

"HUNDRED PERCENT LEGAL, HUNDRED PERCENT ILLEGAL": BUILDING A MODERN CITY FOR
A DYING RIVER, RAVI RIVERFRONT URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This research paper looks at an urban development mega- project, Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project (RRUDP) that is building a new “modern” planned city on the banks of the River Ravi in Lahore, Pakistan. The paper investigates the disconnect in planning imaginations of the state and that of the people at play as this new project is superimposed on the existing geography of the land surrounding the river. It does so by looking at the institutional, legal, and historical factors that shape the project. Interviews with people who support the project as well as those who oppose it illustrate that the fractured space within which the project operates is a rich and generative site of inquiry. Interviews are used to weave together the story of the project and bring into conversation the different worlds of a range of actors, who are otherwise kept apart. The paper makes a case for how this new city is driven by the state’s “modernizing ambitions” and a logic of accumulation that serves narrow elite interest groups at the cost of ordinary citizens lives. A wider engagement with literature in the field of planning and development projects is undertaken to ground the project in planning discourse and chart a way forward to understand projects like RRUDP in Pakistan.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Iman Khan was born and raised in Pakistan. She received her bachelor's degree in law from Lahore University of Management Sciences in 2019 and practiced as a lawyer, and later an urban studies researcher. She then went on to pursue a Master's of Regional Planning Degree at Cornell University from 2021-2023 as a Fulbright Scholar.

DEDICATION

For my parents, whose biggest dream has been watching my dreams come true.

For Faizan, who put his dreams on hold.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RRUDP: Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project

RUDA: Ravi Urban Development Authority

LDA: Lahore Development Authority

LHC: Lahore High Court

DHA: Defence Housing Authority

GLOSSARY OF URDU WORDS

Kisaan: A farmer with small land holding or a peasant

Saab: Sir

Katchi Abadi: Informal Housing Settlements

Ziyadti: Injustice

Mehman: Guest

Lungi: A garment wrapped around the waist

Naya: New

Sadqah: Charity

Mauza: A type of administrative district of a portion of land

Khasra Number: Land holding number.

INTRODUCTION

Inside the waiting area of the Ravi Urban Development Authority office nestled in Garden Town I spot the first *kisaan* I see in the office that day. He is an old man, skin weathered by age and sun, dressed in the traditional *lungi* and a plaid scarf lying loosely around his neck which he's fidgeting with. Immediately I am aware of how out of place he seems, in the office for a development project conceived in a world of power and real estate he has never been a part of but now is a central actor in. I am not the only one uncomfortable by him waiting there, I see the receptionist immediately look at him and assess what to do. The *kiisaan* cuts an odd figure in this 'modern' office and soon I see a staff member approach him on the direction of the receptionist and walk him out to the next room where I assume he will be equally out of place but less in sight. Part of changing his location might be on account of my presence too, I am an outsider no one quite knows why is here and it is best to be safe. While the *kisaan* and I are both there, there is a difference in our waiting which made me think of Auyero(2011) who in his work says that "Waiting is stratified...that there are variations in waiting time that are socially patterned and that respond to power differentials"(Auyero, 2011, 8). My experience of waiting to carry out my research is very different from the wait the *kisaan* was experiencing, his was punctuated more by "uncertainty and arbitrariness" that produced a state of "weariness" (Auyero, 2011, 14, 7). Mine was mediated by my forces of social class and social capital, I was visiting through a contact and being treated as a *mehman*(guest). This difference in our waiting has had a profound effect on me through the course of my research and has made me acutely aware of power politics at play, an issue I reflect on throughout this paper as I

seek to understand the disconnect in the planning imagination of the state versus that of the people that makes the Ravi Urban Development Project (RRDUP) the contentious project it is. To unpack this disjuncture in planning imaginations I look at the institutional factors, the legal environment, and the history of development in Pakistan that explain both the disconnect in imagination and its corollary, the disconnect in implementation. Through this exercise and by employing a rich body of literature on development and planning I make a case for how this “white elephant” of a project is possible because of the anti-poor, anti-environment and real-estate accumulation driven leaning of the State, that is propelled by ideas of building a modern city achieving “new frontiers of spectacular accumulation” in order to “stake a claim to world class citizenship” (Robinson and Torvik, 3426 and Anand, 2006, 3428). I argue that the Ravi Urban Development Project is produced through “conflicting rationalities” whereby the “modernizing ambitions of the state” clash with the aspirations of city dwellers (Watson, 2014, 3). Anand writing on Mumbai offers that “disjunctions between homogenized urban desires and the material effects of chronic inequality” reveal themselves most acutely in such development projects that are based on an imaginary of the city that is far from its present day reality (Anand, 2006, 3422). I look at what exactly these “modernizing ambitions” are and how they are grounded firmly in ideas of what “modern” development is and what it means for RRUDP in Pakistan. My interview with Planner A, a leading urban practitioner in the city of Lahore echoed this sentiment where she told me “RUDA will not have the city it wants but the ideology it wants”.¹ I unpack what this pervasive ideology is and what the ideals of

¹ Interview with Planner A, July, 2022, Lahore.

modernity and development in Pakistan are that value an ideology over the realities of the lived city. The project then becomes a discursive space to make sense of the tensions and anxieties of the moment, of what it means to be a modern Pakistani citizen and what hopes and fears are attached to this.

I begin first with some time spent at the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) office to offer both a glimpse into the heart of this project and to situate my own research process and experience. The interviews and stories gathered over the span of my research serve to add texture and life to larger inquiries of what makes the River Ravi Urban Development Project possible I then move on to describe my methodology, and lay out the background for the project by tracing its historical evolution and the institutional environment of development in Pakistan it is situated in. After that I weave together by interviews in sections organized thematically to better understand how RRUDP operates, the key actors involved and various responses to in the city and to substantiate my case for the forces that drive and shape the project.



Image 1 View of the waiting room of the RUDA Office²



Image 2 The main building of the Authority's Office³

² Personal Photograph, June 2022,Lahore.

³ Personal Photograph, June 2022,Lahore



Image 3 An umbrella with the RUDA logo providing shade to security guards and drivers positioned outside the office.⁴

5TH JUNE 2022, GARDEN TOWN LAHORE

I walk into the Ravi Urban development authority office nestled in Garden Town, an elite housing society in Lahore which is well connected to commercial markets, schools, and the wider city. Like many offices in Garden Town, it is a former residential home converted into a commercial building. The layout is confusing, and doors lead to more doors. Some glass has been used to construct a new door to enter emblazoned with the RUDA logo I will see so much of in my visit to the office, first on the hats worn by the RUDA guards at the gate. The guards sign me in and ask me who I am here to meet, I answer “Colonel *Saab*” and the answer works like a charm. The retired army officer I am meeting is well known by all and

⁴ Personal Photograph, July 2022, Lahore.

like many retired and serving army officers a constant actor in the real estate development world in Pakistan. I walk into the office.

A lot of the old interior has been renovated with wooden doors leading to what were bedrooms now operating as offices. Silver plaques announce office titles. The first I glance upon is legal- ironic since the legality of the project has been under fire constantly. I am told to wait till my contact at the office is free and sit down on a squeaky sofa in a circular room, in what must have been the living room of the former house. It is nearly lunch, and I can see the kitchen staff running around with plates and food, and confusingly one man with a big bag of lemons. The walls are plastered with signs that say no photography and with posters comprised of lists of realtors and third parties involved in the project. It is like any government office space I have been inside Pakistan, be it the Passport Office or the Driver's License Office. Everyone seems very busy but also relaxed, there is constant talk of food and endless waiting. Since I have been told to wait and am inside the office space I quickly fade into the background, no one is in a rush to help me and the slow pace is easy to adopt for myself. I make myself comfortable jotting down details of the room, familiarizing myself with the home ground of the project I have become obsessed with. After thinking about being at the office for the past year or so, it feels surreal to me here finally. "I need the files from Phase I and Phase II!" shouts a voice behind a closed door, "Please end this now Sir" (*Khatam kare Sir, please*) says someone else carrying a tower of files emblazoned with the RUDA logo. The Phase 1 and Phase II they are referring to seem unlikely to ever be made, and it is strange to see this office abuzz with urgency while the world outside speculates the entire project and by default the team will be shut down any

day. Later in the same day the Colonel *saab* I interview tells me this with great confidence “300 people work here..our team will expand in the next few years as the project progresses, we might need a new building”.⁵ It is hard to imagine that this is the same project everyone on the outside is deeply convinced will become non-functional any day.

Sitting in the lobby I manage to take a few pictures despite the no pictures sign, no one in the office thinks there is much to photograph here anyway. I find the RUDA logo fascinating, taking up space on each possible surface. There is such an internal pride in the project which is unimaginable unless inside the Office. Whenever I mention my research to someone in Lahore their first reaction is skepticism about what makes this project even worth research. At the same time it seems so innocuous, that this old house in residential Lahore is home to the project which affects the lives of *kisaan* so far away all around the River Ravi. This office holds the team which has disrupted the lives of so many- from small men cultivating plots of land for survival who know nothing else to larger land like Mr.Warraich, who I mention later in this paper, who have become the face of resistance.

When I think of the giant promises of development and progress being made in reference to the project the first image in my mind is of this forlorn *kisaan* in the office that day in June walking around. I think of the ‘neglected spatiality’ that exists between an ‘imagined geography’ of planning and planners and the actual ‘socio-economic geography of survival’ of people in the city, and how it is in this neglected spatiality the *kisaan* and so many ‘bodies’ of citizens like him who form the city are situated (Dierwechter, 2004, 958). Actors

⁵Interview with Colonel *saab*, June 2022, Lahore.

like the *kisaan* inside the RRUDP push the 'city beyond the cartesian control of modern administrative space' by challenging notions of who belongs where and by highlighting how administrative spaces are not impervious to the effects of the city at large (Dierwechter, 2004, 970). My experience of the RUDA office and the people I meet within it is dispersed through this paper. In these interviews and conversations, I grapple with a series of questions about RRUDP, the way the project was conceived, how it is implemented and how it continues to operate amidst constant opposition.

METHODOLOGY

Following a line of thought where storytelling is understood as both as "an emotional and affective engagement" that is "linked to claim-making, expectations, disappointments and resulting action" as well as "a strategy for translating private meaning into public ones and as a strategy making space for agency" this paper undertakes interviews as stories to form an understanding of what happens as RRUDP unfolds amidst contesting claims and narratives (Wheeler, 2018, 331). Stories around this particular development project are fleshed out to understand the nature of such development projects in the city, and to understand the disconnect in planning visions for the city which become visible in the project. I look at how development as a social project is undertaken by the State in line with its image of creating a modern city for its citizens and the role that infrastructure plays in people's lives. I look at why this project is happening at this moment in time, a question which prompts a look into the past given the specific history of development projects in Pakistan.

I primarily make use of personal unstructured interviews with a range of people involved with and interested in RRUDP. These include journalists, architects, urban planners, lawyers, civil society activists and RUDA employees. Most of my interviews were conducted between June and August 2022, in Lahore, Pakistan while some were over the phone while I was at Cornell. My trip to Pakistan was made possible through an international travel research grant awarded by Mario Einaudi Center at Cornell University.

In addition, I engage with literature in the field of urban planning and work on development and planning projects in the Global South to supplement the stories I gather. Additional sources include newspaper articles written about the RRUDP offering different commentaries on the project, maps both publicly available and those shared by my interviewees, advertisements for RRUDP, government documents such as master plans and gazettes, legal statutes as well as photographs from a range of sources to form a fuller picture of RRUDP. I chose my sources in order to better make a case for how a mega-project like RRUDP remain a central discursive site through which claims are made about the success or failure of Pakistan and its attempt to modernize.

MECHANICS: BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

“The new city aims to cater to the major concerns of overpopulation, traffic congestion, heavy pollution, water scarcity and flooding. Ravi Riverfront City will provide the people of

Lahore a space where they can live life to the fullest and embrace a multitude of opportunities, while keeping the city's rich culture and heritage alive.”

