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Marginalisation, Contestation, and Change in South Asian Cities

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Contents

<i>Introduction: Urban Transformations in South Asia: Views from Below</i>	1
Nida Kirmani	
1. Entangling the 'Global City': Everyday Resistance in Gadap, Karachi <i>Shahana Rajani and Heba Islam</i>	14
2. The Case of LDA City: How a Public-Private Partnership Fractured Farmers' Resistance in Lahore <i>Hashim bin Rashid and Zainab Moulvi</i>	37
3. Looking at the City from Below: Contribution of 'Access' Approach and 'Cityscapes' in Amritsar <i>Helena Cermeño</i>	56
4. Bolstering Security by Erecting Barriers and Restricting Access: The Case of Karachi <i>Noman Ahmed</i>	85
5. Mafia Domination or Victim of Neoliberalism? Contextualising the Woes of Karachi's Transport Sector <i>Asad Sayeed and Kabeer Dawani</i>	101
6. In the Time of Toxic Air: Environmental Knowledges, Collaborations, and Justice in Delhi <i>Rohit Negi and Prerna Srivastava</i>	118
7. Electoral Politics in Delhi's Informal Settlements: Contestation, Negotiation, and Exclusion <i>Shahana Sheikh, Sonal Sharma, and Subhadra Banda</i>	142

5

Mafia Domination or Victim of Neoliberalism? Contextualising the Woes of Karachi's Transport Sector

Kabeer Dawani and Asad Sayeed

Introduction

Karachi's existing public transport infrastructure falls exceedingly short of the demands of the city. While its population has almost doubled over the last two decades, totalling approximately 16 million to date,¹ the total number of buses has remained almost stagnant—in fact, the number has nominally declined. Today, Karachi is one of the few megacities in the world without a planned system of mass transit.

The gravity of the problem can be illustrated through a few statistics. In 2011, only 0.85 per cent of the vehicles in Karachi were buses, compared to cars and motorbikes, which constitute 87.8 per cent of the total vehicles in the city (Hasan and Raza 2015). However, of the more than 24 million trips generated in the city each day, 60 per cent are undertaken through the existing infrastructure of buses and rickshaws (Ibid.). Moreover, there are 45 passengers per seat for every bus in Karachi, making the bus seat-to-passenger ratio one of the highest in the world (World Bank 2016). In comparison, in Mumbai, this ratio is eight passengers for every seat (Ibid.). All these statistics illustrate a demand far exceeding the existing capacity of public transport in Karachi.

The prevailing explanation, including that commonly cited in the news media, for why the city's public transport infrastructure has not grown to

match the needs of the city is because of the presence of a 'transport mafia' which dominates and controls this sector.² While a mafia may have controlled Karachi's transport sector in the past, and there may be a presence of mafias or mafia-like arrangements in other areas of service delivery in the city, this chapter attempts to demonstrate that, as of 2015, when the data for this paper was collected, there was no transport mafia remaining in Karachi. Instead, the decline in Karachi's transport can be explained by the lack of state capacity and the failure of neoliberal economic policies to meet the mass transit demands of the city. Moreover, the resulting informal transport is sub-optimal, and this chapter argues that the state needs to start providing this service again on a large scale.

The rest of this chapter is organised as follows. Section 1 tracks the historical evolution of public transport in Karachi. Section 2 discusses the emergence of a transport mafia in the city in the context of the geo-political environment prevalent at the time. Section 3 analyses the economic and political dynamics that led to the withering away of the mafia. Section 4 discusses the causes of decline of mass transit in the city over the last three decades, which include a lack of state capacity and the onset of neoliberal modes of urban development. Section 5 discusses informal and market driven forms of mass transit and argues that these are sub-optimal for a city like Karachi, while section 6 highlights the problems associated with informal transport. Finally, Section 7 contextualises the poor service delivery within Karachi's broader political economy, before the chapter concludes with some recommendations for a possible way forward towards developing an efficient and equitable mass transit system for Karachi.

