Tactical Cities: Negotiating Violence in Karachi, Pakistan

By

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A.B. English and American Literature and Language
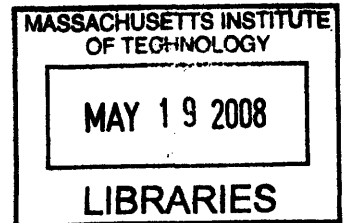Harvard University, 2002

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between violence and urbanity. Using Karachi, Pakistan, as a case study, it asks how violent cities are imagined and experienced by their residents. The thesis draws on a variety of theoretical and epistemological frameworks from urban studies to analyze the social and historical processes of urbanization that have led to the perception of Karachi as a city of violence. It then uses the distinction that Michel de Certeau draws between *strategy* and *tactic* in his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life* to analyze how Karachiites inhabit, imagine, and invent their city in the midst of – and in spite of – ongoing urban violence. Using de Certeau's argument to contextualize ethnographic research, media analysis, and personal narrative, this thesis argues that the everyday practices of Karachiites such as remembering, driving, and blogging are 'tactics' aimed at creating representational spaces that are symbolically free of violence. Through such tactics, this thesis concludes, cities with an urban imaginary of violence nonetheless boast a vibrant city culture.

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1. Karachi: City of Tactics

I have been looking for Karachi as long as I've been living in it. One of the first things I can remember my father telling me about the city that I was getting to know was that it had, until recently, been under water. He described how the waves used to lap against the columns of the nearby Clifton Bridge – which at the time felt like a far away spot, the edge of the complacent universe I inhabited as a member of Pakistan's English-speaking elite and a resident of the posh Defence Housing Authority. Initially, my reaction to this news was one of relief – I was happy that there was no chance of being haunted by disgruntled corpses buried beneath our house. But a few years later, my delight that the corner of Karachi in which my life unfolded was built entirely on reclaimed land came to be tinged with anxiety: I realized that the very ground beneath my feet was no more than a veneer, a man-made cosmetic change to Karachi's shoreline. Even as I was excited that our home and practices would form the first, and thus most profound imprint on the landfill, I became anxious that my world had no past.

To counter this unexpected rootlessness, I began to seek Karachi, to uncover its historical context and fraught chronicles. As a young girl, I remember obsessively watching *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, reveling in an early moment in the film when a red line superimposed on a map of South Asia traced the arc of Indiana Jones's flight from London to Khatmandu, touching down en route in Karachi, the briefest of bounces. To see Karachi on a map, projected to the world, and to know that it mattered enough for Jones to visit was strangely reassuring. The same impulse led me to spend my teenage years driving around the city, well beyond the Clifton Bridge, with successive boyfriends. I never thought of myself as an explorer, but I was certainly on a quest to find that one

spot – or view, or taste, or smell, or symbol – that clarified Karachi for me. Through the years, I have discovered mosques and markets, churches and colonial architecture, moonshine and *masalas*, but none of these has quite captured the essence of the city.

Indeed, the urge to crack the code that is Karachi probably led to my career as a city reporter and motivated me to edit a photography collection on the city's colonial architecture. It also fueled incessant drives along each new mile of reclaimed land, exploring the newest incarnations of a carnivorous city that extends infinitely into the Arabian Sea, impossible to name because it is ever evolving. Kalachi-jo ghote, Kolachi, Kurrachee, Karachi. The tango of slipping vowels that has kept the city's name elusive to itself has also made it impossible for me to baptize my hometown.

In all these years, there has only been one instance in which I felt a sudden truth about Karachi dawn on me. It was my senior year in college, and my roommates Matt, Brenna, and I were reading in our sixth-floor dormitory common room with an enviable view of Boston's Charles River. Suddenly, we heard a loud, crashing sound. In response, Matt rushed to the window, Brenna stood upright and leaned against the closest wall, while I dove to the floor and covered my head with my arms. After we'd had a minute to recover, we tried to unpack our different reactions to the noise. Matt, who had grown up in Orlando, Florida – a ten-minute drive away from Disney World – instinctively assumed that the noise was that of fireworks, and headed to the window to catch a glimpse of the pyrotechnics. Meanwhile, Brenna, whose childhood had been spent in Indian Lake, New York (a small town in the Adirondack Mountains), assumed the noise heralded an avalanche, and so flattened herself up against a wall. For me, having spent the first 18 years of my life in Karachi, sharp sounds have long been associated with the

echoing detonation of a bomb or gunfire. I ducked to avoid being caught in crossfire or injured by flying debris from a fatal blast. We never determined what the noise was, but I learnt something about Karachi that night.

I realized then that the one characteristic of the city that has molded my impression of it is violence—brutal and multifaceted yet persistent and pervasive enough to seem almost ordinary. There was no chance that I would have mistaken the noise for a crashing of waves, the flaring of a *tandoor*, the low growl of a traffic jam, the thumping beat of a danceable track, or the blow horn of a cargo ship. Beyond acoustics, the fact that Karachi is violent is expressed in every bullet-ridden alleyway, gated mansion, speeding car, riot-insured factory, barricaded petrol pump, and news report on the city. This thesis is a response to that sudden insight. It aims to tackle the fact that Karachi is violent by articulating the city's distinct culture in the midst of – and in spite of – the violence, thinking meaningfully about the city without penning a straight history of urban violence, and making sense of the city's residents who go on living in the thrall of bullets, blasts, and blood.

But what exactly do I mean by violence? Certainly, on one level, violence needs to be understood in the most literal manner, along the lines of George Gerbner, who defines it as an "overt physical action that hurts or kills or threatens to do so."[1] But to be adequate to the complexities of Karachi, this notion of violence needs to be expanded beyond physical harm to encompass, in Sophie Body-Gendrot's terms, 'the Other's

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[1] George Gerbner, *Violence and Terror in the Mass Media* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 7.

body', a "body" which includes "integrity, affects, mind, goods."[2] Violence occurs when a person's sense of inviolability is compromised. And by this definition, Karachi is most certainly violent.

Since this project aims at a contemporary analysis of Karachi, incidents reported in *The Herald* between January 2005 and December 2007 can be used to indicate the scale and severity of urban violence in the city.[3] Let us consider some statistics. In 2005, the magazine reported that car-lifting incidents in Karachi had increased by 12.5 percent while motorcycle theft had increased by 20 percent.[4] A feature-length story on Karachi-based market associations that support the sale of stolen goods such as mobile phones, electronics, and motorcycles also appeared in the magazine.[5] Offences against goods were not, however, the most egregious committed in the city. Gang-related violence raged in Lyari – a slum that is home to over one million Karachiites – claiming almost 300 lives in the span of a year and making extortion a daily menace for many shopkeepers.[6] In the course of three years, the magazine also investigated several assassinations, including the successful ambush against the man who ran Karachi's Central Jail and his colleagues as well as a failed attempt on the life of a deputy inspector general of police.[7] In April 2006, *The Herald* reported that "trigger-happy cops" killed nine people, including alleged bandits and bystanders, during a "killing spree."[8] These

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[2] Sophie Body-Gendrot, "The Dangerous Others: Changing Views on Urban Risks and Violence in France and the United States," *Understanding the City: Contemporary and Future Perspectives*, eds. John Eade and Christopher Mele (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 85.

[3] *The Herald* is a Karachi-based news and political analysis magazine that conducts investigative reporting, highlights important news featured by the dailies, and maps national socio-cultural trends on a monthly basis.

[4] H.M. Hussain, "Karachi car lifters zero in on motor bikes," *The Herald*, February 2005, 41.

[5] Syed Shoaib Hasan, "Easy Pickings," *The Herald*, March 2006, 90.

[6] Arman Sabir, "State of Fear," *The Herald*, March 2005, 70.

[7] Syed Shoaib Hasan, "Assassination attempt on DIG shrouded in mystery," *The Herald*, August 2005, 45.

[8] Syed Shoaib Hasan, "Trigger-happy cops go on killing spree," *The Herald*, April 2006, 70.

events and their media coverage indicate how the perception of violence in Karachi is flattened: the distinctions between good and bad, law and disorder, the perpetrators of crime and the guardians of order remain blurred.

Violence linked to criminality of the sort described above was compounded by a violent politics. Incidents of ethnically driven or political party-related feuding that have a long precedent in the city occupied many column inches. On May 30, 2005, the leader of the religious party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) was killed, his death the last in a string of assassinations that were carried out by the Urdu-speaking *mohajir* (migrant) political party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM).[9] On November 15 of the same year, four people were killed and 16 injured in a powerful car bomb attack that occurred in Karachi's maximum security zone and was claimed by a group of Balochi separatists.[10] *The Herald* described Karachi University as a "breeding ground for violence" when, in a throwback to violent student politics of the late 1980s and early 1990s, seven students were killed and dozens injured in an attack on a bus on September 13, 2006.[11] Most disturbing were the events of May 12, 2007, when 34 people died as rioting and

[9] Syed Shoaib Hasan, "Jamaat leader's murder exacerbates JI-MQM tensions," *The Herald*, June 2005, 45. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement, known until 1997 as the Mohajir Quami Movement, is the third-largest political party in Pakistan and the only one to have grown out of a student movement. What began as the All Pakistan Mohajir Students Organization (APMSO) in June 1978 now comprises the 'brotherhood' that owns and runs Karachi. Altaf Hussain, who remains the MQM's leader despite having been in self-exile in London since 1992, founded the APMSO at the University of Karachi in order to carve a distinct identity for Urdu-speaking migrants from central India, thereby distancing them from the unifying platform of religious parties. The APMSO launched MQM, its political wing, in March 1984, which by the end of the decade monopolized representation of the Urdu-speaking community in Karachi and Hyderabad and controlled all business activity in Karachi either through investment or extortion. The MQM's ascendancy over Karachi was a violent process, one that involved AK-47s, territorial clashes, and the deployment of armed youth militias throughout the city. In the early 1990s, the governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif launched a military operation in Karachi to rid the MQM of any revolutionary elements and cleanse Karachi of its *mohajir* (migrant) menace and the related ethnic strife between *mohajirs* and Pathans. The operation was characterized by mass arrests and extra-judicial killings and conversely redeemed the MQM in the eyes of Karachiites. An MQM government has been presiding over Karachi since the local government elections of September 2005.
[10] Moosa Kaleem, "Police claim BLA behind PIDC blast," *The Herald*, December 2005, 62.
[11] Moosa Kaleem, "Student politics turn fatal," *The Herald*, October, 2006, 49.

indiscriminate firing erupted throughout the city in distributed showdowns between the MQM and Karachi's Pashto-speaking population, primarily members of the Awami National Party. While the rivalry between Karachi's *mohajirs* and Pathans has a long legacy, many were startled by the magnitude of the violence. As *The Herald*'s Moosa Kaleem put it:

> May 12 proved that the tranquility that had returned to the city is not inherent and can be shattered whenever required. The display of arms on the fateful Saturday revealed that the various political parties in the business centre of the country are still heavily armed and the party workers are not averse to using weapons, with no thought for what the consequences will be for Karachi. The city and its residents did not just pay the heaviest price on May 12; they will continue to pay it for quite some time to come.[12]

Unfortunately, the May 12 riots were merely a horrifying preview of what was to occur in Karachi in the wake of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's assassination on December 27, 2007. In four days, the city sustained losses amounting to four billion rupees, as 300 vehicles were burnt to ashes while over 1500 vehicles were partially burnt or damaged. Property worth 2.5 billion rupees – including bank branches, government offices, shops, police stations, petrol pumps, factories, and political party offices – was also torched. Another 500 million rupees worth of cargo was destroyed in transit through the streets of the city.[13] As its residents sequestered themselves indoors, Karachi became an inferno.

In addition to citywide riots, Karachi continued to be the staging ground for acts of violence motivated by international policy – particularly the 'war on terror' – and national politics. On March 2, 2006, four people, including a diplomat, were killed in a

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[12] Moosa Kaleem, "May 12: A script gone awry?" *The Herald*, June 2006, 69.
[13] Sabihuddin Ghausi, "Street turmoil, business losses," *Dawn*, January 7, 2008, Economic and Business Review.

suicide attack on the US consulate.[14] Far worse, 143 people were killed and hundreds more injured on October 18, 2007, when two bomb blasts were detonated on Karachi's major artery Sharah-e-Faisal, along the route of Bhutto's homecoming parade through the city, "turning the carnival into a scene of blood and gore."[15] In the wake of the deadliest suicide attack in Pakistan's history, *The Herald*'s Kaleem found the city's streets littered with "pools of blood, limbs, human flesh, bits of clothing, and party flags."

Sadly, the events that have unfolded in Karachi in the past three years are by no means atypical. Indeed, the flare-ups documented by *The Herald* are a good representation of the texture of urban violence, which runs the gamut from hold-ups and petty crime to police brutality and fatal blasts. In *Understanding Karachi: Planning and Reform for the Future*, Arif Hasan points out that "the most distinguishing recent phenomenon particular to Karachi is the extent [to which] violence has become part of the daily life of its citizens...The causes of violence in Karachi range from the more traditional, such as those as a result of the peculiarities of lopsided urban development, the fight for turf by different mafias and vested interests, and the struggle over land and other assets, to the more specific which are a consequence of Karachi's particular demographic and political development."[16] The more specific reasons include a proliferation of ethnic and sectarian conflicts as well as the weaponization of the city during the Afghan *jihad* of the 1980s.

Cataloguing the layered socio-political factors that provoke urban violence is an effort well beyond the scope of this project, which focuses less on the causes of violence

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[14] Idrees Bakhtiar, "Suicide attack on US consulate kills diplomat," *The Herald*, March 2006, 44.

[15] Moosa Kaleem, "Epic Tragedy" *The Herald*, November 2007, 86.

[16] Arif Hasan, *Understanding Karachi: Planning and Reform for the Future* (Karachi: City Press, 2002), 147.

than on the place and function of violence in the idea of Karachi. The work done by

Laurent Gayer[17], A.B.S. Jafri[18], and Farida Shaheed[19] goes a long way towards

documenting the 'Karachi crisis'. Here, a brief summary of the long-standing causes of

violence must suffice. The influx of refugees at the time of Partition created a city of

migrants who could not be properly accommodated and were thus forced to seek housing

in unplanned settlements. Until the 1980s, informal *mohajir* entrepreneurs managed and

apportioned illegal subdivisions of the settlements. This status quo was challenged,

however, by the arrival of Pathans to the city. The *mohajirs* resisted the Pathan

entrepreneurs' attempts to control squatter settlements as well as the means of public

transport in the city, leading to Karachi's first citywide ethnic riot in April 1985, which

claimed over one hundred lives. Since their unofficial hold on the city was threatened, the

mohajirs felt the need to distinguish themselves along ethnic lines. In 1987, the MQM

won its first electoral victory, giving *mohajir* students a political party based on ethnic

differentiation to rally around. *Mohajir* students in universities throughout the city –

particularly the University of Karachi – distanced themselves from the religious parties to

which they had formerly belonged, giving rise to the longstanding rivalry between

religious groups and *mohajirs*. Shows of ethnic solidarity led to widespread violence,

especially since the "large-scale influx of firearms into [Karachi], courtesy of the Afghan

jihad, turned [the university's] campus into battlefields."[20]

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[17] Laurent Gayer, "Guns, Slums, and 'Yellow Devils': A Genealogy of Urban Conflicts in Karachi, Pakistan," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, 3 (2007), 515-544.
[18] A.B.S. Jafri, *Behind the Killing Fields of Karachi: A City Refuses to Surrender* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1996).
[19] Farida Shaheed, "The Pathan-Muhajir Conflicts, 1985-6): A National Perspective," *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[20] Gayer, 528.

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Indeed, the transnationalism of the Afghan *jihad* throughout the 1980s provoked ethnic tensions and "brought to Karachi a flow of arms and drugs which gave birth to a culture of ultra-violence amongst the city youth, for whom Russian TT-pistols became the hottest commodity in town."[21] The city was increasingly fragmented as ethnic enclaves controlled by private militias multiplied. It did not help that the government's attempts to deal with the menace of *mohajir* militancy entailed a mini-genocide in the early 1990s. Operation Clean Up, a state-directed military intervention saw army troops and intelligence units with special mandates – that is, licenses to kill – invade *mohajir* neighborhoods to rid the city of its ethnic blight. The operation converted Karachi's neighborhoods into "killing fields" and exacerbated relations between *mohajirs* and Punjabis – who primarily comprise the ranks of the Pakistan Army – as well as the MQM and the popular political parties of Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif.

Since 1994, Karachi has also been affected by sectarian violence as Sunni mosques and Shia *imambargahs* (congregation halls) have been attacked and Shia professionals, especially lawyers and doctors, have been assassinated. The rivalry between the *mohajirs* and religious parties that was born of criminalized campus politics in the 1980s flared again during the October 2002 elections: battles raged between the armed, organized secular 'brothers' that comprise the backbone of the MQM and the equally well-armed and well-funded activists of the JI. Meanwhile, state intervention – in the form of elite forces who shoot to kill – continues unabated in Karachi's ethnic politics, especially after Bhutto's recent death made Pakistan's most popular political

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[21] Ibid, 519.

party vulnerable. The city's volatile ethnic, entrepreneurial, and sectarian landscape has led Gayer to conclude, "Karachi will undoubtedly remain a violent city in the future."[22]

In describing Karachi thus, I run the risk of reducing Karachi to a violent monolith. But, as Walter Benjamin wrote of Paris, "the city is only apparently homogenous."[23] Plural and diverse, cities defy notions of homogeneity or totality. The ostensible territorial reach of a city, its officially sanctioned borders and boundaries, are constantly contested by competing ontological claims. A built environment, a conduit infrastructure, a social network, a knowledge system, a memory, a mode of interaction, an experience of modernity – from the logistical to the intangible, a city's ontological status necessarily remains fluid and cryptic.

No surprise, then, that arguments made about the plurality of urban ontology are as profuse as cities themselves. Thomas Bender and Alev Çinar reconfigure the city "as a field of experience," "a multifaceted...space."[24] Writing about St. Louis, George Lipsitz admits that he finds cities compelling because they engender "difference, diversity, and division."[25] He warns against treating cities as corporate entities in which "everyone ha[s] the same interests and goals" or "organic entities with prearranged destinies." Lipsitz's understanding of urban histories and narratives dismisses unified perspectives of cities as distortive and reductive. For his part, Michel de Certeau is intent on reintroducing "the plural mobility of goals and desires" into urban spaces, which he argues comprise nothing

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[22] Ibid, 543.
[23] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002), 88.
[24] Thomas Bender and Alev Çinar, "The City: Experience, Imagination, and Place," *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*, eds. Thomas Bender and Alev Çinar (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xi/xv.
[25] George Lipsitz, *The Sidewalks of St. Louis: Places, People, and Politics in an American City* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 2.

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more than "microbe-like operations proliferating within technocratic structures."[26] For de

Certeau, the infinite social and spatial practices that constitute a city are as daunting and

inevitable as a spreading virus. So what looks like or is called one city is really a

multiplicity, as Victor Fournel says of Paris: "it all made for so many distinct small cities

within the capital city – a city of study, a city of commerce, a city of luxury, a city of

movement and of popular pleasures – all of them nonetheless linked to one another by a

host of gradations and transitions."[27]

This irreducibility compels a recasting of the urban question: rather than ask what

a city is, my thesis is concerned with what allows cities to be recognized and

experienced. For that reason, it should be clarified that my project does not mean to pass

judgment on the methods and motivations behind urban violence. After all, not "everyone

[has] the same…goals," not everyone navigates the urban "field of experience" in the

same manner. There are complex transnational, macroeconomic, and socio-political

reasons why someone may turn to violence as a way to navigate his or her city. This

thesis, then, does not intend reductively to vilify or justify the existence of street

violence: when I insist Karachi is violent, it is nonetheless true that there are corners of

the city that are fortunate enough to have never resounded with the clap of gunfire, borne

witness to the cool heft of an AK-47 or a severed limb on a side street. There are also

those corners of the city where violence is primarily a way of speaking, rather than

behaving, a language that empowers rather than eradicates the self. In these communities,

violence is not primarily experienced as a form of physical threat; instead, it functions as

a badge of belonging, a territorial claim, a rite of communal passage, a necessity. Rather

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[26] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), xxii/xiv.
[27] Benjamin, 146.

than dwell on the multifaceted nature and meanings of violence, this thesis will consider what effect violence has on the overall experience of urbanity and how it shapes the way that residents understand their city.

1.1. Imagining Karachi: The Urban Imaginary of a Violent City

To investigate how Karachiites conceptualize and experience their city, I must first recognize that the multiplicities that are the city also fuse into or project something else: an urban imaginary that is, ultimately, real in its effects. In 1937, Benjamin jotted down a few lines by Roger Caillois from his essay "Paris, mythe moderne," in which the latter explains, "there exists a phantasmagorical representation of Paris (and, more generally, of the big city) with such power over the imagination that the question of its accuracy would never be posed in practice."[28] Bender and Çinar echo this notion in arguing that "just as nations are imagined communities, it is possible to conceive of cities as imagined places or as an 'imagined environment'."[29] Insisting that there can be no totalizing accounts of cities, they suggest that cities are "located and continually produced through orienting acts of imagination, acts grounded in material space and social practice." The consequence of such acts of the imagination in an urban context is a "shared, if not unitary, mental image of the city" that can be described as an urban imaginary. James Sanders lends this notion of the urban imaginary cosmic dimensions:

> From the earthly city there arises an immaterial counterpart, a city of the imagination. This other "place" lives what is an admittedly fictive existence, but one complete and so compelling that it may come to rival the real city in its breadth and power. When this happens, the city can no longer by defined entirely by its earthly coordinates; it has given rise to a

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[28] Ibid, 439.
[29] Bender and Çinar, xii.

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place of mind and spirit – a mythic city...a mythic city embodies the *idea* of a city, a powerful thing indeed."[30]

Phantasmagoria, imaginary, or myth; however one chooses to describe "the *idea* of a city," it remains "a powerful thing."

And it is this phantasmagoria of Karachi that lies at the heart of this thesis, an imaginary urbanity that sustains itself in relation to a real, material space in which violent acts occur with undue frequency. As I will argue, the imaginary of Karachi as a violent city is central to and constitutive of this phantasmagoria. Thus, when I refer to Karachi in the course of this thesis, I am interested in a collectively imagined environment, a 'shared mental image' of a violent city. This is not to say that the city's violence is only imaginary or conceptual—there is no denying the reality of bullets and bloodstains. I mean instead to argue that the city's violence is the urban characteristic that makes the most profound impression on its residents and shapes how they inhabit and conceive of Karachi. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that sharing the mental image and participating in the collective construction of Karachi's urban imaginary is what distinguishes one as a Karachiite.

Of course, the conception of Karachi cannot be reduced entirely to a violent imaginary—as with all things urban, the idea of a city is never one thing. This thesis will show how different communities within the city imagine it differently: an older generation of Karachiites imagine the city as a cosmopolis that could have been; residents hoping to reclaim the city's streets imagine it as a space of becoming, of present possibilities, and infinite enactments; and young, tech-savvy denizens imagine the city as it might yet be in the future. Temporally, spatially, and imaginatively distinct, these

[30] James Sanders, *Celluloid Skylines: New York and the Movies* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 15.

competing urban imaginaries are nonetheless generated in relation to a persistent urban imaginary of Karachi as a space of violence: it is by responding to or replacing, transcending or transgressing a felt violence that Karachiites are able to imagine their city differently. Indeed, the urban imaginary of violence can be thought of as the point of interaction between infinite other imaginaries, the common node or reference point that unifies and enables the "shared...mental image" that Karachiites have of their city.

Normally, saying that a city is widely perceived as violent would terminate a conversation about urbanity since the two are believed to negate each other. For example, Body-Gendrot points out that "if violence is associated with the urban, there is a collective and philosophical element implied, referring to a failure of the social cohesiveness which the city, in its political sense, is supposed to generate."[31] Indeed, violence is generally considered antithetical to urbanity. In *Invisible Cities*, for example, Italo Calvino takes the reader on a narrative voyage through 55 cities. The itinerary is an imaginative exploit, weaving through cities that are simultaneously inside and outside, narrated and experienced, emerging and ancient, real and fantastic, apocryphal and apocalyptic. Some of the cities Marco Polo describes to Kublai Khan defy their own urbanity: there is Octavia, the suspended city; Berenice, the unjust city; and Armilla, the unfinished city that "has nothing that makes it seem a city."[32] Laura Chiesa describes how Calvino's mapped tapestry celebrates the multitude of urbanity, a multitude that one needs to coin new methodologies to catalogue. "There's an incessant reiteration of the idea of construction," says Chiesa, "an experimentation with this concept, which pervades the entire text in such a way that it gives space to something which exceeds the

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[31] Body-Gendrot, 85.
[32] Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1974), 49.

"idea" of city and metropolis...in the invisible cities we find articulated a multiform space and cities of n dimensions."[33] Even amongst "cities of n dimensions," Calvino does not accommodate for a city that is violent, either literally or allegorically; even an 'excessive idea of city and metropolis' cannot accommodate for the urbanity of violence.

The many rubrics through which to frame cities have yet to consider violence as constitutive of urbanity and city culture, rather than merely destructive. This thesis, then, is an attempt to show that violence too can shape an urban experience and urban identity. I am in no way trying to glamorize, justify, or romanticize violence when I make this argument. I am, however, trying to reconcile the apparently opposed facts that I hail from a violent city, which I have also and often experienced as a vital city. Karachi, as I have shown above, is violent, but that violence has yet to fully negate the city's urbanity, or dilute the ability of its residents to identify as Karachiites and imagine their city in productive ways. Theorizing this paradox is the goal of this thesis.

But first we must examine why and how Karachi's violence has come to dominate its urban imaginary. Why has this traditionally anti-urban "idea" of the city trumped other possible visions, myths, and imaginative trajectories? To answer this question, we can begin by turning to the varied accounts of urban theorists who locate the urban imaginary in the material and social processes that constitute living in a city. In *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*, Bender and Çinar argue that "collective imaginations become possible through diverse mediums including cinema, market relations, narratives produced via informal networks, literary and textual imaginations, or the official discourse of the state as it is inscribed on the city through various urban development

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[33] Laura Chiesa, "Italo Calvino and Georges Perect: The Multiple and Contrasting Emotions of Cities and Puzzles," *Romanic Review* 97, 3 (2006), 406.

schemes, monuments, and structures."[34] In line with this assertion, urban studies

generally turns to such discourses as urban ecology, political economy, history,

architecture, and personal narratives to show what makes a city a city. Anderson, Fincher,

and Jacobs argue, however, that this discursive multiplicity paradoxically leads to an

increasing illegibility – the city becoming more indecipherable rather than less – so that

most people opt instead for a single lens, an imaginary or urban explanation, through

which to express their sense of what makes the city. As Anderson et al put it, "urban

explanations are positioned narratives that work to legitimate or naturalize particular

interpretations of urban events, calling for the collection of data in certain ways to bolster

this understanding."[35] Each of these explanations create "explanatory modes that bring

different aspects of urbanism and urbanization into view at the expense of other cities,

other lives, and other processes." When I describe Karachi as a violent city, then, I am

privileging the explanatory mode that makes violence constitutive of the city's urban

imaginary and culture "at the expense of other cities…and processes." My justification

for doing so is that other, more traditional explanatory modes and "diverse mediums"

have failed to coin a powerful "positioned narrative" that provides Karachi with an

alternative imaginary. Of course, the fact that I am able to write about other possible

explanatory modes indicates the violence is not the sole framework through which

Karachi might be perceived. Certainly, among over 16 million Karachiites, there must be

many who have another idea of what truly defines their city. My argument here is merely

that violence becomes the most compelling imaginary for the city's residents, and that

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[34] Bender and Çinar, xvii.
[35] Kay Anderson, Ruth Fincher, and Jane Jacobs, "Rescripting Cities with Difference," *Understanding the City: Contemporary and Future Perspectives*, eds. John Eade and Christopher Mele (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 27.

even other ways of thinking about Karachi cannot avoid a necessary reference to it. In the

following sections, let us consider why other social and material processes –

"development schemes, monuments, and structures," historical legacies, economics and

globalization, and political power struggles – have not succeeded in generating a "shared

...mental image" of Karachi that precludes the city's violence from becoming its reigning

imaginary.[36]

1.2. Monumental Failures: A City Lacks Consensus

Monuments have long been central to a city's urban imaginary. Benjamin writes

that Parisian buildings and monuments "[form] a background to important streets...

giv[ing] their districts a center of gravity, and, at the same time, represent[ing] the city as

such within them."[37] This representational quality of monuments is amplified by Henri

Lefebvre, who argues that 'monumentality' or "monumental space offer[s] each member

of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage. It thus

constitute[s] a collective mirror more faithful than any personal one...the monument

effect[s] 'consensus'."[38] In short, monuments not only "mirror" cities, but also contribute

to the social production of cities by becoming the sites of urban identity formation:

discerning their "social visage" in monuments, a city's denizens reach a "consensus" on

what their city is. Consequently, monuments are, in Leslie Sklair's terms, local icons

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[36] This discussion does not claim to provide an exhaustive list of all the explanatory modes that could help elucidate Karachi. I do not, for example, consider narratives that position Karachi as a coastal city, a post-colonial city, a regional trade center, or an emerging outsourcing hub. The intent is to consider the inadequacies of some other explanatory modes in an attempt to explain why Karachiites adopt violence as an urban imaginary.