-Ravi Urban Development Authority⁶

“The government is snatching our land for urban development and displacing us from farms we have occupied for centuries,” says Chaudhary Mahmood Ahmed, 65, a fourth-generation farmer whose land lies within the 46km-long stretch of the river where the new city will be built.”

-The Profit, September 25th,2022⁷

The first quote is from the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project’s (RRUDP) website which works both as an advertisement platform and an information source to keep the public up to date about the project. The quote summarizes the project's self-understanding and the way it presents to the public, as trying to alleviate the pressure on the city of Lahore. The second quote is from a local newspaper where a reporter at the site of the project is interviewing a *kisaan* whose land has come under the territory demarcated for the project. The *kisaan* tells a very different story about the project, he rejects the idea that the project is for greater public welfare and talks about being dispossessed from generational land. To me the contrast in these two pieces of writing about the project crack open the fractured space in which RRUDP is operating. Are these two pieces of writing talking about the same project, what accounts for this difference in narratives? What does

⁶ RUDA Website, accessed at <https://ruda.gov.pk>

⁷ Niazi(2022) at the popular magazine The Profit writes about the response of farmers to RRUDP who argue that the project is a huge threat to their way of life. The article makes use of extensive interviews to argue that RRUPD is mainly a profit-making venture that dispossess farmers.

this rupture tell us about RRUDP? I attempt to answer these questions through this paper, beginning first by looking at what the project is and what it aims to do.

RRUDP is an urban development project in Lahore, Pakistan which takes the shape of a new city on the banks of the River Ravi, from where the project derives its name. The Ravi is often described as a “dying” river due to pollution and lack of water treatment and the project seeks to revive it through the creation of a planned modern city on the riverbank. RRUDP aspires to cover an area of approximately 110,000 acres, stretching over 46 km long upon completion to make the world’s largest river front city catering to the needs of over 10 million people. It is a 5 trillion Pakistani Rupees mega-project which is meant not only to revive the river and surrounding ecosystem of the area, but also to generate housing and jobs and take the pressure off the city of Lahore. The project is meant to include housing units, a lake, an urban forest, modern piers, and boardwalks as well as water treatment plants and more. The website of the project details that it will have many vibrant metropolitan components including: a medical city, a knowledge city, an innovation city, a sports city, an entertainment city. The RRUDP is inspired by development along the River Thames in England and modeled in its image, despite staggering differences in geography and contexts.

While RRUDP was officially inaugurated by then Prime Minister Imran Khan in August 2020, the idea to build on the bank of the River Ravi is not a new one. It dates to 15 years or so, when in 2006 a ‘design Charlette’ was circulated amongst planners and architects locally

and internationally, followed by a concept video for the Ravi Project making the rounds on YouTube in 2008/2009(Malik,2014). In subsequent years Lahore Development Authority (LDA) hired a German firm Meinhardt Group to run the feasibility report and design the project. Imran Khan's and his political party Tehreek-e-Insaaf took very public ownership of the project and went on to set in motion the creation of the RUDA authority based on these earlier reports and efforts.

This new city which is "hyper-modern, Dubai-esque" in nature, is to be built on what historically has been farmland cultivated by small-scale landowners (Pascoe, 1991, 4). The project means mass dispossession of these farmers who have made clear they will not allow the government to relocate them because of their ties to the land. Despite this resistance, and a complex legal battle both detailed later in this paper, land for the project has already been purchased and stages of development have commenced. This apparent apathy to criticisms of RRUDP has led to an uproar amongst civil society and academics, as well as members of the legal fraternity and interviews in this paper catalog this dissent. Prominent architect and urbanist Razi Ezdi when interviewed for a leading Pakistan newspaper on the topic demonstrated these sentiments by asking:

"The central question about the RRUDP is: do we see the river and riverine areas as a public trust belonging to citizens, or do we see these as commodities to be used for monetary gains to narrow business interests?" (Zia, 2020).

THOSE IN CHARGE: RAVI URBAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The project is being built under the purview of the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA), set up especially for this purpose. The Authority is governed by the RUDA Act 2020, and the preamble of the Act reads:

“it is necessary in public interest to establish Ravi Urban Development Authority for the purpose of comprehensive system of planning and development in the area specified in Master Plan of the Authority to improve the quality of life in the area; to establish an integrated modern and regional development approach and a continuing process of planning and development by achieving the highest environmental standards, quality of life and modern standard facilities; to make a healthy and prosperous community in its area as determined by the Government from time to time; and, to rehabilitate water aquifer and the dying Ravi River into fresh perennial water body with a state-of-the-art water front and urban development on reclaimed and adjoining lands” (RUDA 2020,Section 1)⁸

The preamble is interesting because it shows the projects self-understanding and the central role it sees itself playing in the region. As per its official mandate RUDA is meant to ‘develop urban areas of the province into sustainable, livable and well-managed engines of

⁸ Accessed at <http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2771.html>

economic growth” and provide relief for the many problems that plague the city of Lahore (RUDA Act 2020). The RUDA Act of 2020 also as a preamble lays down the wide range of things the Authority can do, whereby:

“It is also necessary in public interest to evolve policy and programs relating to the improvement of the environment for housing, industrial development, traffic, transportation, health, education, water supply, sewerage, drainage, solid waste disposal and other objectives on profit and non-profit basis; to carry out refurbishment, uplifting and maintenance of infrastructure and the performance of other modern civic and municipal ventures or tasks; and, to provide for the ancillary matters”(RUDA Act,2020).⁹

This is a very wide scope of powers laid out in Section 6 of the Act, that includes a host of tasks that traditionally other city authorities manage (for instance Water and Sanitation Agency for water in Lahore, Lahore Waste Management Company for waste). It is unusual for one authority to be given control over all these different portfolios of city management. Additionally, RUDA also has power that cuts across two districts- namely Lahore and Sheikhpura. It has been granted sweeping powers to manage all affairs related to the project with almost no intervention from outside. This means it has the authority to decide

⁹ Accessed at <http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2771.html>

processes like compensation mechanisms as well as the rules governing public private partnership and award contracts as laid out in RUDA Act 2020, Section 6 xxi. ¹⁰

Additionally, the executive part of the Authority board was also given immunity, as per Section 48 of the Act that reads:

“No suit, prosecution or any other legal proceedings shall lie against the Authority, the CEO, the Director General, any member, officer, servant, expert or consultant of the Authority, in respect of anything done or intended to be done in good faith under this Act” (RUDA Act 2020, Section 48). ¹¹

This later became a point of contention in the legal case against the project and was challenged for doing away with accountability measures and opening room for abuses of power. It is important to acknowledge the amount of power vested in the Authority and how it was devised in a way to be almost entirely autonomous, with very little outside interference possible.

How do we make sense of these wide-ranging powers of RUDA? One way to do this is to see them as a” product of the convergence of ‘neo liberalization’ and world city urbanization” where the Authority acts as a broker of large-scale public and private land transfers” Goldman,2011,565). In such a case where the state through its arm is driven by

¹⁰ Accessed at <http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2771.html>

¹¹ Accessed at <http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2771.html>

profit motives, Harvey's work on accumulation by dispossession becomes relevant as does Goldman's idea that is increasingly difficult to "separate the functioning of the state from the workings of finance capital: the state has become a broker and guarantor of public assets and finance capital the new architect and benefactor of public initiative" which is reminiscent of 'colonial infrastructure' which rings particularly true for Pakistan (Harvey, 2005 and Goldman, 2021, 7).

TOOLS OF DISPOSSESSION

There are various tools of dispossession that make development like RRUDP possible. These include most prominently the tool of the map, the master plan and the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. Maps are seen as a "medium between spatial reality and humans" and they function as a "cognitive paradigm and practical means of administration" (Winichakul,1994,52,120). Then when RRUDP comes up with a map for its project it undertakes both an administrative and a discursive endeavor, by sketching out what the new city will be on the geography of the existing city it breathes life into it. Winichakul offers us valuable ways of thinking about the power of a map when he says "maps anticipated social reality" and that the way to conceptualize this is to see a map "as model for not model of"(Winichakul, 1994, 130). This understanding of the power of a map helps drive home the "fabricated naturalness" of RRUDP that is manufactured through the map (Winichakul, 1994, 130).

Additionally, another key tool of the dispossession underway, which forms the basis of the project is the Master Plan. This remains the most heavily criticized document for RRUDP and has garnered a lot of attention. For starters the tool of the master plan itself in

planning in post-colonial states has been seen as oppressive and Pakistan is no exception. King (2015) writing about the link between colonialism and urban planning said that the experience of colonization shaped “particular spatial form” and urban planning in colonies was a specific form of “dependent urbanization” (King, 2015, 32-33). He lays out how the master plan specifically became a tool for the metropole to control and discipline the colony, by professing to bring “order to the disorder and chaos” and marginalizing the poor (King, 2015 ,33). In the postcolonial city then the Master Plan continues to remain removed from the population and is used still to control and reorder an area without enough participation and insight from those who inhabit it. King cites the example of Delhi a former colonial capital which in 2007, long after the experience of colonialism, in its master plan expressed the desire to be a “World class city” since its “vast middle-class English-speaking population had myriad connections with developments in the West” (King, 2015 ,37). Elite groups linkages and sense of familiarity with the West mean that some citizens desire a certain kind of city, a city modeled in the image of the West. Thus, the master plan as an instrument has great power and is deeply tied into the project of developing a certain kind of city, for a certain segment of citizens who have a disproportionate amount of power.

In the same vein Pakistan has a history of making master plans and new formulations like 25-year vision plans to deal with deeply entrenched systemic problems through ad-hoc mechanisms. In such a setting land becomes both the site of imagination and the grounds for development as well as a commodity to be brokered and handled. In this regard land can become the often “unsentimental site of transaction between the state, state, local

and global capital and landholders with an increasing awareness of the benefits of such transactions” (Srivastava,2020). In the case of RRUDP the Master Plan was prepared by a German consultancy group-Meinhardt. The involvement of an international consultancy firm leading the project is another example of Southern cities being constantly crafted with outside involvement. Bhan(2019) writes that “Southern” residents are “those, everywhere, whose livelihoods have been made precarious by geohistorical processes of colonialism and globalizing capitalism” and this precarity and the lingering effects of foreign involvement remain prevalent in Pakistan and visible in this project (Bhan, 2019, 4).

Finally, the third tool of dispossession is the primary mechanism of land acquisition through which the farmer loses his land. In the case of RRUDP it is an archaic instrument of law, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. It is a remnant of colonial era rule, and many critique it as being draconian and outdated. As per Section 4 of this Act any land can be acquired by the state for public purpose following the doctrine of “eminent domain”. A wide reading of public purpose has meant that virtually any land parcel the government wishes to acquire is purchased at values often below market value. Public purpose as a logic is often evasive and hard to understand for development projects because it is never fully representative of the wider public. It is not surprising that the land mechanism for dispossession is rooted in a colonial instrument. It speaks to the historic suppression and the need for southern cities to develop local logics that serve them better. One formulation is to categorize the role of such instruments under the category of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ as David Harvey does. As per this notion neoliberal practices of accumulation, concentrate wealth in the

hands of few by moving towards privatization (Harvey,2005). Harvey is building upon the work of Marx to consider the way dispossession happens in present day capitalism. This is not a theory without criticism, but it does offer an analytic to understand the tools of dispossession that operate in Pakistan. There is also much literature that looks at the legal logics underlying such forceful eviction for public good, in other parts of the world. Gautam writes about this in Delhi, India and how the notion of ‘public interest’ is assigned with eviction of the poor and construes ‘the eviction as part of an active erasure of the poor’s presence within and right to the city’(Gautam, 2012, 1). While this is in the context of illegal settlements the present case has to do with the dispossession of farmers, where a city is sprawling outward. I am reminded of this erasure built into RRUDP when I speak to Journalist Z who narrates a conversation he had with another *kisaan* being dispossessed. The *kisaan* being interviewed by Journalist Z tells him he doesn’t want to sell his land to develop a new city because he knows the only access, he will have to the benefits RRUDP will bring beyond the sale value of land is that maybe someday his son will be a small-time employee in the project. “*At best my son will be a security guard in a Mall in Ravi City*” he says, an indignity he will not have to endure if they hold on to their plot of land that produces enough for themselves. ¹²The *kisaan* then knows that public interest does not include his interest.