Section 1: Transport over the Years

Immediately following Partition (1947), transport in Karachi was dominated by the public sector. A tramway was established towards the end of the nineteenth century, which expanded to cover most of the city by 1947. Soon after Partition, public buses were started to provide transport to the new settlements that had been established as a result of mass migration from India. There were some private buses as well, but their routes were regulated by the state.

Over the next decade, demand for transport rose as a result of the city's population nearly tripling and the concurrent growth in Karachi's inhabited

area.³ As a consequence, the government at the time increased the number of cars for the tramway by almost 400 per cent, as well as increasing the number of buses (see Table 1). Private bus owners also responded to this surge in demand by increasing the number of buses.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the state disbanded some transport operating bodies while creating new ones due to a combination of financial reasons and changes in policy by successive governments at the time. During the process, some of the public buses were sold to private entrepreneurs; hence, as Table 1 shows, the number of private buses eclipsed state-owned buses in 1964. Nevertheless, state involvement remained prominent, as that year the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) was set up. This was an important addition to the transport infrastructure in Karachi to help meet the rising demand from the city's growing population.

Until this point, the state was at the forefront in the provision of transport in Karachi.⁴ This was to change in the 1970s. Although private buses had been operating in the city, they had been strictly regulated by the state. In 1971, however, the 'Free Transport Policy' was introduced, which liberalised the process of obtaining route permits (Hasan and Raza 2015). Now, anyone with the financial capacity to purchase a bus could also acquire a route permit. As Table 1 shows, this resulted in a surge in privately owned buses as well as the introduction and spread of the minibus,⁵ whose number jumped to 1,800 in just three years.

In addition to the liberalisation of route permits, further recession of the state during this time was also marked by the closure of the tramway in 1974. The reason for the tram being shut down was because the Karachi Master Plan 1975–85 had planned a mass transit system whose primary corridor overlapped with that of the tram (Hasan and Raza 2015). Over the next decade and a half, the private sector took over transport in Karachi, with the number of buses and minibuses rising significantly without a proportionate increase in public sector buses. By 1988, the number of trips of the KCR had also declined.⁶

A decade later, the private sector had virtually monopolised transport in Karachi. The KCR was shut down in 1999, and the Karachi Transport Corporation's (a public sector body) buses had stopped operating a few years earlier. The primary reason for the state shutting down these services was because they were operating at significant financial losses (Hasan and Raza 2015).

However, for multiple reasons, private transport has been inadequate in catering to the city's transport needs. From 1999 to 2013, the number of private buses declined because their high operational costs meant that the business was a loss-making enterprise. Even though the number of minibuses has increased slightly, this has not kept up with the much more significant rise in Karachi's population.⁷

Consequently, this shortfall has been filled with the introduction of Qingqis (pronounced *chingchis*),⁸ which first emerged in the city in 2002 (Sayeed, Husain, and Raza 2016). Over the last 15 years, their number has increased to 50,000. This is a completely informal form of transport that is not regulated by the state or given official permits to operate. They are also not organised by a particular ethnic group, unlike buses and minibuses, which are mostly run by Pakhtuns. However, they fill the vacuum that lack of mass transit has created in the city and have proved to be a popular alternative to the other, more inadequate forms of public transport because they are considered to be both convenient and affordable.⁹

Table 1: Mass Transit in Karachi Over the Years

Year	Tramway (No. of cars)	Karachi Circular Railway (No. of trips daily)	Buses		Mini- buses	<i>Chingchis</i>
			Public	Private		
1948	37	-	20	35	-	-
1957	157	-	344	259	-	-
1964	157	Initiated	317	583	-	-
1974	Shut Down	104	891	1,000	1,800	-
1988	-	93	1,050	1,450	5,500	-
1999	-	Shut Down	200	4,000	8,000	-
2013	-	2	160	1,000	9,000	50,000

Source: Sayeed, Husain and Raza (2016: 25)