[37] Benjamin, 526.

[38] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 220.

contributing strongly to "place identity" and helping shape this identity in that they are "a worthy and beautiful way to represent what is being represented."[39]

Karachi's monuments, however, signally fail to acquire such monumentality and consent. Take, for example, the mausoleum of the Quaid-e-Azam, Pakistan's founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah, which is often described as a "landmark building," and "the most important building of [Karachi]."[40] In September 1983, *The Herald* asked eleven children, all residents of Karachi, to draw maps of their city as they understood it. While the maps varied in scope and sophistication, reflecting the socio-economic diversity of the children, they all had one thing in common: a scribbled geometric mess comprising a square and a semi-circle meant to represent Jinnah's mausoleum. However, as the article's author Sairah Irshad argued, this commonality did not derive from the mausoleum's architectural resonance. Quite the converse, it "signifies the pitiful dearth of places of cultural, technical or historical value within the confines of [the children's] lives and the city."[41] Rather than celebrate the mausoleum's pervasiveness, Irshad reinterpreted it, then, as a signal of the paucity of Karachi's urban and cultural landscape. Nor is she wrong to do so: plans are currently underway to develop an elevated transitway across M.A. Jinnah Road, the only vantage point to offer a rare uninterrupted view of the minimalist, domed structure. While the transitway or sky rail will help alleviate the city's traffic congestion problems, it will obstruct the views afforded along this historic road. Sadly, this project is unlikely to incense Karachiites who do not in fact regard the mausoleum as a site of urban identity or ownership.

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[39] Leslie Sklair, "Iconic Architecture and Urban, National and Global Identities" (forthcoming, used with the permission of the author).

[40] Yasmeen Lari, *Karachi: Illustrated City Guide* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.3.

[41] Sairah Irshad, "A Child's Karachi," *The Herald*, September 1983, 41.

This indifference is captured on the weblog Metroblogging Karachi—a citizen-generated catalogue of happenings around and musings on the city.[42] Since its inception in February 2005, the blog has hosted about 40 posts that mention the mausoleum. For the most part, the posts refer to the mausoleum only in order to geographically locate another event such as a riot, traffic jam, aerial firing, or Earth Day celebrations. One post features a tongue-in-cheek list titled "You know you are from Karachi when..." The first comment responding to the list includes the assertion: "you never bother to go to Mazar-e-Quaid."[43] In November 2006, a forum on dating etiquette digresses when one reader refers to the mausoleum as a "crap place" and is gently reprimanded by another user.[44] Only one post from October 2005 recounts an actual visit to the mausoleum. Amusingly, the writer's only comment on the trip is that the mausoleum would make an ideal dating spot.[45] Meanwhile, the City District Government of Karachi seems equally indifferent to the mausoleum. In its most comprehensive urban policy and planning document to date, the Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020, the city's local government makes no special provisions for its maintenance or preservation. The only specific mention of the

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[42] Metroblogging Karachi is an English-language blog, but it reflects the diverse voices of Karachiites. Approximately 50 percent of all Pakistanis have a basic understanding of English, and the percentage spikes to 71 percent in Karachi. Moreover, of the 12 million internet connections in Pakistan as of January 1, 2007, almost half were in Karachi. According to Umar Siddiqi, the overseer of Metroblogging Karachi, most of the people blogging on the site are university students, primarily enrolled at the University of Karachi, which boasts a student population of 24,000. The university is economically and ethnically diverse and long thought to be a microcosm of the nation. There is, however, an age bias in the comments present on Metroblogging Karachi, as many middle-aged and older Pakistanis are yet to go online. That said, in a city that remains largely undocumented, this is an accessible means to an array of voices on a particular issue that can be taken as representative. In this thesis, the comments of bloggers and posters will be quoted exactly as they can be seen online in an attempt to preserve the original tone of the posts. Moreover, the varying proficiencies in English will hint at the different socio-economic backgrounds and education levels of bloggers.

[43] Faraz Khan, comment on "You Know You Are From Karachi When," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on February 15, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/archives/2007/02/you_know_you_ar.phtml.

[44] Abdul Sami, comment on "Typical Reaction," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on November 27, 2006, http://karachi.metblogs.com/archives/2006/11/typical_reactio.phtml.

[45] Umar Siddiqi, comment on "Mazar-e-Quaid," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on October 4, 2005, http://karachi.metblogs.com/archives/2005/10/mazarequaid.phtml.

mausoleum is limited to its being included in a list of the city's historic sites that "have deteriorated from years of neglect."[46]

One might suggest the mausoleum lacks urban resonance because its aesthetic purity, clean lines, and spaciousness are antithetical to the city that houses them. Moreover, the mausoleum has a national, rather than city-specific, symbolism, since it houses the remains of the founder of Pakistan, who, while a resident of Karachi, is a national figure to be claimed by all. Nor does it help that the mausoleum has been claimed as a site of international diplomacy over the years. The blue glazed ceiling tiles were donated by Japan, a silver railing ideal for stringing wreaths was presented by Iran, and the impressive, four-tiered gold-and-glass chandelier that dominates the mausoleum was an offering from China, "commemorating Pakistan's bond with the Chinese people."[47] Finally, the mausoleum's Sultanate period architecture indicates a connection to global trends in Muslim history and art rather than an indigenous aesthetic.

Whatever the reason, the failure of Jinnah's mausoleum to achieve status as Karachi's premier urban monument was codified in January 2006, when the Karachi Port Trust, one of the city's myriad planning divisions, inaugurated a substitute: the Karachi Port Fountain. The fountain was meant to be the icon of a city that has long defied iconicity. Karachi boasts a population of over 16 million people[48] – including migrants from Pakistan's four provinces as well as Afghanistan and Bangladesh – scattered across 18 institutional subdivisions known as towns (each of which is further divided into

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[46] Iftikhar Ali Kaimkhani, *Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020* (Karachi: Master Plan Group of Offices, City District Governmnet Karachi, 2007), 109. In this context, the mausoleum is trivialized because it is the newest structure, dating from 1970, in a list of colonial buildings built by the British that date from the mid- and late-eighteenth century.

[47] Lari, 7.5.

[48] Kaimkhani, 1.

approximately 10 union councils), six cantonments, and innumerable federal and provincial land holdings. Located in the city's harbor, a mile away from shore, the open-sea marine jet Port Fountain does not spatially privilege a particular town, union council, or ethnic neighborhood, and is thus accessible to all Karachiites, on their own terms.

Indeed, the symbol is an apt one. Consisting only of a stream of propelled saline water, the fountain rises high into the air, tracing a different arc with every gust of wind, reflecting different hues of blue, orange, pink, and purple with each evening's sunset. Fluid, malleable, and resilient, offering different views from the high-rises, rooftops, and urban slums along the 11-mile stretch that is Karachi's coast, the fountain is symbolically flexible. Its fluidity accommodates for the shifting stature, size, demographics, and economic viability of Karachi, ever a city of change. Aptly enough, the Port Fountain is equally visible from the open waters of the Arabian Sea as if to iterate Karachi's status as a vital port city: the fountain beckons ships to this port of call, this city of trade. Built at a cost of 320 million rupees as part of an urban beautification program, the fountain also signifies a renewed institutional commitment to making Karachi a tourist hub, a city of desire. Competing for status as the highest jet-propelled fountain in the world – rising 620 feet above sea-level, it comes in second – the Port Fountain also hints at Karachi's long-standing global aspiration to be counted amongst the world's biggest and best.

As my description suggests, the Port Fountain has all the hallmarks of an urban icon. It is institutionally sanctioned, intended to have special meaning, and meant to symbolize something apart from mere functionality. Much like Jinnah's mausoleum, though, the Port Fountain's intended iconicity did not resonate uniformly with Karachi's residents. Given that Karachi is fraught with infrastructural and socio-economic

problems, many believed the fountain was an excessive indulgence on the part of the city government. Its defenders argued, conversely, that the city needed an icon, an urban signifier, a means of representing what has remained largely unrepresented. These conflicting viewpoints were well represented on Metroblogging Karachi. Reacting to an announcement about the Port Fountain, a blogger known as Adi wrote: "the purpose of this is to spend money on something that isnt needed whilst at the same time totally neglecting things like 1. Mass transit system 2. crime prevention 3. water shortages 4. power outages 5. poverty. Must I go on?"[49] Another befuddled blogger asked, "a fountain jet? is that for a practical or an aesthetic purpose? i hope to God, there is a good reason behind this project."[50] Such pessimistic posts attracted innumerable responses that celebrated the decision to install the Port Fountain and represent Karachi to the world through an aesthetically pleasing monument. One blogger shunned all critiques of the project and argued that the government "is spending its money to make Karachi beautiful which is very much needed."[51] For the most part, though, bloggers argued that some acknowledgement of the city's importance within the nation was long overdue. A poster named Faisal exclaimed, "well done karachi…anything build in Karachi, people from other parts of Pakistan never appreciated. So keep it up the good work !!!!"[52] Similarly,

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[49] Adi, comment on "World's Highest Fountain Jet," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on November 11, 2005, http://karachi.metblogs.com/archives/2005/11/worlds_highest.phtml.
[50] Quratulain Khan, comment on "World's Highest Fountain Jet," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on November 9, 2005, http://karachi.metblogs.com/archives/2005/11/worlds_highest.phtml.
[51] Farooq, comment on "World's Highest Fountain Jet," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on January 16, 2006, http://karachi.metblogs.com/archives/2005/11/worlds_highest.phtml.
[52] Faisal, comment on "World's Highest Fountain Jet," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on February 7, 2006, http://karachi.metblogs.com/archives/2005/11/worlds_highest.phtml.

blogger Shoaib Hameed wrote: "well I think its gr8! Now govt. realizing the importance of Khi."[53]

Within days of the fountain's inauguration amidst a fanfare of fireworks by President Pervez Musharraf, however, any debate regarding its iconic suitability was quickly quashed, in part thanks to the comments of the Federal Minister for Ports and Shipping Babar Khan Ghouri, who remarked that the Port Fountain "had been built by the government for the poor people of the country who could not afford to visit Switzerland for rest and recreation."[54] By identifying it with an exotic, foreign locale, the minister stripped the Port Fountain of any signifying properties or urban resonance and reduced it to a spectacle. Barely two years later, the fountain is no longer speckled by the light of fireworks. It remained switched off for many months in 2006 and even now operates sporadically, gushing for a few evenings each week in a forlorn attempt not to be forgotten.

To return to Benjamin and Lefebvre, then, Karachiites have yet to see their city represented in its monuments. Far from generating a compelling urban imaginary, Karachi's monumentality is not a means by which city officials, planners, and corporate developers seek to articulate a vision for the city. The Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020's list of the city's historical buildings – of which there are only 30 – names them merely to acknowledge that these "elements of Karachi's cultural heritage may deteriorate beyond repair if left unprotected."[55] Rather than prioritize the restoration of monuments and iconic landmarks and detail preservation plans, the policy document

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[53] Shoaib Hameed, comment on "World's Highest Fountain Jet," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on December 17, 2005, http://karachi.metblogs.com/archives/2005/11/worlds_highest.phtml.
[54] "KPT Fountain a gift for poor, says minister," *Dawn*, August 16, 2006, Metropolitan Section.
[55] Kaimkhani, 109.

makes feeble calls for "reviewing new design adjacent to historic buildings," "increasing

public awareness regarding Karachi's historic assets," and "enforcing the Sindh Cultural

Heritage Act," legislation that calls for the preservation of historic sites.[56] One can be

certain that preservation plans will not be seriously implemented. As trade-related

activity through Karachi Port has continued to increase over the years, there has been an

escalating demand for warehouses. Instead of developing storage units near the harbor,

the government has converted the old city's residential areas into storage space. Old

buildings – colonial as well as the few examples of native architecture – have been torn

down and replaced by functional units that provide storage on the ground floor and rooms

for rent by day laborers on the floors above.

     In light of Karachi's failed monumentality, some of its residents instead seek their

city's history, cultural heritage, and urban imaginary in the Palace Hotel's Le Gourmet,

the Taj Hotel's Oasis, the Hotel Metropole's Samar Lounge, and the 007 Room. These

are the bars, nightclubs, and cabarets where Karachiites were entertained until prohibition

was enforced in 1977. Although most of these spaces no longer exist, they are the most

significant 'monuments' of a past Karachi. The urban history that they evoke and the

legacy that they have left behind is far more meaningful to certain Karachiites than

colonial architecture that hearkens back to the British Raj or monuments that signify

state-imposed invocations of nationalism or civic pride. In these remembered and

commemorated spaces, Karachiites continue to glean their "social visage," thereby

privileging the urban resonance of dynamic dance floors over static monumentality. And

how could they not? In the chapter titled "Dancing in the Dark: Remembering the (Anti-)

City", I argue that Karachi's nightclubs "represent[ed] the city as such within them," and

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[56] Ibid, 111.

contributed to a strong sense of "place identity" in a way that subsequent monuments have been unable to. I also suggest that the desire in Karachiites to return to the place "represented" by the nightclubs is not a consequence of the city's failed monumentality as described here. Rather, the nostalgia that Karachiites have for the city before 1977 stems from the urban imaginary of Karachi as a cosmopolitan city that could have been, a previous possibility that was never realized. As such, this imaginary is a response to the perception of Karachi as violent, a perception that has influenced the lived experience of the city more effectively than its monuments.

1.3. The Built Environment: A City Seeks a Theme

It seems Karachi's built environment has proven as inadequate as its monumentality to generating an effective urban imaginary. Urban studies typically regards a city's built environment as a discursive realm, an infrastructure that is meant to be read, much like a text, by its inhabitants. Setha Low argues that social, economic, ideological, and technological processes are channeled towards the "physical creation of the material setting," making "public space in urban society…semiotically encoded and interpreted reality."[57] In a similar vein, in *The Theming of America: Dreams, Media Fantasies, and Themed Environments*, Mark Gottdiener claims that a successful built environment should embrace overarching symbolic motifs that help organize and contextualize human interaction occurring in that space: themed built environments "invest constructed spaces with symbolic meaning and convey that meaning to

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[57] Setha Low, "Spatializing Culture: The Social Production and Social Construction of Public Space in Costa Rica," *Theorizing the City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader*, ed. Setha Low (Chapel Hill: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 112.

inhabitants and users through symbolic motifs."[58] The idea that a city's built environment weaves narratives about urbanity and urbanization is shared by otherwise diverse theoretical positions.[59]

Even though their epistemological approaches differ, urban theorists agree, then, that a city's built environment should offer symbolic motifs that help inhabitants regard their surroundings as legible and orienting, be these environments organically invested with symbolic motifs or deliberately crafted as legible by relevant actors such as planners and private contractors. Even those who argue that inhabitants project symbolic meaning onto the space in which they live, acknowledge that such symbolisms are conditional upon the clarity and coherence of the material aspect of the city. Kevin Lynch, for example, writes that "if the environment is visibly organized and sharply identified, then the citizen can inform it with his own meaning and connections. Then it will become a true *place*, remarkable and unmistakable."[60] A city's right to being a "true *place*," in a throwback to Hausmannisation, is thus made contingent on the legibility of its built environment.

By these definitions, Karachi is far from being a "true *place*". Of course, social, economic, ideological, and technological processes have occurred to create the city's material setting. As with other cities, Karachi's built environment is an interpretation of

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[58] Mark Gottdiener, *The Theming of America: Dreams, Visions, and Commercial Spaces* (New York: Westview Press, 1997), 5.

[59] Writing from a postindustrialist perspective, Jan Lin argues that "metropolitan fortunes and identities are increasingly derived from the fabrication of thematic sites and symbols...by impresarios, showmen, entrepreneurs, and boosters, intent on serving private capitalist interest as much as public or community purpose." ["Dream Factory Redux: Mass Culture, Symbolic Sites and Redevelopment in Hollywood," *Understanding the City: Contemporary and Future Perspectives*, eds. John Eade and Christopher Mele (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 398.] For his part, James Holston sees the built environment as "concretizations of contrasting political regimes." ["The Modernist City and the Death of the Street," *Theorizing the City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader*, ed. Setha Low (Chapel Hill: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 249.]

[60] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 92.

urban space, especially by urban stakeholders such as planners, bureaucrats, and private developers who are in the position to realize their vision of the city over those of others. On the other hand, the city's built environment is also subjected to social production insofar as individuals and groups actively engage with their surroundings, shaping and being shaped by the evolving infrastructure. This dialectic has not led, however, to Karachi's material incarnation being "visibly organized and sharply identified." Indeed, as the Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020 admits, "the urban environment, from the point of view of pedestrians, commuters on public transit, shoppers, and also women or children at the park, is unattractive, unhealthy and a source of stress."[61] The reasons for this are multifaceted.

Since the 1950s, Karachi's integrity as a city has been threatened with each federally sanctioned master plan and by schismatic urban policy-making. The first master plan, crafted in 1952 by the Swedish firm MRV, called for the complete separation of the city and the Federal Capital Area. Although never implemented, the plan set a precedent for future master plans, which all emphasized cleaving the city, rather than making it a cohesive entity. The Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan from 1958, for example, aimed at relocating the city's migrant and working class population along an urban periphery away from the city center,[62] calling for the development of two satellite towns at a distance of 25 kilometers to the north and east of the city proper. The relocation of the inner-city population to the periphery transformed Karachi from a diverse, high-density city into an area of low-density sprawl. The previously vibrant center of the city was reconfigured as

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[61] Kaimkhani, 31.

[62] Pakistan's then martial law administrator General Ayub Khan hired the Greek planner and designer Constantinos Doxiades to prepare the Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan. Doxiades went on to design the country's new capital Islamabad as well.

a point of transit, as people moved between the port, the central business district, the old city wholesale markets, and the new satellite towns. Squatter settlements also erupted in the corridors between these distinct areas of the city, especially along the roads that connect the city center to the satellite towns. Now, Karachi is a city with no center and no periphery. Its various towns and union councils are divided along class lines and haphazardly distinguished as either industrial or residential areas.

This incoherent sprawl is exacerbated by the fact that the city's development falls to myriad government institutions that operate independently of each other in the absence of a centralized metropolitan authority. Municipal control is fragmented across 20 federal, provincial, and local agencies with overlapping territories and powers that vie for control of Karachi's planning projects.[63] As a result, present-day planning projects, such as the construction of mass transit routes and flyovers, continue to splinter the city along socio-economic and ethnic lines. The Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020 acknowledges that this multiplicity of ownership has resulted in a "lack of a holistic and unified vision for the city," "unplanned and haphazard growth," poor crisis management, and environmental degradation.[64] The lack of consensus about Karachi's future direction makes it impossible for residents and visitors to conjure a consensual understanding of what is "being represented" by Karachi's built environment.

Institutional confusion about Karachi's master plan is compounded by the collusion of various interest groups – private sector developers, non-governmental organizations, and independent contractors – with governmental agencies and

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[63] These include six cantonment boards, Port Qasim Authority, Karachi Port Trust, Defence Housing Authority, Pakistan Steel, Pakistan Railways, Export Processing Zone, Government of Sindh, City District Government Karachi, Lyari Development Authority, Malir Development Authority, and private owners.
[64] Kaimkhani, 131.

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bureaucrats. Currently, about 94 percent of Karachi's land is in public ownership. The Karachi Master Plan of 1975 made provisions to utilize part of this area to develop well-planned residential and commercial areas catering to different income groups throughout the city, highlighting the importance of consistent planning and uniform architecture, utilities infrastructure, amenity plots and open, green spaces. However, owing to political tensions since the late 1970s, informal developers who occupy state land through corrupt channels and develop retail and housing units on an ad hoc basis have colonized the city. The government has granted many amenity plots to political opponents so as to purchase their loyalties. Government officials also join forces with private contractors to develop land in violation of all zoning regulations. Over 200 illegally developed multi-storied buildings are raised in Karachi each year, while one thousand acres of government land are encroached on for developing urban slums and squatter settlements.[65] The plethora of informal, illegal, and unplanned development in Karachi that occurs on an ad hoc basis with no regard for a consistent urban aesthetic makes Lynch's "visibly organized and sharply identified" environment a near impossibility in Karachi.

Of course, this very disorganization is potentially liberating for it allows the city's residents to inhabit and appropriate the space in whatever way they choose, making it legible through social practices and everyday utilization rather than the dictates of form alone: Karachiites can make their city a "*true* place" less via aesthetic cathexes or by apprehending a structural navigability as by theming their city from the ground up. In other words, order in Karachi is generated by virtue of how its residents operate within the space; it is imagined differently and comes into being through spontaneous, brief enactments of infinite imaginaries rather than well-executed and concretized master

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[65] Hasan, 57.

plans. In the chapter titled "Tacticians and Traffic Jams: The City Becomes a 'Different World'," I show how driving through the streets of Karachi – in all their disorganized and illegible glory – allows Karachiites to appropriate and create new meaningful spaces. The splintered built environment can accommodate and facilitate these multiple spaces – what I, in a nod to Benjamin, call mythological topographies – owing to its fragmented and fluid nature. The built environment is thus reconfigured as productive; it empowers its residents to imagine, organize, and endure their city, creating new maps and modes of legibility, and thereby bestowing their city with "symbolic meaning." By deconstructing the alternative spaces Karachiites create by maneuvering through the cracks of their city, I show how the city is imagined as a space that exists in the moment through enactments, a space that is shifting and dynamic, a space of ever-present possibility that can transform in the briefest moment into something else, something better. Even in this incarnation, however, Karachiites are not imagining their city as a response to its chaotic, symbolically impoverished environment. Rather, I argue that the way in which they inhabit the built environment – in some cases retaining aspects of its illegibility to better suit their own needs – is yet another response to the urban imaginary of the city as violent.

1.4. Economic Vibrancy: A City Not a Node

The illegibility of Karachi's built environment results in many fragments that cannot be neatly assembled into a meaningful whole. But perhaps we can see in this multiplicity and heterogeneity a different model of urbanity, perhaps one that looks ahead to and mirrors the forces of globalization. After all, according to the Karachi Strategic

Development Plan, Karachi's ambition is to become a "world class city and attractive economic centre."[66] Thanks to globalization, these two aspirations have been conflated. As Saskia Sassen puts it, global cities are "centralized territorial nodes" in the global networks of multinational firms and markets that comprise the current world economy.[67] She argues that the dispersal of operations around the world as a consequence of economic globalization has resulted in the need for "thick places," that is, cities that serve as postindustrial production sites and host the concrete operations of the world economy.[68] Global cities are thereby reconceived as a "*location* for international transactions" and "command points in the organization of the world economy," recognizable by their export processing zones, offshore banking centers, high-tech districts, ability to headquarter transnational corporations, and flows of migrant labor.[69]

In these terms, Karachi might seem a good candidate to be considered among Sassen's global cities. A relatively young city, Karachi was first settled by sea-faring merchants and fishermen in 1729. The city was developed by the British in the late 1830s, and the "colonization of Karachi connected it even tighter to the world economy."[70] In the 1850s, the British developed Karachi Port, installing modern docks and treating the city as a strategic alternative to Calcutta with regard to the British Empire's commercial and financial activities in the Indian Subcontinent. In coming decades, European firms increasingly opened branches in Karachi. Throughout the nineteenth century, the city developed to cater to British merchants and troops who were briefly stationed at the port. Most buildings constructed during this time – for example,

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[66] Kaimkhani, i.
[67] Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy* (London: Pine Forge Press, 2006), 2.
[68] Ibid, 3.
[69] Ibid, 7.
[70] Gayer, 517.

the Trinity Church and the General Library – were essential to European social and

cultural life and held little interest for the city's few natives. By 1868, thanks to the

development of the Sindh Railway system, Karachi became the largest exporter of wheat

and cotton in India. The opening of the Suez Canal a year later also amplified the geo-

economic importance of the city as Karachi's port was the nearest in India to the UK. In

the early twentieth century, the implementation of sophisticated irrigation schemes along

the Indus River increased agricultural produce and thus trade in the region. To meet the

demands placed on Karachi by wheat and cotton exports, the port was further developed,

labor was imported from the interior provinces, and merchants from across India arrived

in the city to profit from increased trade activity. In 1889, Empress Market – a vegetable

and meat market that continues to operate in the center of the city – became the second

largest in the world after Bombay.

Patterns of migration amplify Karachi's experience of globalization. Turn-of-the-

century Karachi, which was inhabited by a transient population of about 400,000

comprising merchants and soldiers, went on to become a city of migrants after Partition.

Between 1947 and 1951, over 600,000 refugees, who came to known as *mohajirs*

(migrants) poured into Karachi from northern and central India, increasing the social and

ethnic diversity of the city. Between 1941 and 1961, Karachi's population grew by 432

per cent, a rate of growth "no other city anywhere else in the world at any time in human

history has ever experienced."[71] This migratory trend continues even into the present.[72]

Nowadays, illegal migrants from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma, the Philippines, and

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[71] Ibid, 521.
[72] Between 1972 and 1987, Karachi's population increased from 3.6 million to 7.4 million, with 50 percent of this increase resulting from migration from the rural areas of Pakistan. Throughout the 1970s, over 350,000 refugees arrived in Karachi from the newly formed Bangladesh. Moreover, between 1977 and 1986, between 300,000 and 500,000 refugees from Iran and Afghanistan settled in Karachi.

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Uzbekistan continue to flow into the city to find work as domestic servants or in the textile and fishing industries. Ever the home of migrants and merchants, soldiers and shippers, Karachi is well positioned to be a vibrant economic center.

The city in fact remains the financial hub of Pakistan. Up to 98 percent of Pakistan's foreign trade is conducted at Karachi Port, while 42 percent of regional trade is conducted here. In 2006, the government announced that Karachi Port would be developed into a regional node with massive capacity expansions and enhanced access for China and Central Asian countries. Moreover, the city generates 65 percent of the country's revenue through federal and provincial taxes, customs duty, and other surcharges. Karachi also produces 42 percent of the value added in large-scale manufacturing at the city's industrial zones such as SITE, Korangi, Bin Qasim Town, and the Northern Bypass Industrial Zone.[73] The city is also home to the Karachi Stock Exchange, which was declared the best-performing market in the world in 2002 by *Business Week* magazine. Thanks to the ongoing bull-run, the Karachi market continued to be one of Asia's best-performing indexes in 2007. Meanwhile, in February 2007, the World Bank identified Karachi as the most business-friendly city in Pakistan.[74] Overall, the city contributes 25 percent of Pakistan's GDP and boasts the highest per capita income in the country, despite its large urban population.

However, despite partaking of precisely those factors central to Sassen's definition of a global city, Karachi's financial positioning has not come to dominate narratives about the city for a variety of reasons. For one, economic robustness is seen as

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[73] Karachi Mega City Sustainable Development Program, "About Karachi: Economy," City District Government Pakistan, http://www.kmcdp.gos.pk/lsu/aboutkhi.html.
[74] The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "Doing Business in South Asia 2007" (Washington: The World Bank, 2007), 5.

a national, rather than city-specific, phenomenon. Even in terms of Sassen's model of globalization, this continued affiliation and reliance on the hinterland undermines urbanity on an international landscape.[75] Although they unfold locally, Karachi's economic successes remain intrinsically tied to Pakistan's fate. Since 2000, the Pakistani government has been implementing wide-ranging reforms to improve the macroeconomic situation of the country. As a result, in 2004-2005, the country's GDP grew by an unprecedented eight percent, while the average economic growth rate between 2002 and 2007 has been an impressive 7.5 percent. This growth can be attributed to Pakistan's free market economy, an aggressive privatization program, the doubling of direct foreign investment in 2006-2007, a domestic consumer boom, initiatives to invest in the textile sector, and substantial foreign aid inflows, particularly the 27.5 billion dollars in US aid in relation to the 'war on terror'.[76] Owing to these developments, Goldman Sachs has included Pakistan in its "Next 11 (N-11)" list, which highlights countries to watch as investment destinations. Notably, this distinction belongs to the country, not the city.

Indeed, the effort to locate and concretize these national successes in Karachi's growing harbor, proliferating office complexes, and sparkling shopping malls remains to be implemented. No doubt, national economic growth is a recent and radical enough phenomenon that business analysts, journalists, and investors are still skeptical about its longevity. At a panel discussion at Johns Hopkins University in March 2007, Adnan Hassan complained, "Pakistan is seen as a mercurial and unpredictable state, and suffers

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[75] Sassen, 94. She maintains that a city becomes globally relevant only when it is "so strongly integrated into the world markets that articulation with [its] hinterland – that is, integration with [its] region – becomes secondary."