It is important to note that in other former colonial states, the Act has been repealed. For instance India replaced the same Acquisition Act of 1894 with the Right to Fair

¹² Interview with Journalist Z, June 2022,Lahore.

Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013. This new Law was in response to a growing need to embed resettlement and compensation into the mechanism of land acquisition for public purpose. It strengthened the right to property for all citizens and was a decision to let go of an instrument of the past that was not serving citizens and was perpetuating injustice. This raises the question as to why Pakistan has not been able to do the same? Whose interests are vested in the Act remaining in force allowing for giant infrastructure projects to be fashioned? Nausheen Anwar(2015) in her work *Infrastructure Redux* offers a partial answer when she writes there is an “infrastructure fetishism” in Pakistan where “material progress is constantly imagined but never fully realized” and is closely tied to the “long standing promise of modernity: progress” (Anwar, 2015, 15, 193). In the pursuit of this modernity then RRUDP and other such projects benefit from the Land Acquisition Act 1894 remaining as it is.

MAPS

Following an understanding that maps have great power and meaning as detailed above, this section looks at the maps that demarcate the boundaries of RRUDP. The first maps that became available for RRUDP were staggering in terms of the landmass covered by the project bordering the River Ravi. Below Map 1 is the official map on the RRUDP website which shows the boundary of the project area and how it cuts across two districts of Lahore and Sheikhpura as discussed earlier. To solve the problem of any jurisdictional conflicts RUDA was simply given authority across these districts. Meanwhile Map 2 offers an additional look by illustrating the number of *mauzas* and *khasra* numbers that fall under

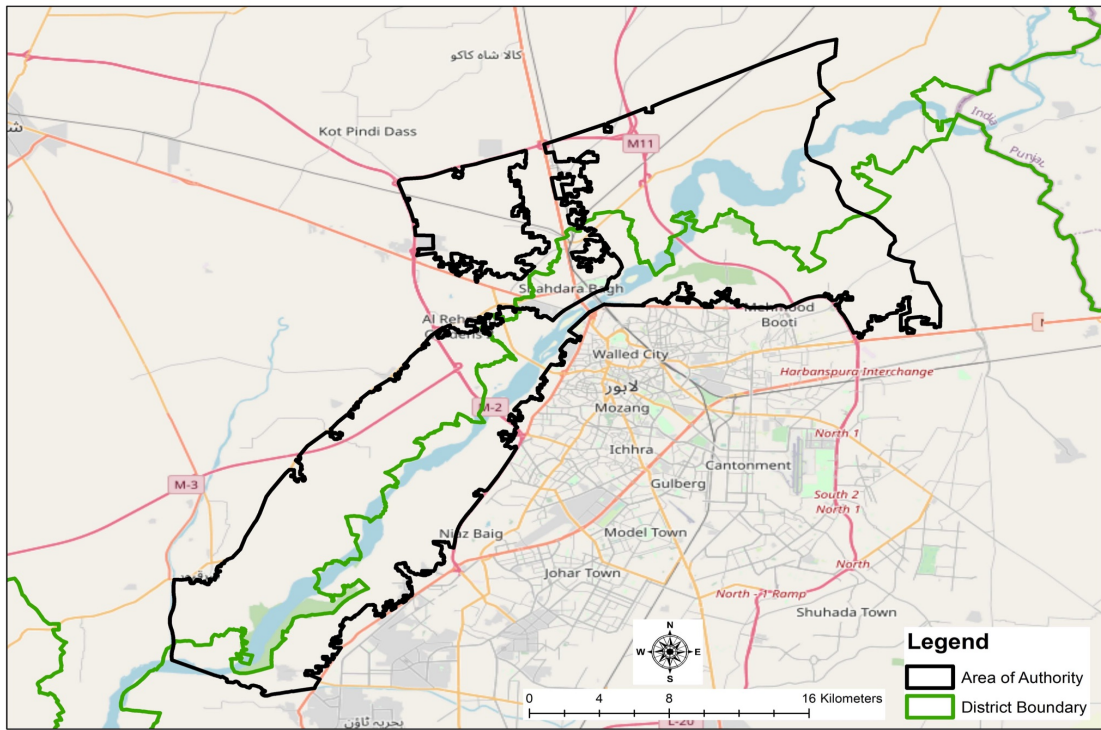
RRUDP.¹³ To supplement the two, Image 4 displays an official Gazette notification by the Government of Punjab that specifies details for how RUDA has authority spanning across districts and makes mention of the system of organization of the area following “khasra numbers”. The gazette works then to clarify the authority RUDA has.

Additionally, Map 3 is sourced from a popular real estate website in Lahore. It helps situate the location of the project in relation to the wider city more directly. The way it is created by real estate agents also speaks to the market elements involved in co-creating the project. It is described as accessible by major road networks like M-2 Interchange, Multan Road and Lahore Ring Road all of which make it connected to Lahore the main city where existing employment opportunities are situated. RRUDP only makes sense in relation to the city of Lahore. The housing society within RRUDP which is currently being marketed is also explained in terms of major roadways which make it legible to those looking to invest, the map for that is listed as Map 4.

Finally, Map 5 is most interesting because it lays out the master plan of land use for RRUDP share by one of my interviewees not officially part of RRUDP. When I visited the RUDA office attempted to get access to the same I was told that it was not publicly available yet, though now various internet sources display them as they have been reported on publicly. These are the most detailed visuals that demarcate the zones of development, a total of 32

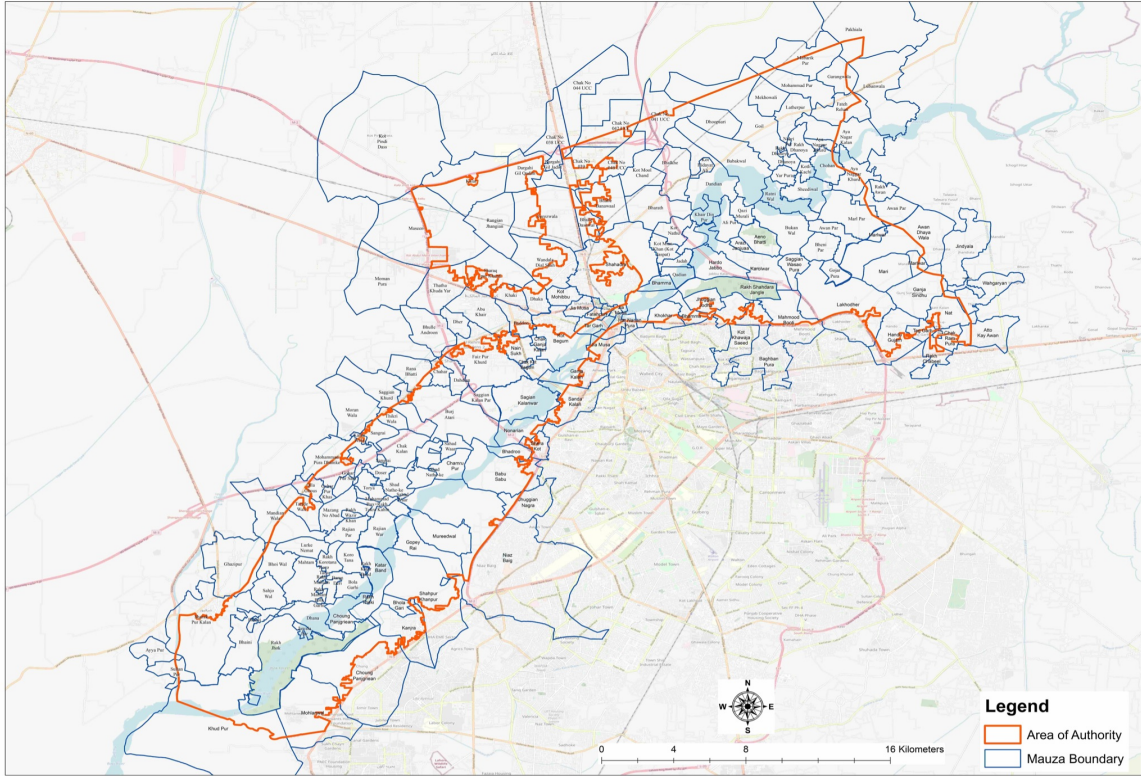
¹³ A *mauza* is a unit of land organization used commonly in Pakistan that is an administrative district corresponding to a bunch of smaller settlements. A mauza is further subdivided into plots and has “khasra number” or plot numbers as a mode of numbering to help form a granulated picture of the number of homes and people in a particular area.

divided into 3 phases of development, and the acres of land designated for each. It helps visualize most closely what RRUDP will look like and where all the sectors of development like the medical city are located and lays out the major road networks within the project. While this detailed master plan reflects the full land use envisioned for RRUDP at present it remains aspirational at best.



Map 1 Area of Authority of RUDA ¹⁴

¹⁴ Accessed from <https://ruda.gov.pk>



Map 2 The Mauza's within RUDA's jurisdiction ¹⁵

¹⁵ Accessed at: <https://ruda.gov.pk>



GOVERNMENT OF THE PUNJAB
HOUSING, URBAN DEVELOPMENT &
PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

Dated Lahore the 25th May, 2021

NOTIFICATION

No. SO(UD)15-2/2021: Consequent upon approval of the Provincial Cabinet in its meeting held on 29.04.2021, in exercise of the powers conferred upon under Section 3 of the Ravi Urban Development Authority Act, 2020 (XVII of 2020), Government of the Punjab is pleased to notify the jurisdiction of Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) comprising of khasra numbers and maps detailed at **Annex-A & Annex-B** respectively, partially falling in Districts Lahore and Sheikhupura and bounding the Ravi River, with the direction that the boundaries of revenue estates shall not be altered or partitioned.

SECRETARY
GOVERNMENT OF THE PUNJAB
HOUSING, URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND
PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING
DEPARTMENT

Image 4 Official Gazette Notification for Authority of RUDA¹⁶

¹⁶ Accessed at: <https://ruda.gov.pk>

Location Map of Ravi RiverFront

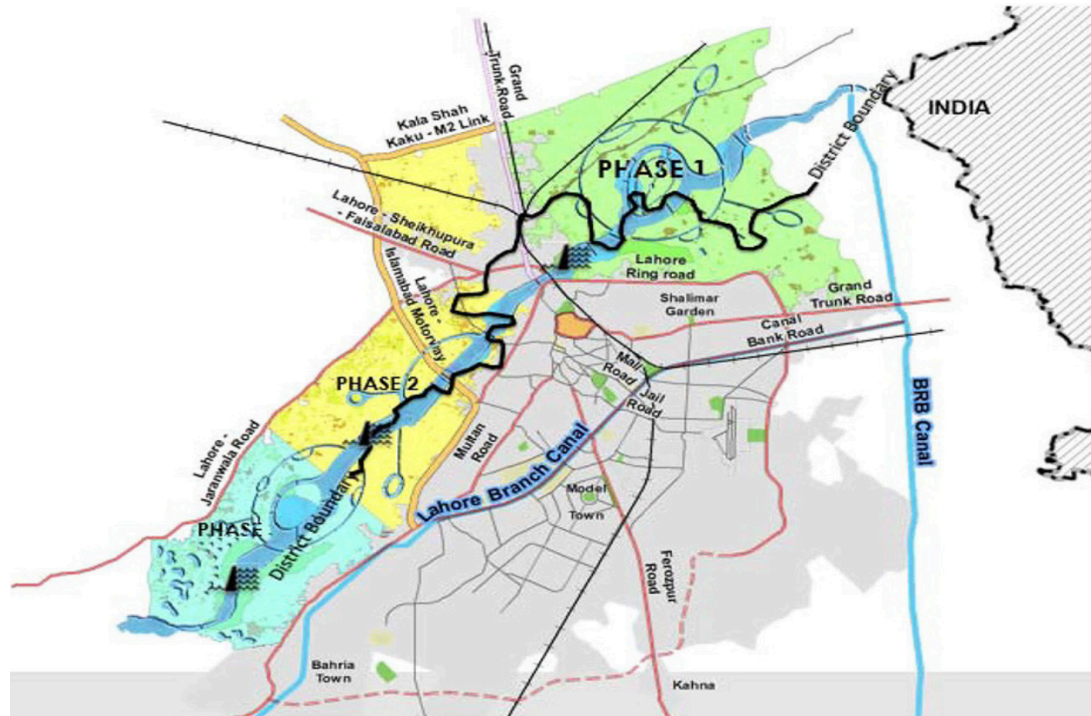
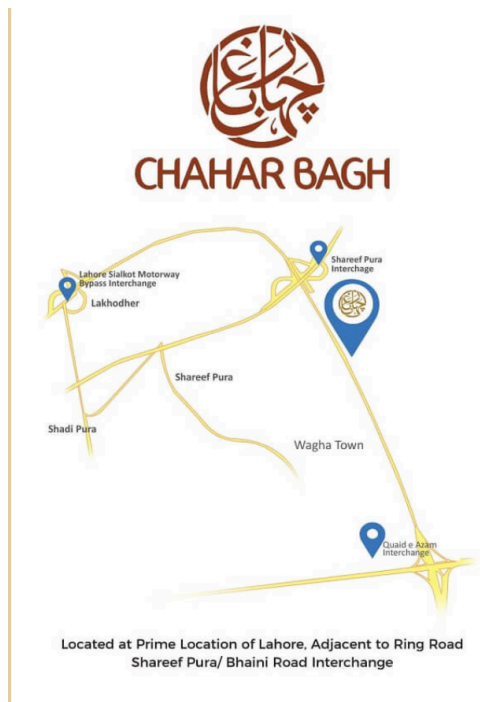


