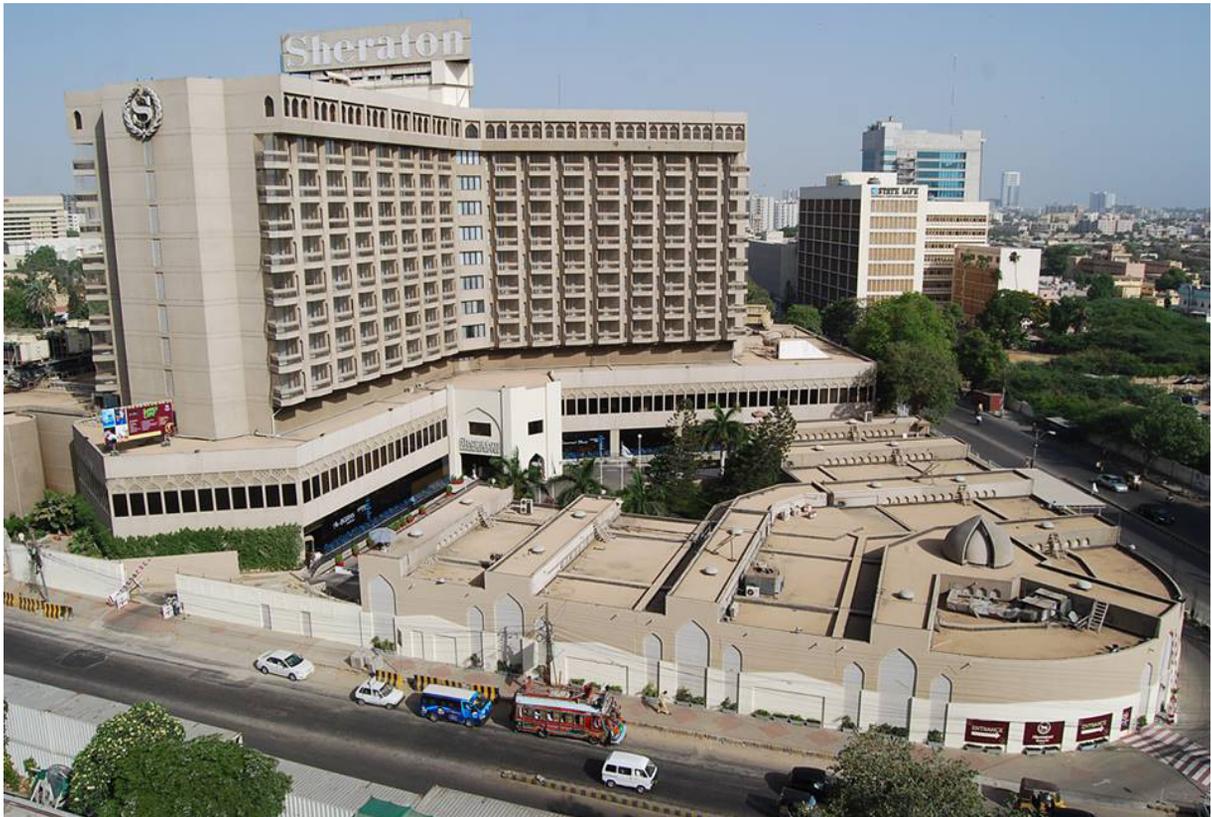


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LIVING THE SECURITY CITY: KARACHI'S ARCHIPELAGO OF ENCLAVES



“Safe and Secure: The Sheraton Karachi Hotel is now surrounded by an anti-blast wall which enables us to control all access to the property, making it one of the safest places in the city. Let us take care of your safety and security needs to make you feel right at home. We look forward to welcoming you.”¹

Like many of the enclaves used by elites and foreign visitors in this troubled megacity of over 20 million,² the Karachi Sheraton Hotel is increasingly fortified off from its immediate environment.³ Blast walls, checkpoints, surveillance systems, and armies of police and security guards continually work to try and control how the hotel’s commodious internal spaces relate to an outside street deemed deeply insecure and prone to unpredictable moments of violence.

Today, a widespread logic of military securitization—which Stephen Graham has termed the “new military urbanism”⁴—exists in many of the world’s cities, even those that are not formal war zones. In those cities, an obsession with attaining total security—especially around financial centers, ports, residential areas, embassy districts, and mega events—results in the generalization of the kind of passage-point architectures most familiar from airports to everyday urban landscapes.