[76] Vikram Khanna, "As economy hums, Pakistan struggles with politics," *The Business Times*, June 7, 2007, Views and Opinions. The 27.5 billion dollars in US aid includes "military aid, disguised subsidies for the Pakistani armed forces, and postponement of debt repayments to donors."

from a serious 'image' problem."[77] A recent Lehman Brothers report echoed this sentiment, stating, "Pakistan has developed a perception of being an unstable country with a number of security issues."[78] In September 2007, *The Economist* also pointed out, "GDP growth in Pakistan has been held back by political instability, poor and inconsistent policies (rampant corruption at the top), and, more fundamentally, by the economy's narrow production base."[79] And although Benazir Bhutto's assassination eventually had little impact on the national economy, the international press was quick to use the incident as a basis on which to declare Pakistan's economy a moot point. The *Financial Times* suggested that "Pakistan's business community ...[brace] for a period of instability,"[80] while *The Toronto Star* declared, "Pakistan's brief period as a destination for adventurous investors seems over for now."[81] Interestingly, the violence that paralyzed Karachi immediately after Bhutto's death was mentioned specifically in many articles about the economy's demise, even though "the Karachi Stock Exchange bounced back fairly quickly from the crash, needing just a few trading sessions to recover most of its losses."[82] In fact, it often seems as if Karachi enters the discussion of national economic growth only when something goes wrong. For example, the *International*

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[77] Adnan Hassan, "Sustaining Economic Reform in Pakistan: The Role of A Middle-Class Growth Engine" (paper presented at a panel discussion on 'Sustaining Economic Reform in Pakistan', which was held at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington D.C. on March 21, 2007). Hassan is a Senior Advisor in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer at the World Bank in Washington D.C.
[78] Alan Hellawell, Lu Sun, Sri Reddy, Lin Shi, and Julian Bu, "IT Consulting & Computer Services: The 'New New Markets' – Asia Edition," (New York: Lehman Brothers Inc., 2006), 32.
[79] Economist Intelligence Unit, "Pakistan Country Profile: Main Report," *The Economist*, September, 21, 2007.
[80] Farhan Bokhari, "Violence threatens to undo growth," *Financial Times*, December 31, 2007, World News, 2.
[81] "Market's resilience tested; Attraction of fast-growing economy outweights rising political risks for Pakistan's new investors," *The Toronto Star*, December 29, 2007, Business Section.
[82] Chris Nelson, "Pakistan Economy Wavers in Bhutto Wake," *Indus Business Journal*, January 1, 2008.

Herald Tribune cited the volatility of the Karachi index as an indicator that Pakistan's growth rate was unstable.[83]

But beyond this skepticism, a more subtle reason why Karachi cannot be imagined as a "world class city and attractive economic center" results from the fact that the very notion of the city's financial independence threatens the integrity of the federation. Most Karachiites are aware that the city's ruling *mohajir* ethnic party, the MQM, has an implicit separatist agenda that remains to be properly documented. Gayer touches on the issue in his summary of Karachi's urban conflicts:

> Karachi has remained the financial capital of Pakistan since Partition and these promises of prosperity have led many Mohajirs to fantasize about Karachi's independence, privately at least since the MQM has always been careful not to alienate the "establishment" it claims to oppose by endorsing separatist projects publicly.[84]

Gayer goes on to explain that "separatist ideas seem to be more prevalent among Mohajirs settled abroad...primarily because their immediate environment is more favorable to free speech." He also describes how his Karachi-based *mohajir* interlocutors freely "admitted that the separation of the town from Sindh and eventually from Pakistan was the only viable solution," when they were confident their comments would remain hidden from MQM leaders and government officials.[85] The largely unspoken fantasy of a completely independent Karachi might be increasingly articulated if the city were perceived as financially self-sufficient. For that reason, the government ensures that the narrative of Karachi's economic prosperity remains unwritten and that an economically vibrant Karachi remains unimagined.

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[83] Naween Mangi, "Volatility a test for Pakistan fund chief," *The International Herald Tribune*, July 13, 2006, Finance Section. In 2006, "the Karachi index recorded volatility of 32 percent in the year ending June 30 as compared with 16 percent for the MSCI emerging markets index according to Bloomberg. Volatility measures stock-price swings."
[84] Gayer, 533.
[85] Ibid, 534.

These feelings of mutual distrust are exacerbated by the city's fraught relationship with its hinterland. Post-Partition Karachi has been subjected to an identity crisis because of the Pakistan government's shifting stance towards the city's role in the context of the nation. In 1935, before Partition, Karachi was made the capital of the Sindh province after it was annexed by the British. Subsequently, at the time of Partition, Karachi was made the capital city of Pakistan, and systemic efforts were made to rid the city of its Sindhi culture and heritage. Parts of the city were demarcated as the Federal Capital Area, leaving the rest of metropolitan Karachi in limbo. In 1958, when martial law was first imposed in the country, the capital was shifted to Islamabad, leaving Karachi with the legacy of an abandoned or forgotten city, a legacy that mars the city's relationship to the rest of the nation to this day. Ironically, in 1972, Karachi was reinstated as the capital of Sindh. While many government schemes aimed at supporting the city's disenfranchised Sindhi-speaking population were implemented, Karachi has never embraced its identity as a Sindhi city. In 1998, only 5.69 percent of the city's population spoke Sindhi.[86] Today, Karachi may be Pakistan's financial capital, but it is not the federal capital city. It is nestled in the province of Sindh, but shuns its Sindhi heritage. It is no longer the city that was, either in the provincial or national context, but has yet to determine what it could be in relation to the hinterland. In terms of its political and regional stature, Karachi must be left unimagined.

Since the city cannot establish itself through global networks of commerce and politics, it participates in trends of globalization through the information and communications technology infrastructure. Indeed, Karachi is a stop on the Information Superhighway, even if it does not appear on the flight itineraries of globetrotting

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[86] Hasan, 187.

businessmen or in the expansion plans of multinational companies. Despite the digital

divide, Karachiites are flocking to represent their city online for a global audience. Many

are also deeply invested in creating a digital archive of Karachi by documenting everyday

occurrences in the city through blog posts. Still others see cyberspace as an arena well

suited to hosting conversations about Karachi and the urban experience of being one of

its inhabitants. I consider these trends in my final chapter titled, "Clicking to Safety: The

Virtual City as Strategy," and show how a community of bloggers choose to imagine

Karachi as a future possibility, a city that might yet be. This online activity, much like the

nostalgia and brief enactments of other Karachiites, is not a response to the city's

faltering imaginary as an important node in global networks of commerce and

communication. Nor is it the case that Karachiites are eager to blog in the hope of

restoring their city's urban imaginary as that of a global city in the sense that Sassen

proposes. Instead, we see once again that the urge to represent Karachi online, thereby

imagining it differently, is yet another social practice enabled by the urban imaginary of a

violent Karachi, with blogging being understood as a response not to globalization, but to

ongoing urban upheavals.

1.5. Strategy and Tactic: Composing Karachi's Culture

To show that certain imaginaries – of a city that could have been, a city that

becomes what it is, and a city that might be – develop as concrete responses to a violent

imaginary rather than other possible perceptions of the city, I turn to the useful

framework provided in Michel de Certeau's writings, and in particular to the distinction

he draws between strategies and tactics. This opposition allows us to see Karachi's

violent urban imaginary as productive and constitutive rather than only destructive. De Certeau is interested in "ways of operating" that are "unsigned, unreadable and unsymbolized" but that nevertheless "compose a culture."[87] With regards to consumers – of products, services, urban spaces, ideologies – he suggests that these "ways of operating" help people transcend the "ways of using…imposed by a dominant economic order."[88] He terms these 'operations' as tactics and explains that they are practices articulated in the details of everyday life. Tactics are thus understood to be subversive, temporary, ad hoc, and negotiated means by which to exist in a social construct and oppose dominant strategies and prescriptive "ways of using."

In the following pages, I will argue that the everyday practices of Karachiites are tactics deployed against the urban imaginary of their city as violent. De Certeau suggests that the operations of walking, naming, narrating, and remembering the city are spatial practices aimed at eluding the order imposed by built environments and the discipline of urban planning and policy. We have already seen how such forms of urban order have not coalesced in Karachi, leaving its residents free, in a manner of speaking, to deploy tactics against the urban characteristic that most shapes their experience of the city: its violence. Remembering, driving, and blogging can thus be understood as "unsymbolized" practices – activities that Karachiites engage in without being reflexive – that nonetheless "compose a culture." The practices are meant to defy or serve as a counterpoint to the persistent violence in the city even as they generate other competing and interacting imaginaries of the city. As de Certeau suggests, "the place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its

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[87] De Certeau, xi/xvii.
[88] Ibid, xiii.

entirety."[89] From this perspective, tactical everyday practices can then be understood as ways of negotiating violence: they let Karachiites insinuate themselves into the urban fabric of a violent city that otherwise threatens to obviate "unsigned," ordinary activity. Moreover, by deploying tactics against imagined and experienced violence, Karachiites can create an "other...place" that is symbolically free of violence within the realm of the city. Indeed, if de Certeau is interested in how tactics enable the "productivity of consumption," I am interested in how tactics that occur in the urban context enable the 'productivity of habitation' and allow an urban experience to be rich, vibrant, and variously imagined even if it is marred by ongoing violence.[90]

Of course, in saying that Karachiites deploy tactics against the urban imaginary of violence, I cannot help but imply that the violence to which they respond constitutes a strategy, according to the logic of de Certeau's framework. That is, violence would appear to be read as a "calculus of force-relationships" initiated by "proper" institutions such as governments, bureaucracies, and corporations. As strategy, violence would have to be understood as an official, codified, prescriptive, and documented practice of social

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[89] Ibid, xix.

[90] Although this thesis examines how Karachi's varied imaginaries manifest themselves through the deployment and enactment of tactics, it does not pretend to be a comprehensive documentation of all tactical possibilities. Tactics are necessarily of "unlimited diversity" and it would be an impossible task to comprehensively list and analyze them. That said, the tactics discussed here were not chosen arbitrarily; they are arranged so as to provide the reader with an imaginative chronology of Karachi, as a city that never was yet could have been, as a city that is, and as a city that may yet be in the future. Beyond this temporal framework, the tactics described in the following pages also hint at the ethnic, religious, and socio-economic diversity of the city: tacticians who make an appearance here include Sindhi businessmen, Pathan bus drivers, Punjabi dancers, Baloch donkey-cart riders, Hindu nightclub owners, Christian saxophonists, Oxford-educated newspaper columnists, waiters, street hawkers, and youngsters from across the diaspora. Practical and logistical concerns also dictated the choice of tactics represented here: writing a thesis about Karachi while based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, meant that I had limited research time in a city that has not been properly documented (the main English-language daily *Dawn* is yet to be made available on microfilm). I therefore chose to interview retired gentlemen who had time to spare for reminisces on long weekday afternoons, describe street tactics because they unfold in public and are thus available for observation and analysis, close read media artifacts such as film and old advertisements because they are easily transported as digital photographs and DVDs, and reinterpret blog posts because online communities can be researched from any location.

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construction. It would also have to be self-contained, self-perpetuating, and "isolated from [its] environment" in order to comply with de Certeau's sense of the strategic. Violence in and of itself, then – and particularly in the literal sense in which I use it in this thesis – cannot immediately be understood as a strategy. Still, the use of the strategy-tactic binary in this argument remains appropriate because violence as I understand it does, in fact, have strategic dimensions. The fact is, violence orders a city much in the same way that a reigning strategy – for example, a successful urban master plan or legislature concerning driving – would. Violence becomes analogous to strategies in the sense that it dictates who can go where, and at what time. It dictates whether businesses activity can proceed as usual or if markets and multinational companies must shut down to ensure the safety of their employees. The threat of violence in a place like Karachi where urban militias, gang mafias, and armed religious sects abound also begins to order society in terms of who can consider themselves to be Muslim, which groups are allowed to interact with each other, and who can say what in public. Indeed, owing to pervasive violence, Karachiites are left with little "place" to determine "what they *make* or *do*" within the space of the city.

The strategic ambivalence of violence can also be understood as a matter of scale. De Certeau is interested in the unitary "force relationship" that orders and dominates "ways of using" across the spectrum. In his analysis of strategy in the urban context, for example, he is concerned with the universal domination that traditional urban planning exerts over a city's residents, prescribing how they must inhabit and navigate a place. For de Certeau, then, The City in its well-planned incarnation is a strategy against which citizens deploy tactics. In the absence of a similar, overarching strategic imposition of a

"way of using" – as witnessed in Karachi – what becomes of de Certeau's theoretical construct? The fact is, Karachi is certainly home to "force relationships" that circumscribe "proper" – rule-governed, prescriptive, controlled – spaces within the city. Instead of singular, successful strategic entities, however, we can detect several, competing ones: state institutions, opposition political parties, marginalized ethnic groups, militarized student organizations, weaponized religious sects, street gangs, urban militias, security forces, etc. In Karachi, all these institutionalized entities enforce rules that govern how people can inhabit the spaces in which they live. Interestingly, they all enforce "force relationships" through violence, which might be enacted in the form of police brutality, armed robberies, physical assault, and the neighborhood patrols of urban militias, depending on the goals of the institution in question. In that sense, while there is no singular, dominant strategy imposing generic order upon the lives of Karachiites, the pervasive violent effects of multiple, invisible, perhaps even competing institutions that constrain everyday practice make it seem as if there were one strategy governing the city.

This issue of scale is best understood through a vernacular example: when a Karachiite is confronted by a violent act – a gunshot, a kidnapping – s/he will behave in a well practiced way to ensure her/his own security. In the moment of violence, it remains irrelevant whether the violence is a manifestation of an ethnic or sectarian conflict, a turf war, or a state-commissioned military operation. Any tactics deployed by the Karachiite to remain safe, retain a sense of integrity, and reclaim the façade of normalcy will be a response to the violent act itself, not the socio-political factor that enabled it. Therefore, in their responses to violence, Karachiites behave as if they are operating in a realm that is governed by one *proper* strategy.

Finally, one must not forget the dialectical nature of strategies and tactics. De Certeau himself recognizes the mutually reinforcing relationship between strategies and tactics. "On the one hand," he writes, there are "the tentative moves, pragmatic ruses, and successive *tactics*" and "on the other hand, the *strategic* representations offered to the public as the product of these operations."[91] Catherine Driscoll also highlights as seminal to de Certeau's argument the fact that the "everyday comprises those practices of culture that are neither specialized as to content nor organized by a hierarchy in which production opposes consumption."[92] In keeping with this dynamic construct, I will show that Karachi's urban culture is constituted through a series of tactics that aim to counter the 'strategic' experience of Karachi as a violent city, but also, more significantly, that that very strategy is born of the tactics that emerge in opposition to it. In other words, violence as such may not operate as a strategy, but the fact that Karachiites are responding to the manifestations of violent means through their tactics causes it to be transformed into a "strategic representation," one that endures in its own right, albeit detached from the infrastructures – the "technique[s] of sociocultural production" – that enforce "nets of discipline."

As I prepare to read the everyday practices of Karachiites as tactics against an urban imaginary of violence, I must also point out that violence itself can be understood as a tactic in a more traditional understanding of de Certeau's binary relationship. No doubt, violence is tactically deployed – for example, by disenfranchised groups who oppose state mandates and are thus termed terrorists – but the narratives of those tactics have already been penned; they are the traditional histories of violence that I declared at

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[91] Ibid, xxiii.
[92] Catherine Driscoll, "The Moving Ground: Locating Everyday Life," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, 3 (2001), 395.

the outset I was not interested in (re-)writing. Treating violence as a tactic does not

destabilize my argument that the everyday practices of Karachiites are tactics against it; it

does, however, highlight the limitations of de Certeau's theoretical framework. Can

tactics be deployed against other tactics? Can tactics morph into strategies, and vice

versa? Can contradictory tactics be enacted from the same location, in terms of space,

time, and political agency? Can a tactic with elements of strategic organization – a

reverence for hierarchy, for example – still be deployed as such? In addition to theorizing

the everyday practice of Karachiites, then, this thesis will also implicitly interrogate the

limits of de Certeau's strict binary conception and show the conditions specific to

Karachi that make it increasingly difficult to maintain a clean distinction between

strategy and tactic.

To this end, my analysis of everyday practice in the next chapter will occur from a

location diametrically opposed to the one from which de Certeau begins his consideration

of tactical spatial practices. He writes from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center in

Manhattan, and from that totalizing vantage point, sees a city that is "constantly

exploding." Since I am writing about a city that literally explodes on a regular basis and

that has resisted different forms of totalizing accounts, I will begin instead with an

intimate and familiar interior, a space of pleasure rather than of business, an inside rather

than an outside, a memory rather than a reality. Let us then time travel and imagine a

Karachi that never quite was, but that many still believe could have been. Instead of a

violent city in the present, let us imagine a cosmopolitan center, a City of Lights where

disco balls swirl and dancers twirl, where bands play nightly and even fights are all part

of the fun. Let us, in other words, begin to be tactical.

2. Dancing in the Dark: Remembering the (Anti-) City

It is only fitting that Tony Casino still uses a cigarette holder. Unlike most smokers in Karachi who drag on their imitation Dunhills until the butt glows in protestation, Tony elegantly taps on his tortoise-shell holder, its gold tip glinting in unison with the trim of his onyx-and-gold cufflinks. In fact, Tony is a vision in black and gold: his starkly dyed jet-black hair sets off the chunky insignia of his Versace sunglasses and the gold heft of his oversized Rolex. These accessories, along with his unshakeable moniker, are some of the vestiges of Tony Casino né Tufail Shaikh's previous incarnation as Karachi's premium nightclub owner.

Today, Tony manages his extended family's land holdings in interior Sindh, but he still considers himself, first and foremost, a high-class hotelier and indisputable don of the entertainment industry. Between 1965 and 1977, Tony owned and managed the Hotel Excelsior – the bedrooms gave way to dance floors and bandstands in the late 1960s – and the Lido, Karachi's first cabaret. In 1972, he became the sole investor in what would have been Pakistan's first casino, a luxury seaside establishment meant to cater to heiresses and airhostesses, local hopefuls and international jet setters. Unfortunately, the casino had not yet opened when prohibition was enforced in Pakistan in 1977. Despite some official mumbles about retaining the casino as part of Karachi's landscape to attract foreign investment and tourists, it never opened its doors. The building, which is still referred to by Karachiites as the casino, has served over the years as an orphanage, a video game arcade, and is now being renovated as an office space.

Contractors and construction workers might swarm the site of the original casino, but the dream lives on in Tony's house, an odd memorial to the thwarted business

venture. All the light fixtures, fittings, and furnishings ordered for the casino have been used instead in Tony's bungalow in Defence, an elite residential area. Entering the house is akin to diving into a kaleidoscope: the hallway comprises a dizzying combination of transparent paneling and mirrored walls. When I first visited Tony, I was ushered to the second floor via a ramp covered in gold carpet and fringe. Upstairs, the walls are splashed with alternating slivers of etched mirror and silver-specked tiles. The tacky chandelier in the main lounge is reflected endlessly in wall-to-wall mirrors while wilting bamboos try half-heartedly to conceal the sprinklers of a defunct indoor waterfall. I was half expecting a disco ball in the bathroom, and was not surprised to find instead that water ran from the penises of golden cherubs. Indeed, the only thing missing was the acoustic backdrop of gambling: the whoops of winners, the cha-ching of slot machines, the whirs and ticks of the roulette table, the endless clicks and sighs of shifting chips and shuffled cards.

While my description may make Tony's house sound kitschy, surreal, or even desperate, it nonetheless stands as a reminder of what could have been for those Karachiites who partook of the city's nightlife from the late 1950s until 1977 when the then prime minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto "tried to present himself as a born-again Islamic reformer" and deemed liquor and gambling illegal.[93] Bhutto's ruling ensured that Karachi's proliferating bars, liquor stores, pool halls, nightclubs, and cabarets closed

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[93] Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2005), 144. Cohen describes how Bhutto forged a new identity for Pakistan by promulgating long overdue social and political reforms while in power from 1971 to 1977: "Bhutto took on the Establishment by cynically merging the two ideologies that had been anathema to it, socialism and Islam, proclaiming a vision of Pakistan as an Islamic *and* socialist state…He ventured into troubled waters when he tried to present himself as a born-again Islamic reformer. Bhutto approached the Islamic world for aid, offering nuclear technology in exchange. This conversion was so transparently insincere that it fooled few people. His portrayal of his policies as Islamic as well as socialist made no impression on Pakistan's Islamist parties, further alienated his leftist supporters, and set a precedent for successors: when in trouble turn to Islam."

down within weeks, leaving a legacy of barely-scuffed dancing shoes in dusty shoeboxes, ill-fitting tuxedos in want of an occasion, and an impressive reserve of anecdotes and images that have come to assume mythic status.

If we look at what has replaced these nocturnal sites, such a retreat into the past does not come as a surprise. After all, recollections of that time are all that remain: what was once the "jivin' 'n' rockin'" hub of the city's nightlife has now been demarcated as a maximum security zone that cordons off several five-star hotels, the Sindh High Court, the Governor House, and the US consulate from the rest of the city. The former merry haunts of courting couples and aspiring lotharios in Chevy Convertibles are now the stomping grounds of diplomats and dignitaries, and thus the logical target for snipers and suicide bombers. Despite the fact that high-ranking police officials and members of the elite forces proliferate in this area, several fatal bomb blasts have shattered windows – and security expectations – in the last few years. On May 26, 2004, two bombs were detonated within an interval of 25 minutes near the US consul general's residence, killing one and injuring more than 30 people, and making "fear the predominant reality in Karachi" in a particularly violent month termed "bloody May" by *The Herald*.[94] On November 15, 2005, a high-intensity car bomb killed three people and injured more than a dozen near the historic PIDC building.[95] A few months later, on March 2, 2006, another blast triggered by a suicide bomber exploded outside the US consulate killing four people and injuring 45.[96] These recent blasts have killed diplomats and security guards, journalists and bystanders. Several decades ago, however, the debris from such blasts would have included stilettos and saxophones, decanters and guitar strings, since these

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[94] Syed Shoaib Hasan, "Fear Over the City," *The Herald*, June 2004, 66.
[95] Kaleem, *The Herald*, December 2005, 62.
[96] Bakhtiar, *The Herald*, March 2006, 44.

blasts all occurred in the vicinity of what used to be Karachi's most successful nightlife venues. The 2004 blast was a stone's throw from the location of the Hotel Excelsior, where twenty-somethings would limbo and lambada on weekend nights while a stunning stripper flown in from the Crazy Horse Saloon in Paris performed to a sold-out house. The PIDC blast, meanwhile, occurred 30 feet away from the Pearl Continental Hotel, where live bands such as the Four Tops, the Talismen, and The Bugs had Karachiites swinging and twisting the night away in the legendary Nasreen Room. And the 2006 blast occurred a three-minute stroll down the road from what used to be the Taj Hotel – home of the infamous Oasis nightclub, where the music blared all night – and the adjoining Talk of the Town snack bar, where tipsy gents in sports jackets would bring their dates for a late-night nibble on leftover samosas.

Given the transformation of these sites from dance floors to battlegrounds, it is not surprising, then, that Karachiites are incurably nostalgic about the city in its previous incarnation as the City of Lights.[97] Until the late 1970s, Saddar was "the heart of Karachi," housing the city's best cinemas, hotels, nightclubs, cabarets, and coffee houses. Writing about that era, film fanatic and music journalist Asif Noorani admits, "Saddar has lost much of its importance, but there are still a good number of people who drift down memory lane. The Saddar of the fifties and the sixties is firmly etched in their memory."[98] Similarly, Anwer Mooraj – the last of the true brown sahibs, an essayist and editor whose bright bowties and brown wingtips complement his Oxford accent –

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[97] For the rest of this chapter, the reference to Karachiites will specifically indicate the community that participated in and is nostalgic for the city's nightlife and entertainment industry. It should be clarified that the nostalgia described here is shared only by a segment of the city's population and is by no means universal. That said, the voices featured in this chapter are socio-economically, ethnically, and religiously diverse.

[98] Asif Noorani, "Saddar: Heart of the City," *Karachi: Megacity of Our Times*, eds. Hamida Khuhro and Anwer Mooraj (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 275.

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concedes that he could fill a book with "vignettes that take me back to the Karachi of the early fifties and sixties, a city that was safe and peaceful and where nobody ever seemed to be in any kind of hurry. People were very tolerant, especially in the coffee houses... What a pity those lazy, carefree days are gone forever, like picture postcards, yellowed with age, stored in a half-forgotten trunk, never to be opened again."[99] Of course, when given the opportunity, Karachiites of Mooraj's generation were more than happy to open up that half-forgotten trunk and inundate me with anecdotes, photographs, ticket stubs, sheets of music, and lovingly cut out advertisements for a New Year's Eve party or flamenco performance where they met their spouse. Most of the women I spoke to unearthed bobby pins and push-up bras, muumuus and platform shoes that they could not resist the urge to try on decades after they had been stowed away. Many even slammed the proverbial trunk shut and leapt on to it to show me how to jitterbug or hully-gully, their hip shakes and thigh quakes suggesting that the once familiar dance moves had become strangely foreign.

Such fragile and unstable memories negotiate among past, present, and future. They recreate what never quite did – but nevertheless might have – happened as a response to the stresses and fractures of an all too alive now, in which the violence of daily life in the city has rendered necessary and indeed produced a tight coupling between recollection and identity. This chapter examines how Karachiites who participated in the city's nightlife until 1977 use memories of their – and the city's – youth as a tactic to efface or negotiate the violence of present-day Karachi. In the following pages, I primarily draw on the oral histories of these Karachiites to document how they remember

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[99] Anwer Mooraj, "Being Young in the Fifties," *Karachi: Megacity of Our Times*, eds. Hamida Khuhro and Anwer Mooraj (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 367.

the "swinging sixties" and "disco seventies" and analyze how their remembrances shape their lived experience of the present. To capture a sense of Karachi's pre-1977 nightlife, I interviewed nightclub owners, musicians, managers and waiters employed at bars and clubs, a retired madam, journalists, and many nostalgic Karachiites who used to frequent the nightclubs. This chapter will focus more on the oral histories of those who had a financial stake in the city's nightlife – the owners, managers, and employees of different establishments – because they were prone to contextualizing Karachi's nightlife with regard to the city, society, and Pakistani politics at large. For those who merely frequented bars and nightclubs, recollections of the establishments are enmeshed in personal memories and a longing for a youth, a body, and a naïveté long lost to time.[100] I also consider the different ways in which present-day violence informs Karachiites' recollections of the past to argue that the act of recalling the past is in fact a means by which to productively engage with the urban imaginary of Karachi as a city of violence. To this end, I use print media archives – newspaper and magazine articles and print advertisements – to time travel and consider how Karachi's nightlife was perceived before 1977.

This use of memories and media artifacts is spurred by the fact that there is not much else to go on: as I have suggested above, the clubs, cabarets, and cinema halls have

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[100] Most of my interviewees launched into personal anecdotes: one woman giggled at the thought of herself in short skirts and bell bottoms; a staid businessman who still lunches at a private gentleman's club every weekday listed how many dances he and his wife could manage; a newspaper publisher recalled the handsome face of an Anglo-Indian bartender who first introduced martinis at the Nasreen Room; yet another gentleman boasted that he would hit the clubs four nights a week and, with a wink, stated that the real fun was to be had at Napier Road, Karachi's red-light district. There were many memories of New Year's Eve balls, petty jealousies, and drunken drives along the beach at the end of a long evening at a nightclub. Almost everyone I talked to bemoaned the loss of that lifestyle and pointed out that I, a child of the 1980s, would never be able to comprehend what I had missed out on. As one former club-hopper put it: "we just had so much fun in those days. It was a happy time. You lot will never know that, you got the raw end of the deal."

largely been abandoned, demolished, renovated, or forgotten. The Samar nightclub at the rooftop of the Hotel Metropole, where Karachiites discovered Pimms, Paul Anka, and their own pretensions to cosmopolitanism, was briefly converted into a bakery in the 1980s and ultimately advertised as a space in which to host children's birthday parties until the hotel was demolished three years ago. Meanwhile, the 007 in the Beach Luxury Hotel has been transformed into a busy exhibition and conference hall. Kaleem Omar, a prolific columnist and poet, particularly regrets this transformation because he believes Karachi's most legendary night unfolded at the 007: "it couldn't have happened anywhere else. A boat drifted up the creek behind the hotel to the 007's balcony. From its rigging descended a gorgeous performer, and she was totally starkers! She performed for 20 minutes to a crowd of about 500 people, totally starkers the entire time, and no one raised an eyebrow, they just kept chatting and dancing. If someone tried that today they'd be shot."[101] The social and political dynamics of why female nudity and a permissive atmosphere are equated with the tolerance and progressiveness of the past are far too complex to unpack here. What is significant in this context is Omar's excitement at the prospect that such a wild party could occur without anyone reacting violently to the events—an unlikely prospect now. Sadly, the only remnants of such nights are redundant speakers strapped to pillars, a convenient alcove – now overstuffed with plants – in which to settle a jazz quartet, and, of course, the now mythic memories of Omar and his peers.