Figure 1: limits of the project area in the regional context

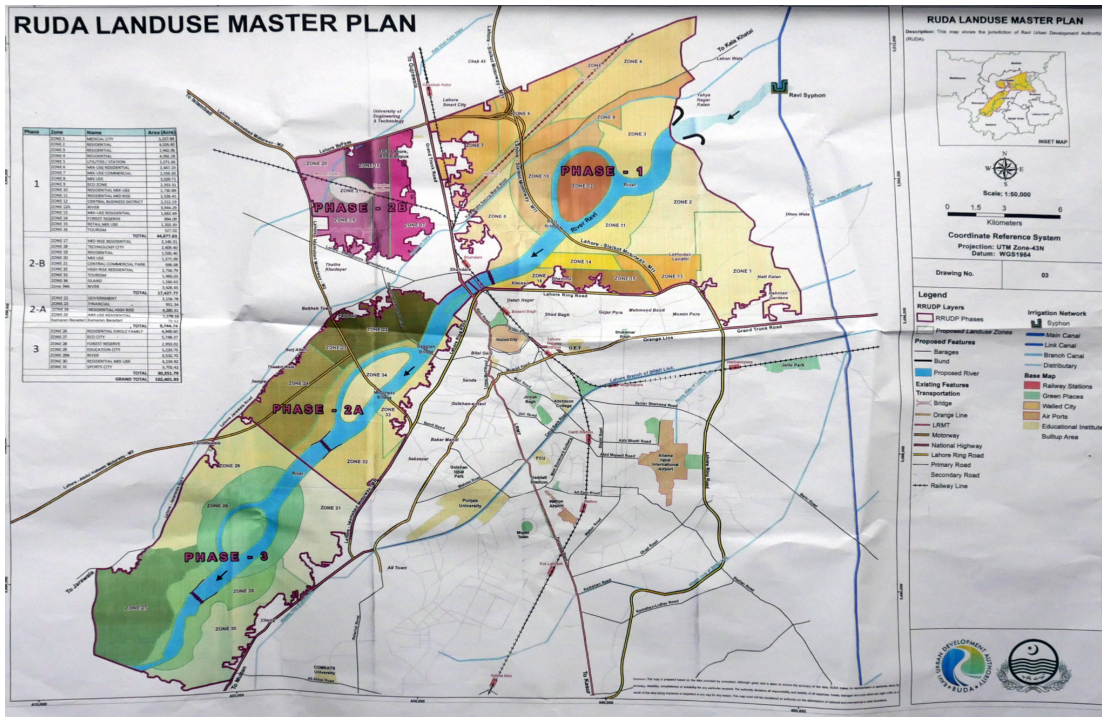
Map 3 The location of RRUDP in reference to the wider layout of the city of Lahore¹⁷

¹⁷ Accessed from: <https://lahorealestate.com/reviews-location-information-about-ravi-riverfront-urban-development-project.html>

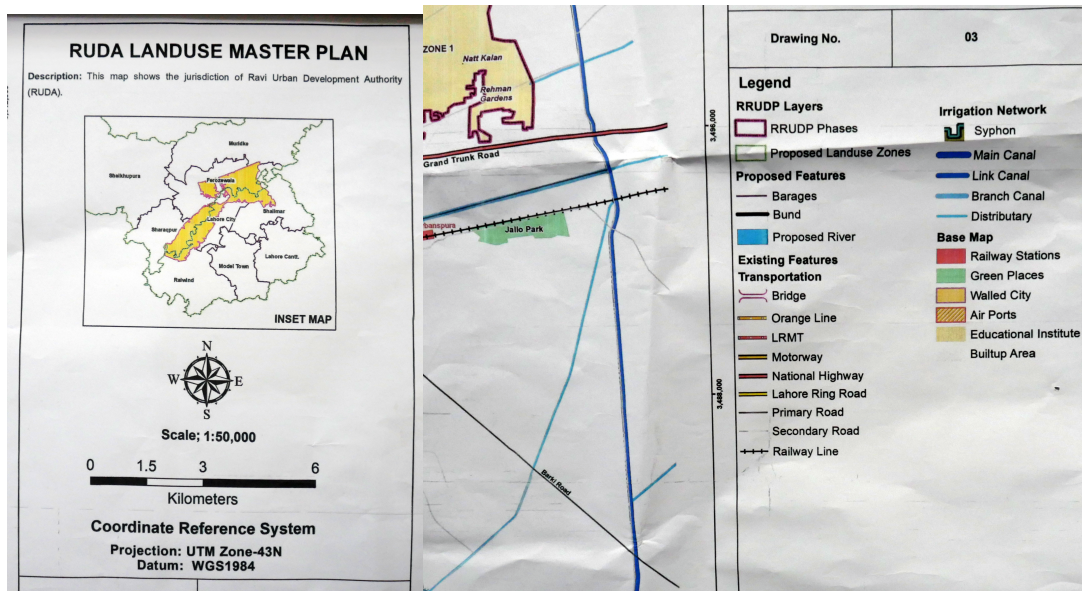


Map 4 The location of housing scheme Chahar Bagh.¹⁸

¹⁸ Image accessed from the RUDA website: <https://ruda.gov.pk/chaharbagh>



Map 5 The RUDA Land use Master Plan that details specifics of development in each zone
19



¹⁹ Accessed through an interviewee, one alternate version publicly available can be accessed at <https://i0.wp.com/eproperty.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RUDA-Master-Plan-Proposed-Landuse-Phase-1.jpg?ssl=1>

UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN PAKISTAN

“There is no urban planning in Pakistan, there are only projects.”

-Architect A²⁰

Development projects in Pakistan are closely linked to aspirations of what it means to follow the ‘global city model’ based on “an international model of urbanization” (Dupont, 2011, 541). Global city is a term popularized by Sassen and is used describe “cities that are strategic sites in the global economy because of their concentration of command functions and high-level producer-service firms oriented to world markets; more generally, cities with high level of internationalization in their economy and in their broader social structure’ (Sassen, 1994, 154). I argue that Lahore as Pakistan’s second largest city wants to assert itself as a global city as described above and building RRUDP is an attempt to do that by developing a planned city that has many modern amenities.

In the same vein Roy describes another term: the “World class city” which can also be used to understand RRUDP where this world class city “ phantasmagoria, the “dream world of post-colonial development” which she argues must be understood as “dialectical image,” containing within it the “radical potential of disenchantment and critique”(Roy, 2011, 276). It is a dream world of post-colonial development because it builds a city that is planned and ordered and employs devices like the master plan. Its dream like qualities is also reflected

²⁰ Interview with Architect A, June 2022. I found this comment extremely valuable because it draws attention to how planning in Pakistan is increasingly moving towards a project-based model. These projects are often tied with specific interests and also often associated with different political regimes. They are more likely to lose relevance once the leadership changes. What does this move from planning to projects signify? Why is it important? What are its implications for planning in the country?

in the way it copies development in other parts of the world and the belief that this project will make the country more “modern”. Additionally, the potential and dialectic relationship Roy describes is evident when a development project like RRUDP becomes “encircled by protest” and “made to stand still” through the people’s active rejection of a project central to the world city imaginary (Roy, 2011, 274). It shows that the people and the project are in constant dialogue and despite power differentials dissent and protest is possible and evident. The form resistance takes is detailed later in this paper.

Meanwhile Sassen describes how “global cities concentrate both the leading sectors of global capital and a growing share of disadvantaged populations” which is very much the case for Lahore where wealth inequalities are deeply felt (Sassen,2005,39). We can couple this with an understanding of Lahore as a city of “incongruent spaces”, which made up of “incongruent and multiple worlds that connect the local to a variety of differing scales and processes” in order to better understand how RRUDP is being built in a city with deep inequality amongst residents (Mcfarlane et al, 2016, 1411). An incongruent space is defined by tensions and ruptures, and RRUDP becomes a site to witness these tensions. The global city model leads to these ruptures because the “global South city itself becomes the marketable commodity” where the “development enterprise” takes the lead in “globalizing cities” driven by the forces of finance and real estate capital (Goldman, 2015, 60). This view articulated by Goldman illustrates how the power of the global city narrative is coupled with very real material interests of “local and international capital” and urban transformation then becomes the conversion of “urban landscapes into global cities with

spectacular skylines and must-see infrastructure” ((Goldman, 2015, 60, 61). It is in this very way that RRUDP and all the grand features it will have been presented as being necessary to the city’s development and growth. Such modernization projects also presuppose land as ‘territory’ overlooking what Sud termed ‘enlivened land’ which is ‘infused with history and meaning”(Sud, 2021, 89, 87). Here, then legal statute like the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 becomes a weapon to acquire land. Sud emphasizes how this form of planning overlooks that ‘place and landscape are part of our cultural system of meaning’, and peoples self-understanding is shaped by their relation to land(Sud, 2021, 87). While Sud is writing of these processes in the land markets of India the same is true of RRUD in Pakistan where there is a strong divide in those who want the project to be built and buy into it, and those who reject it as being just another vehicle for real estate accumulation and dispossession.²¹

These theoretical engagements of the global city, modernizing ambitions, the world class city and land help make RRUPD legible and deepen our understanding of the project. Building upon these ideas the next section highlights why a new city is a particularly useful construct to achieve the goals of development.

²¹ For example, there is an entire category of YouTube videos dedicated to explaining RRUD and how to invest in it and many comments and inquiries that are looking forward to this development. This approach is also indicative of the role speculative urbanism has played.

CREATING A NEW CITY

“A new city to fix the old city”

-RUDA Employee A²²

Developing a new city in response to the pressure on the main city is presented as “a rational response” to problems like overpopulation and urbanization and such cities are often marketed as eco-friendly or smart cities often (Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018, 1225). However in practice their development often leads to displacement and loss of livelihoods with food security concerns, as well as well broader processes that garner concern when “developers and speculators” by “creating new urban space and monopolizing space” manage to privatize and commoditize land even further (Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018, 1234). For one they are likely to increase spatial segregation by creating zones which are inaccessible to the wider urban poor of the city, and this is the exact sentiment echoed by those dispossessed by RRUDP. This form of development creates and perpetuates a “splintered urbanism” where the elite benefit and city management is focused more on their needs than those of the city at large (Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2018, 1235). When Architect A tells me urban planning is now about projects not a wider vision, this is the splintered urbanism he is alluding to which privileges elites over other citizens. He tells me that his views are not just cynical but rather a result of

²² Interview with RUDA Employee A, June 2022, Lahore.

