

**Entrepreneurship, Urban Planning and Transnational Migration in  
Postcolonial Karachi**

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This paper drawn on material for my second book project which is a comparative and transnational study of urban entrepreneurship and infrastructure development in postcolonial Karachi and Bombay. Current histories of South Asian cities offer seminal accounts about architectural and town planning in cities during the colonial period however the effects of development schemes that were adopted in postcolonial South Asian cities has been explored comparatively less, particularly by historians.<sup>1</sup> This paper explores the spatial and economic effects of new models of planning, migration and the transnational flow of capital from outside the subcontinent—all of which have been relatively unexplored in postcolonial period. Interpreting master plans, newspaper reporting, architectural journals, and ethnographic interviews with planners/architects, builders, shopkeepers and city residents, I discuss the manner in which Pakistani and European urban planners undertook urban planning projects in Karachi roughly between 1952 and 1965. In the context of attempting to produce a “scientifically” produced master plan, or projection of the future

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<sup>1</sup> Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India : Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900-1940*, *Cambridge South Asian Studies* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny*, *Asia's Great Cities* (London: Routledge, 2005), Mariam Dossal, *Imperial Designs and Indian Realities: The Planning of Bombay City, 1845-1875*, *Oxford India Paperbacks* (Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), Kenneth L. Gillion, *Ahmedabad: A Study in Indian Urban History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), William J. Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856-1877* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), Nikhil Rao, *House, but No Garden: Apartment Living in Bombay's Suburbs, 1898-1964* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2013). The following two works are important exceptions however the focus of these studies differs significantly from my study: Matthew Hull, *Government of Paper* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), Janaki Nair, *The Promise of the Metropolis: Bangalore's Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

economic, social and spatial growth of the city, I suggest that the creation of a hierarchy of urban marketplaces played a significant role in the ascendant American model for Pakistani cities though one that might not always have been intended. Specifically, local bazaars and “district shopping centers”, as they were called, formed important “nodes” of the cities’ spatial and economic growth located as they were along the newly planned road network and on sites meant to contain trade and consumption. I demonstrate how such plans for the city diverged in important ways from the manner in which commerce and industry was organized in the city before 1952. (For much of the early twentieth century, both commerce and industrial production were concentrated in Saddar which contained the most populated quarters of the city in which commercial, residential and some industrial activities were situated.)<sup>2</sup>

Though my book as a whole investigates comparable processes in the context of postcolonial Bombay, investigating the economic dimensions of master planning in postcolonial Karachi in this particular paper is important because the case underscores a process in which economic development, which was largely committed to a strategy of state-led planning in Pakistan from 1947 onward, was significantly reconfigured by a combination of unforeseen forces some of which were particularly consequential for the social and economic development of postcolonial

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<sup>2</sup> Yasmin Cheema, *The Historical Quarters of Karachi* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Karachi. These include novel discourses about the organization of urban commerce and industry and massive demographic shifts in the city because of the consequences of post Partition migration during which the population (between 1951 and 1972, the population of Karachi increased by 217%).<sup>3</sup> In addition, the case of development in Karachi is located at the intersection of a telling contradiction in economic policy in early postcolonial Pakistan, one in which the state driven development tolerated experiments in commercial capitalism and the expansion of modest habits of individuated consumption particularly from the late 1970s onward. Understanding the unfolding of the commercial economy of Karachi, which has historically been the premier commercial center of Pakistan, that possessed global and regional trade and migration links since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, contributes to our understanding of urban entrepreneurship and consumption as a part of the development of capitalism in South Asia.

The remainder of this paper is organized in the following manner. I examine three interrelated counterforces that reconfigured the state's effort to plan the future social and economic development of the entire city through new techniques of master planning. I discuss the effects of: 1) the arrival of the *muhajirs* as post-Partition migrants to the city; 2) reinterpretation and violations of the principals of the original master plans

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<sup>3</sup> Arif Hasan, *Karachi Master Plan 1952 – 1985/2000* ([cited January 4 2013]); available from <http://www.urckarachi.org/Karachi%20Master%20Plan%20Pervious.HTM>.

concerning commerce; and 3) the flow of modest amounts of foreign capital from migrant workers of Pakistani origin in Dubai.