

- 3 Ensemble
Charlotte Algie
- 5 Rural Functionalism in
Vichy France
Jean-Louis Cohen
- 30 Tides That Bind: Water-
borne Trade and the In-
frastructure Networks of
Jardine, Matheson & Co.
Alex Bremner
- 47 Dublin, 1897: The Art of
(Architectural) Street
Fighting
Mark Crinson
- 59 Late to the After Party:
Neo-Geo Architecture
Hans Tursack
- 67 The Construction of Sovi-
et Ruling Class: From Mass
Spectacle to Synthetic
Theater
Anna Bokov
- 76 Christian Art in Kerala
Between St. Thomas and
St. Peter
Cristina Osswald
- 85 Building and Resistance in
Barbados
Emily Mann
- 97 Pavilions and Tents: Pietro
della Valle's Mobile Archi-
tecture
Matteo Burioni
- 107 Lines of Infrastructural
Control in Plantation
Jamaica
Hayden Bassett
- 115 Extracts From a Conver-
sation with Kim Bowes: Re-
prise on the Villa Romana
at Piazza Armerina
- 118 Other Methods
Yasmin Vobis & Aaron Forrest
- 127 Joseph Urban's Mar-a-
Lago
John Loring
- 136 The Epic of Gilgamesh and
the Political Symbolism of
the Periphery
Mark Jarzombek
- 146 Empire of the Senseless
Edward Mitchell
- 163 **Heyward Hart**
Observations, 2018
- 179 **Arko Datto**
Rail Diwali, 2018
- 195 Abodes of the Goddess
Tapati Guha-Thakurta
- 208 Fabricating Community
and Public Space in
Kolkata's Durga Puja
Swati Chattopadhyay
- 221 The American Architect on
a Cosmic Stage
Bryan Norwood
- 230 War, Visuality and the Mill-
tarized City
Zahra Malkani & Shahana Rajani
- 240 "The only Hellenistic ruin of
great interest in Jordan"
Miguel John Versluys
- 245 Colonial Prescriptions in
Paris
Samia Henni
- 255 Notes on the Delphi Meth-
od: Towards a Definition
Curtis Roth
- 258 Northern/Cape: the Fibrils
of an Asbestos History
Hannah le Roux
- 263 Empire, Networks and
Systems: The Interna-
tional Institute of Tropical
Agriculture, Nigeria, 1948
to 1960
Itohan Osayimwese
- 278 Ten Love Letters
Jimenez Lai
- 288 The Architecture of Com-
municating Vessels: The
Second World in the Age of
Capitalist Realism
Vladimir Kulić

War, Visuality, and the Militarized City

Zahra Malkani & Shahana Rajani

In the years since 9/11, Pakistan's largest city has been increasingly both represented and constituted as a key site in the global War On Terror: Karachi has been delimited by security analysts as an epicenter of terrorism in the twenty-first century and as "a distinctive battlefield."¹ It is described in international media as one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Violence permeates from and extends beyond the city boundaries, imbricating it within a larger geography of networked conflict, and marking it as one of the key sites across the globe rendered exceptional since the onset of the War on Terror. As a reflection of this new gaze, Karachi has been subject to immense transformation, shaped and structured increasingly in the interests and vision of an accelerating militarism, never more so than in the years following the launch of the paramilitary Karachi Operation in 2013: "a concerted campaign against lawlessness and terrorism in the city."² This essay explores the multidimensional and multilayered geography of militarization that has recently emerged in, and transformed, the fabric of Karachi.

Much has been written about the urbanization of warfare and both the causes and consequences of such processes. Stephen Graham argues that "contemporary warfare and terror now largely boils down to contests over the spaces, symbols, meanings, support systems or power structures of cities and urban regions. As a result, war, terrorism and cities are redefining each other in complex... ways."³ In fact, war and the city have always been intimately entangled and mutually constitutive. Urban form as we know it today emerged through a history of militarism

in which cities have always acted as agents.⁴ The ever-present potentiality of political violence and warfare is therefore inscribed and woven into the fabric of the city by its very design. However, the global scale of contemporary warfare represents a shift where "cities are no longer the bounded fortified spaces of old, but rather spaces of multiple networks and internal boundaries which simultaneously demand and defy fortification and defence."⁵

Urban militarization today refers not simply to the placement of military entities and activities in urban space but to a situation in which warfare permeates urban life. It refers to the establishment and entrenchment of borders across the surface of the city and to the ways these processes become a contemporary way of life. This essay attempts to understand the "wider geographical imprint of militarism and military activities."⁶ In Karachi, we take into account the ways in which space, discourse, visibility and social relations have been structured and mobilized in service of the "everywhere war" that has increasingly come to saturate and shape life in the city.⁷ We look not only at the spatial geography of militarization, but at the ways in which the project of boundless war has come to shape the wider landscape of civilian spheres of life, paying particular attention to the representational and discursive strategies.