This quote is interesting because it marks an earnest belief that building a new city is capable of correcting the shortcomings of the existing city. The quote from a RUDA employee is even more telling as this is an insider from the organization reflecting the official stance of the organization. I begin with this quote to show how deeply entrenched the new city narrative.

witnessing this same trend in development time and time again. He laughs and says that perhaps some cynicism is part of his age and experience but urges that project-based models run the risk of these development projects becoming aligned with specific political ambitions. This is very important in Pakistan where building new infrastructure is closely associated with the election cycle. When Prime Minister Imran Khan inaugurated RRUDP as a mega project in 2020 he did so amidst an outcry that this was his “pet project” and that he wanted to be associated with a mega-project during his political tenure (Niazi, 2022). In 2022 he took to twitter to make clear how the project for his new green city was tied to investment opportunities that would be central for Pakistan’s prosperity and how he was spearheading a public welfare-oriented initiative. Thus, the development of this new city was always an explicit part of his political agenda and Architect A argues that this is a tale as old as time in the case of Pakistan.

Additionally, building a new city to solve the problems of an old one is not a phenomenon unique to Pakistan. World over “Entirely new cities are built up from scratch as comprehensively planned self-contained enclaves in the out- skirts of existing cities’ and are presented as ‘a rational response to projections of high urban population growth and unsustainable urbanization” (Noorloos and Kloosterboer, 2017, 224). Neom in Saudi Arabia is yet another more recent example of this phenomenon.²³ However these news cities much like RRUD barely scratch the surface of addressing the problems they espouse

²³ NEOM is planned city being built in the northwest of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The projects’ name means “new future” and it is being built as a futuristic metropolis with a heavy emphasis on being eco-friendly living and technological advancement. The website is sophisticated and slightly frightening in my opinion, with a totally new way of modern living being marketed. It can be accessed at <https://www.neom.com/en-us>.

to eliminate, yet are driven by the same self-understanding of helping citizens. Watson's work reminds us that this is an increasing pattern in the Global South where "new urban fantasy plans take the form of new satellite cities adjacent to an existing larger city" to take pressure away from the "mother city" (Watson, 2013 ,217 ,218). She writes of African cities specifically and how in the case of Nairobi two satellite cities are being built for many of the same logics that explain RRUDP. She writes that these cities appeal to "middle-class consumer tastes" that "align closely with the images portrayed in the fantasy plans, as they all offer environments that are (hyper) modern, high status, clean and well-serviced; and they appear to be free of the congestion, pollution and what is often described as the "disorder" of existing cities" and a quick look at the advertisements for RRUDP show that the very same is true (Watson, 2013, 218). The images on the website of RRUDP, one of which is visible below as Imagine 1.9 depict a fair skinned man jogging in a park wearing workout gear along with advertisements for several other amenities the new city will offer. This is an image that is aspirational at best for most citizens in Pakistan and refers to amenities and a lifestyle that can only be accessed by the wealthy. This is particularly true given the current economic crisis the country is experiencing whereas per the World Bank's Poverty and Equity brief by 2023 poverty will reach 37.2 percent with deep spatial disparities (World Bank, Poverty and Equity Brief 2023). These statistics and the official imagery put forth by RRUDP help drive home the idea that Watson outlines that RRUDP is a fantasy plan aligned with elite interests. To me this image alone was so telling about how real estate development is not just about money but also about aspirations and a deep belief in 'belief in modernization, in progress, in improvability....[that has been] given a new

lease in the era of liberalization as a sign of profit' (Searle, 2017, 239). It shows how real estate development is deeply linked to a web of actors and aspirations, of what modern city life should look like. Searle writing about New Delhi talks about how cultural and historical processes of wanting to overcome 'backwardness' feed these real estate projects as they are also 'moral projects' and 'value projects' linked to "unquantifiable social aspirations and strategies" (Searle, 2017, 230). These aspirations all tie into the logic of accumulation and profit and "land is transformed from a place of living and dense sociality into a fungible asset whose only imaginable use is speculative investment or real estate development" (Upadhyaya and Rao, 2022, 12). These aspirations are very deliberately crafted through media and targeted campaigns. Planner A says that this also feeds on the anxieties of younger people in these agrarian communities, "not everyone romanticizes agriculture within the community" she says, and by hearing what RRUDP advertises many begin to believe there might be something better out there causing them to "collude" in ways that ends up "damaging" them and their families.²⁴

In an interview with the RUDA legal officer he tells me in earned "*Puranay(old) Lahore se log aye gey Naye(new) Lahore*" that people will come from the Old Lahore to the new Lahore, equating this new city to Lahore a city of 12 million and a history of at least 2000 documented years. ²⁵I ask him how people will move so far from the city proper and jobs, how anything can become a new Lahore so soon. He is confident that the jobs will come, and people will be unable to resist the charm of this new modern city and dismisses my

²⁴ Interview with Planner A, July 2022, Lahore.

²⁵ Interview with RUDA legal Officer, June 2022, Lahore.

skepticism. “*Aap bas dekhna*(You just watch)” he says leaning back into his chair in his private office with the files of the legal cases filed by kisaan still splayed out front of him with what I think is meant to be a reassuring smile. It is his last word on the subject.



Image 5 An advertisement on the RUDA website displaying all that RRUDP is meant to achieve²⁶

OBSESSED WITH PLANNING: A STRATEGIC AMNESIA

The origins of this obsession of a planned city can be traced historically once again to Pakistan’s colonial past. Pakistan inherited many “legal and institutional structures like Municipalities, Cantonments and Improvement Trusts’ ’ which were tasked with physical planning functions and often characterized by a lack of vision and coordination (Ahmad and Anjum, 2012, 272,). The creation of RUDA is a continuation of this legacy. To date the presence of overlapping authorities and bodies creates confusion and inefficiency. Other

²⁶ Accessed from the RUDA website, <https://ruda.gov.pk>

legacies in the form of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 and master planning practices have been detailed earlier.

The idea of a planned city is deeply entrenched in Pakistan even though it has only one internal point of reference-the planned capital city, Islamabad. Islamabad was planned by a Greek architect Doxiadis, based on a grid layout where the city was divided into zones following functions. It was an administrative city model where the city was divided according to uses such as administrative, residential, and commercial. It was purpose built as the country's new capital and promised safety, cleanliness, and orderliness. In recent years it is still upheld as an example of these qualities and as an example of planning, but more and more people ask: who was Islamabad built for? It was certainly not for the urban poor who were written out of the city's enclaves systematically, forced to live on the periphery in *katchi abadis*. With urban growth there has been an even greater strain on the city pushing development outwards cutting into green cover. In addition, the city proper has been met with a host of problems like poor water management systems. The guiding philosophy of the city was based on constant expansion without real thought to infrastructure and low income needs and how these would intersect with the features of the built city (Sandhu et al,2019). Despite all this Islamabad and its planned origins remain firmly rooted in the imagination of planners and policy makers of the country. Thus while Islamabad is upheld as the example of a planned city, those like Sandhu point out all its problems and argue that the Islamabad master plan was very flawed and fails to live up to its expectations on all socio-economic fronts.

These critiques of the only planned city in Pakistan become critical to remember when a new planned city is being envisioned with great gusto and a sense of nostalgia. Saab(2007) writes about this dominant form of nostalgia in urban planning, particularly as urban sprawl becomes out of control, as is the case for Lahore prompting in part the emergence of RRUDP . She argues that there is an attempt by many to make planners to “make the fantasy real, to build this imaginary landscape and return “home,” as it were. Yet the “home” that they are evoking in their neo traditionalist blueprints is in large part a myth, a simulacrum, a copy of something that never existed” which often obscures ‘the real-life conditions they are attempting to rectify' (Saab, 2007, 192). Thus, when the RUDA legal officer speaks to me of “New(*naya*) lahore” and “Old(*Purana*) Lahore” he is evoking images of an imagined past.²⁷

When questioned about food scarcity issues and environmental concerns around the project he insisted the land wasn't as fertile as the *kisaan* said at all, following this narrative the land becomes barren and thus open for development. This is significant because it gives “development a natural discourse” and makes the river and the supposedly barren land around it an “object of development” (Mitchell, 2008, 283, 210). Building the riverfront city is then presented as a natural consequence of the geography of the area, the needs of the city of Lahore, and overall welfare of people. Planner A was adamant that this was far from true. “The geography changes along the river” she urged and with it so does what sort of crop is planted and many other uses of land from animal rearing to buffalo

²⁷ Interview with RUDA Lawyer, June 2022, Lahore.

milk production and even sand mining. ²⁸“There is a whole ecosystem- neighborhoods and political networks” she argued which are “inseparable” from the land which RRUDP doesn’t acknowledge and instead remains caught up with what she termed “buzzwords like development”. ²⁹Given this counter narrative Mitchell's work allows us to see how this ‘apparent naturalness of the imagery is misleading’ and devised with a specific goal in mind by RRUDP (Mitchell, 2002, 210). The entire notion of needing a development product is heavily framed by powerful interests- both financial and political- and development discourse allows for the naturalization of these interests. While Mitchell is writing primarily of the 1980 report produced by the World Bank on Egypt that crafted this way of thinking about development on the River Nile, he also makes a larger case for the role international development plays as it ‘constitutes itself in this way as an expertise and intelligence that stands completely apart from the people’(Mitchell, 2002, 210). The RUDA legal officer is echoing these same naturalizing sentiments which make it seem as though the project is the only “natural” course of action. The way Islamabad is upheld as an example of successful planning is also indicative of a deliberate sort of amnesia at play, where the problems with the city are ignored in favour of its potential. It is this selective amnesia which makes possible for RRUDP to use the example of Islamabad as one of success and to model a new project headed in the same direction.

²⁸ Interview with Planner A, July,2022,Lahore.

²⁹ Interview with Planner A, July,2022,Lahore.

THE WIDER LANDSCAPE OF LAND AND LAW

“Section 4 of the RUDA (amendment) Ordinance 2021 is contrary to Article 144 of the Constitution,” the order said. “The acquirement notification of Section 4 is illegal.” Justice Karim said, “The agricultural land can only be acquired when there is a proper legal framework, but in this case it was obtained in violation of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894.” – Tribune Newspaper , January 2022³⁰

On Monday, the Supreme Court overturned a Lahore High Court (LHC) decision ruling the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project (RRUDP) unlawful, instead of ordering the Punjab government to start work on the project.

-Daily Times, January 2022³¹

These two clippings deal with the legality of the same project and present two completely different decisions and views about its legal status and purpose. They illustrate how the first court ruling found RRUDP unequivocally illegal. The verdict was clear and damning for the project and it seemed evident the project would not survive. The *Kisaan* breathed a sigh of relief and civil society leaders opposed to the project called it a great win. However, RUDA was committed to the project and claimed a grave injustice had been carried out through the Lahore High Court Judgement. They vowed to take the case to the Supreme Court and appeal the decision and did just that. In a surprising turn of events the Supreme Court granted relief, now the project was to continue the land it had already acquired. There were some caveats to this decision but once again the project was up and running. Both these quotes reflecting opposite positions on RRUDP again paint a picture of opposite

³⁰ Yasif,Rana.(2022).”LHC Declares Ravi Riverfront project unconstitutional”. Tribune. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2340376/lhc-declares-ravi-riverfront-project-unconstitutional>

³¹ Daily Times. (2022).” Supreme Court overturns the LHC’s decision on the Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project”. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/877970/supreme-court-overturns-the-lhcs-decision-on-the-ravi-riverfront-urban-development-project/>

worlds, and a deep disconnect. How was the same law and the same set of facts used to arrive at such different conclusions? What nuances were at play? What does this say about the forces driving the project? Is there an objective reality of the project? Who are the actors that craft this reality and make it “real”? The following discussion attempts to address some of these questions.