Section 2: Origins of the Transport Mafia

The existence of a transport mafia first came to the fore following a road accident in April 1985. A minibus driver, while racing with a competitor,

drove into a group of students, killing one female student named Bushra Zaidi (Gayer 2014: 45). This incident sparked ethnic riots between the Muhajirs—the name given to Urdu-speaking migrants from India, which was the community Zaidi belonged to—and the Pakhtuns, which was the alleged¹⁰ ethnicity of the minibus driver.¹¹ Following the incident and the violent reaction, the view that a Pakhtun transport mafia existed gained credence. In this section, we explore the possible development of a mafia within the broader historical context of the informalisation of transport in Karachi.

DEFINING THE MAFIA

To be able to assess the existence of a mafia, however, we must first formally define it. In the literature, the word 'mafia' has been used to refer to groups that performed very different functions. For instance, in Sicily, where the original mafia developed as a result of weak property rights, Gambetta (1993: 1) defines it as an 'economic enterprise, an industry which produces, promotes, and sells private protection.' However, within Sicily the mafia evolved tremendously over time to perform different functions, such as vote buying and enforcement of illegal cartels in public procurement, and then illegal activities such as prostitution and gambling.

Varese (2001: 4), however, attempts to come up with a broader definition, defining a mafia as a 'particular type of organised crime that specialises in one particular commodity.' Thus, when applied to Gambetta's definition, this would mean that the Sicilian Mafia specialised in the provision of private protection. However, it is important to note that while Varese calls it organised crime, Gambetta refers to it as an economic enterprise. Characteristics of a mafia include offering protection to legal and illegal transactions, with the latter not being a necessary condition.

Drawing on this literature along with the popular depiction of the transport mafia in Karachi in the late 1980s, we define a mafia as a group that, by virtue of its control over an activity, appropriates rent and distributes it amongst its members, while having (legal and extra-legal) powers of enforcement and protection.

KARACHI'S TRANSPORT SECTOR IN THE 1980s

As the private sector's domination increased in the provision of public transport in Karachi during the 1980s, Pakistan was embroiled in the Soviet–Afghan war between 1979 and 1989. One adverse effect of being involved in this war was that it made Karachi a hub for arms and drugs, which resulted in the 'emergence of major crime syndicates' (Gayer 2014: 44). As the main seaport, Karachi was used to supply arms to Afghanistan for the war, while heroin was produced and transported from Afghanistan to Karachi to be exported elsewhere. Revenue from the latter in particular was then reinvested into the transport and real estate sectors by the Pakhtuns (including Afghan refugees), who were the primary beneficiaries of the illicit drug trade (Ibid.).

By the early 1980s, the transport sector had become a virtual Pakhtun monopoly. This was because, following the 1965 election, Ayub Khan, the president at the time, had patronised the Pakhtuns by giving them priority when allocating bus routes (Gayer 2014). It was, therefore, convenient for the 'drug-barons', who were also predominantly Pakhtun, to invest in this sector (Gayer 2014: 44).

The structure of the transport sector changed a few years before the money from these criminal syndicates entered, and this would prove to have a significant influence in Karachi by enabling the emergence of the transport mafia. Arif Hasan (1986), writing in *The Herald*, outlines how this change took place. Initially, the bus owner (also called the 'transporter')—who held the route permit—operated his own vehicles on the route through hired bus operators. However, at some point during the late 1970s, the operational model changed. From hiring operators, the bus owners switched to giving out informal loans on extremely onerous terms to the operators to buy buses and run them on the route. 'With the switchover from hired operators to prospective owners operating this transport, the Karachi minibus mafia was born' (Hasan 1986). The terms of this informal loan were important in enabling this mafia, as the power dynamic between the two parties was disproportionately in favour of the lender. Until all the debt was paid off, the legal owner of the bus was the lender, and even if one payment was missed, the lender would take the bus away, leaving the borrower with nothing. For the borrower, this was thus an extremely vulnerable position to be in and enabled the lender to exercise a significant degree of control over them.