Much of the violence of the Karachi Operation unfolds at the peripheries of the city in spaces discursively produced by the state, law-enforcement and media as "no-go zones"—a term that demarcates spaces so rife with violence that they cannot be entered. These spaces are

inhabited largely by Pashtun refugee and indigenous Sindhi and Baloch populations and have become proxy sites in the War on Terror. Communities are policed and surveilled for the purported potentiality of insurgents in devastating cycles of raids, resettlement, and ruination. The violence surrounding these transformations is both obscured and upheld by a discursive and visual regime dedicated to the legitimization of war. For a city so deeply imbricated in contemporary discussions surrounding war, geopolitics and security, it is important to question the different ways in which Karachi is being reimagined in popular representations at this moment. Therefore, we study the ways in which modern war visuality plays an essential role in sanitizing the escalating imperial and state-sanctioned violence, and activating the city as a whole in service of it.

Discourse, visuality and processes of 'development' are also a key configuration here. Development is deeply entangled with, and constitutive of, the processes of militarization and securitization across the city. Urban development has always been a militaristic process, couched in militaristic language and geared towards militaristic ends. The military-development nexus in Karachi spans a vast range of projects and processes, from military-backed real estate and infrastructural development to a new imperial aid infrastructure couched in 'Countering Violent Extremism' (CVE) discourse that is saturating and re-structuring the art, culture and education spheres. To fully understand the geography of violence in Karachi we explore multiple manifestations of this nexus: a real estate mega-project, literature festivals and public art interventions.

Military and Land Accumulation

Constituted in 1959 to patrol and protect the border areas of the newly formed nation-state of Pakistan, the paramilitary Pakistan Rangers police a domain that grows as borders become diffused and dispersed, no longer confined to the outer limits of territories. First called into Karachi in 1989 to restore law and order on the politically charged campus of Karachi University, the Rangers have remained in the city ever since. Over the past decade, their jurisdiction has expanded exponentially, and their powers have extended to combating terrorism as Karachi was a focal point in the national and international War on Terror. As the border patrol fortifies, restructures and securitizes the city, the city borders have been drawn and redrawn. New borders crop up every day, functioning in turn as a key technology for the annihilation of landscapes and ecologies. New securitized infrastructures emerge through which the border patrol is able to apply unprecedented intensity to their methods of policing and surveillance of populations.

"The violence in Karachi is related to its land,"⁸ architect Perween Rehman said in a 2011 interview, two years before she was killed on the streets of the city by unknown assailants. Perween Rehman had been working with the NGO Orangi Pilot Project, and much of her practice involved mapping and advocating for the legalization of informal settlements inhabited by indigenous and refugee communities at risk of dispossession due to public and private development schemes. Interviewed at a time when hysteria and media coverage around violence in the city

was escalating, Rehman highlighted the centrality of land to the many forms of conflict in Karachi. Perween Rehman's words and work, and her subsequent murder just months prior to the launch of the Karachi Operation, highlight the stakes of land accumulation and development in Karachi. In the years since the onset of the Karachi Operation, these processes become evermore brazen and militarized.

The interests of Pakistani military in land accumulation in Karachi have long been recognized and predate the Karachi Operation. While exact data regarding military land holdings is difficult to obtain, it is most comprehensively discussed in Ayesha Siddiq's banned book, *Military Inc.* (2005). In a chapter titled "The New Land Barons," Siddiq states: "The Pakistani military is one of the biggest land-owners in the country. As a single group, the armed forces own more land than any other institution or group. The military controls about 11.58 million acres... [and] unlike any other state institution, the armed forces have the capacity to convert the usage of state land from official purposes to private ones. In addition, they are the only state organization that has institutionalized the acquisition of state land for distribution amongst the members of their fraternity."⁹

In Karachi, military land holdings primarily consist of vast expanses of cantonment land, or housing schemes generated by military subsidiaries that usually take the form of securitized enclaves built on questionably acquired land. The military justifies its land acquisitions based on the inherited colonial tradition of granting land to military personnel, or the need for housing for the families of 'martyrs,' or, as Siddiq describes, "the greater logic of the nation paying the price for its military's social security." Siddiq argues "land is acquired not just for capital accumulation, but also to exhibit the military's authority and power in relation to other stakeholders such as the landed-feudal class and the masses."¹⁰

In the years since the Karachi Operation, military-backed housing schemes have multiplied. The Defence Housing Authority City (DHA City) and Bahria Town Karachi are two important examples. Both developments are located in Gadap Town, a neighborhood at the northwestern peripheries of Karachi formerly inhabited by indigenous and refugee communities. Land in these communities was used for agriculture, and primary livelihoods were structured around this use. Militarization has thus aided a violent annihilation in the restructuring of these city outskirts for high-yield real estate. The securitized enclaves and gated communities that have emerged on this land, built by the military and subsidiaries, serve to further divide, surveil and police the city. Paul Virilio has argued, in *City of Panic*, that securitized enclaves and gated communities serve as a tactic to further immerse the city in a new militarized aesthetic, they create forms and structures of living that divide and fragment any sense of an urban community fabric.¹¹ Such transformations in the urban landscape serve to further entrench the Karachi populace in a state of total war.