RRUDP was challenged in courts through claims made by individual smaller landowners, as well as through a wider public interest litigation claim that challenged the mechanism of land acquisition and violation of environmental laws embedded in the project. In the Lahore High Court, the legality of the Master Plan for the project came under fire as did the land acquisition mechanism. As a result, the project came to a temporary halt in January 2022. I conducted an interview with a lawyer, Rafay Alam- deeply involved with the case, who publicly opposed the project since its inception³². He took the case before the Lahore High Court, arguing that RRUDP was unconstitutional. There were several reasons for this claim that he made before the court which he walked me through. To him it was central to understand RRUDP as a profit-making venture dressed up as being for public welfare. For one he said the master plan for the project was not a real master plan but rather a technical assessment (and a poor one at that) by Meinhardt. A real master plan required consultation with the public and includes provisions for schemes being notified through public gazettes and local government collaboration at each stage, which he says did not happen in the case of RRUDP. Rafay Alam also urged that the public purpose mandate as

³² Given the public nature of his participation in advocating against, both in courts and on media, against RRUPD his identity and views are public knowledge. This interview took place on March 23rd, 2022, over the phone.

per the Land Acquisition Act, discussed earlier in the paper, was not being fulfilled by the project as the purpose of the project was not serving any clear public good or clear benefit.

To him the project clearly jeopardizes food security of the region in addition to dispossessing farmers who have lived there for generations, all of which contravene public purpose. He urged that the project was not environmentally viable, as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had done a poor job and conducted public hearings that just paid lip service to local discontent. He referenced feasibility reports on the River Ravi, such as that conducted by the Asian Development Bank, which identified the river basin as heavily polluted and identified a number of ways to address the pollution problem and institutional gaps. He said RRUDP was not about the river at all, because there were other unexplored alternatives to deal with that which had been neglected because despite the authority making it seem like only it cares about the river he argues there is “huge love for the city and the river among many people”.³³ He emphasized that no one had an answer to why the river could not be revitalized without the creation of a whole new city. He referenced the 2017 Asian Development Bank Report on revitalizing the River Ravi, and said that if anything this report should have been the first step for RUDA.³⁴ Additionally the Human Rights Commission had published as fact finding report IN 2021 that in clear terms stated “developments come with serious environmental hazards and evictions of

³³ Phone Interview with Rafay Alam, 23rd March 2022.

³⁴ The ADB report “Revitalizing the Ecosystem of Ravi River Basin: Technical Assessment Report” proposed many ways to tackle the problem of revitalising the Ravi. Rafay Alam relayed how there were comprehensive stakeholder consultations and it was suggested the river basin be divided into 4 areas, that national parks be made and barrages set up. The report can be accessed at <https://www.adb.org/projects/documents/pak-51324-001-tar>.

local farmers, along with the destruction of their agricultural land”(Human Rights Commission Pakistan, The Ravi Riverfront Urban Development Project, 2021,2).

Rafay Alam went on to trace the process through which all these arguments resulted in getting a ruling from the Lahore High Court on January 25th 2022 that said several sections of RUDA Act 2020 were unconstitutional and the project could not proceed. In the Lahore High Court’s Judgement, the Court itself said Meinhardt was only a technical consultant and that: *“By scheme or artifice, the members of the Board were cajoled into approval of a Master Plan while none existed. Thus, any decision taken by them in that meeting suffers from misdirection of facts which fed through the rest of the decision-making process”*(Saeed, 2022). Accordingly, the plan was seen to have no legal standing. This was coupled with a reading of the land acquisition methods being illegal as well as other processes such as that by which loans were acquired. While this was a clear position on the matter the Rafay Alam went on to detail how soon after this win the Supreme Court (the higher order court in the country) went ahead to suspend the Lahore High Court order against RRUDP in February 2022. On the question of planning and approval additional time was given to bring forth documents and deliberate. The Supreme Court said work should continue lands that had already been acquired and for which compensation had been paid. The Supreme Court argued Lahore High Court never had the jurisdiction to rule on this matter and that RUDA was working within the law on matters of land acquisition and more. *“It came as a big blow to us”* Rafay Alam admitted, while narrating this dramatic turn of events but he insisted it didn’t change the facts- the Lahore High Court had been

correct in its ruling.³⁵ He remains adamant that the project is a means of land grabbing being painted as a public welfare project and has powerful elite interests backing it.

Perhaps most interesting were his insights on the role of the consulting company Meinhardt whose disputed Master Plan forms the building block of this project. He argued that the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) had clearly found the technical report Meinhardt made to be lacking upon inspection and had said the consultants had done a poor job. Yet later this same report had become the Master Plan and been approved. The Lahore High Court had also highlighted the problems within it in severe terms, yet the case had been disputed in the Supreme Court and these gaps remained unaddressed. Additionally, he went on to speak about Imran Amin, the present director of RRUDP whose previous job was none other than country director at Meinhardt. He emphasized that this was no coincidence and merited serious inquiry and raised many questions about the legitimacy of the project and its leadership. How is it that the head of the consultancy that was criticized for being subpar now was leading RRUDP? On the RRUDP website however the message from Imran Amin in his capacity as CEO reads “Building the Ravi City is not just an official task to me, rather it is my mission to materialize and bring Lahore back to its glory... With God Almighty's will and your support, we will resurrect the glories of River Ravi and the City of Ravi”.³⁶ Given the criticism his work at the consultancy he worked at before garnered, and how his appointment as CEO is questioned by many like Rafay Alam this message becomes even more sharp and in opposition to ground realities.

³⁵Phone Interview with Rafay Alam, 23rd March 2022.

³⁶ Accessed from the official Project website, https://ruda.gov.pk/ceo_message

However, in an attempt to better understand those on the side of the project being legal, I turn again to my interview the RUDA legal officer. When I asked him how Mienhardt's master plan was pushed forward even after being seen as inadequate. He told me "*A bold step was needed*" and then Prime Minister Imran Khan, who spearheaded the project, was brave enough to take it.³⁷ He went on to admit that there were eighteen n constitutional petitions against them in the Supreme Court and said that while some claims were outright wrong, others perhaps had some merit. With a conspiratorial look on hearing that I was also trained as a lawyer and practiced law in Pakistan he told me:

"you must know then, nothing can happen hundred percent legally or hundred percent illegally".³⁸

While in the moment this seemed cryptic and abstract, in hindsight it seems to get to the heart of the matter of the project. He identifies a third space between legality and illegality where such projects thrive. To understand this I borrow from Ewick and Silbey's conception of the law as possessing "a commonplace materiality pervading the here and now of our social landscape" where something not being "hundred percent legal or hundred percent illegal" can be understood as a consequence of the way the law is diffused in our everyday life (Ewick and Silbey, 1998, 116). The law then is not conceived of as something independent of the society it functions in, instead it is co-created by it. Ewick and Sibley's work is useful for my purposes because it helps make sense of why the legal position on the project has fluctuated so heavily. It does this by offering the idea of

³⁷ Interview with RUDA Legal Officer, June 2022, Lahore.

³⁸ Interview with RUDA Legal Officer, June 2022, Lahore.

“legality” whereby it is understood as the force of law which is “embedded in and emerges out of daily activities” whereby it is “not sustained by the formal law of the Constitution, legislative statutes, court decisions or explicit demonstrations of state power as executions. Rather legality is enduring because it relies and invokes commonplace schemas of everyday life”(Ewick and Silbey, 1998, 17). Legal and non-legal actors come together to enact this kind of “legal consciousness”. The law then for the case of RUDA fluctuates because the project itself is characterized by change and uncertainty, the legal position reflects the fractured terrain on which this project is situated and the host of actors like this legal officer who believe there is nothing as “hundred percent legal”. Sud writing about India adds an additional insight which helps understand this illegality by offering the idea that “If land itself is not some fixed ‘thing’, then order making in land for the market transgressing boundaries of legality–illegality, formality–informality, state, economics and politics, is less surprising ”(Sud, 2021, 127). She offers a way of understanding illegality through pointing at something in the nature of land itself, its quality of being not fixed because her book's project is to address how “land is in the making” as are the actors and institutions that create it (Sud, 2021, 16).

In the same interview I drew the conversation back to the protest posed by the *Kisaan* and their continuous assertion that RUDA was forcibly acquiring land. To this he said that the Authority was going out of its way to make sure each *kisaan* was duly compensated and that the *kisaan* knew they were getting a good deal, he insisted:

“Unki chandi ho gai hai” (they are making a killing where *chandi* is silver)³⁹

I was struck by this idea that the *Kisaan far* from being cheated were in fact benefiting and were pushing their hand to make more of a profit. I asked him why these small landowners, often uneducated, would bother to take cases to court an intimidating space they have no familiarity with. He insisted that this is just the nature of law, that when people think they can use it to their advantage, and they do. The *kisaan* were no exception as per his narration. He said in the Sheikhpura region alone there are 192 cases in the lower courts against RUDA contesting the land acquisition. He showed me a file emblazoned with the RUDA logo in which countless such petitions were filed to indicate how many *kisaan* were happy to go to court. Many had blue thumb prints on the signature portion, since several *kisaan* did not know how to read or write.⁴⁰ This made an impression on me, the sheer rupture between the lawyer's narrative and what the *kisaan* assert, and how unmatched the two forces are. I could not understand why he thought the *kisaan* who could not write their name were going to court because “unke chandi ho gai hai” at the same point in time where the same *kisaan* were talking about how the loss of their land felt like literal death. I write more about this reference to death in the next section on the River.

In the same conversation the RUDA legal officer also commented on the pervasive nature of urban growth to emphasize expansion of the city to the periphery until the River was inevitable. He said what RUDA was doing was getting ahead of the expansion so that:

³⁹Interview with RUDA legal officer, June 2022, Lahore.

⁴⁰Those who cannot read or write are locally known as “Anghuta(thumb) chaap” which is nearly its own measure of literacy and how educated an individual is colloquially.

“Symmetry se banaye, bihangam na banaye (Build symmetrically, instead of haphazardly)”.⁴¹ This reference to symmetry and order helps connect to the importance of legibility that planning methods and the preoccupation with planning ordered cities. For him the project was not doing anything that wouldn’t have happened anyway, it was doing the people a service because the state was leading the enterprise and not letting private developers run free. He told me there was “no *ziyadti* (injustice)” instead “planned growth” was underway, which ultimately would help people whether or not they realize it.⁴² In stark contrast to this Journalist Z who I spoke to said the *kisaan* had been made to sell their land “*korio ke bhao*” which translates to mere pennies.⁴³ He was mentioning the very “*ziyadti*” the RUDA legal officer claims never happened.

RRDUP AS A PROJECT OF “DREAM-MAKING”

“ RUDA regaistano may, RUDA sehhrao may”

-RUDA Employee B⁴⁴

To make sense of RRDUP it is imperative to acknowledge that infrastructure and development is never just physical form. Anwar writing of infrastructure in Pakistan says

⁴¹ Interview with RUDA Legal Officer, June 2022, Lahore.

⁴² Interview with RUDA Legal Officer, June 2022, Lahore.

⁴³ Interview with Journalist Z, June 2022, Lahore.

⁴⁴ Interview with RUDA Employee B, June 2022, Lahore.

This translates to how RUDA is being built on barren land and on deserts, denying all other claims (where *regaistan* and *sehra* both loosely translate to mean dessert). This statement sounds like a caricature given the claims of the *kisaan* and civil society that the area is fertile ancestral farmland. This is also echoed in a Human Rights Commission Report published in 2022 on RRUDP where prominent architect Fauzia Qureishi is quoted as saying “70 percent of the area on both sides of the river was agricultural land, while around 2,000 acres comprised forests” and that the project poses a risk to “Mughal-era heritage sites such as Kamran’s Baradari and Jahangir’s tomb” (HRCP 2022, 3).

we must understand infrastructure “also as a site of aspirations and desire...In this latter line of thinking, infrastructures are understood as sociotechnical systems with mediating capacities” (Anwar, 2014, 14). These mediating capacities include creating and altering notions of “time, space and the economy and the potential to generate new kinds of discourses, subjectivities and mobilities that serve political-economic ambitions and visions of material progress” (Anwar, 2014, 14). Anwar’s work is a powerful reminder on how to understand a development project like RRUDP as more than just a project building a new physical city. It is also the building of an imagined city of aspirations which is cosmopolitan and cutting edge- part of a new ‘conceptual architecture’ where ‘world class political aspirations mobilized by urban political elites and endorsed by middle class citizens’ are born (Sassen, 1991, 28 and Sheppard et al ,2020, 2). The desire to be a world class city is deeply embedded in the State’s imagination. Goldman argues that it is crucial to ask, “from where this specific impetus of contemporary world-city making came” and “how did certain discursive strategies emerge to assume dominance” (Goldman, 2005, 558). Looking at RRUDP offers many answers on this front as does further engagement with infrastructure and the role it plays. It furthers the idea that infrastructure should not be seen just for what it does in people’s lives but rather as being “in dynamic relationship’ with the “governance, financial and social context” of the place it is, and for the “co-constitutive” role it plays in society (Charlton, 2018, 98, 116). It is this understanding of infrastructure that helps situate RRUDP and the role it plays in urban life in Pakistan.