Enclaves such as those surrounding the Karachi Sheraton Hotel have emerged in response to heightened perceptions of vulnerability within a wider city wrecked by murderous violence. But it is important to look beyond the already familiar physical architectures of enclaved cities per se. By focusing merely on the physical architectures of securitized cities—their fortified walls, checkpoints, and barriers—risks an environmentally deterministic perspective suggesting that these constructions work completely or that their effects can be assumed from their appearance. Complex *interconnections* between gated enclaves and the rest of the city are easily overlooked. This is especially so when it becomes clear that immense and ongoing labor is required to even create the pretense that relations between the inside of enclaves and the broader city can ever be fully scrutinized and filtered within huge, dynamic, and highly mobile megacities.

In what follows, our discussion will center on the dynamic relationships between those who perform and work the boundaries of enclaves and those who live and use enclaved spaces. We will concern ourselves with the neglected question of how the transformation

of megacity landscapes into uneven patchworks of securitized enclaves work to produce novel experiences and forms of urban political life. Our question, then, is simple: How is the new security city, the archipelago of gated enclaves, lived?

To address this question we draw empirical references from Sobia Ahmad Kaker’s doctoral research examining inside-outside relationships resulting from widespread and rapid enclavization—the process of creating secure enclaves which filter circulation—in Karachi. The main port and financial center in Pakistan, Karachi has become a lightning rod through which two programs of organized violence pass and operate. On the one hand, the city is the pivotal logistical hub and vital transit route for US and coalition forces fighting the war in Afghanistan. On the other, Taliban groups fighting the US-led coalition forces across the porous Afghanistan-Pakistan border have swelled the ranks of the city’s existing criminal and mafia groups. In some cases, they have also created their own syndicates to generate revenue for their terrorist activities.

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The radical insecurity of life in Karachi that has resulted operates at the expense of ordinary citizens who feel deeply vulnerable to violence in their everyday lives. Karachi has been branded one of the world’s most dangerous cities, with a murder rate of approximately 13.49 per 100,000 in 2012.⁵ Between 2007 and 2012, 1,360 people were killed in terrorist attacks (suicide bombings and sectarian killings), and more than 2,209 were injured.⁶

Karachi residents live among multiple fears: terrorist attacks, muggings, kidnapping for ransom, violent burglaries, and targeted killings. The recurring news reports of pitched battles between political groups and urban gangs, and between security forces and criminals, grip residents with fear. Failures in enforcing law and

order have destroyed the public's confidence in both municipal and national security governance. These trends have encouraged an ever-widening process of enclave formation in residential areas, commercial spaces, and places of leisure. Emergent forms of private security governance and securitization have erupted into improvised architectures of walls, fences, and checkpoints across the urban landscape.

Inside-Outside Relationships

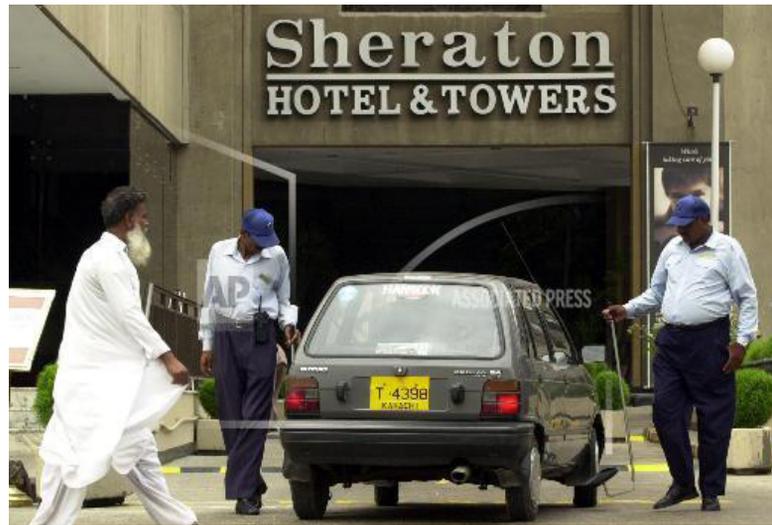
Despite the walls, setbacks, razor wire, gates, fences, and omnipresent security cameras, enclaves must remain deeply connected to the wider city and to the world beyond. To function usefully, all manner of connections, mobilities, and flows—of residents, labor, services, data, energy, waste, and goods and commodities—must continually link the inside and outside of enclaves. Efforts to filter how these inside-outside relationships operate require enormous investment and continuous work. Walls and barriers, in and of themselves, don't reorganize the texture of urban life; the prosaic and often very boring world of security labor does. How such labor is organized does much to shape the details of how enclave formation works to restructure the experience and politics of urban life within fragmenting cities.

Detailed research on what sociologists call the "situated practices" of security labor in and around enclave boundaries shows that attempts to filter the various circulations are often extremely ineffective and frequently, symbolic, even theatrical. Assumptions that security practices can truly monitor and surveil every aspect of these relationships in massive cities are deeply flawed.