The Pakistan Rangers have inscribed and fully immersed themselves into the city's diverse spaces in other diverse ways. Since 1999, the Rangers have been using the historic heritage building called Jinnah Courts, in the city

center, as their headquarters—a structure that once served as a hostel for law students. In 2015, it was reported by the newspaper *Pakistan Today* that the Rangers were running a construction business on the premises of Karachi University, the city's largest public university.¹² The same year, another daily newspaper, *Dawn*, reported that Rangers personnel had moved into the centrally located Radio Pakistan building that housed the archives of Pakistan's historical radio broadcast network.¹³ Since 2013, Karachi has also seen a proliferation of paramilitary checkpoints throughout the city, and multiple concrete structures painted in camouflage and adorned with slogans and army propaganda. Posters and billboards supporting the military have popped up in every neighborhood, radically transforming the visuality of the city with increasingly ubiquitous military presence. As Giroux suggests, notions of community are now organized not only around flag-waving displays of patriotism, but also around collective fears and militarization of public space and visual culture.¹⁴

Terror Maps and Militarized Visualities

Modern war-visibility plays an essential role in sanitizing and selling military violence, as well as turning the citizenry into participants of war. In the months prior to the launch of the Karachi Operation, a series of maps were produced and circulated in leading English newspapers. These maps played a crucial role in building public support for the operation: they reproduced an imperial visuality that, alongside media discourse, presented a city teeming with violence. Crafting 'red zones' and 'no-go zones,' the new borders marked across the city conjured visions of danger, terror and insurgency. Through press briefings and media reports, the narrative of the *ghairmehfooz* (insecure) city was created and enforced, where living spaces were reduced to sites of "sneaking terrorist attacks."¹⁵ Barely known but vividly imagined, certain neighborhoods and ethnic communities entered the public imaginary through maps in phantasmic form. As colors bled from map to city, a 'red zone' became indisputable truth.

Counterinsurgency in the post 9/11 era, as Nicholas Mirzoeff argues, deploys itself as a visualized field to produce legitimacy.¹⁶ Geographic visualization has become an important military tactic through which counterinsurgency seeks to render a culture in its own image. In this explicitly cultural war, the discursive practice of visibility comes to have new and material consequences for the social and spatial fabric of the city. As Judith Butler argues, the apparatus of military violence has become so closely entangled with that of visualization that "there is no way to separate, under present historical conditions, the material reality of war from those representational regimes through which it operates and which rationalize its own operation."¹⁷

Six months prior to the launch of the Karachi Operation, in March 2013, *The Express Tribune* published a story entitled "Where law enforcers fear to tread: The entry fee for these spots of Karachi may be your life." It featured a map that visualized no-go zones of the city.¹⁸ Thirteen complete no-go zones were presented, marked in red, and twenty-nine partial no-go zones were marked in orange. The article explained that since the Kalosha II Operation in

South Waziristan in 2004, Karachi has seen an increasing influx of Mehsud tribesmen. Embedded in this influx are "Taliban militants who have settled in Pakhtun-dominated areas in the city and have established an iron grip in these neighbourhoods." Quoting the Deputy Superintendent of Police Qamar Ahmed, the article warned that if left unchecked, these no-go areas would proliferate.

This report and map were key evidence in an ongoing *suo motu* case in the Pakistan Supreme Court that addressed the issue of increased violence and killings in Karachi. Since the case began in October 2011, law enforcement agencies had been adamantly denying the existence of no-go areas. During the hearing on March 29, 2013, Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry included the *Express Tribune* map and report as part of the proceedings and ordered both the Director General of Rangers and the Inspector General of Sindh Police to testify in response. In the following week, the police submitted a report to the court which, for the first time, admitted the presence of no-go zones in Karachi. "So, you've admitted the newspaper's report is correct," said Justice Khilji Arif Hussain, referring to the special report and map. "Yes," replied IG Baloch.¹⁹ These exchanges illustrate the productive power of the map in creating certain truth claims about the city. Once mapped as objective truth, the no-go zone became an irrefutable reality. This unveiling has since become central to the public imaginary of Karachi.

The frequency with which such maps were circulated in the media prior to and during the Karachi Operation helped to create and intensify panic around Karachi's imagined descent into terror and violence. Routine visualizations of a lawless and volatile city were used to assert the need for intense security measures. These maps, while claiming to "open up" and make the city transparent, also worked to 'close down' urban space under an intensified regime of surveillance and violent military control.²⁰ The scientificity of the map, which allowed these visualizations to be consumed as objective and truthful representation, became an important means through which the paramilitary began to assert its command over the battle space, or the "urban jungle," of Karachi.²¹ Derek Gregory similarly argues that such maps produced and sustained a militarized visuality that was integral to the US invasion of Iraq. These public displays "worked to stabilize the city, visually, imaginatively and rhetorically," into an ordered, coherent totality.²² While urban war is constantly fluid and in the process of construction, a map resolves the city into a single definite picture, becoming a sovereign map. The no-go zones became those "dark, labyrinthine, structureless places that needed to be unveiled for the production of order through scientific, planning and military technologies."²³

Chad Harris argues that those maps that visualize the abstract realm of 'battlespace' "detect objects and people, but also produce both objects on the ground and surveillant subjects."²⁴ Visual representations form a dangerous feedback loop where security paradigms that depend on abstractions of terror derive power partly from the concrete images that abstractions purport to explain. Jordan Crandall calls this conjuring a mode of "armed seeing." Through the illusion of the no-go zone and the specter of

terrorism, a military colonizes the entire city, unleashing violence “not only on the side which is redlined, but also upon the side that is protected [through] a mechanism of control in relation to an exterior danger produced for that purpose.”²⁵ In this process, the city becomes a limitless battlespace, or a battle-scape, what Gregory calls an “everywhere war.”²⁶ The Karachi Operation similarly unleashes a boundless and unending process of militarization in which everything becomes a site of permanent war—a limitless battlespace with no edges and no end.