At this point, however, this mafia-like structure did not have the political power to systematically extract rents from this sector. This would change with the influx of the arms and drug money from the Afghan War in the 1980s. The ability of the transporter to give loans increased manifold, and consequently the number of minibuses also increased exponentially. According to Hasan (1986), between 1979 and 1986, Rs 1.5 billion was given as loans for almost 5,000 minibuses, compared to only Rs 90 million between 1973 and 1979 for roughly 600 minibuses.

Hence, the new structure of the sector and the money from this illicit trade resulted in a shift of political and economic power to the hands of the transporters, which in turn determined the relationship they had with the state. They were able to facilitate the bus operators in obtaining driving licenses and generally protected them from law-enforcement agencies. Moreover, the concurrent development of a land mafia—where the profits from the arms and drug trade were invested in real estate—meant that the state lost control over some Pakhtun settlements (Hasan 1986). These changes in the city meant that the ‘rules of coexistence between Karachi’s ethnic groups were brutally uprooted’ (Gayer 2014: 44), and resulted in violence and contestation over the city’s resources (Sayeed et al. 2016). The control of the city’s public transport system was one aspect of this.

Section 3: Is There a Transport Mafia Today?

While there is some evidence to support the presence of a mafia that controlled Karachi’s transport sector throughout the 1980s and perhaps part of the 1990s, our research shows that no such mafia existed as of 2015 in this sector.

Ownership of buses in Karachi in 2015 was highly dispersed; the existing 1,000 buses are owned by 650–700 different individuals, with a similar ratio amongst minibus owners.¹² Moreover, there is minimal collective action¹³ among the owners, despite their ethnic homogeneity.¹⁴ In addition, Sayeed et al. (2016: 26) show that the sector is highly unprofitable due to high vehicle costs and a need to keep prices affordable for the majority of the public, which has been the primary reason for underinvestment in transport in Karachi. Therefore, given its lack of profitability, there are no significant rents to be extracted in this sector. This is why public intra-city transport, in most parts of the world, is considered a public good and subsidised by

the state. Finally, there are no discernible linkages between Pakhtuns in the transport sector, who had historically dominated this sector, or any political party either, which could help in collective action, protection, or the enforcement of contracts.

Thus, it is clear that there is no one 'group' that controls this sector, there are no substantial rents to be earned, and neither are there any means for enforcement or protection. Therefore, it is factually incorrect to continue to cite this as the reason for the decline in Karachi's public transport. Instead, we need to identify other factors that have led to this failure in service delivery.

Section 4: Explaining the Decline in Mass Transit

There are two primary reasons for the large gap between the supply and demand of transport in Karachi: first, the inability of the state to operate public transport and second, failure of the market to efficiently and equitably meet the demand for public transport in the city.

LACK OF STATE CAPACITY

In the first instance, a lack of state capacity led to the informalisation of transport. As was outlined earlier, the state adequately provided public transport in Karachi at the time of Partition and in the decade after. Problems started arising in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, because the transport organisations formulated by the state were operating at a loss. Hence, the tramway closed down in 1974. Over the next two decades, the state was unable to revamp the financial structure of the sector. This resulted in the privatisation or shutting down of the state-owned Karachi Transport Corporation and the Karachi Circular Railway in the late-1990s, both of which were operating at significant losses.¹⁵

The state was thus unable to run public transport in Karachi and did not have the capacity to reform its operations to make state-owned mass transit fiscally feasible. It left the provision of mass transit in Karachi to private entrepreneurs. While this process began in the 1970s due to capacity and fiscal constraints, over the next two decades, consigning the transport sector to the vagaries of the market mechanism was further legitimised by the prevalent global consensus on neoliberalism.