However, to suggest that the nostalgia Tony Casino, Noorani, Mooraj, Omar, and other have for Karachi's nightlife constitutes a set of tactical responses to present-day realities, I must first extend de Certeau's conception of tactics. He argues that "a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized on the

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[101] Kaleem Omar in discussion with the author, August 12, 2007.

wing."[102] This notion emphasizes that tactics are opportunistic, instantaneous, temporary, and fleeting. Nostalgia, on the other hand, necessarily unfolds over time: it emerges and evolves through the years, betraying new tones and taints in response to present-day circumstances and their relation to times past. Tactics are unique and unfold in the moment while memories are assembled over time, narrated over endless cups of tea and tumblers of whiskey, repeated until they become a refrain. Although the temporality of nostalgia extends well beyond that of the tactic, elements of the tactical are evident in the emergence of nostalgia as well as in how it functions. After all, in considering everyday practice, de Certeau points out that the "re-uses and functions of the memory" enable tactics, much in the same way that they enable nostalgia.[103]

Indeed, de Certeau's analysis of how the activity of reading – which relies heavily on remembering – is tactical can also be applied to how nostalgia functions. The tactical reader 'slips into' the place of the author through an act of "silent production" facilitated by "the drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation and expectation of meanings inferred from a few words, leaps over written spaces in an ephemeral dance."[104] De Certeau adds that the "production" and "arrangement" that the reader effects while perusing a text are an "invention of the memory" because "the readable transforms itself into the memorable." Unable to "protect himself against the erosion of time" and recall exactly what he has read, the reader insinuates himself into the author's text, using his interpretation and arrangement of what is remembered to create a "different world," an alternative or "anti-text" in the author's place. When such inventions of memory serve nostalgia rather than

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[102] De Certeau, xix.
[103] Ibid, xv.
[104] Ibid, xxi.

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interpretation, they allow remembering to become a tactic in and of itself rather than a technique or consequence of tactical reading. Much like reading, then, remembering the past requires those who are nostalgic to drift back in time, improvise when something cannot be recalled with clarity, infer meaning on the basis of documentations of the past – whether these be yellowed postcards or the anecdotes of others – and leap over all that is forgotten. Since this process creates an invented past, nostalgia can be regarded as a "silent production" enabled by the activity of remembering: when deployed tactically, it allows a "different world" to slip into the place of a lived past. In particular, I want to argue that through the (re-)invention of a pre-1977 Karachi, some of its residents tactically create a "different world" through which they address the violence of the contemporary city, either by effacement or by mitigation.

2.1. Now and Then: Being Present in the Past

One of the ways in which Karachiites make their memories tactical is by preventing the "different world" they create from remaining in detached isolation, a phenomenon from another time and place. Like a tactical reading that improvises and infers on the basis of the author's words, tactical nostalgia responds to and engages with the present in its 'invention' of the past. Karachiites thus frame their memories of the past in terms of the present, which is consistently perceived as violent. Indeed, when describing the swinging sixties, most of my interviewees resorted to binaries, presenting pre-1977 and present-day Karachi as diametric opposites: a city of sex as opposed to a city of violence; a city of fun versus a city of fear; a city for all against a city for some.

Mohammad Rafiq – a waiter who was employed at the Nasreen Room in 1967 and continues to work in the Chinese restaurant that replaced it – insists that "there is a day and night difference between then and now. It was a beautiful environment; we never had to worry about any trouble. Then, the men were gentlemen; now, they are *goondas* (thugs)."[105] Hilary Furtado, a saxophonist with the Talismen who played Frank Sinatra, Elvis, and James Brown covers for crowds of over 300 people on consecutive nights at the Nasreen Room, backs up Rafiq's account:

> There were no fights back then, you'd barely punch someone. Bands
> would quibble among themselves if someone played the wrong chord,
> but other than that there was no fighting, and definitely no guns. That's
> why no security was needed back then. Now, the way the security is at
> hotels, they check you everywhere, they even x-ray my sax.[106]

Implicit in Furtado's statement is the sense that violence – the frequency of fighting and the prevalence of guns – is normative. For that reason, he frames his description of the past, when security measures were unnecessary, through the lens of the present, when heightened security is the norm. Furtado's rhetorical choice makes the past dependent on the present by describing it as what it was not, a place of *"no* guns" and *"no* security." The way he introduces the Karachi of his youth, then, says as much about contemporary Karachi as it does about the city before 1977.

Vinoo Advani, the former owner and manager of the Playboy – "the gentleman's favorite cabaret" – and the Taj Hotel, home of the Oasis nightclub, echoes Furtado's words along with his framing of the past. Attired in a tan safari suit, Advani resembles a Bollywood villain with his slicked back hair and fingers adorned with chunky gold-and-ruby rings. His office is in disrepair – carpets chewed on by rats shirk away from water-

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[105] Mohammad Rafiq in discussion with the author, January 18, 2008.
[106] Hilary Furtado in discussion with the author, January 8, 2008.

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stained walls and guests have to make do with tannin-stained teacups – but his flair for pomposity and profanity, no doubt cultivated in the clubs, remains. Punctuating his earnest yearnings for a more tolerant society with expletives, Advani explained, "when the nightclubs were there, people had a drink or two then bloody well went home, unlike now, when they kill themselves drinking or just kill each other. Today, everyone is crying, but back then we had a bloody good time. It was a time of tremendous fun; now there's fear."[107] Much like Furtado, Advani celebrates the lived experience of Karachi before 1977 by setting it up in opposition to the present. For his part, Byram Avari complicates this dichotomy of fun and fear by suggesting that there was a progression – rather than a sudden inversion – between Karachi then and now. Currently the chairman of the Avari Group, Avari began his career as the manager of the 007, the nightclub housed in the Beach Luxury Hotel.[108] Today, he is the epitome of a high-flying businessman: attired in a light cotton suit, he met with me in his office and multi-tasked throughout our conversation, signing checks, taking phone calls, and organizing an overnight trip to Dubai. The names of Avari's four dogs – Whiskey, Soda, Vodka, and Tonic – were the only hint at Avari's past as a club manager. When I asked him if he used to frequent nightclubs other than his own, Avari distractedly rambled a reply:

> We went out to party every night, to different places, to each other's clubs. I used to date a lot, and cannot remember going out in two consecutive weeks with the same girl. The worst thing we'd heard of at that time was a knuckle-duster. My friend Zaffar Zaidi went to Baluchistan in the sixties and came back with a small knife and that was a big deal. Then in 1977, Nawab Akbar Bugti's son fired a pistol and we knew it was the end of something. Now we have Kalashnikovs. Back then, we never thought of having a guard, we never saw a gun. We had

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[107] Vinoo Advani in discussion with the author, July 23, 2007.
[108] The Avari Group owns three luxury hotels in Pakistan, one in Dubai, and one in Toronto. The Beach Luxury Hotel, the Avari Group's first project in Karachi, was owned by Byram Avari's father, and was the family's first foray into the hospitality business.

never heard of Shia-Sunni violence. We were relaxed; I used to sail and row and water ski three times a week.[109]

Avari's language does not enable a neat dichotomy between Karachi then and now, and instead demonstrates that the city's security situation has been evolving to account for present circumstances. That said, his use of knuckle-dusters and Kalashnikovs to distinguish between pre- and post-1977 Karachi is similar to the framing devices employed by his contemporaries, indicating the extent to which present-day circumstances shape his nostalgia. Rather than focus on partying or water sports in his recollections, Avari emphasizes his description of Karachi as a non-violent place where knuckle-dusters and knives were anomalous, threatening items. Indeed, his tactical nostalgia can be read as a critique of the present – the realm of the Kalashnikov – rather than a celebration of the past.

The fun/fear, play/paranoia dichotomy pitting Karachi then against Karachi now has also been concretized in print. One of the very few books dedicated to the city, *Karachi: Megacity of Our Times*, aims to capture its "contrasting moods" by juxtaposing accounts of life in the 1950s and the 1990s. Introducing his idyllic vision of the "good old days," Mooraj writes:

> Ethnic violence was unheard of, and public enemy number one was the bicycle thief, a close relative of the nocturnal burglar. The urban armed dacoit [robber], mercifully, had not yet appeared on the horizon. What a contrast to the roaring nineties where first information reports at police stations are simply littered with details of armed robbers forcibly taking away cars and motorcycles at gunpoint or robbing householders while holding women and children hostage.[110]

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[109] Byram Avari in discussion with the author, July 29, 2007.
[110] Mooraj, 357.

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The need to draw a sharp contrast between the past and present is similarly evident in

poet-turned-columnist Omar's prose. In a resonant column published when the Hotel

Metropole – former home of the Samar discotheque – closed its doors forever, he wrote:

> In the Karachi of the old days, the city of my youth, one often used to
> hear people whistling a jaunty tune as they cycled home at night. Many
> things in Karachi have changed since then, mostly for the worse. Which
> probably explains why nobody in Karachi whistles anymore...The
> carefree Karachi of that happy-whistler era has gone forever, lost in the
> mist of time. Today's Karachi is a beleaguered, angst-ridden city, where
> most urban problems seem bigger and more intractable than those in any
> other Pakistani city.[111]

Although Omar does not specifically name the city's ethnic conflicts, lawlessness, and

infrastructural collapse as the reasons for widespread angst and the demise of "carefree

Karachi," he chooses to describe the city in terms of a lack, as a city where nobody

whistles anymore. To the oppositions we have already encountered, he adds another: a

city of jaunty tunes against one of silence. Even though many would argue that today's

Karachi has indeed its own contemporary soundtrack – encompassing everything from

pop music to pistol shots – Omar's rhetoric is notable in its need to preserve the binary

and oppositional relationship between the city's past and its present.

In their need to silently produce the city's past in relation to the present,

Karachiites resemble the residents of Maurilia, one of the imagined cities that Calvino so

effectively conjures in *Invisible Cities*. Those who travel to Maurilia are invited to visit

the city and simultaneously to examine old postcards showing the city as it used to be.

Calvino writes:

> If the traveler does not wish to disappoint the inhabitants, he must praise
> the postcard city and prefer it to the present one, though he must be
> careful to contain his regret at the changes within definite limits:
> admitting that the magnificence and prosperity of the metropolis
> Maurilia, when compared to the old, provincial Maurilia, cannot

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[111] Kaleem Omar, "Nobody in Karachi whistles anymore," *The News*, June 18, 2006.

> compensate for a certain lost grace, which, however, can be appreciated
> only now in the old postcards, whereas before, when that provincial
> Maurilia was before one's eyes, one saw absolutely nothing graceful and
> would see it even less today, if Maurilia had remained unchanged; and in
> any case the metropolis has the added attraction that, through what it has
> become, one can look back with nostalgia at what it was.[112]

Much like the residents of Maurilia, nostalgic Karachiites prefer the "lost grace" of a

Karachi with a nightlife to the present city. And just as old, provincial Maurilia is made

attractive through comparison, Karachi is nostalgically revered for what it was only

through the lens of what it has become, the present creating the condition of possibility

for an imagined past of fullness and "grace" whose loss defines the reality of the present.

As a "different world" that was not violent – that knew knuckle-dusters rather than

Kalashnikovs, and that was populated by gentlemen rather than *goondas* (thugs) – pre-

1977 Karachi only comes into being by way of comparison with contemporary

Karachi.[113] This tactical nostalgia thus allows Karachiites to negotiate present-day

violence by inventing an alternative to it, producing a "different world" or "anti-text" into

which they can escape by going down memory lane. Like the citizens of Maurilia who

"saw absolutely nothing graceful" in their provincial town, Karachiites would have

remained oblivious to the charms of their city before 1977 had it not changed so

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[112] Calvino, 30.

[113] It might be tempting to read the contrast between pre- and post-1977 Karachi in light of present-day religious politics in Pakistan and assume that the distinction between safety and violence signals a West-East or secular-fundamentalist divide. It would, however, be more appropriate to think of the contrasting time periods in terms of cosmopolitanism and regionalism. The entertainment culture of pre-1977 Karachi, after all, is a clear legacy of Pakistan's colonial past, with parties and concerts unfolding in gymkhanas and gentlemen's clubs. The families of some of the Karachiites interviewed for this chapter would have had close ties with the British administration in the Indian subcontinent. Some of them would have been employed by the Indian Civil Service, others would have traveled to the UK to study at top universities in Cambridge, Oxford, or Edinburgh, and still others would have managed local franchises of British companies. Indeed, cosmopolitanism is the hallmark of those who interacted with or were subsumed by the British administration while regionalism defines those who distanced themselves from the colonialists. It is for this reason that Karachi's cosmopolitan class is socio-economically diverse: the British administration also employed servants, waiters, caterers, entertainers, chauffeurs, etc. whose children and grandchildren remain globally oriented. The current politics of this post-colonial legacy is not violent and one should be careful not to conflate present-day Karachi's myriad ethnic and political conflicts with its colonial history.

drastically thereafter. By acknowledging this fact through their nostalgia, they rationalize and utilize contemporary violence, thereby mitigating its effects, and limiting its psychological impact.

After speaking to nostalgic Karachiites, I, like many of my generation, find myself wooed by stories about "carefree Karachi," a city of lights and lovers. Despite wanting to maintain an academic distance between my subject and myself, I cannot help but imitate my interviewees and imagine the pre-1977 city in opposition to my contemporary experience of its nightlife. In my adolescence and early twenties, I inhabited a Karachi where aerial firing and shoot-outs marred many a private party; where even the children of the elite swig moonshine because it is the only kind of alcohol available; where young couples on dates dread approaching policemen for fear that they might be asked to present a marriage certificate or risk incarceration for having a pre-marital affair; where cassettes and CDs have always stood in for live music; and where high school proms are regularly canceled owing to bomb scares or the threat of being stormed by the rioting activists of political parties. No wonder then, that juxtaposing this assemblage of heard and second-hand memories with my own nighttime escapades gives rise to a "different world" that I yearn to inhabit, and for which I find myself vicariously nostalgic.

The pre-1977 Karachi that is produced by my interviewees is better conveyed through a photomontage or film than prose. If I were to cobble together the yellowed photographs, posters, advertisements, and above all, the recollections of that era, Karachi might look something like this: it's early evening in the mid-1960s, and Karachi is prepping to party. Young boys on their bicycles are weaving through Napier Road, the

red-light district, hoping to "gawk at the dancing girls" before rolling up to the Manhattan Soda Fountain to enjoy some Hangman's Blood, a popular purple-hued drink.[114] In Cincinnatus Town, Goan men can be seen serenading their sweethearts under balconies while across the city, young Parsi men dock their sailboats and settle down by the creek "to cool off in the sea breeze and down a bottle or two of Chianti."[115] At dinner time, young couples flock to Ampis or Talk of the Town to snack on burgers and samosas, ever envious of their peers who chose to splurge at Le Gourmet, Karachi's first French restaurant and a haven for fine steak. Once all manner of delicacies have been digested, Karachiites plan the rest of their evening. Will drinks be downed at Le Gourmet, where whiskey flows freely and the "wine list [bursts] with the best that Bordeaux, Burgundy, and the valley of Loire [have] to offer?"[116] Or will the evening kick off at the Nasreen Room, where Princess Ameena is expected to perform? Faces flush with excitement at the mention of the princess: rumor has it that the beautiful belly dancer is in fact Bobbi Berry, everyone's good friend from Karachi Grammar School. After reveling in the feats of Bobbi's undulating abdomen, the crowd migrates to the Samar discotheque at the rooftop of the Hotel Metropole. There, the crowd is swelling as the Black Jacks unleash their Discorbit Jolt, a new dance move that combines "a little jivin', a little rockin', a little twistin', and a whole lotta lovin'." Hours later, having twisted most of the night away, Karachi's pretty young things are not done having a good time. Young gents in a feisty mood head to one of the city's cabarets – the Oasis, Playboy, or Hotel Excelsior – to watch dancers from the "bawdy nightclubs of Istanbul and Beirut…shaking their

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[114] Mooraj, 360.
[115] Ibid, 335.
[116] Ibid, 335.

partially unclad bodies with exhausting twinkles."[117] Couples, meanwhile, drive along Hawk's Bay or Clifton Beach, enjoying the moonlight while holding hands.

Of course, such a grand night deserves an appropriate coda, and Karachiites are spoilt for choice. After all, pre-1977 Karachi is best remembered for its superb soundtrack: it's a city where music of all genres is welcome, as long as it's danceable. Jazz abounds at the Palace Cinema – where the roster of performers has included Benny Goodman, Dizzy Gillespie, Glenn Miller, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Dave Brubeck, and Connie Francis. A cosmopolitan cacophony can be heard at the Loco, an Anglo-Indian cultural center where local Goan-Christian musicians imitate the croons of Bing Crosby, the Latin beats of Don Azpiazu, and the hot jazz of Jelly Roll Morton. Meanwhile, rock and roll still rules at the 007, the Nasreen Room, and the Samar, where local Christian quartets faithfully deliver Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley covers. Even as hips continue to sway on packed floors and legendary guitarist Julius literally bites down on his guitar strings, the credits roll, and the film draws to a close.

2.2. Selecting Fragments

Returning to the "different world" of pre-1977 Karachi as evoked by my interviewees is helpful in revealing other tactical dimensions of their nostalgia. It becomes apparent that, in their memories, the dance floor serves as microcosm for the city. Tony, for example, describes a diverse and cosmopolitan Karachi by saying:

> Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Hindus all danced together. People from the interior and foreigners who wanted to see what Karachi was about would come to the clubs. And it wasn't like today when no one goes anywhere else in the city. Anybody could come to the parties: people from North

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[117] Ibid, 337.

Nazimabad came; people from Defence and Clifton came, and they all
met up at the cabaret.

Through references to North Nazimabad – a working class part of the city littered with

unplanned settlements – as well as the elite residential areas Defence and Clifton, Tony

suggests that socio-economic diversity complemented religious pluralism to make the

dance floor representative of the city as a whole.[118] This conflation makes the nightlife of

pre-1977 Karachi and the venues where the fun unfolded central to the urban experience

of that time at the expense of other locations, industries, issues, and processes of

urbanization. In other words, by focusing on the clubs and cabarets, Karachiites ensure

that they need not address anything that happened in the rest of the city. Nostalgia thus

tactically creates an urban imaginary that effaces violence. As de Certeau suggests,

"tactical trajectories…select fragments from the vast ensembles of production in order to

compose new stories with them."[119] So, too, in their production of the past, its residents

"select fragments" to tell a new story in which violence plays no part, thus inventing the

perfect "anti-text" to present-day Karachi.

None of the people I interviewed mentioned violent flare-ups that occurred in the

1950s and 1960s, thus maintaining the purity of the dichotomy opposing the safe Karachi

of the past to the violent now. Even as the dance floor symbolizes a utopian, multicultural

harmony, it ignores, for example, the sectarian fighting initiated by the Jamaat-e-Islami

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[118] Tony Casino's rhetoric of diversity is characteristic of cosmopolitans who, in the era before the
Islamization of Pakistan, were never suspicious of minorities and, in fact, valued the company of people
from different social classes, creeds, and countries. This cosmopolitanism, inherited from the British, also
fit well with General Ayub Khan's mandate to industrialize and modernize Pakistan in the 1960s, making it
a progressive and west-facing nation. The martial law regime under General Ziaul Haq between 1977 and
1988, however, took practical steps to make the nation more Islamic. These included the passing of
legislature that curtailed the rights of religious minorities and made them increasingly vulnerable under
strict blasphemy laws. Religious and ethnic minorities thus withdrew from the public sphere, making for a
more intolerant and divisive society.

[119] De Certeau, 35.

(JI), a religious political party, in the 1950s. To mobilize public support, members of the

JI declared that a small indigenous sect of Muslims, the Ahmadis, were not in fact

Muslims, but heretics. Brewing anti-Ahmadi sentiments then led to sporadic rioting

throughout the 1950s.[120] Subsequently, in 1964, when the Nasreen Room and 007 were at

the peak of their popularity, boasting lines out the door most weeknights, "bloody

clashes" erupted in various localities between the Pathan supporters of General Ayub

Khan – a military dictator eager to legitimate his six-year-long rule – and the *mohajir*

community, members of which resented the general's orchestrated success in widely

rigged elections that year.[121] The height of the disco era was also marred by rioting and

fatal clashes that are overlooked by most Karachiites. The early 1970s saw sustained

ethnic conflict between Sindhis and Mohajirs, exacerbated by the ascension to power of

Bhutto, a feudal Sindhi landlord.[122] Policy changes and shifting power dynamics initiated

by Bhutto unleashed simmering ethnic tensions and led to violent flare-ups in 1972 that

came to be known as the "language riots." That same year also saw fatal upheavals in

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[120] Shaheed, 196.

[121] Ibid, 198. In 1964, General Ayub Khan held a limited form of elections designed to maximize his chance of winning. Since this was the first chance for political parties to organize and oust a military dictatorship, they formed a coalition party the Combined Opposition Party. Shaheed explains that "in Karachi, the COP candidate, Fatima Jinnah, was staunchly supported by the numerically strong Muhajir (refugee) community (i.e. immigrants from India), whereas Ayub Khan, himself a Pathan, was widely supported by the Pathans. Fatima Jinnah lost the elections, generating frustration and disappointment amongst the opposition. Widespread allegations of rigging transformed this disappointment into anger. Since the targets of the anger, i.e. Ayub Khan and his family, were beyond the reach of the people, it turned against Ayub Khan's community, the Pathans. A victory march in Karachi led by [Ayub Khan's son] Gohar Ayub resulted in bloody clashes between Ayub's Pathan supporters and the poorer sections of the Mohajir community, which culminated in general attacks against all Pathans."

[122] Ibid, 199. Since the conflict between Sindhis and Mohajirs is far too complicated to document here, a summary will have to suffice. Sindhis resented the loss of their province's most valuable asset, Karachi, to *mohajirs*, immigrants from India who gravitated more towards the Urdu-speaking culture of their homeland than the Sindhi language or cultural heritage. The fact that the *mohajirs* had not tried to assimilate after their arrival in Pakistan and instead ousted their less-educated Sindhi hosts from much-needed jobs had long been a point of contention. When Bhutto came to power in 1971, he instituted quotas that differentiated between *mohajirs* and Sindhis, forcing them to compete for the same educational seats, job opportunities, and development benefits. These policies forced the tension between Sindhis and *mohajirs* into the public sphere and led to "language riots" throughout 1972.

Karachi's two major industrial areas SITE and Landhi-Korangi. Instead of being ethnically inflected, these upheavals occurred in the context of Pakistan's labor movement, which had been gaining momentum throughout the 1960s, Pakistan's infamous "decade of development."[123] In the first six months of 1972, periodic lockouts and encirclements of industrial units in Karachi's two major industrial zones led to heightened worker frustration. On June 7, 1972, the issue came to a head when over five thousand workers encircled the Feroz Sultan textile mill in SITE. Police arriving at the scene of the protest tear-gassed and fired on the crowd, leaving three dead and dozens injured. The next day, at the funeral of one of the workers, "mayhem" ensued again when a police-worker showdown culminated in a deadly "barrage of bullets."[124] SITE and Landhi-Korangi were paralyzed for days after the incident, as violent flare-ups prevented industrial units from functioning normally. Given the potential volatility of these ethnic and economic issues, it is no wonder that in his 1972 address to the nation, Bhutto felt the need to warn against "lawless behavior" and "*gherao*" and "*jelao*" (encirclement and burning) politics.

Tactical nostalgia not only eradicates all mention of street violence but goes so far as to ensure that all possible forms of violence are purged from the invention that is pre-1977 Karachi. For example, allusions to the exploitation and sexual abuse of women are romanticized so as not to taint the act of nostalgic production. Writing in *The Herald* in

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[123] Kamran Asdar Ali, "The Strength of the Street Meets the Strength of the State: The 1972 Labor Struggle in Karachi," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 37 (2005), 83-107. Ali explains that Pakistan's industrial boom in the 1960s ushered in an era of unprecedented growth in the wealth of major industrial houses. Throughout the decade, however, retrenchment and dismissals were employed as tools to discipline factory workers, who quickly organized into powerful unions and activist committees. In March 1963, the Mazdoor Rabita Committee (Workers' Coordinating Committee) organized the first major demonstration in SITE that channeled the frustration of the workers. Policemen were called in to fire on demonstrating laborers and several people were killed. Similar flare-ups occurred throughout the 1960s, culminating in the police-worker showdowns of 1972.
[124] Ibid, 91.

1989, Gregory Minissale celebrated the "mythical lineage" of Napier Road and regretted that the departure of a "once affluent clientele" has led to the "twilight of the nautch girls."[125] Commemorating the decline of the red-light district, Minnisale wrote:

> In the fifties and sixties, most areas of swinging Karachi had billiard halls, bars and cinema halls. The Napier Road area had five cinemas and numerous bars selling alcohol with billiard halls invariably attached. There was the Star Bar, the Delta Bar, the Mekran Bar, and the Seaman's bar, to mention only a few...The period of about thirty years from 1940-1970, was the heyday of the bohemian nautch girl scene, a nexus where the working classes brushed shoulders with the elite, where artists and poets drank themselves decadent over the best kind of *mujra*. Today, only traces are left of this dark elegance.[126]

By pointing out that Napier Road also houses cinemas and billiard halls, he normalizes the red-light district, casting it as an area of play rather than exploitation. He then romanticizes rampant prostitution as a "bohemian" activity, glamorous and intellectual, the indulgence of poets and artists. Finally, he celebrates the egalitarian culture of Napier Road, representing it as a place where social stratification becomes redundant. Of course, his account makes no mention of the skewed social, power, and gender dynamics that exist between dancing girls – that is, prostitutes – and their clients. This optimistic vision of Napier Road is not held by Minissale alone: Tony Casino remembers the district as "the most lively place at night, filled with song and dance"; Mooraj recalls biking down the road to gawk at the dancing girls; Furtado insists that some of the best music could be enjoyed at the *kothas* (brothels). The fact that Karachiites are telling a new story about Napier Road that is composed of well-chosen "fragments" becomes apparent when their words are compared with articles published during the heyday of Napier Road. For example, the January 1973 issue of *The Herald* documents Nasim Ahmed's first trip to Napier Road in 1948. Ahmed blatantly admits, "what I saw on Napier Road that winter

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[125] Gregory Minissale, "Twilight of the Nautch Girls," *The Herald*, August 1989, 93.
[126] Ibid, 99.

evening… was prostitution."[127] His account of gruff, ill-tempered men lining up outside

brothels, the aggression of pimps, and the silent detachment of women selling their

bodies on a cash-down basis does not evoke an era of "bohemian decadence" or "dark

elegance." Similarly, Hasan Shahriar's critical article about Karachi's nightlife, published

in 1972, strips 'nautch girls' of their mythic and romantic allure by naming them for what

they are: "strippers and whores, call girls and tramps, street walkers and swingers."[128] It

is only through the tactical selection of fragments that such unsavory details can be

"[leapt] over," thereby preserving a vision of a past Karachi that cleanly balances the

violent present.

Even a solitary instance that acknowledges violence in pre-1977 Karachi,

normalizes and familiarizes it, making it comic. Remembering the night in 1964 that Le

Gourmet closed its doors, Omar suddenly broke into wheezy laughter. After regaining his

composure, he narrated a story about a fight that erupted on the dance floor:

> Iqbal Butt – he was Mr. Pakistan that year, the top body builder – his
> missus went to the bathroom. On her way back, her sari got caught in
> Akram Sultan's chair [revealing her bosom]. Next thing we know, a free-
> for-all fight is in full swing. Everyone was taking swings at everyone,
> Humanyun Beg Mohammad was punching about; even his wife hit
> someone. Anwer Mooraj, Naazi, all of them; people were hitting each
> other on the head with jugs, the whole works. The hotel called the police
> and they carted everyone off to the *thana* [police station], which was a
> jolly good time.

Omar's anecdote mitigates violence on several levels. The comedic nature of the

altercation resembles a screwball comedy or cartoon, thereby undermining the violent

dimension of a club-wide brawl. The decision to mention specific people by name – even

when speaking to someone who would not recognize the individuals – makes the

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[127] Nasim Ahmed, "Any Time is a Good Time for a Good Time," *The Herald*, January 1973, 45.
[128] Hasan Shahriar, "When Karachi swings," *The Herald*, June 1972, 27. *The Herald* magazine was
launched in February 1972 and so documentation of and reflections on the city's nightlife in the 1960s is
not available.

perpetrators of violence seem familiar and thus less threatening. Highlighting the use of domestic items such as jugs in the place of 'real' weapons, meanwhile, renders the violence absurd rather than menacing. The sense that this act of violence is without consequence is further conveyed by Omar's description of temporary incarceration as a "jolly good time." No doubt, a dance floor punch-out bears little affinity with street violence, but Omar's anecdote nullifies violence even as it recounts it, thereby maintaining the "different world" of pre-1977 Karachi. By eradicating or undermining violence, Karachiites create an alternative or "anti-text" to present-day Karachi. More importantly, by "select[ing] fragments" through which to recall the past, they create the reassuring option of one day remembering present-day Karachi as a violence-free space. Indeed, nostalgia comes to have redemptive potential, showing that present-day violent Karachi, when produced through the "drifts" and "leaps" of memory, can be purged of violence and experienced much like the "different world" of the past.

2.3. Inauthentic Longings: Nostalgia as an Act of Reclamation

It is by now apparent that the 'production' of pre-1977 Karachi described here gives rise to a city that never existed in the first place. Whether by framing the city through the lens of a violent present or by selectively inventing a violence-free space, Karachiites use nostalgia to tell a story that was never penned in the past. According to Susan Stewart, this "sadness without an object" is the very condition of nostalgia. She writes:

> Nostalgia is… a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is
> inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it
> remains behind and before that experience. Nostalgia, like any form of
> narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except
> as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to

> reproduce itself as a felt lack. Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality.[129]

I have already suggested that the desire in Karachiites for the existence of the "utopia" ostensibly realized in a pre-1977 Karachi in fact fuels the invention of this no-place. But we can go further: nostalgic Karachiites face a bigger problem than the "threat" of an "inauthentic" past "[reproducing] itself as a felt lack," for Karachi itself – the city as concept, not merely in its nostalgic incarnation as the polar opposite of the present – was "always absent." To put it plainly, pre-1977 Karachi had no interest or investment in being Karachi; rather, it was a city that aspired to be all cities, or any city. In the absence of an authentic Karachi, a "place of origin" characterized by the "pure context of lived experience," Karachiites who commemorate their city are caught in a double bind: they must long for a city that never was as if it were a city that could have been. The challenge of their nostalgia ceases to be the need to "select fragments" from the "vast ensembles of production" to produce a new story. Instead, they must justify the use of those "vast ensembles of production" to invent a city that never had any intention of being at all.

