in the neoliberal model depends on the business's ability to pay high rents. Therefore, the Master Plan's vision for securing housing close to areas of employment isolates the working-class population because they can afford neither to live nor work there. Over time, a complete replacement of the current population of these highly valued lands will ensue, with a new, richer population that is able to uphold and accelerate the World-Class city's development. Ironically, the city centers with the most attractive "land value" are presented as sites of decline requiring immediate attention. The strategies proposed require a "cleaning up" where the areas marked for demolition are presented as messy and disorderly.

This project of development is one that actively damages Karachi's most underprivileged. The state has long used national interest as an excuse to carry out demolitions that further its own interests. Beginning in 2002, demolitions were carried out in Lyari to make space for the Lyari Expressway, which stretches 38 km along the Lyari River (Hasan, 2002). The Lyari Expressway Resettlement Project (LERP) is a civic project that aims to resettle the over 200,000 people who were displaced due to the construction of the expressway. Most families received compensation, although there were roadblocks for a few; some families had still not received compensation or relocation 19 years after demolitions began (The Express Tribune, 2021). Though the Lyari Expressway was framed by the government as a national necessity, it still took fifteen years to be fully functional (DAWN, 2018).

Most families whose houses were demolished due to the Lyari Expressway Project did not have government-issued leases, but the LERP enabled their relocation to designated spaces. However, the opposite is true when it comes to Gujjar Nullah: nearly half of the families have legally leased the land they live on, but no compensation or resettlement package has materialized yet. Although Gujjar Nullah affectees strongly resisted the demolitions in an unprecedented manner, the state went ahead with demolitions anyway. Affectees and activists working to resist the aggressive demolitions at Gujjar Nullah believe that the 2020 floods and the COVID-19 crisis provided the KMC with an opportunity to go ahead with their operation. The floods affected elite areas of Karachi that are usually cushioned from infrastructural breakdowns on such a level.

People residing in these neighborhoods protested, filing a petition in the Sindh High Court that placed the onus of responsibility on the settlements along Karachi's nullahs, requesting their immediate demolitions (DAWN, 2020). The public opinion was swayed in the same direction as well, and more and more people began to view the anti-encroachment drives as justifiable, although residents along the naalay are at the greatest risk of financial and health-related issues caused by urban flooding. Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis has created a global narrative around the necessity of living in a sustainable, green, healthy city. In fact, the Stakeholder Engagement Plan for Project SWEEP states that "the COVID-19 crisis has added to [people's] concerns that their immediate environment be safe and healthy," and that there is a "need for a clean environment and maintenance of public spaces." (Project SWEEP Stakeholder Engagement Plan, 2020) This falls in line with the KMC's narrative of the settlements along the nullahs as a health hazard that needs to be eliminated.

The Government of Sindh received funding from the World Bank and their \$100 million Solid Waste Emergency and Efficiency Project (SWEEP) to clean the Nullahs, ostensibly. This instead caused large-scale forced evictions and displacement for which neither the World Bank nor the government had any preemptive plans for resettlement of thousands of people; around 6000-7000 families have been displaced in Gujjar and Orangi Nullah demolitions. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) in their 2015 investigative report outlined how since 2004, the World Bank has funded several projects in the Global South which have directly led to evictions or forced displacements (ICIJ, 2015). This is not the only project in Karachi that the World Bank was involved in. Another project led to the forcible demolition of 2000 informal shops in Saddar (Hasan, 2021). The World Bank's knowledge of whether they were aware that such a large scale project would lead to forced displacement is questioned, as well as their involvement in such 'development' projects (Faraz, 2021).

Conclusion

Future Directions

Dealing with flooding and other instances of climate change, as well as the issues of waste and sewage, also highlight how bourgeois environmentalism has penalized the poor for living alongside Nullahs. After the rains of August 2020, the government needed to be seen taking action against flooding and that came in the form of clearing Gujjar and Orangi Nullahs of informal settlements, even though no direct relationship was ever established. Thus evictions were legitimized by the judiciary, gaining them acceptance from the general public as part of the process of work towards preventing flooding.

Moreover the fact that continued urban development is anti-poor is also reflected in new projects such as the Malir Expressway, which will also displace several thousands of families and cause more trauma and stress to the specific working class segment in Karachi. Furthermore, the resettlement plans have been vague and rehabilitation is still not forthcoming. Karachi will have to reckon with the cost of displacing the marginalized communities to the peripheries. The neoliberal, capitalistic model of urban development is not sustainable, which is both a sad prediction of increased evictions, but also a hopeful gleam that organizing and campaigning against evictions and increasing community bonds, might lead to everyday forms of resistance to power becoming a sustainable movement.

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