These visuals worked in tandem with the post 9/11 global security, development and media discourse. In September 2012, *Al Jazeera* published an interactive map titled “Karachi’s Killing Fields.” This was perhaps the first terror map of Karachi, published six months before the *Express Tribune* map. It provided readers with detailed instructions on how to use the map:

Our interactive illustrates homicide data for the years 2011 and 2012, broken down by police station, letting you explore a map of the city’s violence... The default view shows you the city’s most dangerous districts. To get deeper into the data, click on the arrow in the top right corner. From there, you can explore the Detailed Homicide Data tab, which will show you all of the city’s police stations, as well as administrative and electoral maps of the city.²⁷

In this map, dangerous districts appeared as ‘default.’ They were depicted as a natural, intrinsic part of Karachi’s urban landscape which was defined in the article’s by-line as “the world’s most dangerous megacity.” The prompt to explore the city is similar to the frequently invoked metaphor of ‘walking through maps’ and these instructions worked to virtually erase the distinction between the city and its representation.²⁸ The format of the interactive map produced a compelling spatial vector of terrorism framed through the lens of objectivity and scientific data. However, in the process, these maps flattened and effaced the three-dimensional social space of the city, staging it for global consumption.

Karachi’s portrayal as a ruined and repellent city, under siege, is not a neutral act of representing the city as it is. These maps are not disinterested presentations of statistical information, but rather reflect the desires and fears of their authors and audience. They are highly politicized representations that exemplify the persisting relations of a cultural colonialism, produced through the performance of imaginative geographies. Through a series of spatializations, these representational constructions fold distance into difference. Edward Said argued that imaginative geographies work by multiplying partitions and enclosures that serve to demarcate ‘the same’ from ‘the other’ while also constructing and calibrating a gap between them by “designating in one’s mind a familiar space that is ours and an unfamiliar space beyond ours which is theirs.”²⁹ The differences and distances that constitute imaginative geographies are set in motion and made meaningful through cultural practices. These representational regimes are reflective of a global world order, as Graham argues, in which

contemporary reality is split into the civilization of the rich, modern north and the separate global south, characterized by backwardness, danger, pathology and anarchy.³⁰

Over the past decade, Karachi has been described with increasing authority as a “failed and feral” city in global security and media discourse: Richard Norton, in a 2003 paper for the *Naval War College Review*, devised a taxonomy of “feral cities,” encouraging readers to:

Imagine a great metropolis covering hundreds of square miles. Once a vital component in a national economy, this sprawling urban environment is now a vast collection of blighted buildings, an immense petri dish of both ancient and new diseases, a territory where the rule of law has long been replaced by near anarchy... Yet this city would still be globally connected. It would possess at least a modicum of commercial linkages, and some of its inhabitants would have access to the world’s most modern communication and computing technologies. It would, in effect, be a feral city.³¹

Norton claims that while such cities have been routinely imagined in apocalyptic movies and science-fiction genres, these imaginations have now become reality: While “cities have descended into savagery in the past,” feral cities “will pose security threats on a scale hitherto not encountered.”³² Norton constantly uses biomedical terms to describe these challenges. He warns that “the toxic environment” of a feral city poses uniquely severe threats—it is “a ‘petri dish’ of deadly virulent epidemics and dangerous terrorist activities.”³³ Disease and terrorism are used interchangeably to render the city as a pathological space. Norton’s discussion illustrates the ways in which counterinsurgency and military strategy are envisioned as a surgical practice. Norton continues the use of medicalized language to propose a diagnostic tool to assess the ‘health’ of cities. In it, measurements representing a healthy city are green, those that would suggest cause for concern are yellow, and those that indicate danger are red. He explains that “the picture of a city that emerges is a mosaic, and like an artist’s mosaic it can be expected to contain more than one colour.”³⁴

The *Express Tribune* map takes its cue from these discourses to produce a similar medical diagnosis of the city. Just like an x-ray scan of the body, maps of red zones and hotspots become irrefutable depictions of the health of the city. The *Express Tribune* report furthered this medical analogy by describing red zones as “cancer” spreading through the city.³⁵ General Raheel Sharif has also frequently described terrorism as a cancer that needs to be rooted out from Pakistan. By describing terrorism in these terms, military operations are likened to surgeons cutting out cancerous tissue. In visualizing the no-go zone, militaries practice a capacity to fragment the body of the city, and isolate and target a tumor.³⁶ Rational-scientific means become inseparable from a series of truth claims about the danger posed by a target. Military violence appears intrinsically therapeutic and abstract, another bloody surgical reality of an operation enacted on human lives.

