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Faiza Moatasim, *Master Plans and Encroachments: The Architecture of Informality in Islamabad*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023. ISBN: 9781512825206 (cloth); ISBN: 9781512825190 (ebook)

Encroachment—the private capture of public space—is a fact of everyday life in Pakistan. The media focus is inevitably on the encroachments of the poor—urban informal settlements known as *katchi abadis* (literally, uncooked or raw settlements). But the Pakistani rich encroach just as much as, if not more than, the poor. In *Master Plans and Encroachments*, Faiza Moatasim explains how a range of actors encroach on public space and violate the master plan of Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan. She shows how encroachment is enabled by multiple architectural, textual, and legal strategies. These strategies are not conducted in open defiance or disdain of the master plan, however. Moatasim argues that encroachment is a type of engagement with, and negotiation of, the master plan.

One powerful way to understand the historical geography of encroachment in Islamabad through the city's "green lungs", or public green spaces. Moatasim sets the scene with Chapter 1, "Model Villages in a Modern City", which discusses the historical and political context of the founding of Islamabad. The Greek urban planner Constantinos Apostolos Doxiadis was hired by the military government of Ayub Khan in the 1950s to plan and build Islamabad. Doxiadis envisaged Islamabad as a series of identical "sectors" arranged on a grid. Each sector was designed as a "self-contained community that could provide the basic needs of its resident population" (p.31). Doxiadis wove planned green spaces, such as nature reserves, parks, and walking trails, into the plan. Some of these green spaces were not planned as regular shapes, but rather clung to the city's irregular ravines and hills. The master plan also designated a large area to the east of the city as a protected National Park, "imagined as a large open space of respite easily accessible to the citizens of the new city" (p.30).

This plentiful open green space, however, proved too tempting for city officials torn between a desire to preserve the master plan's grid and the need to house low-wage workers who were essential to the city's commercial and public life. People had been living on the land that became Islamabad for generations. Indeed, "over 54,000 people" were settled in 220 communities on the site (p.39). The Capital Development Authority (CDA), the agency that

governs Islamabad, began acquiring much of this privately owned land in the 1960s according to the master plan. However, it did not require residents to vacate the land until the 1980s—at which time the residents resisted their displacement. To pacify these residents, the CDA established "model villages"—located mostly within the ostensibly protected National Park area. The CDA thus "inaugurated the practice of using numerous, open public spaces, a characteristic feature of high-modernist planning, as sites of encroachment in Islamabad" (p.51). Encroaching on the carefully planned "lungs of the city" provided an easy fix to the problems of rapid urbanisation in Pakistan. Many people who needed to live and work in the city but could not afford to build within the increasingly expensive formal grid, followed the example of the CDA and set up house on the green spaces that ribboned the small streams of the city.

Chapter 2, "Ordinary Informality", is a fine-grained examination of how tiny scraps of land designated on the master plan as green space are occupied, bought, and sold by the residents of France Colony. France Colony is a majority-Christian neighbourhood where many of the residents work for the city sanitation department. Contrary to the myth that squatter settlements are illegal or even criminal, self-built communities like France Colony, built "outside of the master plan", were nevertheless established "with official consent" (p.54). France Colony is sited on a sloping terrain near a *nala*, or small stream—an area designated as a park on the Master Plan. Moatasim relates, through a close examination of everyday life and space, how property is occupied, registered, defended, and socially recognised in this ethnographically dense chapter. The settlement was approved by the CDA because it needed to provide housing for this essential labour force. Because France Colony encroaches on green space, it didn't interfere with the grid. This "solution" exemplifies the "split between the official obligation to preserve the master plan and the need to accommodate essential functions like housing for lower-level employees" (p.59). Instead of taking the path Doxiadis himself suggested—city-built housing for essential labourers and workers—the CDA instead authorised squatting on public space.