Additionally, Goldman's writing on Simone's understanding of people as infrastructure is hugely helpful for understanding RRUD's attitude towards citizens, where Simone says that a state absent from the lives of its low-income residents finds that the "vulnerable majority, out of necessity, become the 'infrastructure' necessary to provide 'public' resources and support "(Goldman, 2022, 577). People then become part of the formulation and so to RUDA the dispossession of farmers does not seem unnecessary or harsh, it is part of the demands of the project and what is expected from citizens. Moreover Simone in another commentary on infrastructure writes about the power of what he calls the 'spectral' component of infrastructure, which is not just a reference to how much of it is invisible through technologies but a reference to the "conceit that particular kinds of things can be built anywhere, regardless of the specificities of setting or the practicality of use" (Simone, Infrastructure: Commentary , Journal of Cultural Anthropology,). This rings true for RRUDP where a modern city is being crafted very much at odds with the wider context of the country.

Finally, Sud draws attention to "infrastructure of market-making as dream-making" which functions through the role of "advertisers, brochure makers, and others whose job is to sell the infinite possibility in land" (Sud, 2020, 43). Dream-making is a powerful term that shows that projects like RRUDP are an expression of the state's dream to build modern cities and is tied up with citizens dreams of what their lives ought to look like. This expansive formulation of infrastructure builds on the seminal work of Simone, who writes that people should be included in our formulation of infrastructure because the

“incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used” have increasingly come to shape what the city is (Simone, 2004, 407). Then we can see that body of land around the River Ravi is contested, with multiple meanings and multiple roles because land is at the heart of the dream-making process and because what we see as a “natural source is actually highly social” and is in fact “an assemblage of material substances, technologies, discourses, practices, policies, politics and power” (Sud, 2021, 69).

WHERE IS THE RIVER IN THE PROJECT? (AT THE MARGINS)

RRUDP is predicated on an understanding that its focus is cleaning up the increasingly polluted River Ravi. One of the biggest sources of this pollution is industrial waste from Lahore that flows untreated into the river. As per a report in Dawn News, despite the River Ravi being the smallest river that merges into the Indus, 48% of the pollution in the Indus is attributed to Ravi (Gabol, 2022). Environmentalist Afia Aslam goes as far as to say that River Ravi has become a drain due to poorly implemented laws for dumping wastewater and industrial waste, referring to a York University study that finds Lahore’s Ravi along with rivers in Ethiopia and Bolivia the most polluted in the world (Gabol, 2022). Since water from the Ravi is used to irrigate the province of Punjab of which agriculture is the main form of livelihood the importance of the river cannot be understated in fact the ADB technical report notes that “about 50 million people live in the basin within Pakistan. This includes 24 million urban dwellers in Punjab’s major cities of Lahore (population 11 million)

and Faisalabad (4 million), and in about 70 other urban areas (ADB report, 2017).⁴⁵ The project is not the first attempt to clean the River. A technical report was commissioned by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) which in 2017 completed an assessment of the River Basin in partnership with the Punjab Planning Board. The ADB suggested that a “holistic river system approach” be taken that included wastewater treatment, integrated water management, an awareness campaign as well as agricultural policies (Brown, 2020). This revitalization plan was meant to achieve all the goals RRUDP says it will prioritize without the real estate development and new city that are central to RUDA’s plans. This raises the question as to why the work by ADB could not on its own form the cornerstone of cleaning up the River Ravi, why did RRDUP have to be conceived?

The Lahore High Court in its judgment penned by Justice Shahid Karim said that “it would be utterly irrational for the Govt. of the Punjab to put aside the said Report and to assign the task to RUDA which neither has the expertise nor the institutional capacity to do so. Full effect should be given to the Report without further loss of time” , Justice Shahid Karim wrote adding that “River Ravi cries out for its revitalization and the ADB Report provides the solution”(LHC Judgement, 155, 156). Despite this clear position on the matter the Supreme Court by granting relief to RUDA allowed the project to go through and made it the lead authority to execute the River revitalization. This is why Rafay Alam argues that all

⁴⁵ There is also extensive literature that focuses on the rights of water bodies, with the notion that “natural objects” like woods and streams should have their own rights, a notion first put forward half a century ago by Christopher Stone (Kolbert,2022). Ecuador is one country we can hope to learn from in this regard where the preamble to the constitution celebrates mother earth and the rights that mother earth enjoys (Kolbert,2022). This is a far cry from the treatment of water bodies in Pakistan but an aspirational framework to understand how rights can be granted to nature, and how communities connected deeply to nature can be better looked after. It helps gain a better understanding of what a project like RRUDP entails- a stripping away of rights of nature and people.

this talk of environment by RUDA is just “greenwashing” and an attempt to make the project more palatable for the public.⁴⁶

In the meanwhile, RUDA continues to position itself as taking the lead on revitalizing the river. A new initiative by the Authority is titled “Ravi Dost” or Friend of the River Ravi. The website markets this initiative by writing *“The time has come that citizens of Shehr e Ravi start caring about their old friend that has always been there for them”*.⁴⁷ The Ravi Dost program asks volunteers to enlist to become friendly proactive citizens who care about the river and by extension about RRUDP which is working to save the river. The advertisement for this venture urges “This initiative belongs to everyone who shares a bond with the rich culture of Lahore.”⁴⁸ Through this outreach those who support the program are seen as pro city and pro-environment even though most protests around it have labeled it anti poor and anti-environment. It points to the power of the media wing of the authority who by targeting schools and partnering with organizations counteracts the negative press the project has received.

Another such venture that took up a lot of space in the media was when the project authority announced that six million trees will be planted over the city, prompting one newspaper to run this news with the headline “RRUDP as a game changer”.⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that this tree planning is very much intertwined with Prime Minister Imran Khan’s goals and interests. In 2019 he launched the “Ten Billion Tree Tsunami” in

⁴⁶ Phone Interview with Rafay Alam, March 23rd 2022.

⁴⁷ Accessed from the RUDA website, <https://ruda.gov.pk>

⁴⁸ Accessed from the RUDA website, <https://ruda.gov.pk>

⁴⁹ Khan, Yasir. (2021). “RRUDP As a Game Changer”. Daily Times Pakistan. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/807575/rrudp-as-a-game-changer/>

Pakistan where climate action was a huge part of his agenda and a signifier of what made him distinct from his predecessors in government. This emphasis on trees then can be read as part and parcel of Imran Khan's personal agenda and rhetoric, one that has much like RRUDP itself become vulnerable after he has been ousted from government.

In my interviews, I was very interested in getting a better sense of what people felt about plans to clean the River Ravi and how much was being done to achieve it. In speaking to those who were critical of the project the answer was very different from that of those in RUDA.F or instance when speaking to Architect A about RRUDP being framed as centered around the River and wider ecological welfare I was told that if the Project is built "The Ravi is being ruined by dumping another city the size of Lahore into it" and that the River is the last thing on anyone's mind.⁵⁰ Instead he narrated how when the proposal for RRDUP was circulated the marketing was such that people on the meeting "drooling" at the prospect of a project of this size being instituted and on expressing his displeasure he was told by those in the Lahore Development Authority that the "forces lined up" for this project were too great.⁵¹ According to him the forces he was warned off were "waiting like vultures" to begin making profit of RRDUP and "that this is bigger than Lahore, there are other elephants in the room".⁵² The idea that there were other "elephants in the room" as far as predatory authorities were concerned was of great significance. I pushed him about it a little and he responded by saying that other authorities like Defence Housing Authority, Walled City Authority and Walton Cantonment Board Division were all operating in these

⁵⁰ Interview with Architect A, June 2022, Lahore.

⁵¹ Interview with Architect A, June 2022, Lahore.

⁵² Interview with Architect A, June 2022, Lahore.

semi-autonomous zones which allowed for a fair deal of variation.⁵³ This refers to the institutional complexity of planning in Pakistan whereby a plethora of agencies tasked with overlapping assignments creates both confusion and room for manipulation. This is what Ahmad and Anjum(2012) refer to when writing about the planning regime in Pakistan and suggest that “perplexity needs to be eliminated through reassessment of institutional capacities, legal and regulatory support”(Ahmad and Anjum, 2012, 277). The authority the interviewee referred to first, DHA, is the biggest army led private housing society. It has systematically taken over smaller villages and is governed by its own authority free from the scrutiny of wider city management agencies.⁵⁴ This is to say that the sort of wide sweeping powers RUDA has are not entirely unique, it is part of a complex ecosystem.

In such an environment it is easy for the River to fall behind in the race of competing interests. Speaking to a local government representative, Interviewee L, I heard another articulation of why the River Ravi was not being talked of enough. He said “ The plan to revitalize the river that part is not commercial so there’s much less interest”, the real preoccupation is with where prime real estate can be developed and where an “Elite created community” can come about.⁵⁵ Watson (2009) writes of this process where in “poorer cities, spatial forms are being driven by private-sector property developments and

⁵³ These authorities have a long history in the country and are often criticized for exerting too much power without accountability in the city and are a part of the institutional complexity that defines the terrain of planning in Pakistan.

⁵⁴ DHA Lahore was originally built to house retired army officers but soon it became a housing scheme open to the wider public, again a nod to the role of the military in real estate alluded to earlier. Whole ordinarily development and land function through the politician-developer nexus in Pakistan, there has always been a third player- the military itself. DHA Lahore on its own website describes itself as a housing society ‘that has endeavored to provide, to the people of Pakistan, an opportunity to live the innovative models of modern living’ this language is also reminiscent of the language on the RRUDP website.

⁵⁵ Interview with local government representative, Interviewee L, July 2022.

increased rental markets” and contributing to an urban growth that exacerbates the environmental crisis (Watson, 2009, 163). In RRUDP this process is very visible.

Just as the River River slips to the background in the narrative of the Authority it is central in the story of the *kisaan*. Through Journalist Z who interacted closely with the *kisaan* about their ongoing struggle, I learnt of the strong connection people have to the land and river, where he says people use “poetic language” to explain their connection to their ancestral land. ⁵⁶One woman speaking to Journalist Z articulated her grief by saying that when the Land Acquisition Department arrives to draw boundaries on the land they will take over and create distance between them and the River that feeds the land those lines “are marking out our graves”. ⁵⁷ Here she was expressing this notion that there is a very real and lived socio-spatial reality of the area around the River Ravi they call home on which the map is superimposed onto, and disconnection from the river is killing her and those like her and marking out their graves.

⁵⁶ Journalist Z, Lahore, June 2022, Lahore.

⁵⁷ Journalist Z, Lahore, June 2022, Lahore.



Image 6 A picture of River Ravi at sunset⁵⁸

REAL ESTATE INTERESTS AND HOUSING

The financing arrangement to raise money for RRUDP follows a bidding model, where investors bid for development rights for the project to the Government.⁵⁹ The winning bidder raises finance for the developments and is not directly the developer itself. Media outlets reported that finance would be raised from citizens through public offerings at stock exchanges in Pakistan but there is little information surround this to date (Global Village Space, 2021). For starters competitive bidding took place in May 2021 for the first phase of the project where Arif Habib Javedan Consortium owned by Arif Habib Group of Companies won and *“As per the business development model, the bidders were required to*

⁵⁸ Personal photograph, July 2022.