FAILURE OF NEOLIBERALISM

In the aftermath of the state's withdrawal from public transport in Karachi, however, was the failure of neoliberal policies to meet Karachi's transport requirements. In other words, private transporters operating in a free market were unable to fulfil the city's demand. In fact, instead of growing in number, the total number of buses and minibuses has stayed roughly stagnant over the years. The primary reasons for this are a non-conducive incentive structure and ineffective regulation.

In interviews with bus owners, we discovered that the rate of return on buses has decreased over time. Furthermore, banks refuse to provide credit for investment in this sector because it is not recognised as an industry by the Chamber of Commerce. Added to this is the greater operational risk arising from transport being a 'victim' of instability in Karachi (Sayeed et al. 2016: 28). Together, these have resulted in significant underinvestment in the sector. In fact, Irshad Bukhari, the President of the Karachi Transport Ittehad (KTI), which is the city's transport association, said that most people try to make some money quickly and then exit this sector. The underinvestment is depicted by the fact that the average bus model is more than 35 years old, while the average minibus model is 15 years old. Bukhari explained this phenomenon, 'This is because there is no money in this business and so no one is willing to invest in newer models, and neither do banks provide credit for this.'¹⁶

The violence and lack of incentives have contributed to the dissipation of surplus from this sector, and also explain why the 'mafia' withdrew from it sometime during the 1990s. The ineffectiveness of the state to address these market failures through regulation has further contributed to public transport shortage in Karachi. As a market response, other informal forms of public transport have come up in recent years.

Section 5: New Forms of Mass Transit

In the absence of private buses and minibuses meeting the needs of Karachi's citizens, there have been two market responses, in the shape of motorbikes and Qingqis. Both are more cost-effective and convenient for commuters than buses and minibuses.

Since 2004, the number of motorbikes has increased exponentially, such that Hasan and Raza (2011) argue that this is now a form of mass transit. From 1990 to 2004, motorbikes only increased from 450,000 to 500,000. However, over the next six years they doubled, increasing to 1 million in 2010 (Ibid.). In 2015, there was another huge jump, with the total rising to 1.85 million (Raza 2016). This means that there are 116 motorbikes for every 1,000 persons in Karachi. This is an extremely high number and shows the popularity of this vehicle.

There are two primary reasons for why motorbikes are such a popular choice among individuals and families in Karachi (Hasan and Raza 2011). First, they are cheaper than public transport, apart from the initial investment required. With the spread of options to purchase motorbikes on relatively easy instalments, the latter problem has also been diminished. Second, motorbikes are much more efficient and convenient for families when compared to public transport, which is inefficient and time consuming, particularly during peak hours, as they would have to change buses or fit into overcrowded ones. In this regard, motorbikes have the advantage of being able to carry a family of four at once and transport them directly to their destination much quicker. Hasan and Raza (2011) note that motorbikes can reduce commuting times by 50 per cent.

The number of Qingqis, although lesser in absolute terms, has seen a similarly astronomical increase in just fifteen years, rising to 65,000 in 2015.¹⁷ They are operated on the same format as a bus: they have a fixed route between two points, and transport passengers at a fixed fare anywhere along that route. These vehicles are popular because they are suitable for short distances, connect passengers to areas outside of regular bus routes, and are relatively safer from muggings.¹⁸ They are also especially favoured by women because it increases their mobility, as they run on shorter distances, and the vehicle design, with a lower height, is more amenable to them getting on and off quickly (in buses this is much more difficult because the drivers only stop the vehicle fleetingly). Moreover, women also face less harassment on Qingqis than they would on buses (Hasan and Raza 2015).

Section 6: Problems with Informal Mass Transit

There are several reasons that render market-driven and hence informal forms of mass transit prevalent in Karachi sub-optimal.¹⁹ First, the shift to smaller

vehicles mentioned earlier means that per unit cost of transport is higher than those of buses, trams, or trains, both in terms of operational and capital costs. Moreover, motorcycles and Qingqis are hazardous for passengers and create a traffic menace for regular motorised traffic, which includes buses and minibuses as well as cars.