Enforcing the no-go zone

The Pakistan Rangers launched the second phase of the Karachi Operation in 2015 with a special mandate to “police, surveil and secure” the “vast suburbs of Karachi.”³⁷ Inhabited largely by Pashtun refugee and indigenous Sindhi and Baloch populations, certain neighborhoods were systematically shrouded in darkness and mystery through the discourse of the no-go zone. Home to large populations of refugees from the war-torn northern regions of Pakistan—where a series of military operations since 9/11 have displaced millions—these refugee settlements are brutally policed and surveilled and have become proxy sites for the War on Terror. The Karachi Operation equipped the paramilitary with special powers of prosecution and investigation, utilising the 1997 Anti Terrorism Act (ATA). This included the power to seize property, the power to arrest without warrant, and the power to fire upon and use force as deemed necessary. In 2014, the Protection of Pakistan Act and amendments to the ATA expanded state impunity—Rangers could detain suspects without cause for up to ninety days. This legally enabled the paramilitary to use greater of violence than before.³⁸

The peripheries of the city, neighborhoods such as Gadap and Malir, are also chosen sites for ‘encounters’ – the term used for the now almost daily processes by which citizens disappear. Unofficial reports record that between 2013 and 2017, four-hundred and forty four refugees from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas were killed in ‘encounter killings’ in Karachi.³⁹ The newspaper *Dawn* reports:

According to police records, Malir saw 195 police encounters from January to October 2012, in which 18 people were killed and 276 arrested; the ratio of deaths to arrests—the ‘kill rate’—was 6.5 per cent. Between February to June 2013, the kill rate was 17.6pc. In 2014, after the operation began, there were 186 encounters, in which 152 people died and 192 were arrested—the kill rate a whopping 79pc. Last year, there were 93 encounters resulting in 110 deaths and 89 arrests. That translates to the number of arrests falling 23pc below the number of people killed.⁴⁰

Gadap and Malir emerge as favored sites for these activities, as a long-serving police official reports: “Men are airlifted from as far away as Fata⁴¹ and brought here for [Karachi law enforcement] to dispatch.”⁴² In the no-go zones of Gadap and Malir, borders of citizenship are constantly made and remade. New borders are enforced by the Karachi Operation and serve to limit movement, access and visibility. The no-go zones are sites of containment, enclosure and opacity. Border lines displace indigenous and refugee neighborhoods such as Gadap by redrawing them as outside of national territory, in shadowlands where anything and everything can be and is done. Feldman explains that “the ubiquity of borders create flexible biopolitical zones, capable of traversing the globe, in which certain subjects are invited to occupy categories of life and wield power over the lives of others, while others are banished from sociality to the point of death.”⁴³ The configuration of life-in-death “constitutes the kernel of the raciality of the War on Terror.” Although Feldman is describing the excep-

tional site of the “Af-Pak” frontier, this argument holds true for the no-go zones of Karachi.

Drawing on Junaid Rana, Feldman explores how the production of national fear at the local everyday level is a practice, expanded through the creation of specific demonized figures.⁴⁴ Certain bodies are racialized not only in relation to terror but also in relation to certain ideas of illegality and criminality that are historically associated with racialized populations. The conceptual linkage relies on the logic of fungibility in which a number of objects, things and ideas are conflated into a particular racial figure—from the criminal to the illegal alien to the security threat to the terrorist.⁴⁵

The Karachi Operation depends on this comparative racialization where Pashtun populations are suffused with the potential of terror through the rhetoric of illegality and criminality. The act of migration becomes a suspect activity in which particular kinds of labor and informal economies are deemed part of underground and illicit activities. Here refugee populations are constantly imagined as inherently linked to suspicious activity.

These biopolitical frontiers draw upon and re-enact older colonial violence that legitimates the production of racialized targets through a rubric of threat, fear, and terror. These frameworks invoke practices that mark the colonized body as irredeemably savage, wild, other. The Sindhi/Baloch native and the Pashtun refugee bear markers of criminality and illegality, that are rendered spectacularly visible in the emerging borderlands of Karachi.

Imagining landscapes of development

The violence of securitization infiltrates neighborhoods and communities hand in hand with processes of urban development and place annihilation. Stefan Kipfer and Kanishka Goonewardena argue that urbicidal violence is heavily shaped by the political economies of imperialism and the geographical dynamics of colonization: “The production of colonized space necessarily involves multiple scales of urban erasure.”⁴⁶ To understand the spatial relations underscoring the War on Terror as a new imperialism, we must engage with the changing relations between colonization, imperialism and urbanization. Integral to the War on Terror and its urban militarization are various acts of urban erasure, securitization, and reconstruction. Here, military geographies and technologies, connected to predatory capital flows, also function as key drivers of neoliberal globalization.

The Karachi Operation is testament to the increasingly militarized nature of real estate accumulation and development. As mentioned, two of the largest real estate development projects, DHA City and Bahria Town Karachi, each sited over more than twenty-thousand acres of land, are located in Gadap—one of the first neighborhoods to be cordoned off and cast as a no-go zone in the Karachi Operation. [FIG 1](#) The bordering up, securitization, devastation, appropriation and development of spaces that had previously been identified as no-go zones, all demonstrate the ways in which the Karachi Operation is closely linked to real

estate and the War on Terror: “the new military urbanism’s wars ... now operate to fuel capital accumulation through the global city system.”⁴⁷ Across the city, securitization has paved the way for privatization and gentrification—transforming lands that were previously common into global capital. In Karachi’s vast suburbs, under the guise of an operation targeted at terrorists, the military has been “clearing new space for the exigencies of global-city formation, neoliberal production, or as urban tabula rasa necessary for the most profitable bubbles of real estate speculation.”⁴⁸