Below, we take a look at these tensions and paradoxes in detail in case studies of how three very different enclaves in Karachi help to constitute broader patterns and experiences of the city: the Karachi Sheraton; Clifton Block 7, a recently enclavized residential neighborhood close to the high security zone; and Sultanabad, a poor and marginalized settlement neighboring it. These cases have been developed using information gathered from qualitative fieldwork conducted between April 2011 and July 2012. All interviews quoted correspond to this time frame.

Symbolic Security: The Elite Hotel Enclave

The Karachi Sheraton's system of defense includes hard boundaries and state-of-the-art surveillance and security technologies. Security checks start well before anyone enters the hotel. Cars line up in a separate lane



on the main road leading to the main gate. Once guards establish where the occupants of the car are headed and why, second- and third-tier checks involve screening the vehicles for explosives or suspicious objects. An apparatus of armed guards, sniffer dogs, angled mirrors, and screening devices embedded in the road combine to check the car's occupants, chassis, hood, and trunk for suspicious contents. If these steps are cleared without piquing suspicions, the vehicle is granted entry.

Pedestrians, too, face airport-style security checks: walking through a scanner gate and placing bags and metal items in a basket that goes through an X-ray device. Guards stationed at these posts are tasked to identify suspicious people or items.

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Our interviews with people going through the checks showed that the very process of ensuring security inside the hotel worked to dramatically heighten a sense of insecurity outside. This is because the peripheral security architectures of enclaves are often the very targets of suicide and other bomb attacks. In May 2002, for instance, a suicide car bomb targeting French naval engineers staying at the Sheridan exploded outside

the hotel's gates killing 14 people, 11 of whom were the engineers. "If a terrorist blast occurs," remarks Gulmina, a regular guest at the hotel, "it [will] most likely happen when I'm going through the security checks, stuck between the cars in front and behind me."

The sheer monotony for security labor in an enclaved city and how this labor works to produce theatrical symbols of the distancing between inside and outside is also evident at the Sheraton. Walking through the pedestrian check, it becomes obvious how perfunctory the whole process is. The weary guard looks into a bag halfheartedly, while chatting to his colleague who is supposed to be screening other bags passing through the conveyor.

One of these guards—Aslam, who we will encounter later—voices our suspicions. "My presence here shows how strict Sheraton's security is," he says. "Even if I don't fully check people's bags . . . I take a cursory look anyway. I really have no way of stopping a blast. That is all up to Allah! I'm likely to be the first victim, the unnamed person who dies with the big names."

Aslam draws attention to the performative nature of security checks, and the inevitably permeable connections that link enclaves to the city and to the world beyond. The impossibility of perfect control and total, panoptic transparency means that, despite careful measures, security breaches continually occur.

This is especially so when the terrorist's very body becomes the explosive ordinance at precisely the moment that scrutiny takes place—as in the act of suicide bombing. In a video released in November 2010 after a particularly deadly attack on the fortified building housing the Criminal Investigation Department (a few hundred meters from the Sheraton), a suicide bomber made a posthumous claim. "I am fit and healthy and can fight anywhere, but I have offered myself for the suicide attack only to defeat the enemy's technology. The enemy has technology that can only be defeated by the suicide attack."⁷

Securitization in a city terrorized by suicide bombing is thus contradictory. The technologies that promise security generate insecurities. In the case of suicide attacks, the public is collateral damage in a war on enclaves that are produced as putative responses to urban insecurity. Security architectures, processes, and technologies also inevitably generate insecurities and security gaps within themselves. The very guards employed to buttress security within enclaves are a cause for concern for many on the "inside" who strive for protection.

The Enclosed Elite Neighborhood: The 'Enemy' Within?

Such perceived problems come to light especially in upscale residential enclaves like Karachi's Clifton Block 7, a recently enclosed neighborhood for the urban elite. Unwanted and risky circulation is now restricted in Clifton Block 7 through the placement of barriers at all exit and entry points, which are operated by private security guards whose scrutiny is reinforced by CCTV cameras. The neighborhood is also patrolled round the clock by guards on motorcycles. In paradoxical ways reminiscent of some of the dystopian fiction of J.G. Ballard, these watchful eyes make some Block 7 residents uneasy. "I don't like the idea of these guards knowing my daily routine," admits Samina, a Clifton Block 7 resident. "I feel more insecure knowing that they are aware of my movements and daily pattern."

Indeed, the system seems to turn in on itself in multiple ways. Azim, a senior member of the Block 7 residents' association who took the authors to the control room, proudly states, "I tell the guards that



these CCTV [cameras] not only watch criminals but also watch them, so we'll know immediately if they have been lax in their jobs.”

This paradox of insecurity is one aspect of enclavization that highlights the deeply politicized nature of these spaces. Service workers such as maids, drivers, gardeners, and guards—residents of the deeply insecure city beyond who must be continually relied on to provide security and other services within enclaves—are never fully trusted. The security officer at the Sheraton and the president of the Clifton Block 7 Residents Association repeatedly tell us that their biggest threat comes from their laborers, who, they argue, live among what one termed pejoratively “criminals from low-income settlements.”