Second, because of the informal nature of the industry, bus owners can neither access formal sector banks for credit nor the formal insurance market. Transport has not been declared an industry and therefore it is unable to access bank credit. According to the President of KTI, Irshad Bukhari, they applied twice for industry status with the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) but were rejected on both occasions. Probable reasons for this occurrence are because of dispersed ownership in the sector, low levels of profitability, no interest on the part of the formal corporate sector to invest, and above all the law and order situation in the city, which poses a higher risk to buses and minibuses (Sayeed et al.: 2016). As a result, there is severe underinvestment in buses and mini buses. Both buses and mini buses are very old and lack of credit is one of the main reasons for the number of vehicles declining in the city.²⁰ The inability to access the formal insurance market has meant that vehicle owners have had to informally insure their vehicles at a high premium, and benefits do not cover the replacement cost of the vehicle.²¹

Third, the contractual arrangement between vehicle owners and operators is based on a residual payment system. This system requires drivers to pay a specific amount to owners on a daily basis after excluding fuel costs (and payments to the police) and the rest is divided between the driver and the conductor. This creates a perverse incentive structure to work long hours (and hence self-exploit) as well as overcrowd buses. Both these conditions are hazardous for transport workers as well as commuters. For instance, drivers, since they are effectively on daily wages, cannot really afford a day off. One newspaper quotes a driver saying, 'I have a hole in my kidney ... I lose Rs 500 a day if I don't go to work' (Maher 2014). Moreover, it is equally harmful for commuters to travel in buses that are overcrowded and driven by transporters who have often been working for 12 hours. One female passenger is quoted as saying, 'Sometimes so many people get on the bus that the men start pushing their way into the women's section ... we find no place to sit and there is nobody to assist us' (Hasnain 2016).

Fourth, with the demise of the public sector and informalisation of the transport sector in the city, there is no union or other forms of occupation collective action for workers in the sector. This has further intensified self-exploitation of workers, which in turn has created negative externalities for the commuting public.

Section 7: Explaining Weak Service Delivery in Karachi

The transport sector is symptomatic of lack of service delivery and bad governance in the city as a whole. Many other public services—such as provision of water, sanitation, and solid waste management—are also severely neglected within the city. This lack of effective local governance is underpinned by the ethnicisation of political organisations and violence that has marred the city for the last three decades.

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)²² was the first entity to politically mobilise a large segment of the Urdu-speaking population of the city in the early 1980s.²³ Thereafter the Sindhi, Baloch, and Pakhtun segments of the population have similarly organised politically along ethnic lines.²⁴ At one level, this ethnicisation of politics is reflected in national and provincial elections held in the city since 1988. Along with the ethnicisation of politics, Karachi has witnessed the gradual ethnicisation of business, trade, and residential associations.²⁵ Furthermore, neoliberal economic policies of de-regulation and privatisation have weakened trade unions. As such, collective action along class, occupational, and geographical axes has gradually declined within the city.

Ethnicisation of political and civic organisations in the city has also impacted the ability of the state to efficiently and impartially deliver services in various ways. Because of the ethnic basis of political organisations, victors in electoral competitions are often accused of discrimination in the provision of public services to rival ethnic groups. Electoral victors have also been accused of ethnicising the bureaucratic arms of service delivery departments. The effectiveness as well as credibility of the local state as an impartial provider of services has thus been severely compromised.

The local state has been further compromised by the ensuing violence that has accompanied ethnic political organisation in the city. As mentioned

earlier, Karachi experienced an influx of arms during the First Afghan War, and the trend has continued because of flawed policies of the higher levels (provincial and federal) of state taking sides in ethnic conflict in the city.²⁶ This has meant that perpetrators of violence from one group are often given impunity as the state cracks down on its rivals.

The partisan role of the state in violent conflict across ethno-political lines implies that the local state has lost its (legitimate) monopoly on violence. This erosion of the writ of the state appears to underpin its lack of effective governance in general and in the provision of public services in particular, which includes the provision of public transport.