The transformation of indigenous Sindhi and Baloch settlements into spaces of exception and destruction is in keeping with a long history of urban warfare in Karachi, entailed by planned annihilation of indigenous space to make room for a modern, orderly urbanity. The ‘global cities’ that Bahria Town and DHA City are building in Gadap give form to aspirations for western-style development, but also require the complete erasure of the forms and visualities of life specific to Gadap indigenous community and ecology. There is a colonial history to both this devastation-by-urban-planning, and the abjection of the native and of nature that allows such unspeakable violence to be committed. Achille Mbembe writes:

In the eyes of the conqueror, *savage life* is just another form of *animal life*, a horrifying experience, something alien beyond imagination or comprehension. In fact, according to Arendt, what makes the savages different from other human beings is less the color of their skin than the fear that they behave like a part of nature, that they treat nature as their undisputed master. Nature thus remains, in all its majesty, an overwhelming reality compared to which they appear to be phantoms, unreal and ghostlike. The savages are, as it were, “natural” human beings who lack the specifically human character, the specifically human reality, “so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they had committed murder.”⁴⁹

Place annihilation, the creation of “death-worlds,”⁵⁰ accompanies the vilification and demonization of indigenous and refugee communities. As Karachi’s landscapes are gouged with the violence of raids, ‘encounters’, land-grabs and resource extraction, entire community histories are erased to create blank slates upon which a new Pakistani urban modernity can be built. This restructuring is made possible and sustained as much by cultural technologies of representation as by more obvious and brutal modes of conquest.

FIG 1
Entrance to Bahria Town, Karachi.



FIG 2
Bahria Town, Karachi.



The development sector utilizes and builds upon the militarized visibility of no-go zones to legitimize urban expansion and expropriation at the city’s outskirts. Malik Riaz, the CEO of Bahria Town, proudly claimed that Gadap had been the habitat of drug peddlers and criminals prior to his leadership of the development (he made these claims in an on-going case in the Pakistan Supreme Court regarding the illegal acquisition of lands by Bahria Town). He further explained to the court “how barren lands had been converted into a modern, developed city by planting over ten million trees, constructing one of the largest mosques in the world, building schools, colleges, hospitals, golf courses and dancing fountains, and providing other amenities.”⁵¹ Bahria Town’s promotional video similarly envisions Gadap as a barren and wild landscape, with a voiceover that describes the location before Bahria Town’s development as “*ghairabad, banjar aur ghairmehfooz*” (uninhabited, barren and insecure).⁵² FIG 2 The force of this image, evoking Gadap as a barren wasteland, constitutes an erasure not only of the communities that currently live there but also of centuries of place-making practices and indigenous settlement that mark its landscapes.

The rendering of Gadap as a blank space continues the colonial myth of a no man’s land, dry dusty paths and thorny bushes waiting to be ordered and made productive.⁵³ This visibility continually erases indigenous rights, creating frontiers of wild and empty spaces, where ‘discovering’ land and resources remains to be made possible. The Karachi Operation and development projects like Bahria Town are two sides of the same frontier-making project, as Anna Tsing explains: “built from historical models of European conquest, frontiers create wildness so that some and not others may reap its rewards.”⁵⁴ This imagined wildness turns everything visible into threat. Unruly subjects exist in unruly landscapes. Development and security intertwine, as fear and threat are embedded in, and are byproducts of, the process of securing new frontiers.

Stephen Graham argues that “place annihilation is utterly intrinsic to both urban modernity, and modern urbanism and planning.”⁵⁵ Much of the spaces constituted as no-go zones, such as Gadap and Malir, previously constituted the ‘green-belt’ of Karachi. Water was abundant, in wells and from rain-fed rivers that emerged on its ranges in monsoon seasons. The Karachi Development Plan of 1975–1985 termed Gadap as “the fruit basket of Karachi” and envisioned that eighty-five percent of the city’s agricultural needs would come from this region.⁵⁶ Today however, Gadap’s lands can barely sustain fodder.

Over the past decades, Gadap has undergone a systematic and sustained ruination. The place annihilation of Gadap has been a drawn out project—not only conducted through military violence but also through environmental violence. *Dawn* reports that the law enforcement agencies in Gadap are also responsible for unleashing environmental destruction in the region through sand mining. Interlinkages between ecological devastation and securitization can be seen clearly in the case of Rao Anwar, an infamous law enforcement officer known widely as the ‘encounter specialist’ for his strong-arm, extra-judicial tactics. In Gadap, Anwar was known for threatening, abducting and torturing villagers, coercing them sell their ancestral lands to Bahria Town or other developers. Lesser known was Anwar’s stake in sand mining, a lucrative business.⁵⁷

The systematic desertification of Gadap has largely taken place through the long project of sand mining, which has dried rivers and debilitated agriculture in these areas. As early as the 1970s, when the military first became involved in developing land as real estate, topsoil from cultivable lands in Gadap was illegally lifted for construction purposes, leading to soil erosion, water depletion and environmental degradation. As sand mining laid waste to fertile landscapes and ecologies, debilitating the livelihoods of the local population, it also created a landscape ripe for the discursive projections of “*banjar, ghairabad aur ghairmehfooz*” (uninhabited, barren and insecure).

Cast as simultaneously barren and insecure, Gadap’s ruined landscapes were now available for militarized development. Indigenous communities faced a double dispossession, robbed of their livelihoods, and then their physical lands. In this sense Gadap is a testament to the intersection of militarization, environmental devastation and land development in Karachi.