Police and security officials recommend strict background checks before hiring guards or other service staff. The suggested procedure is to verify the validity of the potential employee’s national identity card (NIC) by text messaging the number to the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), which immediately replies with details to corroborate the applicant’s NIC information. The employer is advised to register the NIC with the local police to ensure that the applicant does not have a criminal record and that the police know where to locate the employee in case of an untoward event.

Despite being users of enclaved spaces, workers are constantly viewed with suspicion. We thus confront the central contradiction of the enclaved megacity: The vast labor of work essential for producing and sustaining elite enclaves falls to an army of low-paid and profoundly insecure workers who inhabit the increasingly demonized city beyond.

Marginal Enclaves: Demonization and Insecurity

The formalization of this mistrust through complex governance and policing arrangements further marginalizes poor urban service workers. But how do they fare, as political subjects and residents, within the insecure megacity? They, too, are pushed into their own much more peripheral and less well-resourced enclaves for mutual protection. In poorer neighborhoods, police and state security intervention involves violent incursions rather than paternal protection. Such raids treat residents as sources of insecurity for the wealthier and more powerful enclaves of the city, where, ironically, many of the same residents work all week performing security for visitors and residents.

Sultanabad—our final case study—is one such enclave in Karachi, a dense, multiethnic, low-income settlement located within the frequently targeted security



“red zone.” It neighbors the fortified US Consulate and is within a one-mile radius of other securitized enclaves: the Karachi Port, the Criminal Investigation Department, the Governor’s House, law courts, Clifton Block 7, and numerous five-star hotels, including the Sheraton.

Although not totally walled yet, Sultanabad is nevertheless an enclave. Its narrow, labyrinthine streets and alleys are reinforced by its reputation as a volatile and dangerous place, deterring visits from the police and other outsiders. During our visit to Sultanabad, we were narrated stories of different *mohallahs*, or small neighborhood clusters, as being strictly out-of-bounds for even local residents. Such *mohallahs* have been subjected to various militarized “urban operations” by the police and paramilitary forces, searching for suspects involved in crimes ranging from robberies, illegal drug trading, and terrorist activities.

Although viewed by security forces as a space that generates insecurity to the wider city, Sultanabad’s residents argue that they themselves are victims of the militarization of Karachi. One resident, Aslam, whom we met earlier at the Karachi Sheraton, points to his smart security guard’s uniform and wonders, “What’s the point of this? I can’t seem to keep my family and me secure! The other night someone crept into our apartment through the window and took my mobile phone and my savings!”

Kausar, a cleaning lady who works at a residence in Clifton Block 7, speaks of her ordeal. “Between the police and the forthcoming elections, I have had enough!” she complains. “Every few days the police come in—I don’t know who or what they are looking for. And then all these political party workers come in, asking for votes...sweet-talking and threatening in the same breath!”

A heightened sense of everyday insecurity, cases of police brutality and injustice, and a sense of abandonment by the state are common themes in interviews with locals in Sultanabad. Yet for all of them, enclavization—which in this instance refers to restricting external influence through community-based protection—has been an effective strategy for navigating urban life.

For Sultanabad’s inhabitants, the process of being pushed out of the urban mainstream turned into a process of establishing alternative ways of living, managing, and governing everyday life. The residents have organized themselves politically and now choose patronage from political parties that can offer maximum gains for neighborhood development. Residents have also established community arrangements for policing and dispensing justice, so as to offer residents some semblance of security.



Living the (In)security City?

Karachi’s case is obviously distinct because it is so deeply bound up with the transnational violence of the “war on terror” and its derivatives. We propose, however, that the reconstruction of urban life as an archipelago of security enclaves in Karachi is illuminating for many other cities where rapidly deteriorating public security has long been the main preoccupation of the politics of city life. The inside-outside relationships of enclaves reveal how the new military urbanism produces political subjectivities that heighten marginality and vulnerability for the urban poor. As the case of Sultanabad reveals, this vulnerability is managed by marginalized urban residents through creating their own version of enclaves, which are often linked to and reinforce the criminal/mafia/terrorist networks that the rest of the city braces itself against.

Above all, enclaves constitute new styles of urban life and urban politics as an *ensemble*. To really appreciate life in the new security city, our research demonstrates that attention must fall beyond the checkpoint architectures per se. We must, instead, piece together how archipelagoes of different sorts of enclaves relate together to reorganize broader geographies on inequality, labor, governance, patronage, and, not to be forgotten, reputation.

We would like to acknowledge Martin Coward’s invaluable input in shaping the research project of which this article is an outcome.