This challenge stems from the fact that in the 1960s and 1970s, politicians, planners, and the residents of Karachi did not prioritize building a city with a unique urban identity that would promote a strong sense of urban ownership or identification. This is not to say that a vision for Karachi was not being articulated: in an ironic twist, Karachi was being conceptualized as a cosmopolitan city, a place other than itself. This notion of Karachi as a cosmopolis extends to the pre-Partition era, when the first airport in British India was constructed in Karachi in 1924. It was this detail – a sense of the

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[129] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, The Gigantic, the Souvenier, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 23.

city's global connectedness and accessibility – that Bhutto latched onto when he came to power. According to Arif Hasan:

> [Bhutto] saw Karachi as a cosmopolitan international city whose economic interests could be served if it could cater to the entertainment and business needs of the newly independent Gulf states. To this end, five-star hotels, cabarets, casinos, an active race-course, and similar activities were planned and some of these plans were executed.[130]

The success of Karachi's cosmopolitan imaginary is evident in the testimonies of Karachiites. Tony Casino and Advani both refer to Karachi as the "Beirut of Pakistan" while others I interviewed likened it to Dubai, Las Vegas, Bombay, Paris, and Rio de Janeiro. Many emphasized the cosmopolitanism of the streets, describing the center of the city as populated with Europeans, Arabs, and even African-Americans. These Karachiites seem to have had the sense that their city was interchangeable with any other global city. For example, Furtado, who tried to emigrate eastwards in the 1950s and spent several years bouncing between Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia said, "I came back to Karachi eventually, only to realize that it was like all those places, but better." Rafiq, who as a waiter has not had the opportunity to travel abroad, also shares the sense that pre-1977 Karachi could rival any foreign destination. While we were talking, he asked me if I lived in New York City: "if you had been alive then, you would have felt like Karachi was New York, and you wouldn't have wanted to leave." The pride that Karachiites took in the worldliness of their city is exemplified by Tony Casino, who claims that he wanted to participate in the creation of a cosmopolitan Karachi: "Mr. Bhutto wanted Karachi to be the Switzerland of Asia. By making the Hotel Excelsior world class and pitching the idea of a casino, I wanted to help him realize his vision."

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[130] Hasan, 30.

Since memories can change as easily as urban policies, Karachi's cosmopolitan

aspirations should not only be located in these recollections. Advertising from the mid-

1950s to the mid-1970s reveals similar trends: internationalism seemed to be the only

thing guaranteed to sell, with Karachiites wanting to experience the best that all cities had

to offer in the space of their hometown. No wonder then, the names of entertainment

venues – Lido, Imperial, Palace, Oasis, 007 – hearken beyond Pakistan to iconic

European venues and western popular culture.[131] Indeed, the ABC restaurant – with its

acronym standing for American, British, and Chinese – remained a favorite with

Karachiites until it closed its doors in 1979. More explicitly, advertising for the city's

nightlife truly fostered the notion of Karachi as a cosmopolitan chimera. One

advertisement published in the daily *Dawn* on December 15, 1959, promises:

> Glamour Galore Tonight at Beach Luxury Hotel. International Cabaret,
> Oriental Dances, and Sensational Shows by 4 Glamorous Beauties:
> Dazzling Diamond Sisters; Yasmin the World Famous Turkish Oriental
> Dancer; Lys Matthias the Great Dutch Dancer. Backed up by Los Latinos
> Orchestra. Excellent cuisine by our popular French Chef.

The Orient, Turkey, Holland, the Latin World and France: one evening thus offered

Karachiites a whirlwind global tour. A similar advertisement placed by Le Gourmet in

June 1964 describes the performer Rita Berna as "the sensation from Greece, star of 'Sex

Appeal' Paris, in Egyptian, Oriental, and Cuban dances, dancing to the music of The 5

Pellicani, Europe's most popular orchestra with stereophonic sound." Several years later,

the allure of all things international had not subsided. A 1971 show at the Hotel Excelsior

– the "House of Selected International Artistes" – boasted the appearances of "Jones and

Liana (Miss Greece)" along with "The Bomb Busters: The American International

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[131] This is yet another manifestation of the cosmopolitanism and west-facing tendencies of Pakistanis whose families had aligned with the British administration in the subcontinent, and were thus well-traveled and attuned to western trends.

Attraction of Radio and Telelvsion and The Stars of the Sullivan Show" in "two programs totaling over one hour." The Bomb Busters were to be accompanied by "Rosella Giacotto at the mike" and "Gianni Spadacini and his stereophonic sound Italian Orchestra." The fact that these advertisements highlight performers' mastery of several kinds of dance suggests that adaptability – the ability to be equally at ease in different cultures – was thought to be attractive by cosmopolitan Karachiites before 1977. Just as Karachiites in the present would prefer to inhabit a city of the past, Karachiites before 1977 seemingly desired to inhabit nothing less than the world: instead of their memories, they used cosmopolitan stage performances as a conduit to places other than their own.

The cosmopolitan urge of past Karachi presents a problem for those hoping to use nostalgia as a way to validate another version of Karachi, one that counters its current incarnation. To understand how Karachiites navigate this conundrum, we must first return to Calvino's Maurilia and learn more about its residents' approach to their city's past and present. After pointing out that Maurilia's residents prefer their "postcard city," Calvino warns:

> Beware of saying to them that sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves…It is pointless to ask whether the new ones are better or worse than the old, since there is no connection between them, just as the old postcards do not depict Maurilia as it was, but a different city, which, by chance, was called Maurilia, like this one.[132]

Despite earlier comparisons, it seems Karachiites are unlike the inhabitants of Maurilia in one respect: they are quick to distinguish between pre- and post-1977 Karachi, arguing that the two are indeed "different cities" that have "follow[ed] one another on the same site…without communication among themselves." This distinction allows Karachiites to

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[132] Calvino, 30.

present themselves with a choice. They then posit that pre-1977 Karachi – the city that

had not claimed its identity as such – is the more authentic and valid, the place truly

signified by the signifier 'Karachi'. This sense is best articulated by Advani when he

says, "Karachi *is* a peaceful city, really. It's a city of freedom, lights, it's not meant to be

a city of guns." His words imply that present-day, violent Karachi is a place other than

the Karachi he knows, which is a "peaceful city." The notion that Karachi then and now

are "different cities" is even more apparent in Advani's desire to return to pre-1977

Karachi:

> I wish we could take it back, just for one day a year, to before things
> really failed and went upside down. I wish we could return for a bit.
> There's such a sense of nostalgia for those who passed through it, they
> should get to go back. For those who haven't seen that Karachi, they
> should see it just once.

Advani's words set up the Karachi of yesteryear as another place, a foreign, exotic,

distant locale that is worth visiting. Indeed, his words imply that one version of Karachi –

a city that remains 'right side up' – continues to exist somewhere apart from present-day

Karachi. This spatial and temporal schism is echoed by Furtado who believes, "the city

has stopped dancing. Everyone misses those days; things were different then. It was a

different place. I don't recognize this Karachi." Even Akbar Khan, the manager of the

Nasreen Room between 1969 and 1977 distinguishes between two "different" Karachis.

Grumpy and officious, perpetually clad in an immaculate dinner jacket, Khan dismissed

my question about whether he enjoyed working at the nightclub:

> What can I tell you about that job. You won't know what I'm talking
> about. You're too young. You can't understand. You weren't there and
> that world doesn't exist anymore. You can't know, since you're seeing a
> mad person's version of the city I used to know.[133]

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[133] Akbar Khan in discussion with the author, January 8, 2008.

Khan's description of present-day Karachi as a "mad person's version" of a city implies that it is a warped imagining following no 'sane' norms, rather than a real place. For his part, Tony Casino makes the club and the city interchangeable through slippery rhetoric, thereby reinforcing the idea that Karachi no longer exists. He delights in the memory of organizing a private cabaret show for the Shah of Iran, who visited Zulfiqar Bhutto in the latter's tribal village of Larkana. "The shah really wanted to see Karachi," explains Tony, "but he had to remain with Mr. Bhutto. So Mr. Bhutto told the shah that he would organize to have Karachi come to Larkana. Next thing I know, I'm loading a truck with a bar, dancers, performers – the works." By equating the cabaret and the city, Tony implies that the closure of the nightclubs was equivalent to the closure and conclusion of *the* city, Karachi as it existed before 1977.

As de Certeau puts it, "the space of the tactic is the space of the *other*": the deployment of tactics enables the creation of new, *other* spaces or "different worlds." Suggesting that the *other* Karachi reflects the city's true nature – the sane person's, 'right side up' version – allows Karachiites to distance themselves from the violent realities of present-day Karachi. By speaking of the city that they inhabit in terms of what it used to be, they can reject or undermine what it has become: present-day Karachi is thus negated and negotiated, made to seem less real, an accidental deviation from the norm, a sociological and geographical anomaly that has occurred in the space of an otherwise vibrant City of Lights. Through their (re-)invention and reification of the past, then, tactical Karachiites create an *other* city, one that is repeatedly described as "swinging," safe, diverse, cosmopolitan, tolerant, and fun. Present-day Karachi, on the other hand, is

reduced to a separate space of fear and violence, intolerance and instability, yet one that can be transcended through the "drift" of memory.

Ultimately, though, nostalgia enables two Karachis that can neither be separated nor reconciled, each the obverse of the other, the one providing respite from the other even while being produced in relation to it. But perhaps this duplicity of Karachi will cease to matter in the space of its streets, where each tactic creates not only another city, but also a different world. Indeed, in the next chapter, we will see how alterations of "unlimited diversity" enable new urban possibilities that celebrate rather than coalesce the inherent multiplicity of urbanity. These pluralistic tactical cities, I will argue, privilege mobility as a means to effacing or mitigating street violence. In keeping with the spirit of the following pages, then, we too shall move through this thesis: from the interior of the nightclub, we will transfer to the interior of a car, a space of automotive limbo where we are outside, navigating the city's streets, even while remaining inside. From there, in the final chapter, we will continue moving into the public realm of the blogosphere, an online – albeit disembodied – 'exterior'. This spatial and temporal movement, from the interior of the nightclub to the liminal space of the vehicle in traffic and on to the exterior blog post, from the past into the present and ultimately towards the future, should help spur yet other imaginaries of the city, imaginaries that in their multiplicity can begin to match the plurality of tactics that we shall now discern in the streets of Karachi.

3. Tacticians and Traffic Jams: The City Becomes A "Different World"

It took me almost eight years to learn how to drive a car. Given that I'm incapable of staying in one place for very long, and that Karachi's public transport is forbidding – to say the least – that should seem like an inordinately long time. Allow me to explain: while I was learning how to slide from third to first gear with one masterful flick of the wrist, preparing to conquer the city in my *sans*-silencer 1984 Diahatsu Charmant, Karachi seemed intent on showing me the myriad *other* ways in which its streets could be used.

On the last day of a rather pointless driving course – my instructor wore a *niqab*, a face-covering veil, and so had no peripheral vision – I took a right turn onto the egregiously named Sunset Boulevard, and found myself marooned in a sea of orange. A herd of foam-at-mouth, cart-toting donkeys – their hides aflame after being dyed with henna – were barreling towards my car, their brays so frenzied that the hysteria of the racing donkey-cart riders was almost drowned out. Startled and disoriented, I yanked on the hand brake and refused to turn the ignition on until my father came to rescue me.

A few months later, just shy of my seventeenth birthday, I found myself stranded amongst a similarly crazed crowd. Returning from the beach, my sister and I were caught in a terrible traffic jam. The residents of a nearby locality who had been deprived of electricity for over a week were protesting by throwing rocks at and torching passing cars. Rather than risk an attack, I, like everyone else on the road, turned off the car, rolled down my window, and prepared for the long evening ahead by making a mental list of the closest restrooms fit for use. Within minutes, over one hundred young men poured out of the buses and trolleys around us and transformed the jammed street into a dance floor: their rendition of the traditional *bhangra* had us mesmerized for the hours we were

trapped on the road. Indeed, over the years I have seen all manner of young men leap off buses, rickshaws, and water tanks that have been brought to a standstill by the dictates of a red light or a riot. On hitting the asphalt, they break into the slow, rhythmic pulsing that distinguishes the *bhangra* from other folk dances. Occasionally, they'll dance to garish pop tunes blaring out of radio transmitters in the cabs of trucks. For the most part, though, their movements will unfold amidst ritualistic silence, the familiar flailing of the arms and steady snapping of the fingers performed in a trance to music heard only by the dancers. Their expressions remain solemn, their movements determined, as if there was something tangible to be gained by taking the opportunity to dance while stuck in traffic.

More recently, in 2005, while reporting on the evolving local gang war, I braved a drive through the urban slum Lyari. As luck would have it, that being one of the few days that I did not avail of the chauffeur-driven van provided by my newspaper, I found myself caught in the midst of an armed showdown. I ducked into the small shack of a community activist named Shakil, whom I had previously interviewed, and spent 25 minutes crouched on the floor while shots rang out around us. When an eerie silence descended, indicating that the fight was over, I rushed outside, hoping to hop into my car and speed away, only to find that it was trapped behind a water tanker and several other cars that had similarly pulled into the side alley to avoid being caught in the crossfire. I knew I was stranded in the area until the drivers of all the vehicles returned, and was about to start panicking when I saw the hand-painted illustration on the back of the water tanker: in hues of sky blue, gold, and ivory, the images of Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio as the characters Rose and Jack from *Titanic* smiled down on me. The likenesses were impressive, except that the local artist who had adorned the tanker had

chosen to make Hollywood's dream team a little more *desi*,[134] a little more familiar.

Winslet was now equipped with a nose ring, gold hoop earrings, and dark, dramatic eyes.

DiCaprio, for his part, was now sporting a pencil-thin mustache that recalled Errol Flynn

rather than any Lollywood lothario.[135] The incongruity of the homage to Hollywood in

the midst of a gang war-torn neighborhood and the absurdity of the images had me

hysterical with laughter. Suddenly, I was less afraid, and happy to wait on the boot of my

car for the water tanker driver to return and move his vehicle out of my way.

These are only some of the everyday sights, sounds, and practices that I have

encountered on Karachi's streets that make driving seem like an impossibility. I

remember complaining to my father that the roads were unpredictable and the images one

saw in advertisements and on vehicles too distracting, that Karachiites could not be

trusted to get out of the way of my moving vehicle, that I could not trust myself to drive

faster than 30 kilometers per hour for fear of colliding with a dashing donkey or a

twirling teenager. He would laugh and tell me that these were the attributes, rather than

the anomalies, of Karachi's streets and that I would have to learn how to drive around

and beside them, or brave the local mini-bus.

In this chapter, I would like to argue that these practices – the attributes of the

city's streets – can be read as tactics deployed against prevalent street violence. De

Certeau suggests that the very act of walking through a city allows pedestrians to alter

and appropriate space: walkers "follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write

without being able to read it...[making] use of spaces that cannot be seen."[136] The

"manifold story" they write "has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of

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[134] *Desi* literally means 'of the land' and is used to refer to South Asians.

[135] Lollywood is the Pakistani film industry, so called because it is based in Lahore.

[136] De Certeau, 92.

trajectories and alterations of space."[137] Everyday practices such as walking – that cannot

be discerned or consciously articulated – enable individuals to reinterpret the material

organization of cities and to create dynamic alternatives by means of their trajectories.

Since movements of walkers are understood as being different from (if in response to) the

physical, theoretical, and institutional space of architects, planners, governments, and

other ordering institutions – such as street gangs that mark out urban territory – walking

and driving may be reconceived as tactics through which to negotiate pervasive street

violence. Empowering the pedestrian's every move, de Certeau adds:

> Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc. the
> trajectories it speaks. All the modalities sing a part in this chorus,
> changing from step to step, stepping through in proportions, sequences
> and intensities which vary according to the time, the path taken and the
> walker. The enunciatory operations are of an unlimited diversity.[138]

In this chapter, I too consider the "unlimited diversity" of tactical enactments – driving,

consuming images, racing, playing cricket, and filming the city – that make the streets

sites of enunciation rather than violence. The "chorus" begins to approach cacophony as

some tactics efface violence while others embrace it, some privileging the appropriation

and alteration of the space, others relying on aestheticization.

In addition, I will show how the tactics deployed by the city's residents enable

different *mobilities*: escapes into different realms, new mappings through movement, a

quickening of motion. Indeed, some of the tactics described here privilege mobility at all

costs: in Karachi's case, after all, the tactical impetus of such movement is more resonant

because, on a literal level, it is the very mobility of the average Karachiite that is

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[137] Ibid, 93.
[138] Ibid, 99.

inhibited in violent times. Other tactics, meanwhile, unfold in the midst of traffic jams, adding new dimensions to stasis and thereby reclaiming the moment of standing still.

Of course, this is not a comprehensive list of the tactics that unfold on the city's streets: I make no mention of the subversive verses adorned on rickshaws, graffiti, the panorama created by outdoor advertising, the hustle around roadside stalls, the antics of hitchhikers, and innumerable other media forms and practices that could be read as a response to violence. But even the few tactics that I do highlight here begin to reveal the limits of de Certeau's theoretical framework, at least as applied to a city as complex and multifaceted as Karachi. We will see how the simple binary opposition of strategy to tactic is muddied on the city's streets: tactics overlap or contradict each other; they are deployed in one moment against several different "dominant orders"; a tactic enacted from one location might enable different kinds of mobilities. Thus, not only is the "chorus" of tactics diverse, but each tactic in itself also has multiple means and ends.

The destabilization of de Certeau's model is also apparent in the ironic yet empowering reversal that occurs on the streets of Karachi. Tactics do not undermine the "ways of using" imposed by the "dominant order" because they are deployed amidst the illegible built environment and disorder of urban sprawl. Instead, they allow the city's residents to inhabit a *proper* space even as they appropriate and alter the official realm of the city government and its planners. After all, by making sense of the city through their movements, remapping its streets to create their own order, and inhabiting it in functional and productive ways, Karachiites become the temporary planners of their unplanned city: tactics begin to occupy the space of strategy. But before we can begin to consider how driving and appropriating the streets can be understood as tactical attempts on the part of

Karachiites to negotiate and produce a city concretely in relation to a violent reality as well as an urban imaginary of violence, we need to consider the violent reality of the street.

3.1 Streets of Fire

In Karachi, urban violence and traffic have long been correlative. No doubt, in most cities, violence is regularly enacted on the street – one need only think of the proverbial getaway car – but in Karachi, socio-economic and ethnic conflict have concretized the connection between violence and traffic. Indeed, the first citywide incident of rioting and lawlessness in Karachi was sparked by a traffic accident, and its aftermath clearly established the enduring links between violence, traffic, and ethnic conflict. On April 15, 1985, a Pathan[139] minibus driver hit a vehicle and then ploughed into a group of students from Sir Syed College, killing Bushra Zaidi, a *mohajir* (migrant). In the following days, violence erupted throughout the city, especially in Liaquatabad and Orangi, two of the city's most ethnically divided regions. *Mohajirs* and Punjabis went on a rampage, setting buses and minibuses on fire. On the day of Zaidi's funeral, Pathans retaliated by attacking a bus carrying *mohajir* students. The fact that it took days for the fighting to simmer down established Karachi's reputation as a volatile and violent city.

This incident has long been read as the first major showdown between Karachi's *mohajir* and Pathan populations. However, the fact that this confrontation took the overt and tangible form of attacks on vehicles suggests that ethnic and socio-economic differences collide here with the city's politics of public transportation. As Akmal

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[139] Pathans are Pashto-speakers native to Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province. Many Pathan men migrate to Karachi to seek employment and supplement their household's income.

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Hussain has argued, Karachi's communities were vulnerable to being manipulated into ethnic conflict because of the city's transport problems. For decades, the minibus and bus system in Karachi has been privately owned and operated by Pathans. The existing ownership structures, as detailed by Hussain, put individual drivers under extreme financial pressure.[140] As a result, they overload minibuses with passengers and drive recklessly at "breakneck speed to reach the next bus stop before [their] competitors to pick up passengers." The resulting "manslaughter on the roads, combined with humiliation suffered by passengers, has caused acute resentment amongst the public...There is usually a spontaneous riot following an accident on a busy road. The Pathan driver is often killed by the mob and the minibus set on fire."[141] Farida Shaheed in turn emphasizes how "the predominance of Pathans in the transport business...and frequent accidents [have] amplified into a veritable nightmare in the sprawling city of Karachi."[142] In other words, Karachi's street violence can be reconfigured as a conflict between transport users and transporters, a divide that can be ethnically mapped as a conflict between *mohajirs* and Pathans. No wonder then, traffic accidents in the mid- to late-1980s served to fuel Pathan-*mohajir* tension and consolidate Karachi's image as a city of violence.

Interestingly, the burning bus has itself since been adopted as a violent motif. Labor unions, the student wings of political parties, utilities-deprived apartment dwellers, and even policemen have torched vehicles to mark anger, aggression, frustration, and

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[140] Akmal Hussain, "The Karachi Riots of December 1986: Crisis of State and Civil Society in Pakistan," *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 188. "The big owners who buy fleets of minibuses then lease them out at high rates to individual drivers who are poorer members of the Pathan community. The driver pays the lease in installments and is under heavy pressure to make money quickly," explains Hussain.

[141] Ibid, 189.

[142] Shaheed, 204.

territorial supremacy. In 2007 alone, vehicles became the targets in a wide range of conflicts with very different causes and origins. Buses and trucks burned in the slum of Lyari both as a consequence of and as a protest against persistent, gang-related violence. On May 12, citywide riots and indiscriminate incidents of firing – the simultaneous fallout of anti-government protests and a clash between Karachi's different political parties – were punctuated by burning tires and vehicles. In June, a severe shortage of electricity provoked agitated demonstrations throughout the city, many of which resulted in the torching of maintenance vehicles and private cars. These incidents culminated in the torching of 1800 vehicles on the night that Benazir Bhutto was assassinated—a combined expression of political protest, grief, frustration at endless traffic jams that paralyzed the city immediately after the news broke, and general criminality and lawlessness. The charred remains of an auto body have come to symbolize Karachi's proclivity for urban violence, whether it be spurred by an ethnic conflict, a rejection of the state apparatus, or an act of resistance against the institutionalized violence of gangs and urban militias. Appropriately, though, the multiplicity of violence(s) that leads to the burning of the bus is responded to through an equivalent multiplicity of tactics.

Indeed, a variety of tactics must be deployed because the symbolic value of a burnt bus is bolstered by real-world logistics. Scorched vehicles abandoned on the city's street obstruct the flow of traffic through Karachi, often bringing it to a standstill and disrupting economic and other everyday activities. In the context of riots, vehicles are often torched to block traffic, making it easier for rioters and looters to rob the unfortunate drivers of jammed cars. As in many other cities, Karachi's streets are recognizably the sites of criminality, public protest, and territorial feuding. Indeed,

statistics apart, the Capital City Police Office's method of cataloging street turmoil provides an effective gauge of the interconnectedness of the street and violence. The CCPO's roster of violence includes rioting, assault on police, kidnapping, dacoity (armed robbery, or armed assault with intent to rob), robbery, vehicle theft, and accidents. The fact that the list distinguishes between kidnapping, kidnapping for ransom, and child lifting; between vehicle theft and vehicle snatching; between dacoities and robberies; and further, between dacoities that occur on the highway and dacoities that occur at petrol pumps shows street violence as rampant, multifaceted, and excessive.[143]

Perhaps owing to this nexus between traffic and violence, Karachi's City District Government is agonizing over its "systemic failure to provide a sustainable transport system."[144] In the Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020, the "rational[ization], modern[ization], and expansion" of the city's transport infrastructure have been prioritized. Indeed, an improved transport system is pitched as a guarantor to help make Karachi "a world class city with *a decent life* for Karachiites." Interestingly, in a document that makes no explicit mention of the city's ongoing struggle with violence, the need for "increased mobility alternatives" is described thus: "The city needs to place importance upon *safe* and efficient movement of vehicle and pedestrian traffic, and to provide affordable, *safer*, faster, more comfortable and efficient transportation alternatives."[145] Implicitly, then, the city's streets are perceived both as the site of

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[143] Capital City Police Karachi, "Comparative Statement Showing Cognizable Cases Reported During the Period from 01-01-2007 to 15-12-2007," *The News*, January 11, 2008.

[144] Kaimkhani, 16.

[145] Ibid, 70. While western readers might connect this idea of safety with better road safety and the reduction of the accident severity rate, Karachiites understand the use of "safe" here to include safety from crime and violence. As the Executive District Officer of the city government's Master Plan division Iftikhar Khani said in a discussion with the author on January 5, 2008, "first people have to not be scared of getting killed or blown up on the streets, then we can begin to worry about pedestrian crossings and bus stops."

violence, and the antidote to it: better movement through the city, it is believed, might counter or compensate for the urban paralysis that occurs during violent flare-ups.

As the state tries to rationalize and modernize Karachi's transport infrastructure in response to both the reality and urban imaginary of violence, what everyday practices do Karachiites deploy to navigate these streets of fire? After all, traffic – the pluralistic cacophony of private and public transport systems – is the one urban phenomenon that all Karachiites necessarily share. In a single day, 24.2 million trips are taken through the city, 60 percent on so-called public transport, including buses and minibuses; 20 percent via 'paratransit', which includes private cars, motorcycles, taxis, rickshaws, and donkey carts; and 20 percent on foot.[146] How do Karachiites on the go accommodate themselves to the fact that their very means of movement are, aptly enough, the mobile battlefields of Karachi's mutable and ever evolving battles? How do they create a dynamic city, a city of flows and progress, in opposition to the static failure of monuments, the built environment, the misconceptions of urban planners, and the paralysis of a city besieged by violence? Is movement really the answer, the apt inversion of the non-mobility of a burning bus or a city under siege? And how do multiple tactics begin to work together? Let us consider some everyday street practices of Karachiites in the hope of addressing these questions.

3.2 The Great Escape: Mythological Topographies and Mediaspaces

De Certeau argues that the tactician transforms the act of walking into a "process of appropriation of the topographical system," converting the street into a "space of

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[146] Kaimkhani, 13.

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enunciation."[147] Thus, walking or driving in a social space allows for the creation of new spaces and enables "a *migrational* or metaphorical city [to slip] into the clear text of the planned and readable city."[148] I want to argue here that the variety of mobile, metaphorical, and mediated tactics visible in Karachi need to be understood in relation to the street violence described above. Through tactical everyday practices, Karachiites create spaces that are symbolically free of violence. Much like Benjamin's Paris, then, my Karachi has a mythological topography. This topography is the perfect union of myth and metaphor and, as de Certeau promises, allows Karachi's tacticians to migrate beyond violent streets. The creation and consumption of Karachi's mythological topography can be read as a tactic through which the city's residents efface violence through the everyday practice of driving. How does this mythological topography come to be? De Certeau says of walking that the very act of movement through an urban space creates "alterations of space," that is, other, infinite possibilities. As he puts it:

> To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and
> in search of a proper. The moving about that the city multiplies and
> concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of
> lacking a place – an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into
> countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for
> by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine
> and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be,
> ultimately, the place but is only a name, the City. The identity furnished
> by this place is... a network of residences temporarily appropriated by
> pedestrian traffic, a shuffling among pretenses of the proper, a universe
> of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-of places.[149]

What de Certeau says of walking is equally applicable to driving. When in motion, then, Karachiites create a multitude of urban possibilities that are temporary, "nowhere," and "dreamed-of," yet together comprise a version of what the city can become. Moments of

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[147] De Certeau, 98.
[148] Ibid, 93.
[149] Ibid, 103.

exodus and deportation – detours, shortcuts, the losing of one's way, a drive without a

destination – allow Karachi's drivers simultaneously to appropriate the topographical

system of de Certeau's pedestrians as well as enter into "dreamed-of places" that

comprise the city's mythological topography.

Drawing on de Certeau and Benjamin, I want to argue that Karachi's

mythological topography develops in part via the 'mediaspaces' created through the act

of driving. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy have defined mediaspace as a "dialectical

concept, encompassing both the kinds of spaces created by media, and the effects that

existing spatial arrangements have on media forms as they materialize in everyday

life."[150] They suggest that media forms – which include artifacts, discourses, and

practices – and social processes are "allied [phenomena]" because media forms "shape

and are shaped by social space." In this sense, media forms interact with material places

and the social processes that unfold within them to create new "cultural visions of a

physical space," or mythological topographies and "dreamed-of places." These media

forms can also help tacticians reappropriate space by liberating them from the material

constraints of mobility and temporality. To put it another way, the process of driving

through Karachi enables the creation and consumption of a violence-free mediaspace

composed of different media forms, which together comprise the city's mythological

topography.