Local ecologies such as rivers, wells, agricultural land are ripped apart in no-go zones. Roads, walls, barriers, checkpoints and prime real estate are instituted in their place. In these transformations, infrastructure becomes a tactical measure. Wide, new roads cut through these landscapes, with grand promises of modernity, accessibility, surveillance and profit. The borders of the no-go zone give way to gated community as security and development intertwine, naturalizing each other’s conquering, settling and colonizing processes.

Warfare in the terrains of culture

The daily violence of urbanization processes, in which military visualities are increasingly imprinted into the built environment and public discourse, determines life in the city as increasingly a military-development nexus. Boundaries between global and civil war, citizen and combatant, start to blur as the global War on Terror is increasingly invoked in contestations over the city, its spaces, history and future. All citizens are imagined as potential fighters or threats and “all terrain [becomes] the site of battle.”⁵⁸

The culture sphere, too, is activated as a site of combat. If representational strategies are essential to the militarization project, it is through these practices that military enti-

ties build support for their activities, and create a pervasive sense of fear, panic and warfare. Woodward argues that these activities too, are:

geographically constituted, in that they require and draw upon the resources (material or discursive) of spaces and places, environments and landscapes, in order to come into being...Furthermore, these military geographies also have a far wider imprint than armed conflict, marking and shaping places and spaces far distant from the points of military engagement...they impinge upon other geographies, of production, reproduction, circulation, exchange and representation, of material entities and discursive constructions.⁵⁹

Much of this work is done directly by the military’s media wing, Inter-Services Public Relations. Over the past few years, the cultural and education sphere of Karachi has been engaged through the language of ‘Countering Violent Extremism,’ CVE. The Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa, in a speech given at a seminar titled “Role of the Youth in Rejecting Extremism” in May 2017, made clear that the first line of defence for Pakistan is indeed media houses and educational institutions.⁶⁰ He elaborated, “having defeated terrorism physically, now [terrorists’] deceitful message and narrative must also be defeated.” That is, the enemy must be decisively defeated not only in battle but also in ideology. Here the university and media—both key sites of knowledge and cultural production—are cast as the new battlegrounds of counterterrorism. Therefore it is unsurprising to see the Pakistan army’s renewed interest in these sites of knowledge-production to acculturate citizens to the proliferation of violence and control.⁶¹ These practices normalize the boundless process of militarization, of both the urban landscape and realms of culture, collapsing the distinction between military and civilian binaries. An increasingly militarized culture is geared towards the production of values that support the pervasive surveillance and securitization under the guise of an unlimited war against terrorism.

These narratives have been patronized not only by the Pakistani military but by a larger, global network. A new imperialist aid infrastructure emerged post-War On Terror, siphoning money into the cultural and education spheres under the discursive framework of countering violent extremism. This triggered an unprecedented growth in literature festivals, public art projects and educational endeavors all of which propagate the same narrative about the need to activate civil society and the citizenry of Pakistan in service of the war against terror. This boom coincided with dramatic and brutal growth in the policing and surveillance of cultural spaces and educational institutions by the Pakistan military.⁶²

One collaboration that has been widely covered in the media took place between the fine art department at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, one of the country’s leading art schools, and the Karachi Youth Initiative (KYI) – a local ‘funnel’ organization for USAID, part of USAID’s CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) stream that was established to sidestep the growing skepticism and fears amongst local organizations about accepting USAID

money. The project set out to cover supposedly rampant 'hate graffiti' in Karachi by replacing it with aesthetically pleasing imagery. FIG 3 'Reimagining the Walls of Karachi' was a much-lauded project for which both KYI and IVS received rave reviews in the local and international press. In this discourse, graffiti was framed in entirely negative terms as religiously motivated and hate mongering—while Karachi, as was often the case with KYI projects, was framed as a terror-ridden city in which the potentiality of violence lurked at every corner and was inscribed onto every surface.⁶³ The goal was to fight extremism by painting over the 'hate graffiti,' which was in fact often little more than advertisements for small businesses, barbers or homeopaths for example, or otherwise simply expressed the slogans of political parties. The guidelines for artists responding to USAID's CVE Call for Submissions asserted that there be no text and no 'religious or political imagery' while encouraging 'landscapes/cityscapes/patterns/designs.' The result was a depoliticized aesthetic—colorful, celebratory and often orientalist in nature.

One of the longest lengths of wall unfolded on MT Khan road, down the street from a long, white stretch of twenty-foot high blast-resistant walls lining the new U.S. consulate. Despite these walls being used as a site for a project of aesthetic regeneration, the violence inscribed upon the walls, with snipers stationed every few feet down the road, remained unaddressed by artists. Through this collaborative project, KYI, IVS and the artists involved instrumentalize art and culture against the ever-present threat of fundamentalism. In these collaborations, global corporate and imperial powers calibrate art's function in line with the demands and political vision of the emerging 'everywhere war.'

The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program was initiated by the Obama Administration in 2011. It refers to "noncoercive longer range tools deployed in an effort to counter violent ideologies and narratives." In the US and abroad, its operations are "combining bolstered investments in soft power with sustained military and law enforcement efforts."⁶⁴ The key currency of soft power here is culture. In addition to public art, film and literature festivals are another major addition to the cultural landscape of Pakistan, bolstered by USAID support alongside the diplomatic missions. USAID's humanitarian aid in culture is not just a noble cause to inculcate "hope, pride and ownership in the citizens of Karachi,"⁶⁵ but is entrenched in imperial and military goals to protect U.S. security interests in the post 9/11 world order.