Conclusion: Signs of Change

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that contrary to popular perception, Karachi's transport sector is no longer dominated by a mafia. Instead, as things stand now, the sector represents a classic case of market failure where low returns to investment have resulted in underinvestment and under provision of an essential public service. As we demonstrate in this chapter, one important reason for this failure is the neoliberal model adopted by the state, which denies the provision of public goods such as affordable transport in favour of private ventures. As such, it was losses to the exchequer from the public provisioning of the KCR and public buses that prompted the withdrawal of the state from this sector.

However, with the introduction of the metro bus service in the federal capital, Islamabad, and in Rawalpindi and Lahore, the trend regarding the public goods nature of urban mass transit in Pakistan may be changing. As such, the revival of the KCR and state investment in the proposed Karachi Rapid Bus Transit System (BRT) is on the cards again.²⁷ It appears that financing for part of the project has been resolved. Besides financing, the only hurdle in completing these projects will be removing encroachments to allow for construction and credible resettlement plans for those affected by these developments. Karachi's volatile political economy may also prove to be an obstacle. An affordable and effective public transport system can only become a reality when the Pakistani state shifts the focus of urban development to socio-economic equity rather than simply to the maintenance of law and order and the attainment of short-term profits.

NOTES

1. We assume a population of 16 million (UN DESA 2014). Since there has been no census data released since 1998, various numbers are cited for the total population of Karachi. This is one of the few estimates that uses a systematic methodology. It should be noted, however, that a census was conducted between March and May 2017, but the data has not been released at the time of writing this paper.
2. See, for example, *Dunya News* (2012) and *AFP* (2012).
3. There was a 161 per cent increase in Karachi's population between 1941 and 1951, which is when the censuses were conducted (Hasan 1999). This translates to an average annual growth rate of 11.5 per cent. In the 1950s, there was another significant rise, with an 80 per cent increase in population, which is equivalent to a 6.05 per cent growth per year on average (*ibid.*).
4. There was a slight decrease in the number of private buses between 1957 and 1964, but this was temporary as the number would increase in the subsequent years.
5. Compared to buses, mini buses are smaller and cheaper, therefore requiring lower investment. They have a capacity of 25 people, while buses can seat up to 40.
6. See Section 4 for an explanation of why the state stepped back from the transport sector.
7. Growth in minibuses for this period was about 13 per cent, while the population has grown by an estimated 60 per cent for the same period.
8. These are small motor-rickshaws that can seat 4–12 people, depending on the type. They have the engine and front of a motor bike but the back of a rickshaw.
9. An attempt was made to ban *chingchis* in August 2015 because these are essentially illegal vehicles, running on the roads as unregistered vehicles and without any route permits issued by the government's transport department. In fact, in the Sindh government's list of vehicle categories, there is no recognition of a vehicle such as the *chingchi*. Nevertheless, this ban was then overturned by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in January 2016 on the condition that the *chingchi* association works with the government to come up with a design of the vehicle that is safe and is registered before plying the roads of the province.
10. The ethnicity of the driver is still contested; some claim he was Punjabi-speaking while others say he was Kashmiri (Imtiaz and Ahmed 2012).
11. This incident happened around the same time as the formation of the MQM, which, as we explain later, was the beginning of ethnicisation of politics in Karachi.
12. Interview with Irshad Bukhari, President of Karachi Transport Ittehad, on 21 March 2015.
13. There is some occupational collective action. Due to no avenues of formal insurance for buses—because they are often targeted during violent strikes in Karachi, they have a high risk—the owners have come together to create an informal insurance mechanism. Sayeed et al. (2016: 26) outline the working of this informal insurance in detail.