The media form that most vivaciously informs Karachi's mythological

topography is the indigenous art that adorns its trucks, tankers, and buses, and is

commonly referred to as truck art. The heavy vehicles that plod through the city streets

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[150] Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy, "Orientations: mapping MediaSpace," *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, eds. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

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have been described as brides, circuses, exotic flowers, princesses, and palaces. They are

rainbows in motion, iridescent and irrepressible, and thus dominate most non-violent

accounts of the city. The entries about Karachi on VirtualTourist.com, for example, are

flush with descriptions of local buses and trucks. As one tourist puts it: "Karachi's public

transport buses are easily recognizable with their reflective tape, colorful paint

decorations of birds and flowers, flashing lights, different loud melodious horns and loud

music – it's a celebration on wheels."[151] Many would say this description is a sorry

understatement.

Indeed, the images splashed across Karachi's buses map nothing less than

mythological terrain and explicitly represent the "dreamed-of places" that de Certeau sees

emerging through the process of tactical movement. In *Art on Wheels*, Renata von Oppen

emphasizes this dream-like quality of truck art, explaining that the painters of transport

vehicles have a "vivid sense of beauty and art" and "perform their work incredibly

skillfully in a naïve style, using their imagination and inspiration to create fantasies and

dreams whose colors and embellishments are deeply rooted in Pakistan's rich

folklore."[152] Much like a dreamscape, the imagery of truck art is excessive and assembled

in the form of collage. Each vehicle is awash with fantastic images: not an inch of space

is left unadorned, not even on hubcaps nor fuel containers. Richard Covington describes

how each panel of a truck or bus is infused with "*dreamlike* scenes of wooded lakes and

snow-capped mountains, alpine hunting lodges, and tigers chasing deer that are framed

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[151] JessH, comment on "Local Transport: Unmistakeable: The Karachi Bus Experience," Virtual Tourist, comment posted on May 17, 2007, http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/Pakistan/Sind/Karachi-1311845/Transportation-Karachi-Local_Transport-BR-1.html#0.
[152] Renata von Oppen, *Art on Wheels* (Lahore: Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd., 1992), 10.

by flowers and diamond-shaped reflective strips in bright red, orange and green."[153] Red

roses, kissing peacocks and pigeons, disembodied lips, and the bedroom eyes of

mysterious veiled women also find their way into truck art imaginings. The artistic vision

spills beyond the front and side panels of trucks and buses, as chains of hammered steel

leaves and steel balls dangle around the chassis while beadwork eagles and shimmering

gilt peacocks glint off side- and rear-view mirrors. What the trucks tell, then, is a

"manifold story" composed of "fragments and alterations of space" that, much like the

walk of de Certeau's pedestrian, is a tactic deployed against urban space.

Further, truck art literally allows a "*migrational* and metaphorical city" to exist

within the space of the physical city by transporting drivers who gaze upon the images to

other worlds and other times. De Certeau suggests that everyday signifying practices can

"invent spaces…within the structured space of the text [that is the city], thus [producing]

anti-texts, effects of dissimulation and escape, possibilities of moving into other

landscapes."[154] The metaphorical worlds portrayed on trucks and buses provide just such

an "escape" from Karachi's brutal streets and serve an entry point into a "dreamed-of

place" and "other landscapes" that are persistently free of violence.

Paradisiacal landscapes with snow-covered peaks, perennially flowering gardens,

gushing waterfalls, and suns that never set serve as a welcome counterpoint to the city's

drab streets, accented only by the rust-orange stains of dried blood or expectorated betel

juice. Drivers glimpsing images off trucks indulge in a guilty tourism as they are whisked

off to faraway places where the upturned eaves of an East Asian home are reflected in an

impossibly blue lake or canoes rest on the shore of a tropical island littered with palm

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[153] Richard Covington, "Masterpieces To Go: The Trucks of Pakistan," *Saudi Aramco World*, March/April 2005, 9.
[154] De Certeau, 107.

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trees that dance in the breeze. In clever moments of meta-textuality, an adorned bus or truck is barely visible in the background of these imagined realms: in that instance, the fantasy is complete—it is as if the process of driving through Karachi has opened up the possibility of shifting to another space, the tropical destinations and various Never-Never-Lands depicted on the vehicles themselves. Indeed, mobility itself is reconfigured as a form of artistic expression as the panels of many trucks and buses boast many-hued images of trains winding through mountain passes, ships adrift on calm seas, and aircrafts gliding through cloud-speckled skies.

In addition to "other landscapes," truck art also transports drivers to mythological worlds, spiritual realms, and ancient civilizations. A popular icon that is repeatedly painted on Karachi's heavy vehicles is the *buraq*, a winged horse with the head of a beautiful woman that the verse of Sufi poets claims transported the Prophet Muhammad on his mystical journey to Heaven. When this image enters the tactician's mediaspace, he or she is figuratively saved from the city's streets of fire and delivered to the redeeming realm of Paradise. Other panoramas that inspire strength or promise escape show Hercules subduing a lion and an eagle with two sets of wings flying high above a cityscape, possibly Karachi. Religious sites such as the Ka'aba in Mecca and the famous Faisal Mosque in Islamabad are painted on trucks, reminding Karachiiites of the spiritual salvation that lies beyond the violence of the streets. Drivers crafting a mediaspace as they move through the city are also temporally liberated, as they can visit the melancholy emperor Shah Jehan at the Taj Mahal as it glints on a moonlit night or a procession winding through Harappa at the time of the Indus Valley Civilization. In fact, many have observed how the decorations that proliferate in the cabs of trucks and around the

windshields of buses are throwbacks to the refined ornamentation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mughal courts: mirror mosaics, fringed silk, and the arabesque inlays carved on wooden cab doors evoke the *sheesh mahals* or mirror palaces ensconced within the forts of Lahore, Jaipur, and Agra. As such, multiple mobilities are engaged in deploying this tactic: as the driver moves through traffic consuming truck art, the art itself is always in motion for other viewers. And through these images are constituted metaphorical movements through space and time, into and within these "other landscapes."

The temporal escapism of truck art in Karachi is an unlikely endpoint for what began as an exaggerated form of advertising for privately owned vehicles during the 1970s, when the city was just beginning to struggle with politically motivated student violence and increased gang activity. While we cannot determine whether truck art has evolved as a direct response to urban violence, one irony is surely apparent: the very trappings that are meant to make trucks and buses attractive to potential customers also draw the unwanted attentions of gasoline-spraying, match-tossing rioters and looters. Until decorated trucks and buses are torched and reduced to a blackened frame, however, they contribute an array of imagery that helps constitute Karachi's mythological topography, carving a mediaspace that effaces violence by enabling escape and migration to imagined realms symbolically free of violence.

3.3. The Soundtrack of Safety

Sounds follow sight: Karachi's mythological topography is both spectacular and sonic as the visual mediaspace of truck art complements the aural component of FM radio

broadcasts.[155] The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) prevents

all FM radio stations – whether state- or privately-owned – from broadcasting news or

any time-bound content with political implications.[156] As a result, no matter what is

unfolding on the streets of Karachi, the city's airwaves are alight with the hummable

ditties descended from Pakistani folk music, danceable tracks popularized at raves across

Europe, world music, Bollywood-inspired disco beats, and the catchy guitar chords of

pop hits. Simply put, FM radio broadcasts respond to violence by never acknowledging

it; their effacing of violence expressing, paradoxically, the closeness of their relation to it.

During violent flare-ups, broadcasts become "anti-texts" that allow Karachiites to

"escape" into other soundscapes. As Caroline Bassett puts it, "the prioritization of the

auditory space is above all a means by which users re-aestheticize their everyday

experience of urban space as a whole."[157] In the creation and consumption of a violence-

free audioscape, we begin to see the destabilization of de Certeau's theoretical

framework. Tactics are meant to be deployed against strategies, the working of the state.

Here, however, the state enacts a strategy against street violence by prohibiting its

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[155] There are nine privately-owned FM radio stations currently operational in Karachi. These were launched between 2002 and 2005, once the government privatized the airwaves and began granting licenses to broadcast. For the purposes of this thesis, the practices and programming of three FM radio stations were analyzed: Apna Karachi FM 107, City FM 89, and Radio One FM 91. Apna Karachi was chosen because it is the only city-specific radio station (other stations have obtained broadcast licenses for Lahore and Islamabad as well) with a Karachi-based team of radio journalists. City FM 89 was chosen because it generates the most advertising revenue and enjoys a healthy 15 percent of the market share, despite broadcasting exclusively in English. Radio One FM 91 was chosen because it introduced the concept of niche audiences and targeted programming: owing to its emphasis on entertainment, it is popular with younger audiences and women. Overall, FM radio stations saw increased success in 2007, with advertising revenue intakes increasing by 43 percent from Rs. 428 million to Rs. 614 million. ("Aurora Fact File: Radio," *Aurora*, November/December 2007, 126.)

[156] PEMRA Broadcasting Regulations (2002) state that FM radio stations are required to broadcast a "diversified mixture of programs on information, education, entertainment, culture, religion, public service, and such other areas of public interest." This clause has been widely interpreted to mean that no local, national, or international news content, or any information that directly refers to political parties or implicates political parties or politicians will be broadcast. Traffic and weather reports are, however, permitted.

[157] Caroline Bassett, "How Many Movements?" *Auditory Culture Reader*, eds. Michael Bull and Les Back (New York: Berg Publishers, 2004), 349.

acknowledgment on the airwaves. In this moment of effacement, the interests of the state and citizen align against the violent realm. This is not to say that de Certeau's notion of the tactic is no longer of use to us; rather, we can now examine how tactics can be inherently diverse and even intermingled with the strategic.

Despite the fact that state regulations enable the violence-free audioscape, actual radio use tactically allows Karachiites a moment of respite from the snap of gunfire, the wails of police car and ambulance sirens, and the dull, lingering thud of a distant bomb blast. Recorded sound, in Theodor Adorno's opinion, "takes the place of the utopia it promises."[158] While Adorno's phrase is a critique of mass culture, with regard to Karachi, it can be read against its grain to suggest that the violence-free, utopic realms of popular music actually create a habitable space, one that is fun and frivolous – indeed, seriously and importantly so – as opposed to dangerous and destructive. Much like truck art, the broadcasts of FM radio stations offer a segue into "dreamed-of places." In an aural context, these might include locations with a soundtrack – night clubs, dance floors, concert halls, underground discos, film sets, the shrines of saints, and festival arenas – that serve as counterpoints to violent spaces. Alternatively, these "other possible landscapes" might be the fantastic or faraway places – ice cream parlors, the seaside at sunset, heaven, and fields of gold – described in adolescent lyrics or mystical poetry. Whatever auditory migration Karachi's FM radio stations enable, the main aim, in the words of Sara Taher Khan, the CEO of Radio One, "is to provide reassurance and spread calm through the airwaves."[159]

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[158] Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge 2001), 46.
[159] Sara Taher Khan in discussion with the author, January 20, 2008.

No wonder, then, that during some of the most turbulent days in 2007 – and amongst the most violent in Karachi's history – most FM radio stations barely altered their regular programming. On May 12, when 34 people died in gun battles and protest riots throughout the city, Radio One chose to broadcast live, upbeat programming from Lahore: listeners who tuned in to the station were literally transported out of Karachi into a safer, more stable city. Meanwhile, City FM 89 continued as normal until the evening, and then played popular music in repetitive loops uninterrupted by the quirky ramblings of its radio jockeys. Listeners would have barely noticed that radio jockeys were unable to reach their workplaces because of turmoil unfolding in the city, the silence resulting from their absence being drowned out by the regularity of syncopated and synthesized beats.

The multiplicity of this tactic of auditory effacement begins to take effect when radio jockeys, even while preserving the aural utopia, begin to subvert state-imposed restrictions regarding what may or may not be broadcast. Indeed, violence is occasionally acknowledged or alluded to on the air. One indication that there was trouble in the city came during "The Breakfast Show," which aired on City FM 89 well before political rallies planned for May 12, 2007, became fatal. The radio jockey for that show alluded to the violence simmering on the city's streets as follows:

> We hope this will be a peaceful day in Karachi... That's a song from
> Snow Patrol called "Chasing Cars," something we hope none of you will
> be doing, well some of you will be doing... Our plan is to chill, this is
> the show on which we are focusing on the music, because there's nothing
> else to focus on – no papers in the house, and the roads are empty, for
> good reason... If you're in Karachi, we hope you'll be able to avoid
> anything unpleasant, which I haven't been able to do unfortunately, but
> I'm not going to talk about it and just keep going on with the show.

By mentioning the violence, the radio jockey reacted against state censorship, but his broadcast took on a tactical multiplicity when he also mitigated violence through his elliptical words. Rather than taint the airwaves with any more explicit references to violence, the radio jockey chose to resume playing popular music and undermine the threat of violence through clever word play and musical allusions. In one sense, his subversive broadcast reinforced the effectiveness of the state-imposed tactic against street violence. After all, a tactic against violence can only be effectuated when that violence exists. The radio jockey's broadcast introduced the threat of violence into an otherwise safe aural realm, thus providing Karachiites with the option of effacing it from the media form by focusing instead on humor and music. In this moment we see, then, how tactics themselves, much like space, can be altered and appropriated – the attempt to efface violence from the audioscape is appropriated from the state by radio jockeys and reclaimed by station listeners.

This complicated dynamic – the fusing of strategy and tactic and the multiplicity of the tactical – was seen again on October 18 (when 143 Karachiites died in a double bomb blast targeting Benazir Bhutto) and December 27 (the day of Bhutto's assassination), when FM radio stations continued to provide the city with peppy soundtracks. On the morning of Bhutto's triumphant return to Karachi in October, City FM 89 acknowledged the event on "The Breakfast Show." The radio jockey rambled:

> If you're in Karachi, the traffic may be difficult, because the queen bee,
> or should I say queen BB, is headed back...Like a fine wine, she gets
> better with time. I'm drawn to her, just like Ali Saleem is drawn to saris.
> Benazir, this from one camp icon to another: Kylie Minogue!

By using puns, comparing Bhutto to fine wine, describing her as a camp icon, and drawing a parallel between love for her and a popular drag artist's love for saris, the radio

jockey first acknowledged, and then undermined, the political gravity of Bhutto's arrival in Karachi. Ultimately, though, solemn programming did not balance out this frivolity after the attack on Bhutto's convoy later that night. The discrepancy between radio programming and the harsh realities of Karachi's streets was even more apparent on December 27. While television stations were reporting that Bhutto had been assassinated and Karachi began to go up in flames, City FM 89 was broadcasting its "Rush Hour" show. The only mention the radio jockey made of the crisis consisted of a vague reference to the deteriorating traffic situation: "traffic is mad, and we're going to put on some music to put a smile on someone's face." Over at Radio One, radio jockeys were taken off the air and mellow national anthems, *naats* (religious odes), and nostalgia-evoking hits from classic Lollywood movies were broadcast on a loop. Khan explains that after Bhutto's death, the station managers "chose to keep it light and we kept clear of the topic [of Bhutto's assassination]." That said, by altering their programming and alluding to the traffic situation, they subtly relayed a message about violence to the public, thereby defying the government's mandate about addressing political issues on air.

Despite these reactions against state censorship, tuning into FM radio broadcasts, much like the creation and consumption of truck art, is primarily a tactic that allows Karachiites to efface and escape the violence and turmoil of the city's streets. By implanting "dreamed-of places" in volatile streets, these media forms contribute to the city's mythological topography, which comes to represent a quasi-utopic reconciliation with the violence that presses in on daily life, a tactic of survival on the streets of fire.

3.4. Car Talk: The Urban Text as Comedy

The city's mediaspace also offers comic respite: the practice of vehicle ornamentation has trickled down from the realm of so-called public transport to private cars as well. Many youngsters will adorn their cars with stickers and reflective tape that spell out pithy witticisms, logos, signatures, and innuendo-laden messages that respond to the pervasive threat of violence by defying or mocking it. Unlike truck art and FM radio broadcasts that efface violence, the signage on cars embraces it, therefore mitigating threat. In fact, car stickers provide such a welcome distraction from the ravages of Karachi's streets that the popular urban blog Metroblogging Karachi has a category titled 'Car-achi', under which bloggers are invited to help catalogue the best messages seen plastered on cars. In 2007, images of cars adorned with the following messages attracted the most comments from readers: "Stolen"; "Fightclub: Membership Closed"; "Sponsored by Dad"; and, "Sssshhh! Bhai Log." One reader responded to these messages saying, "annoyed by stupid message on car. But then again, thank you for making annoying traffic jams a bit interesting."[160] Regarding another post, he added, "our roads might not promise you a smooth ride but they sure won't let boredom accompany your journey."[161] Yet another blogger wrote: "Bumpy roads, traffic congestions, signals which fail to work, and all sorts of other issues often makes driving a nightmare. But then there is always something on the roads to cheer you up, some times it's a slogan written on a rickshaw or on the back of a car."[162]

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[160] Jamash, comment on "Car-achi #29," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on June, 11, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/category/car-achi/page/3/.

[161] Jamash, comment on "Car-achi #23," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on March 5, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/category/car-achi/page/3/.

[162] Adnan K, comment on "Car-achi #22," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on December 21, 2006, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2006/12/21/car-achi-22/#comments.

Such responses all hint at a snatched moment of joy or respite, a comic distraction, in the otherwise stressful space of Karachi's streets. But it is worth noting that the messages that have created the most buzz amongst bloggers are the ones that allude to the streets as sites of criminality or violence. The public labeling of a car as "stolen" is no doubt a jibe against the frequency with which that crime occurs and how it is institutionally tolerated. Similarly, "Fightclub: Membership Closed" would be read by most Karachiites as a tongue-in-cheek call for the end to street gangs and urban militias. The most provocative message mentions "Bhai Log" [brotherhood], alluding to the practice of *mohajir* political activists of the MQM referring to each other as brothers. The message is a comic attempt to point a finger at MQM members who patrol the streets of Karachi to maintain 'order', that is, control of their ethnically demarcated territories within the city. By 'outing' the *mohajirs* through this message, the driver points to the source of most of the violence in the city, but in a flippant way. In so doing, he shows that he can counter the threat of violence – a severe reprimand from a *mohajir* activist in the form of mutilation or kidnapping – through humor. Thus, these comic messages can be read as literal manifestations of the Certeauian "urban text," which makes moving through a space a "rhetorical operation composed of juxtaposed citations…or elliptical (made of gaps, lapses, and allusions)."[163] The rhetoric here is defiant: it succeeds in defying violence either by normalizing it or embracing it, but through the protective language of comedy.

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[163] De Certeau, 102.

3.5. Tactical Cities: Turning Nowhere into Somewhere

De Certeau argues that those who walk "lack a place": when in motion, the tactician is temporarily absented from the proper, physical space that is the city, instead inhabiting a "nowhere" or a metaphorical, "dreamed-of" place that begins to approach what the city "ought to be." In the case of Karachi, I have shown that this "nowhere" – in order to enable escape or efface violence – is understood in truck art and FM radio broadcasts as 'anywhere', or, more precisely, 'anywhere else'. But movement through a city can produce other spatial possibilities as well. I would now like to reverse de Certeau's argument by suggesting that walking, or driving, through a city is also a tactic that determinedly allows the tactician to create and inhabit a 'somewhere' that is violence-free. That is, instead of merely enabling escape, walking or driving through the city redraws urban boundaries, redefining spaces as safe or violent, traversable or impassable. Unlike in some European cities where planned public space over-determines the forms of habitancy permitted to urban residents, in Karachi – with its illegible built environment, sprawl, and schismatic master plans – the creation of a legibility, a cogent map, a 'somewhere', can, in fact, seem more empowering than escape because it encompasses an implicit critique of a government that has failed in its duties. In the absence of planners, Karachiites stratify the city into the "nowhere[s]" of violent upheaval or the 'somewheres' of everyday practice, thereby privileging safety over danger. (No doubt, violent nowheres can also be read as the violent somewheres of yet other disenfranchised groups, but this more usual interpretation detailed in other histories of Karachi is not the focus of my argument.)

On the most basic level, such stratifying tactical movement entails avoiding areas that have a reputation for violence. For example, most Karachiites know to avoid Banaras Chowk, the point of intersection between *mohajir* and Pathan communities, as much as possible. Lyari, with its ongoing problem of gang warfare, is another area regularly circumvented by those who do not reside there. Karachiites intimately acquainted with particular neighborhoods, slums, or districts of the city further stratify the city into habitual no-go zones and safe somewheres on the basis of class, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. Residents of Lyari know whether specific bus stops, tea stalls, back alleys, and public water taps fall within the domain of gang leader Rehman Dakait or his rival Arshad Pappu. Depending on their gang affiliation, then, Lyariites re-map the area into the somewheres of gang supremacy. Similarly, the over one million dwellers of Orangi, Karachi's largest slum, pass through the space as either *mohajirs* or Pathans, deeming the side streets of the other ethnicity dangerous and impassable.

These divisions are far from static. Quite the reverse, in a given moment, the staging of a violent act can reconfigure a 'somewhere' into a "nowhere." There have been several times when, driving home from work, I have seen a pillar of charcoal-hued smoke curling high into the sky before me. Like most Karachiites, I have become adept at recognizing the distinct taints of smoke emitted from burning garbage dumps and rubber tires. When the latter are alight en route, I veer right or take a spontaneous U-turn, transforming the nowheres of my urban experience – the streets and alleys I rarely need to traverse – into a violence-free 'somewhere' that is worth driving through. An ominous wisp of smoke, the rhythmic clap of gunfire, the density of oncoming traffic: each of these can transfigure a "nowhere" alley into an alternative.

One could argue that Karachiites take this tactic a step further: to mitigate violence they reconfigure it as nothing more than an obstacle to the flow of traffic, an inconvenience that impedes movement, an urban phenomenon that transforms somewheres into nowheres and vice versa. This dynamic is most apparent on the broadcasts of the radio station Apna Karachi FM 107. Unable to provide news updates, the station negotiates violent flare-ups in the city by issuing regular traffic reports. For example, on May 12, 2007 – when Karachi was affected by violent rallies, gun battles, and the indiscriminate torching of vehicles – Apna Karachi punctuated its programming at five-minute intervals with traffic updates. Throughout the tumultuous afternoon, the station's radio journalists called to report which roads were heavily congested, which were blocked, and which were seeing only sporadic traffic. At 11:57 a.m. that day, the reporter Mohammad Qayyum stated: "the roads to the airport are empty. Public transport is at a standstill and the few taxis and rickshaws operating in the area have inflated their fares." Just after noon, he alerted drivers, "although we had earlier told you that Mai Kolachi Road was seeing normal traffic, we are now suggesting that you take a diversion and choose an alternate route." At 12:22 p.m., his colleague Waqarul Hasan reported, "buses have been torched near Karsaz, so people wanting to come to Drigh Road shouldn't head in this direction *because traffic is bad*." Later in the afternoon, the radio journalist Waqar Azmat advised drivers to avoid the area known as Gurumandir, "because the conditions there are not good, there is no traffic in the area." A few minutes later, at 2:26 p.m., he returned to the airwaves to say, "traffic on Shaheed-e-Millat Road is very bad, as it is on Sharah-e-Faisal. There's madness all the way until Tipu Sultan Road. Drivers should choose their routes carefully so that they don't become *victims of*

bad traffic." In these broadcasts, we again see a tactic being deployed on two levels: the radio journalists are subverting the "ways of using" imposed by state censorship and PEMRA regulations by using traffic reports as a way to discuss violence in the city on air. That said, the journalists are also responding to the violence by helping residents negotiate and efface it through mobility.

Each of the journalists book-ended their traffic updates by assuring their listeners that they would be on the air all day pointing drivers to "alternate routes," "diversions," and "other places to go via new routes." They also offered tips on where to refuel, given that petrol pumps throughout the city were closing down for the day. Tacticians refusing to let urban strife restrict their movement who were spotted by radio journalists were also given encouraging nods: on the morning of May 12, Danish Saeed described people who were "driving their cars over and along sidewalks and footpaths." Later that afternoon, Hasan also made note of Karachiites "taking motorcycles through by going on the footpaths."

These and similar traffic updates broadcast that day make it seem as if violence can be reconfigured as that which renders a part of the city a "nowhere," a no-place where traffic ceases to flow. Violence is thereby relocated within the realm of the ordinary, creating a continuum with events as mundane as a traffic jam. Further it manages the threat of violence by suggesting that "alternate routes and diversions" are always possible.[164] Karachiites hearing these broadcasts understand that roads that are heavily trafficked are relatively safe while violence has erupted in other locations: with

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[164] This sense that crime and violence can be evaded through movement is not restricted to radio broadcasts alone. Referring to the 1980s and early 1990s, Mehvish Hussain writes, "Indeed, there was a time when standard driving procedure was to slam on the accelerator rather than brake at a red light to avoid becoming a victim of car snatchings." (Mehvish Hussain, "Boomtown Karachi," *The Herald*, September 2000, 95.)

this knowledge they are empowered to take their own tactical diversions. Moreover, violence is mitigated when reporters allude to gun battles, torched buses, and general pandemonium, but make it seem as if the worst fate that could befall a Karachiite is being caught in a traffic jam. Movement itself is privileged as it allows drivers to inhabit a 'somewhere': traffic becomes antithetical to violence. With each tactical turn, Karachiites remap the city, making urban boundaries instantaneous and fluid. Somewheres emerge as violence demarcates different areas as nowheres, and in a strange twist, the city itself becomes as dynamic as the traffic that persistently flows through it.

3.6. Representing Mobilities: Karachi's Manifold Story on Film

The tactics deployed against violence extend well beyond the locomotive ambitions described above. Visual representations of Karachi also privilege it as a city that moves, perhaps as a way of countering the stasis of violence: the burning buses that cause traffic jams, the shootouts that induce a citywide paralysis. Indeed, filmic representations of the city tend to gravitate towards traffic-related themes: of the eight films set explicitly in Karachi that have screened at the KaraFilm Festival since 2001, six use traffic as a motif, metaphor, or plot device.[165] For example, the short film *Tabdeeli*, screened in 2005, fetishizes Karachi traffic through long, lingering shots of the city's streets.[166] Bird's-eye view and panoramic shots of main thoroughfares at rush hour highlight the endlessness of Karachi's traffic, and as the lens slowly goes out of focus, the streets are transformed into rivers of locomotive flow. The film emphasizes the sheer

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[165] The annual KaraFilm Festival was inaugurated in 2001, and is Karachi's only international film festival. It aims to create a space for alternative and independent cinema in the city. By providing a venue for young filmmakers to meet on a regular basis, the festival's organizers hoped to reinvigorate an indigenous film culture and revive Karachi's previous role as the hub of the film industry.

[166] *Tabdeeli*, directed by Babar Sheikh (Diagram Motion Pictures, 2005).

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abundance of transport possibilities: donkey carts, rickshaws, minibuses, trucks, water tanks, buses, black-and-yellow taxis, motorbikes, bicycles, camel-drawn carts and horse-drawn carriages, ad hoc vehicles consisting of yards of rope and discarded rubber tires. The camera gazes out from the embellished windshield of a rickshaw, which frames the windows of a car through which a viewer can see still other vehicles roll by. This framing creates the sense that nothing exists in the space between two vehicles, that the city itself exists in and through its transport infrastructure. The reflections of Karachiites captured in side- and rear-view mirrors furthers the idea that Karachi is inseparable from, or even identical to, its flows of traffic.

Raat Chali Hai Jhoom Ke, a feature film directed by one of the festival's organizers, complicates this straight adoration of the city as a dynamic space of flowing traffic.[167] The film unfolds during a long, dramatic night on Karachi's badly lit streets. To begin with, the film's credits are superimposed on a dynamic, digitized map of the city. The plot gets going when the protagonist Waleed drives off into the night on the invitation of a mysterious woman he has been speaking with for several months on the phone. Waleed, a resident of the posh Defence area, is apprehensive yet excited as he heads to Malir, an area that has been described as the city's graveyard because of frequent political and ethnic flare-ups and a "nowhere" in terms of his normal navigations through Karachi. Prolonged sequences on the streets allow viewers to join Waleed on his long drive through the city: lingering shots from his point of view through the car's windows reveal recognizable roads – main thoroughfares such as Sharah-e-Faisal, Clifton Bridge, and University Road – and showcase Karachi's traffic diversity in the form of

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[167] *Raat Chali Hai Jhoom Ke*, directed by Hasan Zaidi (Tamarin Pictures, 2001).

colorful buses, zigzagging rickshaws, and grinning street hawkers laden with roses and bawdy magazines.

Waleed's evening takes a turn for the worse when he is held up and kidnapped and his car snatched. The gravity of his predicament is articulated through the traffic situation: the streets are suddenly portrayed as dark and deserted – literally nowhere – the absence of traffic indicating the extent of his misery. The rest of the film then documents his quest for safety after he manages to escape from the mud hut of his kidnappers. Waleed becomes a typical picaresque hero, wheedling a pair of clueless police officers out of their motorcycle so that he can return to Defence, a distinct 'somewhere' that would doubtless be familiar to the film's primarily elite audience. The bike takes him as far as the tracks of the city's circular railway before running out of fuel. Waleed briefly mounts a train, and subsequently hops aboard a heavily adorned meat truck, replete with jangling bells and dripping carcasses. Arriving in a part of the city that he knows well, Waleed leaps off the meat truck and catches a rickshaw. A final scene showing dawn breaking over I.I. Chundrigar Road, a busy artery that traverses Karachi's financial district, is used to indicate that the film is resolved safely. As the sun rises, traffic picks up on the road, the city is enabled, and the nowheres of Waleed's adventurous night are replaced by a somewhere of flowing traffic. Modes of transportation are thus depicted as redemptive safe havens.