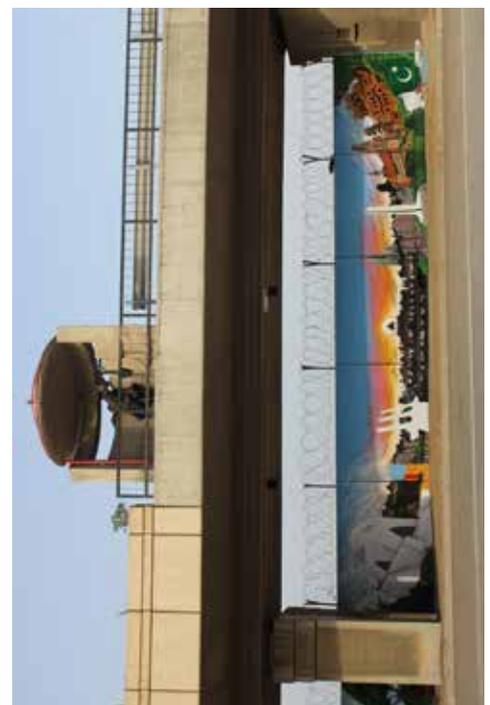
The growth in funding in Pakistan's cultural sector, derived from U.S. and European sources, activates this cultural sector as a battleground and cultural workers as combatants against their own fellow citizens. Highly securitized and increasingly censored film and literature festivals are framed as acts of resistance against the ever-present threat of terrorism in the city. Meanwhile, the Pakistan military is also engaged in militarizing these spheres through surveillance and brutal policing. Universities are increasingly instrumentalized as sites for propaganda, censorship, raids and abduction.⁶⁶ Through the dual efforts of the Pakistani military and U.S. and European development assistance programs, a new and vast militarized-cultural

sphere emerges, one which produces knowledge, visualities and discourse in service of war, and which leaves little space for dissent.

In May 2014, Pakistan's National Assembly passed *The Surveying and Mapping Act*. This legislation aimed to regulate the production of geospatial data and transferred all mapping authority to the Survey of Pakistan, a body which reports to the Ministry of Defense and takes its orders from the Army General Head Quarters. While the stated objective of the Act is to "stop unqualified/unregistered firms to take part in Surveying and Mapping activities that can pose a security risk to the state," it makes visible the Pakistani military's desire to control the visual field. By banning all independent mapping projects, the military retains the sole power and authority to study and represent space. This demonstrates that military strategy has become a distinctly cultural and visual project.

The study of military geographies is marked by opacity, an absence of data and an atmosphere of censorship and surveillance that perpetuates military occupation of space and social relations. Despite this enforced opacity, the reality of militarization is increasingly ingrained and palpable in every aspect of life in Karachi. Practices of accumulation and annihilation, and development and representation, are appropriated by military entities to make control concrete, and to create the conditions for absolute power in what Virilio describes as cities of panic: spaces marked by securitized and standardized landscapes, erasure of history, growth of surveillance, a pervasive atmosphere of fear and dread, and the dissolution of a social body.⁶⁷ As Karachi increasingly becomes both a target and a terrain of war, and as militarism becomes increasingly mundane, it is important to trace the violence and erasure enfolded into the city, and the fear and anxiety engrained in the emergent, sanitized and securitized landscapes and literature fests of Karachi.

FIG 1 A 2016 mural by German graffiti artist Sebastian Schmidt at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport. This mural was produced as a collaborative 'Meet the Culture' project by Goethe Institut, Vasi Artist's Collective, and On the Run.



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Norwood

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Malkani & Rajani

Figure 1: Mujeeb, Faysal. Entrance to Bahria Town Karachi. Digital Image. Dawn.com. April 18, 2016. Figure 2: "Bahria Town Karachi Development Updates." Video. YouTube. March 25, 2016. Screen capture by Shahana Rajani. Figure 3: Photograph courtesy of Julia Tieke.

Versluys

Figure 1: Vue restituée par CAO de l'angle nord-ouest du Qasr

(dessin F. Larché ; CAO Cl. Soiro) in François Larché (et alii) 2005, 'Iraq al-Amir. Le château du Tobiade Hyrcan, vol. II : Restitution et Reconstruction—Planches, IFPO, BAH 172, Beyrouth. Figure 2: Vue restituée par CAO de l'angle sud-ouest du Qasr (dessin F. Larché ; CAO Cl. Soiro) in François Larché (et alii) 2005, 'Iraq al-Amir. Le château du Tobiade Hyrcan, vol. II : Restitution et Reconstruction - Planches, IFPO, BAH 172, Beyrouth. Figure 3: Drawing based on a site survey by Nancy Rapp. *The Excavations at Araq el-Emir*, Volume I, The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, Vol. 47, The Excavations at Araq el-Emir, (1980), 153. Figure 4: Drawing based on a site survey by Nancy Rapp. *The Excavations at Araq el-Emir, Volume I*, The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, Vol. 47, The Excavations at Araq el-Emir, (1980), 2.

Henni

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Le Roux

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Osayimwese

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Lai

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