14. The owners are still predominantly Pakhtuns. An interview with Khurram Gulzar, former Deputy Inspector General Traffic, on 16 March 2015 and with the Karachi Transport Ittehad on 21 March 2015 revealed this fact.
15. The Karachi Transport Corporation was operating at a yearly loss of Rs 120 million in 1996, while the Circular Railway was losing Rs 6 million per year in 1998, by which time its number of trips had also declined tremendously (Sohail 2000).
16. Interview with Irshad Bukhari, President of Karachi Transport Ittehad, on 21 March 2015.
17. Interview with Safdar Shah, President of All Karachi Chingchi Rickshaw Welfare Association.
18. In interviews with minibus drivers and owners, we found that muggings in buses were common. The way robbers would carry these out is that two of them would climb aboard a bus, one of them would hold the driver hostage at gunpoint and tell him to keep driving without stopping, while the other would collect valuables from the passengers (mobile phones, cash, jewelry, etc.). After stealing all they could, they would then tell the driver to drop them off and drive away. In *chingchis*, this does not happen, or is much less likely, because these are much smaller and more open or visible vehicles. They are also less valuable targets simply because they have fewer people on board (6 people on average compared to 25 on a mini bus).
19. For details on the impact of informality on bus operations, see Sayeed, et al. (2016: 25–8).
20. The average model of buses is of 1980 and mini buses from the mid-1990s.
21. The umbrella owners association in the city—Karachi Transport Ittehad (KTI)—insures vehicles. The maximum benefit that owners can receive is Rs 600,000 which is significantly lower than the replacement cost of vehicles in the case of total loss. See Sayeed, et al. (2016: 25) for more details on this.
22. The MQM was previously known as the ‘Mohajir Qaumi Movement’ and represented the Urdu-speaking migrants who came to Pakistan after Partition. The political party changed its name in 1997 to the more inclusive Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) but remained strongly associated with the Urdu-speaking community.
23. There was ethnic political mobilisation earlier also. Most notably in 1964 and 1972 by the Pakhtuns and Mohajirs respectively but they were episodic events that did not lead to the formation of political parties. See Gayer (2014) for further details.
24. This is manifested in voting patterns in Karachi over the last two decades. The Sindhi and Baloch population has voted for the PPP and the Pakhtun segment of the population for ANP and PTI. See Gazdar (2011) and Sayeed, et al. (2016) for further details.
25. Earlier, it was ideological divides—mainly Islamic, centre, right, or left—prevalent in political parties that influenced local or occupational level collective action in the city. This pattern changed once politics in the city took on an ethnic colour. See Sayeed, et al. (2016) for further details.
26. Several ‘operations’ have been launched against one ethnic group and later the same ethnic group has been given a virtual *carte blanche* to rule the city. See Sayeed, et al. (2016: 8) for a description of this phenomenon.
27. The BRT comprises of five different lines, but work on only two lines had started by mid-2017. The first,

Green Line, is funded by the federal government with technical assistance from the Asian Development Bank and this cuts across the north-south axis of

the city. The second, the Orange Line, is funded by the Government of Sindh and cuts across the east-west axis of the city.

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Marginalisation, Contestation, and Change in South Asian Cities

Edited by **Nida Kirmani**

The expansion of neoliberal forms of accumulation and the growing flows of goods, ideas, and human beings between and within global networks is having profound effects on the urban experience in South Asia, creating new possibilities as well as challenges, particularly for marginalised citizens. While powerholders struggle to create 'world-class' and 'smart' cities to attract capital, the vast majority of urban inhabitants are forced to cope with multiple forms of insecurity. For many urban citizens, the city is both a site of promise as well as precarity. As such, there is an urgent need for scholars to reflect on the social, political, economic, and ecological impacts of these changes on South Asian cities and their citizens.

This book approaches the city as a site of multiple contestations and contradictions and aims to highlight struggles over space, resources, identities, and meaning taking place within South Asian cities. It explores the ways in which the adoption of neoliberal models of development has impacted South Asian cities and their citizens, focussing on both Indian and Pakistani cities, highlighting similarities and differences in urban change on both sides of the border.



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