In another nod to the "unlimited diversity" of tactics, the parallel narratives in *Raat Chali Hai Jhoom Ke* equate moving through the city with another kind of mobility: social mobility. This thematic choice shows how profoundly traffic shapes Karachi's imaginary, but what is more interesting is the ability of one tactical enactment or

representation to respond simultaneously to different strategies. Indeed, the film reacts to both violence and social stratification, suggesting a tactical multiplicity that is hard to capture with a clean opposition or division between strategy and tactic. Waleed's kidnappers are thrilled to get hold of his Honda Civic and hope to use it as a way to gain respect within their gang. Of course, their dreams of being criminal 'dons' are quashed when, in an ironic twist, two policemen (recently deprived of their motorcycle by Waleed) steal the stolen car away from them. Cruising through Karachi in the snazzy four-wheeler, the cops also cannot help but dream of the perks that come with becoming officers in the elite force. As such, increased mobility becomes a symbol of socio-economic mobility in all sectors: the public one of policemen, the parallel world of organized crime, and Waleed's realm of middle-class professionalism. The ability to keep moving – the tactical propensity to ensure transport whether by stealing it, hitching a ride, or hopping aboard – is reconfigured as a way to survive the city, whether by escaping the violent blows of kidnappers, or the violent realities of economic stagnation.

This notion of multiple mobilities – through streets as well as socio-economic strata – is apparent in other films as well. *ShahRukh Khan Ki Maut*, for example, shows how a young boy's dreams of emulating Bollywood hotshot ShahRukh Khan are dashed because he fails in his responsibilities as an apprenticed car mechanic and is severely reprimanded by his employer.[168] By affiliating the boy's inability to repair a car, and thereby enable motion, with his quashed ambitions, the film's director Ehteshamuddin fortifies the notion of traffic as redemptive. Shakeel Mallick's fictional enterprise *Chauraha (Intersection)*, showcased in 2005, also equates traffic with social capital.[169]

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[168] *ShahRukh Khan Ki Maut*, directed by Ehteshamuddin (Art Republic, 2007).
[169] *Chauraha*, directed by Shakeel Mallick (Geo Television, 2005).

The film revolves around friends who gather nightly at a busy intersection in the city to boast about petty crimes they have committed under the patronage of the local don Majju. The young men do not bear arms at these nightly sessions – indeed, the film is set in the early 1980s when TT pistols were not as easily available – and are instead emboldened by the rush of traffic and the uplifting soundtrack of musical horns to tell their tales. In these moments, set in the 'somewhere' of an intersection, violence is distanced: it is presented as a rhetorical device or conversational piece, a flurry of words rather than troublesome acts, and is thus mitigated. The space of the traffic intersection is reclaimed as a space of social interaction, where rhetoric rather than violence can help you establish yourself and earn the respect of your peers – the mobility of cars that rush around the intersection is echoed in the attempt to social climb within the group.

By contrast, *The People vs. Lyari Expressway*, screened in 2003, complicates the relationship between traffic, road making, and violence.[170] The documentary features interviews with many Karachiites who have been evicted from their homes to make way for the city's first expressway. Descriptions of atrocities endured by those who have been displaced by the expressway are, however, littered with acknowledgements of the importance of transport infrastructure and the belief that a radial road network is the ultimate manifestation of modernity. These mixed messages are amplified by the fact that the infrastructure that supports traffic flow is itself depicted as violent: in its ability to deprive people of the safety of their homes, the Lyari Expressway becomes an instigator of violence. Even while deflecting the source of violence from gangs, militias, sects, and the state onto traffic infrastructure, the film remains a tactic against the state, which is criticized for privileging the modernity of traffic flows over public housing.

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[170] *The People vs. Lyari Expressway*, directed by Maheen Zia (Action Aid Pakistan, 2002).

In addition to representing multiple mobilities, these films create tactical cities by stratifying Karachi into the representational somewheres of iconic roads and junctions and unrecognizable nowheres. After all, through the process of being repeatedly filmed, certain parts of Karachi are iterated as distinct somewheres where the camera – like the car – dares to tread. These spaces exist in implicit opposition to the endless nowheres of Karachi, the real spaces that are not aesthetically pleasing or visually resonant, and thus precluded from being captured on film or from being recast as the 'somewheres' of a represented city.

3.7. Altering Space: Sites of Violence, Sites of Play

In the previous pages, we have seen Karachi's streets transformed into a kaleidoscope of color, a moving art gallery, a space of comedic communication, a race track, a film set, and a concert hall. De Certeau terms these transformations "alterations" and "appropriations": when transformed into a dance floor or an art gallery exhibiting the images on trucks, Karachi's streets resemble the "residences temporarily appropriated by … traffic" that de Certeau argues are the consequence of movement through an urban space. But urban traffic equally reappropriates sites of violence – the killing fields of Karachi, the stages of ethnic conflict, the battlegrounds of gang warfare – as sites of play, pleasure, and productivity. For not only can the temporary residences afforded by the street be altered and appropriated, but they can also be reconfigured through everyday practice as "other landscapes." Unlike the escapist landscapes of truck art, however, these landscapes allow tacticians and practitioners to reclaim and reorganize urban space to suit

their diverse ends: the tactics create a multiplicity of uses for the street and enable

multiple ways of constructing identity in the space of the street.

Donkey-cart racing, for example, is an unparalleled Karachi phenomenon.

Writing on the popular 'All Things Pakistan' blog, Bilal Zuberi says that donkey-cart

races are "a unique Karachi thing that demonstrate the vibrancy present in the local

communities."[171] This "Karachi thing" has a long precedent: writing in *The Herald* in

1981, Rehana Hakim described a donkey race unfolding in Lyari:

> The donkey is decked up like a *dulha* [groom], carted on to a mini and
> taken to the starting point at Kemari. Watched by hundreds, the donkey
> cart race begins. The interested parties follow on bikes, suzukis, minis.
> Wagers are laid...Abdul Rehman Baloch's voice reflects some of the
> thrill and chill that Lyari-dwellers feel each time there's a donkey cart
> race.[172]

Donkey-cart races that used to be a standard form of entertainment in Lyari were pushed

out of that locality when gang warfare made the streets far too dangerous to navigate, let

alone race through. Now, these races are spontaneous, ad hoc events, but they still

manage to retain elements of "thrill and chill" for the enjoyment of all. The drivers of

unusual two-wheeled donkey carts will often spice up an afternoon amble through slow-

moving traffic by signaling to each other and organizing an instantaneous competition.

The only warning given to others on the road is the familiar rattle of pebble-filled cans

attached to the cart. While racing their donkeys, riders communicate with each other by

shouting across the street, spontaneously deciding the route of the race as well as its

termination point. Routes often change midway through the race, and it's not uncommon

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[171] Bilal Zuberi, comment on "Donkey Up!" All Things Pakistan, comment posted on July 27, 2006, http://pakistaniat.com/2006/07/27/guest-post-picture-of-the-day-donkey-up/. The local community referred to here is the Makrani community hailing originally from the Makran Coast along the Baluchistan province.

[172] Rehana Hakim, "Whatever Happened to the Town that Never Slept?" *The Herald*, September 1981, 42.

to find yourself driving towards a donkey speeding through the streets against traffic and taking unpredictable turns around your car.

Recognizing that there's something naturally defiant and resilient about the practice of donkey-cart racing, Karachi's City District Government has repeatedly tried to institutionalize the sport. Indeed, each time the local authorities organize a festival or export fair, initiate an urban renewal project, or attempt to promote tourism to Pakistan, donkey carts are relied on to "represent the vibrancy" of the city,[173] show that it "can become a dream city,"[174] or "[celebrate] the city by…[changing] its image, especially regarding security."[175] Indeed, the frivolous nature of donkey-cart races seems like the perfect "anti-text" to Karachi's urban violence, and another provocation that complicates the distinction between strategy and tactic. Explaining the decision to include a donkey-cart race at the first Hamara Karachi (Our Karachi) festival in February 2007, the city's assistant mayor Nasreen Jalil said that it was a wonderful way to "celebrate" a city that "no one owns, no one is loyal to…and everyone uses roughly." These attempts at institutionalizing the sport have met with varying success: impoverished cart riders will participate for cash prizes, but prefer spontaneous racing on unpredictable routes, especially in oncoming traffic, which the government refuses to support. But the fact that the local government sees the donkey-cart races as a way to temper Karachi's violent image is testament to the successful reappropriation of street as racetrack.

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[173] Farooq Baloch, "Braying for the Chief Secretary Cup," *The News*, July 27, 2006.

[174] Arif Hasan, "Proposals for Making Karachi a Dream City" (paper presented at 'Karachi 2025: A City of Dreams: Visioning for a Better Tomorrow', a panel discussion organized by Shehri: Citizens for Better Environment on November 18, 2006).

[175] Nasreen Jalil, interview by Rubab Karrar, "Celebrations by the Sea," *The Herald*, February 2007, 103. A donkey-cart race was organized as part of Karachi's first "Hamara Karachi" (Our Karachi) festival. The festival wanted to counter the fact that "everyone uses the city roughly" by celebrating it through indigenous music, tradition, and sport. "Everybody involved wanted to do something for the city; basically, we decided to facilitate them," explained Jalil.

This practice of reclamation extends across classes as Karachi's middle- and upper-class youth also see the streets as racetracks. On Friday and Saturday evenings throughout my late teens and early twenties, I was prohibited by my family from driving because those were the nights that "Karachi thrill-seekers" indulged in their "weekend choice of sport."[176] Zipping through congested streets at speeds up to 150 kilometers per hour, drag racers are bound to make the novice at the wheel careen with fear at their approach. Since the 1980s, drag racers have lined Seaview, the road that runs along Clifton Beach, checking out each other's cars, performing bike stunts, and looking for competition. Beach Avenue – a wide, well-paved road that runs off into a sand-and-stone pit better known as Devil's Point – was the preferred racetrack: those who successfully negotiated the 180-degree turn at Devil's Point earned the moniker *shaitaan*, or devil. Since 2000, new 'racetracks' have been appropriated throughout the city. On weekends, hundreds of men in souped-up cars – a coveted Mazda RX-8, modified Honda Civic VTI, or special edition 1600cc Toyota Corolla – stalk the city's streets. The sight of a sportily modified car at the same intersection is reason enough to start a race, while obstructions of any sort – potholes, construction work, a drug addict lying on the roadside, an overcrowded bus – instantly alter the course of the race, a tactic that reconfigures Karachi as a dynamic, ever-changing track with endless possibilities for other races. Interestingly, the website advertising garages that modify cars and selling speed-enhancing spare parts boasts the domain name 'evilkarachi.net'. This sense that the only "evil" on the road comes in the form of young men who accelerate – devils on the run in a literal sense – also counters the image of Karachi as violent. By reclaiming the streets as racetracks, young men in their cars temporarily appropriate the spaces normally stalked by urban

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[176] Syed Shoaib Hasan, "Devil's Run," *The Herald*, April 2005, 94.

militias and gangsters. This tactic of reclamation also has another dimension: while drag racing, young, male Karachiites reappropriate the image or experience of urban masculinity. The young man who invests his savings in a Mazda RX-8 replaces the young man who believes the Russian TT-pistol is "the hottest commodity in town"[177]; the AK-47 is exchanged for keys to a snazzy sports car.

Much like racers, aspiring first-class cricketers also enjoy temporary residence on Karachi's streets by reappropriating sites of violence as cricket pitches. Today, street cricket – the practice of playing a modified version of the sport on side streets and in alleyways using a tennis ball covered in electrical tape – is a nationwide phenomenon. Significantly, though, street cricket emerged as an everyday practice in the mid-1980s in Nazimabad, one of Karachi's most volatile neighborhoods at the time. (As veteran journalist Zaffar Abbas puts it, "driving after sunset on a deserted road in Nazimabad was regarded as an act of supreme daring."[178]) Even today, the "congested streets" of Nazimabad remain the "focal point of the tape ball."[179] It is impossible to draw a causal link between the rise of street cricket and increasing unrest in Karachi. But it is significant that the day after Benazir Bhutto's assassination irreparably charred Karachi, YouTube.com was awash with videos of young children playing cricket on the streets of a Karachi in mourning, a city at a standstill. Like the best tacticians, these children were taking advantage of the unprecedented desertion of the streets. More importantly, their opportunistic, spontaneous appropriation of the streets where cars had burnt and bodies

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[177] Gayer, 519.

[178] Zaffar Abbas, "Looking Back in Disbelief," *The Herald*, September 2000, 87. In this article looking back at the violence in Karachi in the 1980s and 1990s, Abbas considers the "nightmare that will continue to haunt Karachiites for the rest of their lives."

[179] Osman Samiuddin, "Pakistan's quicks get into the swing with tennis balls and electrical tape," *The Guardian*, July 12, 2006.

lain only the night before, were perceived by other Karachiites as a sign of hope and resilience. For example, a clip titled 'After Benazir's death - Hope remains in the streets' shows a wide road in north Karachi where several cricket games are simultaneously underway: on scoring a run or taking a wicket, the young players jump for joy.[180]

Performers join players and racers in appropriating sites of violence to their own ends. Street performers, though dwindling in number, still colonize most corners of the city. Magicians, folk dancers, snake charmers, entertainers accompanied by trained monkeys and bears, and *dholwallahs* (traditional drummers) regularly transform sidewalks into circuses. Since the late 1980s, however, after Karachi's volatility had become the norm, street performances began to evolve in an intriguing way. "Under pressure to spruce up their act, animal trainers are bringing an increasing amount of violence in their performances," points out Amber Abbas in *The Herald*.[181] She goes on to describe the 'sport' of bear-baiting, which pits a bear tied to a pole against a pack of hungry dogs. "Snake charmers too resorted to bringing violence into their performances to keep their kitchen fires going... From a mesmerizing snake dance, they transformed their performance into battles unto death between snakes and mongoose," adds Abbas. As such, street performances can be interpreted as a way to distract Karachiites from the violence that surrounds them by deflecting it onto animals and thereby making it entertaining and controllable. But the violent performances also establish a subversive equivalence between urban militants and animals, a strange parallel that can be read as a critique of street violence. Indeed, if bear-baiting and snake-and-mongoose fights are aspects of the "metaphorical city [that slips] into the clear text of the...readable city,"

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[180] Requiemworld, video titled "After Benazir's death - Hope remains in the streets", posted on YouTube, December 29, 2007, http://youtube.com/watch?v=8W6fqmruXPI.
[181] Amber Abbas, "Out in the Streets," *The Herald*, June 2000, 122.

then militants and gangsters are symbolically reduced to packs of dogs and combative snakes. This transference is simply articulated by Raja Shamsheer, a snake charmer who paces across Karachi's French Beach on Sunday afternoons, eager to entertain: "Of course I had to make my well-trained snake fight," he says. "Karachiwallahs have become used to seeing *tamashas* (performances) and all sorts of madness on the streets and on cable news channels. Now we have to compete with that as well as Indian films."[182] The violent performativity of urban warfare, amplified by 24-hour news coverage since 2002, is thus appropriated by a street entertainer and presented to Karachiites to consume on their own terms, in a context of pleasure rather than fear.

It is notable that the diverse tactics described here have vastly different methods of engaging with violence. While earlier tactics effaced violence at all costs, drag racing and street performances evoke and internalize it. Drag racing is, after all, a dangerous sport that presents a threat of physical harm. Street performers, meanwhile, have made their shows animalistic re-enactments of urban strife. In this way, these tactics reveal multiplicity not only in their ability to reappropriate the street as stage and racetrack, but also in their alteration of violent acts themselves.

3.8. An Anti-Text for Sale

Meanwhile, the tactics deployed by street hawkers are "diverse" because they reappropriate Karachi as a space of commerce while remapping the city. In Karachi, men, women, and children selling a variety of practical and peculiar goods accost drivers, transforming the city's streets into a dynamic marketplace and each vehicle into a mobile shopping mall. Over the years, street hawkers armed with compelling sales pitches have

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[182] Raja Shamsheer in discussion with author, January 17, 2008.

thrust the following items into my car window: rose bouquets, sliced coconuts, local

newspapers, outdated Ikea catalogues, purple-hued mutant incarnations of SpongeBob

SquarePants, inadvertently penis-shaped balloons, fire crackers – with the fuse alight, no

less – lacy bras, audio cassettes featuring Michael Jackson remixes or Baitullah Mahsud's

sermons, field hockey sticks, dishrags, budgerigars, and sunglasses ranging from Gucci

imitations to iridescent sporty numbers. For street hawkers, the city is not stratified in

terms of safe 'somewheres' and violent 'nowheres'; rather, they stratify the city in terms

of productivity and profit. Mohammad Siddique, an older street hawker who has been

selling newspapers since the late 1970s historically maps the city through his commercial

fortunes: "I used to sell papers at Mehran Hotel but now I make the most money selling

at Khayaban-e-Shamsheer, where the streets are now nice and the people are nice."[183]

Mehran Hotel is located in the former city center, which now logs record numbers of

criminal cases, while Khayaban-e-Shamsheer runs through a relatively safe residential

area by the beach. Interestingly, Siddique eradicates any mention of the city's

deteriorating security situation in his account of street commerce. Fahad, a young coconut

seller, similarly recasts Karachi in terms of its commercial potential, but his view of the

city is more dynamic: "I sell at Akhtar Colony, Mehran Hotel, in Saddar, and near the

cemetery; the weekends are better at Akhtar Colony while Saddar is the best at sunset."[184]

Like Siddique, Fahad, does not comment on the fact that the primarily Christian

neighborhood around the cemetery remains relatively peaceful in comparison with the

other areas in which he works. Another street hawker Raju who sells dishrags at Nipa

Chowrangi boasts, "this is the best spot in the city for sales because there's so much

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[183] Mohammad Siddique in discussion with the author, December 18, 2007.
[184] Fahad in discussion with the author, December 18, 2007.

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traffic."[185] Raju seems unconcerned by the fact that his profitable intersection became a battleground on several occasions in 2007: in addition to May 12 and December 27, the intersection's proximity to the University of Karachi, the hub of hostile student politics, makes it the kick off point for many an inflamed rally. Of course, the fact that street hawkers are willing to do business in an area promotes or iterates a sense of normativity and safety. In that sense, their mapping of the city in terms of commerce is reflexive: their very presence helps recast dangerous nowheres into safer somewheres; by reorienting concerns around sales rather than safety, they help mitigate the threat of violence.

Notably, the commercial activity of street hawkers also challenges the idea that Karachiites privilege mobility above all else. Their productivity, after all, is a consequence of stasis – the longer the traffic jam, the better their sales. Street hawkers, in fact, change the possibilities of being stuck in traffic, their very presence preventing the city from being experienced by drivers exclusively as a realm of criminality and violence. Street hawkers have unprecedented access to vehicles: they sit on them, lean up against them, flag them down, and use them as display tables for their wares. Indulgent drivers will roll down their windows when a hawker strolls by, happy to hear a sales pitch or partake in witty banter to break the monotony of a traffic jam. When hawkers force a cup of tea or a slice of mango or guava through a car window, garland young couples with wreaths of roses in a sly nod to marriage rituals, or familiarly reach into the backseat of a car to hand a child a balloon or toy, they enact domestic and familial gestures in public – often perilous – spaces, making them seem safer and habitable. Street hawkers, then, help

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[185] Raju in discussion with the author, December 19, 2008.

to create another possible landscape in which strange men do not approach your car only

to steal it, hold you up at gunpoint, or worse, kidnap you.

But here too, stasis can turn into its opposite. Even as they activate the stoppage

of a traffic jam, street hawkers enable a new mobility beyond the flows of Karachi traffic

into the streams of globalized commodities. The very goods that street hawkers parade on

Karachi's streets are entry points into what Arjun Appadurai has termed media*scapes* –

as distinct from the media*spaces* mentioned earlier – and which are defined as follows:

> Mediascapes refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to
> produce and disseminate information...and to the images of the world
> created by these media...What is most important about these
> mediascapes is that they provide...large and complex repertoires of
> images, narratives and 'ethnoscapes' to viewers throughout the world, in
> which the world of commodities and the world of 'news' and politics are
> profoundly mixed.[186]

By this definition, the goods sold by street hawkers – textiles and Chinese toys, pop

culture spin-offs and pirated media artifacts – effect a mediascape and allow Karachiites

to drive through a space of globalization rather than one of violence. Normally,

discussions of globalization in developing world contexts dwell on the 'homogenization'

argument – in its different incarnations this is also put forth as the 'Americanization' or

'commoditization' argument – which is mired in colonial implications and the absolutism

of capitalist values. In this context, however, the ability to purchase a SpongeBob

SquarePants toy from a hawker on a street that is patrolled by armed youth becomes a

tactic: it is opportunistic and unconscious yet enables a form of migration across

Appadurai's mediascapes. Buying a Chinese toy or an Ikea catalogue (often the Swedish-

or Spanish-language edition) allows Karachiites to reappropriate a site of violence by

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[186] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 299.

converting it into a node in the global cultural economy. Within the dynamics of global flows, drivers in Karachi may indeed be 'choosers' of commodities laboring under the false impression that they are 'actors'.[187] But in terms of Karachi's streets, they are tacticians who have momentarily sought residence in the realm of the global economy. For their part, street hawkers effect an entrepreneurial escape in the moment of transaction: they leave behind the world of local ethnic and political conflict to participate in the global mediascape. Of course, uniformly romanticizing the lot of the street hawker would be fallacious. Roaming the streets, desperate for a sale, hawkers admit that this is a profession of last resort, a way to make ends meet in the face of rampant unemployment: most hawkers in fact hope that their vocation itself is a temporary residence, and that they will soon find employment in other capacities. Seroo, for one, who sells bolts of cloth at the tumultuous Nipa Chowrangi aspires, aptly enough, to become a driver, preferably of a "fancy" car. "I like the streets," he says, "but I want to be on the move. I want to move faster than I can on my feet. And I want to leave this intersection and drive all over the city."[188] In the manner of a Certeauian pedestrian, Seroo recognizes that movement is the means to survival in an urban space.

Picking up on the momentum of street hawkers, it is time that we too escape into a globalized realm, that of the blogosphere, leaving a city of present possibility for one of future potential and flows. Having imagined Karachi as a conglomeration of tactical

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[187] Ibid, 307. Appadurai calls for a distinction to be made between consumers and actors. He writes, "as for the fetishism of the consumer, I mean to indicate here that the consumer has been transformed, through commodity flows (and the mediascapes, especially of advertising, that accompany them) into a sign, both in Baudrillard's sense of a simulacrum which only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent; and in the sense of a mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production."

[188] Seroo, in discussion with the author, December 22, 2007.

cities, a space of enactment and enunciation, let us try to re-imagine it anew: as the cohesive entity it might one day be in the future.

4. Clicking to Safety: The Virtual City as Strategy

In the previous pages we have seen how Karachi is imagined and invented, altered and appropriated, cleaved and consolidated, all the while being understood in relation to it as a space of violence. Against the imagined (and real) violence, the city has been shown to exist in infinite incarnations: it eludes representation through its monuments, it is recreated in the twists and tangos of old timers, and re-drawn via the mental maps of street hawkers. The city grooves on the dance floor, thrives through the stock exchange, proliferates on streets thronged with traffic, and burns through the night. Karachiites, for their part, alternately escape or embrace this multiform city: nightclub owners create and inhabit utopic realms in which violence is effaced while street performers imitate and internalize violent realities, thereby making them normative or negotiable. The "manifold" stories, "anti-texts," and "migrational spaces" thus created enable an endless array of tactical cities: *other* Karachis, anti-cities, cities of the past, cities with mythological topographies, dynamic cities of somewheres and nowheres. In their plurality, these tactical cities counter – and indeed subsume – the lived experience and imaginary of Karachi as a violent space; in their irrepressibility, they remind us that its imaginative production is an ongoing and recursive process. No wonder then, an infinite variety of yet *other* Karachis can also be found online.

Indeed, its innumerable websites caution that virtual Karachi betrays as many contestations and contradictions as the actual city.[189] The virtual city also resembles its

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[189] Any discussion of virtual cities is preceded by a vast literature on the intersection of urbanity and information and communications technologies. This intersection has by now been considered from urbanist, sociological, technological, and existential perspectives. As Edward Soja puts it: "we seem to have entered a new urban 'hyperspace' of invisible cities, postmodern urbanism, electronic webs, virtual communities, nowhere geographies, computer-generated artificial worlds, Cybercities, Simcities, Cities of Bits." [*Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 324.] Each of these variations of the virtual city boasts different ontological, technological, and spatial

actual counterpart in resisting traditional models of urbanity. Just as Karachi failed to express itself in its monuments, built environment, political stature, or through its economic vibrancy, its virtual extension escapes the reach of the generic 'digital city' templates that are widely available online. Websites pulled up by a simple Google search for Karachi – including Karachi.com, RealKarachi.com, KarachiWala.com, and ApnaKarachi.com – are all examples of uniform online platforms provided by multinational companies to increase the efficiency of gathering, maintaining, and presenting hyper-local information about a city. These sites are primarily commercial enterprises, the provision of local content supporting regional advertising. Intended for use by a large number of cities, the local portals of digital city templates look homogenous, even though the information provided is particular to the city represented. Such "globally-oriented, displaced 'non-grounded'" digital city platforms fall short in comparison with "regional websites [that are] constructed by small communities [and]…are completely heterogeneous, reflecting the cultural backgrounds of the

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dimensions, the parsing apart of which lies beyond the scope of this project. For the purposes of this thesis, 'virtual city' can be understood to mean an online representation or interpretation of an 'actual' city, a physical space which in this case is Karachi. Rather than wrestle with the ontological instability of the virtual city, this discussion will focus on its social construction and its impact on the lived experience and urban imaginary of the actual city that is its referent. Important aspects of virtual (digital, cyber) cities that comprise a useful backdrop for this discussion include: the theming of American cities through "simulated urbanism," or Simcities, that occurs at "specialized commercial sites" (Soja, 324); the use of the city metaphor as a way to conceptualize the internet [Wiliam Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place and the Infobahn* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 24]; digital cities as "prostheses to extend human actions…and communities" [Stephen Graham, "Introduction: From dreams of transcendence to the remediation of urban life," *The Cybercities Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), 18]; digital cities as transcendent spaces that enable the "substitution of corporeal presence and movement within and between urban places" (Graham, 9); cities as the intersection of 'spaces of flow' – transnational technological flows – and 'spaces of places', that is, the geographic spaces and communities of everyday life [Manuel Castells, *The Informational City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 4]; virtual cities and issues of identity and embodiment [Ken Hillis, "Identity, Embodiment, and Place: Virtual Reality as Postmodern Technology," *The Cybercities Reader*, ed. Stephen Graham (London: Routledge, 2004)]; and, the appeal of virtual cities for online participants [Anne Beamish, "The city in cyberspace," *Imaging the City*, eds. Lawrence Vale and Sam Warner (New Brunswick: Rutgers Center for Urban Policy Research, 2001), 289].

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corresponding cities."[190] This discrepancy is particularly marked in a city like Karachi

that eludes rational, western conceptions of urbanity. After all, public transportation

routes, listings for hotels, movies, restaurants, and museums, as well as sightseeing

information for tourists are meaningless in the context of a city where you can hail a bus

like a taxi, where cinemas screen films at the request of influential bureaucrats and

industrialists, and where bars were long ago replaced by smuggled cases of bootleg

whiskey. Despite claims of authenticity and ownership – *wala* translates as 'belonging to'

while *apna* means 'our' – the various sections of the digital city platforms representing

Karachi remain incomplete: the listings are blank, the photo galleries contain generic

images of local colonial architecture detached from the hustle and bustle of its

surroundings, and the chat rooms do no more than occasionally feature a stray,

unanswered question from an aspiring adventure tourist. William Mitchell may have

invited us to "click, click through cyberspace...the new architectural promenade,"[191] but

in the case of virtual Karachi, this is a promenade emptied of food stalls, bazaars, things-

to-do, and, more importantly, Karachiites who might have shared tacit knowledge about

the city. This lack of participation results from the unsuitability of digital urban templates

to represent Karachi online. But it is exacerbated by the websites' "top-down, heavily

controlled, selected and edited set of contents"[192] that allow little room for the kind of

invention that the actual city – fragmented and fluid as it is – permits. Even more

important for this chapter, the utter absence of any reference to violence in the digital city

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[190] Toru Ishida et al., "World Digital Cities: Beyond Heterogeneity," *Digital Cities III*, eds. Peter van den Besselaar and Satoshi Koizumi (Berlin: Springer, 2005), 189.
[191] Mitchell, 24.
[192] Ishida, et al., 198.

templates curbs the participation of Karachiites who are accustomed to producing their city as an act of resistance or reclamation.