Chapter 4, "Elite Informality", provides a sort of elite parallel to France Colony. Bani Gala is a posh neighbourhood whose residents include the former Prime Minister Imran Khan. It was established without authorisation on the banks of Rawal Lake in the protected National Park. Moatasim draws on interviews with residents in this section, especially one

Mrs. Nabila Sheikh. Starting in the 1980s, a circle of well-connected people began to buy land from villagers in the protected area who had property rights that predated the master plan. Any new construction in Islamabad must be approved by the CDA, and Bani Gala was in violation of this rule. In the late 1990s, the CDA challenged the legality of Bani Gala in front of a High Court. Sheikh argued the CDA had long been aware of the new houses but had nevertheless taken no action. She also produced paperwork showing official authorisation of new homes in the area—not by the CDA, but by another branch of local government. Finally, Mrs. Sheikh and her elite associates formed an "unlikely strategic alliance" with some of the original (much poorer) villagers of Bani Gala as part of a media strategy. Ultimately, the courts "upheld the residents' rights to private property ownership over the authority of the master plan" (p.149). This elite encroachment strategy was ultimately successful because it deftly navigated the masterplan and the CDA—not by butting heads against these forces of officialdom. France Colony and Bani Gala represent very different types of people with starkly uneven levels of social vulnerability and economic precarity practising encroachment. Both deployed similar (non-architectural) methods of evidencing official recognition in the past and generating a paper trail of pseudo-official authorisation.

To distinguish types of encroachment, Moatasim introduces the concepts of ordinary informality and elite informality. "Ordinary informality" consists of "claims to space based on materiality and modalities that are perceived to be temporary" (p.7). This category does not map on to any specific class group. It is not a socioeconomic category based on class or social precarity, but rather a "material category based on an aesthetic of temporariness" (ibid.). "Elite informality" and the spaces and structures it creates, on the other hand, "look highly planned and show no signs of impermanence … [these structures] involve massive monetary investments that help communicate the high socioeconomic status of their inhabitants" (p.8). One part of this dyad—ordinary informality—is thus purely aesthetic while the other—elite informality—is both socioeconomic and aesthetic. This conceptual framing allows Moatasim to make compelling claims about ordinary informality that are not reducible to class, and involve aesthetics, materiality, and architectural strategy—as she shows in Chapters 3 and 5.

Chapter 3, "Long-Term Temporariness", examines the strategies and practices deployed by a range of street vendors that are aimed at producing an impression of

"temporariness". These include choice of construction material, or the daily dismantling and reconstruction of a stall. Chapter 5, "Non-conforming Uses", looks at the architectural choices deployed by elites to establish "farmhouses" (residential mansions) on agrarian land, and run boutique businesses on prime residential land. By producing a plausible paper trail of residential (or agricultural) intent in the architecture, and by maintaining a residential facade, for example, elite strategies are shaped by the city's planning and zoning laws. But instead of producing a strict division of commercial, residential, and productive landscapes like the master plan calls for, architectural design instead becomes a "means of making and sustaining territorial claims" (p.6). These claims might not be technically legal. But they are nevertheless often officially recognized, acknowledged, and permitted to continue, even if only on a temporary basis.

Moatasim ends her book with a call for rethinking urban planning as an exercise in contingency and flexibility. Rather than being blinded by the desire for order and predictability, city officials should be free to innovate design and space solutions that are able to adapt dynamically to the changing shape and needs of the city. She points to the rapid authorisations for new uses of urban space during the Covid-19 pandemic around the world as an example. But her study suggests something stronger and more specific—a type of urban planning that puts the housing, livelihood, health, and leisure (green space) of the city's essential workers front and centre. Subaltern encroachments, as Moatasim shows, occur out of the need for people to secure the spatial conditions of life—housing and access to a means of livelihood. Elite encroachments, on the other hand, are made in the name of leisure, securitised exclusion, or profit accumulation. This difference between the two types of encroachments suggests the political necessity of going beyond the embrace of contingency in urban planning. This would entail the defence of existing subaltern encroachments—but it should also mean the reorientation of urban planning to the provision of low-cost and inclusive housing, retail space, transport, and green space.

Master Plans and Encroachments provides a compelling, informative, and deeply spatial understanding of cross-class encroachment in Islamabad. Moatasim leverages her architectural training and experience, access to key players and archives, a keen ethnographic eye and many visually captivating maps, photographs, and blueprints to deliver an essential

book for anyone interested in urbanisation, informality, and the legal politics of encroachment—in Pakistan and beyond.

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