4.1. Metroblogging Karachi: Producing the Virtual City

And so it is that one of the most productive incarnations of virtual Karachi can be found on Metroblogging Karachi, the English-language weblog maintained by a community of Karachi-based bloggers (upon whose comments my previous chapters have already drawn in order to gauge the prevailing sentiments of contemporary Karachiites).[193] Boasting an economically and ethnically diverse readership since its launch in February 2005, the blog's success can be attributed to its discursive model: in the absence of a computer-generated representation of the city's built environment or a digital city template, Karachi – rather, 'manifold' Karachis – thrives in user-generated blog posts that allow for infinite production, alteration, and (re-)invention. The mandate that the blog remain city-specific and locally focused enables further participation since bloggers can produce a virtual incarnation of their city in response to the violent realities of the actual city, much in the same way that nostalgic Karachiites invented the pre-1977 city in contrast to the present.

Those who engage with Metroblogging Karachi are truly concerned with the everyday practice that "composes" the city's culture: the blog is inundated with naïve, teenage musings about flawed urban and civic infrastructure as well as optimistic calls

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[193] Metroblogging Karachi is one of the few interactive, user-generated, up-to-date websites with a local emphasis. ApnaKarachi.com, previously a digital city template, now the one other city-specific website with a social networking component, was re-launched in March 2008 and therefore had not registered enough activity to be useful for this analysis. Of course, Karachi is represented and re-imagined in the thousands of blogs that focus on Pakistani politics, history, and culture. Owing to their national platform, however, those sites are beyond the scope of this analysis. Virtual Karachi is also rendered through the online diaries of its residents, but these are personal accounts that are not relevant to the present discussion.

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for the eradication of poverty, crime, disease, and intolerance. Links to news reports about the city, announcements and reviews of cultural events, rants against traffic jams, odes to Karachi's delicacies (such as roadside *bun kababs*, an improvisational hamburger), and in-depth critiques of jazzy advertising campaigns also abound. In an attempt to foster feelings of authenticity, belonging, and spatial commonality, one blogger posts photographs of different sites in the city each week, challenging his readers to guess the location. Some of the street tactics discussed in the previous chapter – such as drag racing, provocative graffiti, car ornamentation, unusual driving practices, and the antics of street hawkers – are also documented and celebrated through the blog. Not surprisingly, the cataloguing of unexpected obstructions to traffic flows (cows, potted plants, crazed magicians, swarms of vultures, collapsed billboards) is a popular online activity as well. As a form of citizen journalism, Karachi Metroblogging is genuinely participatory and timely—though by no means comprehensive, investigative, or even particularly effective in terms of mobilizing the public or advocating policy change. Its appeal, however, lies not in its potential as a mode of civic engagement but in the virtual community and imaginary of Karachi it creates.

Its community is a sizeable one: Metroblogging Karachi receives 3,000 unique visitors and 40,000 page views each day, significant statistics in the Pakistani context, where the digital divide curtails the popularity of local websites. Trackbacks show that the city's residents and diaspora Karachiites are the blog's prime audience. But even beyond this actual audience is the wider imagined community that the blog aims to engage in a conversation about the city. Just as Tony Casino idealized the dance floor as a microcosm of a diverse and cosmopolitan Karachi, bloggers revere Metroblogging

Karachi as an all-encompassing discursive space. Umar Siddiqi, affectionately known by

bloggers as the 'captain' of the website – he manages contributions and handles software

and formatting kinks – sees the blog as an accurate representation, demographically and

ideologically speaking, of the actual city:

> Karachi is a very diverse city and there are many contrasts in the
> city…there are people from different places [within the city] and from all
> over the country so this city has so much to offer and so many faces. So
> [Metroblogging Karachi] is a website about the city on which people
> [talk] about their perspective of life in Karachi and where they come
> from and what they do and how they experience life in Karachi…The
> comments we get show that readership is from all areas. Sometimes the
> English is not so good, the Urdu script is used, or Roman English is used.
> People also say that they're from Landhi or North Nazimabad. People
> may not be from Defence but they work on I.I. Chundrigar Road and
> they have internet access at the office and read and write on the blog
> from there.[194]

The readership Siddiqi alludes to here is diverse in terms of ethnicity, profession, and

socioeconomic class.

This pluralistic and participatory virtual community is further unified under the

directive of the blog – Metrobloggers "love [their] cities. Even the parts [they] hate" –

and in its desire to produce a virtual Karachi that is positive, forward-looking, and, most

importantly, free of violence. In a throwback to Karachiites nostalgic for the city's

nightlife, Siddiqi explains the blog's goals in terms of a good/bad dichotomy:

> People don't care if they only get the news when something bad happens
> in Karachi. But that's not what Karachi is all about. Good is also
> happening in Karachi, but there's no coverage for that. But if you read
> the blog, you'll see whatever else is happening in Karachi.

Much like the saxophonist, street hawkers, and street tacticians we have already

encountered, Siddiqi assumes that the default representation of the city is one of a violent

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[194] Umar Siddiqi in discussion with the author, January 3, 2008. Landhi Town is an industrialized zone in the eastern part of Karachi and is peppered with dense slums. North Nazimabad is a middle- and upper-class residential area to the north of the city. Defence is an elite residential area along the coast at the southernmost tip of the city, while I.I. Chundrigar Road is the main financial district that runs adjacent to the city center.

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and contested space; he therefore projects the city's culture in opposition as the "whatever else" or *other* dimension of Karachi that deserves equal recognition. His desire to portray Karachi as vibrant rather than violent is echoed by Metroblogging Karachi's most prolific poster Dr. Awab Alvi. In reference to the horrifying flare-ups that occurred across the city on May 12, October 18, and December 27 in 2007, this dentist-by-day, blogger-by-night says:

> Recently when all these bad incidents were happening then I thought we should cover Karachi in a positive light and so I went to Flickr and I picked up all these inspirational pictures and for several days I just kept a photo blog. I wanted to Karachi to remember its beauty and how it is really a good place.[195]

Alvi's description of his all-consuming "serious hobby" suggests that blogging literally manifests de Certeau's "space of enunciation," comprising as it does the posts, proclamations, and pontifications of all and sundry. For their part, bloggers, like the best tacticians, must always be "on the watch for opportunities that must be seized on the wing," posting promptly on any number of subjects. The most successful blog posts create or articulate "spaces" that otherwise "cannot be seen" in the context of the mass media and everyday discourse. In so doing, bloggers "select fragments from the vast ensembles of production in order to compose new stories with them." Rather than post on recurrent violent upheavals, Alvi, for instance, chose to upload carefully selected photographs of Karachi to create a new story about the contemporary urban experience. Metroblogging Karachi supposes that the practice of blogging – much like the inventions of pre-1977 Karachi and the mythological topographies manifest on truck art – creates the "dreamed-of space" and "different world" that is a Karachi cleansed of violence.

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[195] Awab Alvi in discussion with the author, December 31, 2007.

Such a desire is not unique to the blog as a medium. Simulated cities such as Deuxième Monde, Virtual Whitehall, and Virtual Los Angeles that duplicate the physical world of Paris, London, and Los Angeles embrace the cities' built environments, "painstakingly [re-creating] buildings and streets," but present them as "clean and free of crime."[196] In the case of computer-generated virtual cities, this effort to "sanitize and secure the city…[succeeds] in removing much of [the city's] life – often there are no people, no cars, no trees, and the streets are eerily empty." In the discursive realm of Metroblogging Karachi, however, urban sanitation and security do not come at the expense of liveliness because the drive to keep the blog cheerful and forward-looking is not an individual or imposed quirk on the part of prominent bloggers and site managers such as Alvi and Siddiqi. It is, instead, a collaborative, contested, and thus carefully negotiated process of social construction. Indeed, blogging enables the ground-up creation of a 'metaphorical city' that inverts the traditional, top-down processes of urban planners and policy makers.

The city thus produced is, however, faced with competing goals: not only do bloggers have to narrate the actual city that is, but in using blogging as a tactic to efface and mitigate violence, they are also committed to coining a virtual representation of Karachi as it "ought to be." By both documenting and 'dreaming' Karachi, bloggers ensure that the virtual city they create is not merely a detached utopia: it is, instead, a far more complex territory than the mythological topographies, safe somewheres, and reappropriated spaces that emerge on the city's streets. In a blog post titled "Why Karachi Sucks: Security," Siddiqi writes:

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[196] Anne Beamish, "The City in Cyberspace," *The Cybercities Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), 274.

The problem more serious than any other problem faced by Karachi today is security. If a common man is worried about something as ridiculous as his mobile phone getting snatched, then the city has some serious issues. Add that to car lifting, robbing, stealing, killing, and you have a city with security chaos at its peak. The security problem in Karachi is very real. If it is not dealt with immediately it might have catastrophic consequences.

What people can do: Well, all that we can do is be careful...Avoid dark, empty streets while talking or driving. Don't take out your wallet or mobile phone in the street. Last but not the least, report any incidents to the authorities, even though they might not be the most helpful people around.[197]

It is notable that this post was submitted by the person whose self-professed investment in Metroblogging Karachi is to show that "good is also happening in Karachi." The safety advice he imparts recalls common driving practices and the traffic updates broadcast by FM radio stations that remap the city according to safe somewheres and violent nowheres. Cognizant of the competing responsibility to narrate the actual city while envisioning its utopic future, Siddiqi concludes his post with a caveat: *"The series 'Why Karachi Sucks' is aimed at highlighting the most serious problems that make Karachi a tough city to survive in...The intention is not to make our city look bad, but to be realistic enough to face the facts as they are, instead of sugar coating them."*

Not surprisingly, given its explicit – albeit apologetic – discussion of everyday violence, Siddiqi's post generated one of the most active discussions that Metroblogging Karachi has ever hosted (within three hours of the post appearing on the website it elicited 43 comments). Some readers argued that the blog's goal was to efface and eradicate violence from virtual Karachi by never openly acknowledging it in the way that Siddiqi had. A poster identifying himself as Obi Wan Kenobi, for example, complained: "Umar, almost all readers suggested you not to use this subject for your posts but you

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[197] Kar_Umar, comment on "Why Karachi Sucks: Security," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on May 7, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2007/05/07/why-karachi-sucks-security/#comments.

don't seem to care. You should be more considerate."[198] Another blogger took a more

severe stand, recommending self-exile: "If you are so irritated then why don't you leave

this city? Such mentality can't be helpful for our city."[199] Significantly, the blogger does

not make a distinction between Metroblogging Karachi and the actual city, his words

implying that the blog itself is "our city." Since violence only exists in this discursive

realm when acknowledged through prose, a "mentality" that willingly does so must be

driven out, thereby effacing the threat. This blogger's extreme position was complicated,

though, by an unregistered user of the blog:

> Dude, we need to be cognizant of the fact that this is an international
> blog that everyone around the world reads for information about Karachi.
> I always thought of metblogs.com as a venue for those who love their
> city to share their observations as well as provide reviews/updates of
> various happenings, events, etc in the city. When a posting with such a
> negative title is seen it brings into question the motives and loyalty of the
> blogger to his city. While I do acknowledge whatever you have said is
> true, I don't know if this site is the appropriate place for your
> grievances.[200]

Here, a distinction is made between the virtual and actual city whereby the former is

positioned as the sanitized public face of Karachi while the latter is a "negative" space.

Since the poster acknowledges the city's security problem, it seems as if s/he too

substitutes virtual Karachi for the actual city. Loyalty to the violence-free virtual realm is

privileged over the security of the actual city, which, as a "negative" realm, is implicitly

cast as the "appropriate place" to air "grievances" against security, leaving the blog to

emerge as a utopic space.

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[198] Obi Wan Kenobi, comment on "Why Karachi Sucks: Security," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on May 7, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2007/05/07/why-karachi-sucks-security/#comments.
[199] Adnan Siddiqi, comment on "Why Karachi Sucks: Security," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on May 8, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2007/05/07/why-karachi-sucks-security/#comments.
[200] International, comment on "Why Karachi Sucks: Security," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on May 7, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2007/05/07/why-karachi-sucks-security/#comments.

Meanwhile, other readers, like the tacticians we have met before, were interested in normalizing and mitigating the violence: Red_Munk argued, "Don't worry. Stuffs may 'seem' bad, but what city is perfect. Like everywhere else, you have to be responsible for yourself. Be it safety or anything else."[201] Here, violence is conceived of as a normal condition of urbanity, a circumstance that city dwellers should be able to manage individually. Red_Munk's use of the word "seem" in quotation marks also hints at virtuality, suggesting that the imperfect city under discussion is the discursive city enabled by Metroblogging Karachi. Perhaps Red Munk believes that virtual Karachi could approach a more convincing urbanity by embracing rather than effacing violence. Another likeminded poster XYZ says, "the series is interesting but you need to change the title...you can rather word it as: Areas of Improvement for Karachi, or Things I would like to change in Karachi."[202] Although Siddiqi's original post does not propose solutions to the endemic security problem it highlights, XYZ empowers himself through a rhetorical turn, presenting violence as something that can be improved upon or changed.

Only one poster insisted on representing in this virtual forum the reality of violence in the actual city: "Security issues are very much there and just closing our eyes and negating them simply won't help," said d0ct0r, adding, "there is nothing wrong with highlighting these problems."[203] This comment, which was ignored by posters who otherwise remained in dialogue with each other, undermines the collaborative effort at

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[201] Red_Munk, comment on "Why Karachi Sucks: Security," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on May 8, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2007/05/07/why-karachi-sucks-security/#comments.
[202] XYZ, comment on "Why Karachi Sucks: Security," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on May 8, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2007/05/07/why-karachi-sucks-security/#comments.
[203] d0ct0r, comment on "Why Karachi Sucks: Security," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on May 8, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2007/05/07/why-karachi-sucks-security/#comments.

eradicating or mitigating violence in virtual Karachi showing that that the ground-up, social construction of a safe urban space is a more challenging task than private reminiscences or the individual enactment of a tactical move.

Indeed, while an isolated instance, the blog post described here suggests virtual Karachi's ontological instability, its discursive multiplicity. As an online representation of actual Karachi, the blog is a "space of enunciation" where Karachiites can organize and interpret the physical city they inhabit. But virtual Karachi also serves as an "anti-text [that] effects dissimulation and escape," enabling "possibilities of moving into other landscapes" persistently free of violence. As competing urban productions occur simultaneously at the same site, the blog becomes a shifting discursive space, one that explicitly acknowledges *from the same location* the city for what it is, and implicitly for what it could be.

This multiplicity draws the blog closer to the street, where a "chorus" of tactics appropriate the space, reconfiguring it in any number of often contradictory ways. However, street tactics maintain spatial distinction in that their embodiment in physical space limits the extent to which different ways of operating can be effectuated from the same location. Similar concerns about embodiment and escape are made apparent with regards to virtual Karachi. After all, on one level, blogging is an embodied practice: an individual sits at the computer, typing posts. In the context of Karachi, though, blogging becomes an escape from violence even at this embodied stage since it is achieved from the safety of one's home under protection of the anonymity permitted by the internet, which shields a person's physical being from attack in the event that they voice an inflammatory opinion. This safety allows the blogger to transition to the "different

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world" created by the blog, a disembodied space built upon the guarantee of bodily integrity. As Ken Hillis points out, "from the fiber-optic privilege of cyberspace, the human body becomes one more thing within a nihilistic perspective of data overload."[204] Virtual spaces make the human body redundant – but only via the prior assurance of its stability – a fact that is comforting in a violent setting where the physical body is prone to harm.

But why do bloggers frequently *privilege* the virtual city over the actual one? This spatial tussle might best be explained by considering instead the different temporalities of the two 'cities'. Siddiqi describes Metroblogging Karachi as "an interesting database or online history of what happens in the city." By reconfiguring the blog as a history, he imagines a future in which Karachiites seek their city's past in Metroblogging Karachi. This dimension of virtuality recalls Gilles Deleuze's insistence that a past *"coexists with itself as a present."*[205] He points out that a past is "stuck between two presents: the present that it was and the current present in relation to which it is now past." The past is thus understood as a potentiality, which, with the passage of time, becomes a reality. As Deleuze argues, "it is the essence of the virtual to be actualized,"[206] making what was the virtual into *"this* past." That is, virtuality denotes a condition of being that which may eventually be actualized in the present (which, from the perspective of the past 'now', is the future). In this sense, the virtual city as incarnated through the blog is an online history of a Karachi that is yet to be actualized. The need to maintain Metroblogging Karachi as a violence-free space, then, has a greater goal, since what exists virtually may

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[204] Hillis, 281.
[205] Gilles Deleuze, "Bergson, 1859-1941," *Desert Islands*, ed. David Lapoujade (Paris: Semiotext(e), 2004), 29.
[206] Ibid, 28.

ultimately be realized as the actual city. Blogging can thus be considered as an act of remembering in the moment, the virtual Karachi being a projection, a glimpse into an idealized future city, the city that "ought to be" in the very moment of its coming into being. From this Deleuzian perspective, it begins to make sense why bloggers might privilege the virtual city over the actual one: their posts, after all, are the (potential) building blocks of a better city of tomorrow.

4.2. Tactic as Strategy

Not all virtual futures *will* be realized, however. To enable a future city, bloggers must also codify the social construction of a virtual Karachi: after all, a virtuality cannot be actualized if it remains ever-evolving and contradictory, an unstable stream of inventions and productions. The process of actualization necessarily includes snuffing out potentialities, shutting down "different worlds." In their attempt to create a "good," violence-free virtual Karachi in the hope that it will one day be actualized, bloggers therefore have to streamline the urban possibilities available on the website. It is perhaps for this reason that Metroblogging Karachi is hierarchically arranged: between 15 and 18 bloggers are authorized to post prominently and consistently to the blog, while the rest of Karachi's population is lumped together in the readership category. Readers' contributions to the blog are clearly differentiated from posts by authorized bloggers, their thoughts appearing a click away on the comments page, restricted in length, and denied the option of incorporating multimedia content such as photographs or video clips. Alvi, an authorized blogger himself, admits, "there's no democracy in choosing new bloggers, we just take recommendations from our team when a space opens up." Both

Alvi and Siddiqi also confess to flexing editorial muscle and controlling the content that appears on the site. Alvi acknowledges that if you "start controlling content [on a blog], then you don't get the purity of it." At the same time, however, he recalls telling fellow bloggers what content they should produce:

> After May 12 [2007], we were worried that the website would get too political and so we sent out a list to our membership saying, okay, slow down, the posts are too political – emphasize the non-political stuff, show what's happening on the streets, what's happening every day.

'Captain' Siddiqi, meanwhile, takes his steering duties quite seriously. He describes how he monitors the blog, deleting those comments that contain foul language, that are "off topic and have nothing to do with the original post," that "are bad comments with a bad tone and are judging our authors," or that seem to comprise "fake stories or fiction." Siddiqi could not elaborate on what criteria he uses to determine a comment's suitability, explaining that he exercises judgment on a case-by-case basis. This top-down control of the blog is complemented by self-censorship amongst the blogging community: the excerpts from the discussion about Karachi's security situation show how readers check authorized bloggers and each other, make suggestions to ensure that the blog champions its mandate of presenting Karachi in a positive light, and apologize for or justify the inclusion of provocative comments that highlight the city's shortcomings.

In the process of creating a virtual Karachi sanitized of all crime and violence, though, the multiple tactics of blogging begin to resemble a unified and coherent strategy. After all, the "ways of using" the blog are imposed by a "dominant order"—the elite of authorized bloggers. Readers who choose to comment on the site know that they are participating in a *proper* space, one with a clearly stated agenda and rules about how to achieve the goal of producing a positive Karachi. Their tendency to self-censor and

conform to expectations reveal how they are already caught in "nets of discipline" imposed by the blog's basic premise of 'loving' Karachi. De Certeau's conception of strategies is formulated with regards to consumers whose desires are subsumed within the "systems" of "sociocultural production": he argues, "the steadily increasing expansion of these systems no longer leaves consumers any *place* in which they can indicate what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems."[207] His analysis could as easily describe the fate of the bloggers and readers of Metroblogging Karachi who find that with each deleted comment and each critiqued post, they are left less "place" in which to construct their version of a virtual Karachi.

Indeed, the transformation of the tactic into the strategy is exemplified by the fact that the rhetoric of Metroblogging Karachi resembles what one might at first blush take to be its opposite: the sanitized official presentation of the actual city available on CDGK: Official Web Portal of City District Government Karachi. The city government's official website introduces the city as follows:

> Karachi the mega city is the largest city, original capital and cultural, economical, philanthropic, educational, and political hub, as well as the largest port of the country.[208]

The string of superlatives deployed here is a less elegant version of content included in a post about graffiti and stickers reading "I ♥ KHI" that appeared across the city – on walls, traffic signs, buses, T-shirts, and the baseball caps donned by street hawkers – during the turbulent winter of 2007-2008. The blogger Sid excerpted and posted the following quote from an interview he conducted with one of the anonymous instigators behind the 'Loving Karachi' campaign:

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[207] De Certeau, xii.
[208] CDGK: Official Web Portal of City District Government Karachi, "Karachi: The Gateway to Pakistan," http://www.karachicity.gov.pk/.

> As a mega-metropolis in the world today, KHI must present herself as a dramatic, defiant, self-conscious, independent and nurturing mother whose beauty lies in the fact that she is so unconditionally loved by her inhabitants...I LOVE KHI is not only for the melancholic, for those trying to swim upstream in their river of nostalgia; but for those who find themselves in the new KHI–a strong, self-affirming city full of possibility, attracting hundreds of thousands from other parts of the country; our only true melting pot, where life is currently knotted but charged. Karachi is drunk with business opportunities, tele-communications, internet and real-estate deals abound, the service industry has finally awakened and we are most certainly entertained.[209]

This shared language connects Metroblogging Karachi with the official website. It is explicitly manifest in both sites' obsessive desire to realize the potential of a "city full of possibility" in a flawless Karachi of the future. Not only does Sid's post look ahead to an "awakened" city, but Metroblogging Karachi's implicit goal of producing a virtual Karachi to be actualized in the future is directly addressed on the government website: the mayor Syed Mustafa Kamal is quoted as saying, "I see bright future for Karachi because all the problems would be solved...new developments are commencing in the city and we are going to build up Karachi of future."[210] Similarly exuberant and positivist is the government's description of Karachi's physical and demographic diversity:

> Karachi prides itself on being one of the most livable cities in world. An interesting and colorful combination of the old and new tradition offers more than 18 million residents the opportunity to taste, touch, and experience things from diverse cultures. The narrow twisted lanes and alleys of the old city throb with energy along-side the wide metalled roads and elegant modern buildings.

This celebration of a city of "diverse cultures" resonates with Siddiqi's idealistic rendering of the ethnic and economic diversity of the blogging community.

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[209] Sid, comment on "I ♥ KHI," Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on November 18, 2007, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2007/11/18/i-%E2%99%A5-khi/.
[210] CDGK: Official Web Portal of City District Government Karachi, "City Nazim: Syed Mustafa Kamal," http://www.karachicity.gov.pk/.

Such similarities extend into the visual realm as well. The dynamic Flash presentation that greets visitors to the CDGK website comprises still images of the city at night, its major flyovers, as well as the port in a slide show format. Many of the same images can be found on Metroblogging Karachi. In a post titled "The Birds of Karachi Must Feel Lucky!", Nadir replicates several images from the government website, saying, "I came across recent pictures of Karachi. Since then, I was wondering that it doesn't matter how much broken roads we still have, and a number of failed and seized construction projects – we still have made it to the point when we look at our city it looks good, in fact it looks awesome!"[211] Given that government officials and bloggers are thus united in their goal to present Karachi in a positive light, it is not surprising the tactic of blogging seems increasingly in line with official strategy.

4.3. Virtual Karachi: Tactical, Strategic, and Violent

One would think, however, that the strategic evolution of Metroblogging Karachi would motivate some of its bloggers and readers to respond tactically and create still other "*migrational* and metaphorical cities," new websites where different visions for virtual Karachi are articulated. Trawl through the internet, though, and very few alternative Karachi-specific websites with an interest in engaging the city's residents will emerge. Instead, you might hit upon Karachi Page, one of the earliest incarnations of virtual Karachi established in 1997. There is a warning in fine print that the website "contains images of violence against people of Karachi, especially against Mohajirs, by

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[211] Nadir, comment on "The Birds of Karachi Must Feel Lucky!" Metroblogging Karachi, comment posted on April 3, 2008, http://karachi.metblogs.com/2008/04/03/the-birds-of-karachi-must-feel-lucky/.

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terrorist governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif."[212] As such, Karachi Page is

indeed a tactic, a subversive response to state policies that called for a military operation

– many would argue an attempted, extra-judicial ethnic cleansing – to "clean up"

Karachi, in other words, rid it of the *"mohajir* menace."[213] In this context, Karachi Page's

tactical viability exists in relation to the actual city. In the online realm of virtual Karachi,

however, it is unclear what strategy the website might be tactically deployed against.

In fact, Karachi Page is better read as a virtual mimesis of – rather than a counter

to – the actual city that is experienced and imagined as violent. The website is an

assemblage of decontextualized, gory images of dead bodies, severed limbs, bloodstained

streets, wounded men on stretchers, bodies piled up in ambulances, instances of police

brutality, and funeral processions. The titles of internal links on the website include

"violence," "fake encounter,"[214] "mass arrest," and "dead *mohajirs*." A series of images

on the "mass arrests" page appears to be a form of photojournalism, with successive

photographs showing how Rangers – elite Pakistani security forces – round up *mohajirs*

"and 'ask' them to board the trucks, treating them as cattles." Another internal link on the

website titled "city tour" leads to images of everyday life in Karachi. However, the

images of the downtown skyline, landmark buildings and monuments, residences, parks,

and the beachfront at Clifton are here interspersed with portraits of working class

Karachiites at their jobs or in the market, beggars on streets, traffic policemen at stop

lights, and children playing near train tracks. The website thus visually expresses the

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[212] Karachi Page, http://www.karachipage.com.

[213] Jafri, 123.

[214] 'Fake encounter' is a term that was popularized by the news media in Karachi in the 1990s. It refers to an instance in which MQM activists are killed in what members of their political party claim was a targeted, extra-judicial killing by state actors, and what the authorities claim was an 'encounter' between security forces and illegally armed youth militias.

urban imaginary of Karachi as violent: the city emerges as a tumultuous space in which violence is the norm against which everyday practices nevertheless manage to persevere.

Given this realist representation, perhaps we ought to rethink Metroblogging Karachi as both a tactical and strategic response to the violent virtual city of Karachi Page. If so, a new ontological query arises: can an everyday practice be simultaneously strategic and tactical? Further, what are we to understand through the juxtaposition of the CDGK website and Karachi Page? One website embraces Karachi as a utopic realm while the other depicts it as persistently violent, yet they are both enabled by the same political standpoint, the same ethnic legacy, the same relationship to actual, lived violence.[215] And what of the reading of Karachi Page as a tactic deployed against Metroblogging Karachi and similar sites that deny the city's experience of violence? In the face of the indiscriminate effacement of all violence from virtual Karachi, the attempt of the Karachi Page community, one that has mourned many sons and fathers, to ensure that the memory and brutal circumstances of their loved ones' deaths survive online might easily be construed as tactical.

This positional ambiguity suggests the limits of de Certeau's binary construction in which strategies and tactics are neatly pitted against each other. I had asked what the situation would look like if tactics were deployed against tactics, or if one could no longer distinguish between the strategy and the tactic? The question remains unanswered – perhaps it cannot be answered – but the utility of this opposition itself, I would argue, has been demonstrated by the multiple, competing incarnations of virtual Karachi. Indeed, the dynamics of the strategy and the tactic must be understood as fluid and shifting (dare I say tactical?), that is, a matter to be decided in the light of practices and

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[215] The MQM has been elected to the City District Government since 2005.

perceptions that constantly shift between "different worlds." What endures through it all – in the lives of nostalgic Karachiites, on the city's streets, and in blog posts – is the violence. And in the face of that violence, distinctions collapse between state and citizen, between authority and resistance, between somewhere and nowhere, between virtuality and actuality, between order and chaos, between strategy and tactic, and, finally between traditional urbanity as it commonly understood and the lived experience of Karachi.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

As an incurable Karachiite, I acknowledge that this thesis has been written from an odd positionality: I am addressing – if in quasi-exile – the same location from which I am speaking. Who am I, after all, to characterize the behaviors and practices of fellow Karachiites? Since my permanent home address still contains Karachi's 75500 zip code, this project has not been a traditional anthropological exercise premised on my documenting and understanding from the outside the basic tenets of the culture I am observing. My project might, in James Buzzard's terms, be called a form of auto-ethnography, an attempt to theorize and describe my own everyday practice.[216] Catherine Driscoll argues that such an exercise "[does] not require reference to a culture other than one's own...the everyday is the practice of culture without reflection on its productivity or its meaning."[217]

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[216] James Buzzard, "On Autoethnographic Identity," *Yale Journal of Criticism: Interpretation in the Humanities*, 16, 1 (2003), 33.
[217] Driscoll, 386.

But rather than fully embrace Driscoll's implication that the everyday by its very nature defies self-reflexivity, this thesis needs to be understood as yet another tactical response to Karachi's violent urban imaginary, one that suits my own situation as a graduate student and a journalist. I have used this thesis as a way to reflect on the "meaning" of my own "practice" of Karachi's culture, my "productivity" as a Karachiite. As strategies and tactics become indistinguishable from each other, one conclusion remains to be reached at the end of this road: despite the violence, I ♥ KHI.

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