⁵⁹ The bidding follows existing legal procedures for any mega development project in Pakistan, yet exactly how the level of investment needed to build a project of this size is to be gathered remains difficult to decipher. This obfuscation seems deliberate given that financial information on the project is limited and piecemeal at best in contrast to detailed plans for development that are accessible on the RUDA website.

offer percentage of developed residential and commercial plots and money to RUDA against the land they would be getting for development and contribution in the development of river channelization, construction of barrages, river' training, roads, infrastructure etc" (Hasnain, 2021). This decision also sparked controversy as Arif Habib who owns majority share in this consortium was also one of the founding members of RUDA.⁶⁰ Additionally in December 2020 RUDA reported that two Chinese firms were also investing in RUDA namely China Road and Bridging Company (CRBC) and Gezhouba Group Company Limited (CGGC), particularly focusing on water treatment plants, solar plants and other infrastructure work.⁶¹ As recently as March 2023 talk of new investment was pouring in when RUDA presented at the Dubai International Property Show (IPS)-2023 and said that it conducted successful meetings with international donors securing investment opportunities and learnt more about best practices for public private partnerships (Dawn Staff,2023). The financial arrangements that make this project possible remain vague and add to concerns that there is no real development plan in phase, or that real financial interests of private developers are being concealed.

Additionally, as a backdrop to this confusion on financing it is imperative to remember that rapid urbanization and murky real estate dealings in Pakistan have also meant there is a country wide housing crisis. Ammar Rashid (2018) writing about this crisis urges us to remember there is nothing natural about it. It is instead the result of "widespread rural landlessness, entrenched social discrimination and violent conflict in the country's

⁶⁰ He later announced that he resigned a month before the bid was won but this again points to a lack of financial transparency around the project.

⁶¹ Accessed from RUDA official website, <https://ruda.gov.pk/node/44>

peripheries, which has led to millions streaming to cities in search of security and economic opportunity” coupled with a huge housing affordability mismatch (Rashid, 2018). Most low-income residents cannot afford the formal housing options available and have to rely on informal settlements or rentals in a market that is famous for being precarious for renters. The supply of housing does not match the demand and incomes of residents, particularly in rapidly expanding cities like Lahore. Rashid(2018) in his work, which is now some years old but still illustrative for the propose of understanding the extent of the housing mismatch, writes that Pakistan’s “real estate sector grew by 118% in the last 5 years”(Rashid,2018). Additionally, between 2012 and 2017, housing prices in Pakistan more than doubled and rents grew by 180pc, while incomes grew by only 15pc in the same period (Rashid,2018). He offers the statistic of housing prices rising by 152 percent since 2012 and quotes the State Bank of Pakistan saying that the house price-to-income ratio in Pakistan was 20:1 (compared to a global average of 5:1) pointing to the extent of the mismatch (Rashid,2018). His work helps formulate a picture of the extent of crisis in the housing market and put in context RRUDP’s claims about the remedies they bring towards addressing it. Those critical of RRUDP accuse it of being yet another housing society, a term that has become synonymous with elite residential housing enclaves accessible to a few. Imran Amin the CEO of RRUDP has said on multiple occasions that RRUDP is in fact an antidote to Pakistan’s elite housing society problem and low-cost housing is part of the plan. How it is an antidote or what this affordable housing provision is a vague goal of RRUDP never fully articulated.

In my interview with RUDA employees I heard a similar reference but few specifics. Most people at the RUDA office would caution me that this was a mega project that spans over decades, and this was just the beginning, in due time all plans would materialize. The current scheme being developed in RRUDP that has to do with housing provision is Chaharbagh Housing Scheme. This derives its name from the Mughal era and translates to four gardens, a nod again to the grandeur of the past that becomes nostalgic and a key part of the imagination that drives RRUDP. The website describes it as offering *“Exclusive Villas, Sky rises, Mid rises, Condominiums, Apartment buildings and Commercial Complexes make it the first of its kind. The community offers economical, highly secured and swift connectivity to the necessities of sustainable living. In the first phase, Chahar Bagh offers 1 Kanal & 10 Marla plots, Studio to 3 Bed apartments. Furthermore, planning to extend our infrastructure more dynamically as per contemporary advanced trends in the future”*.⁶² The website also has a list of frequently asked questions that detail the price of apartment, specifics of applying and more. Interestingly enough it specifically says overseas Pakistanis can apply to. This phenomenon of overseas nationals shaping local aspirations in land markets is also what feeds the idea of development of cities in Pakistan modeled in the image of other modern housing developments and city building projects world over.

Over the years people writing on urbanization and the housing crisis in Pakistan have pushed for a myriad of reforms to get to the root cause of the distorted land market and its byproducts like the housing crisis. They have argued for reform targeted at the real estate sector, instating higher taxation and regulation and systematic measures to address land

⁶² <https://ruda.gov.pk/chaharbagh>

distortions (Rashid, 2018). This is coupled with a wider call to push for reform in environmental assessments as well as reign in speculative practices surrounding land particularly with a focus on preserving rural land necessary for agrarian futures (Alam et al, 2021). These long-term reforms require great political will and clash arms with the land lobby and its interests. In such a case it seems that projects like RRUDP which build a new city and new housing serve as easier solutions, which appease the real estate lobby and other actors without addressing the root of the housing crisis and catering to the needs of the vast majority of ordinary low-income citizens.

In fact the real estate market in Pakistan is often seen as a means to accumulate wealth and power, as opposed to cater to provision of the needs of citizens across various groups. Some of the richest men in the country are identified as “real estate tycoons”, as individuals working within the real estate market who acquire great power and wealth. Real estate investment is often seen as a vehicle for social mobility in Pakistan, where land investment is seen as one of the only reliable modes of investment that reaps rewards. The force of the real estate market is explained by the rapid urbanization in the country which means that real estate developers within the poor regulatory environment have a lot of room to develop in ways that allows them to maximize profits. The confusion surrounding RRUDP’s financing is proof of this. Several authors write that the last two decades in Pakistan have been marked by “marked by considerable growth of private capital in real estate development, either in the shape of private developer-led schemes, or the partnering of private firms with public and parastatal entities” (Alam et al, 2021). This is hugely useful in understanding the real estate landscape within which RRUDP has

ambitions where returns from real estate remain sizable and environmental concerns take a backseat. The story of one developer between 2001 and 2010 illustrates this potential, where Bahria Town developers “alone acquired and sold nearly 4,000 acres of land (mostly without formal approval from the LDA), which on its own was greater than all public-sector land development projects in the city combined” (Alam et al, 2021). This points to the power wielded in the real estate market and the potential for substantial gains with a tendency on behalf of the government to increasingly subsidize the construction sector and change zoning regulations to allow for more development and building. Sud(2021) writing about land markets in India says “markets as a space for exchange have to be exchanged and performed.. there is nothing natural about them” and writing for India she says the land market in “aspirational India is particularly fantastical” and makes people “dream big” (Sud, 2021 ,47). RRUDP is aspirational too in how it seeks to build a new city, and the wider real estate market it is part of feeds into this imagination of possibility and the incentive of real gains to be made.

In this attempt to build RRUDP, intermediaries like real estate agents also play a crucial role. While there is a traditional understanding of brokers who co-create the landscape of land in Pakistan and other areas of the Global South as “slick men” in a variety of roles, the role of these actors as intermediaries of the state’s intentions is also crucial(Sud, 2021, 111). They are comprised of officials who are consultants and employees of this authority act to ‘link the state and shadow state in land with its market in the making’ (Sud, 2021, 201). They play the role of instruments of the state, able to extend its agenda of land accumulation and development. In my interviews with real estate agents, I find that these

middle men have a host of opinions on RRUDP and that not all are openly advocating for state interests.⁶³

The project website has a list of registered real estate agents with public contact information for people to get in touch with them. Out of this list of 58, I was able to speak to 4. All the 58 registered agents were men, as is largely the case in the real estate sector in Pakistan and they are commonly referred to as “property dealers” with the same “Slick men” sort of connotation that Sud articulated, which explains the way they work and pitch land deals to those interested. I began the conversation with simply asking them details for investing in Chahar Bagh the main housing scheme currently being marketed in RRUDP. I asked them whether they thought it worthwhile to purchase files for it given the uncertainty surrounding the project.

Shanawaz Hayat was the only of the four to outright advise against the project he said, “this is a project envisioned by the outgoing government, the new government will abandon it...this happens all the time”.⁶⁴ He also said no infrastructure work was being done contrary to the media coverage which says active efforts are being made. Mohammad Yasir instead offered a long commentary on the nature of the property business saying “there is a nationwide slump” which explains why activity is nominal and the project would pick up pace in due course.⁶⁵ Naseer Ahmad was the biggest proponent of the four people I spoke to charting out a plan for payment in installments and insisting

⁶³ Perhaps part of this hesitation to openly support the program is the heavy media campaigns criticizing the project and the constant fear of the project being shut down. This sets RRUDP apart from other real estate investment schemes and can account for the real estate agents more tentative stance.

⁶⁴ Interview with Shanawaz Hayat, Property Dealer. July 2022.Lahore

⁶⁵ Interview with Mohammad Yasir, Property dealer. July 2022.Lahore

that a road and sewage infrastructure was being laid down as we spoke eager to get me to commit to investing in the scheme while we spoke.⁶⁶ Finally, Mujahid Yaseen said that files for smaller plots were actively being traded and there was the possibility of making a profit.⁶⁷ These interviews were very different from others I carried out as they were largely based on small chunks of information being shared as opposed to longer conversations. They were however useful to understand the way property dealers were actively engaging with RRUDP and to see how each had their own view of how successful an investment opportunity it would present. It illustrated how smaller actors in the wider landscape of development projects also bring their own insights and mirror the confusion that surrounds the project at large. Even the official listed agents are not entirely convinced of the project and showcase how fractured the space in which RRUDP operates really is.

⁶⁶ Interview with Naseer Ahmad, Property Dealer. July 2022.Lahore

⁶⁷ Interview with Mujahid Yaseen, Property Dealer. July 2022.Lahore



Image 7 Protestors outside the RUDA Office⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Ammar Ali Jan, twitter. Accessed at: <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2022/09/27/farmers-in-punjab-province-of-pakistan-protest-forced-acquisition-of-land/>



Image 8 A banner showing farmers rejection of RRUDP on the project site ⁶⁹

A NEW CITY FOR WHOM? EVERYDAY PROTEST AND PUSHBACK

In the case of the RRUDP an everyday politics emerges in the very public contestation that plays out between the state and the farmers, the courts and the development authority, and civil society and the state. It manifests in various overt and covert ways. This ranges from distressed farmers protesting in the street outside the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) office, nestled away in a residential elite neighborhood of Lahore, to smaller pockets of resistance among the public who reject the project. It brings to light

⁶⁹ Ammar Ali Jan, April 2023. Accessed from twitter:
<https://twitter.com/ammaraalijan/status/1647857313481383936>

what Bayat calls the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” where groups resist the development in a way that “reconfigures power relations” and allows “individuals to “step out” of the futures expected for them, and make a life that is totally unanticipated, a life for which there is no obvious preparation or eligibility” (Ballard, 2015,219,220). In these multiple parallel and intersecting processes “institutions of the state project bump up against groups and individuals attempting to make meaningful lives” and as per Wafer and Oldfield this creates “encounters” in which “citizenship emerges” (Wafer and Oldfield, 2015, 4). Their formulation is part of a wider call to “rethink governance and citizenship not at a distance but pressing into the flesh, through questions of intimacy and proximity” forcing us to observe how RRUDP forces the state and citizens into close interaction (Appel Anand and Gupta, 22). It allows us to understand citizenship as a product of contestation with the state, produced in the “encounters” which we see between RRUDP and protestors. It illustrates how the “problematization of government” is “articulated not just by rulers, but also by the governed” in the claims they make of the state and even in the way they are ignored or rejected (Anand, 2017, 163)

The most obvious and constant protest to the project comes from the farmers who are being dispossessed by the actual built area of the project. These farmers have rallied with urban activists belonging to various groups, including Human Right Commission Pakistan, Climate Action Pakistan, the Pakistan Kissan Rabta Committee and the Haqooq-i-Khalq Movement as well, the All-Pakistan Kissan Ittehad, Pakistan’s largest farmers’ rights body (Alam et al, 2021). The movement is also inspired by the farmers uprising in India, shaping the form resistance has taken. Farmers have made videos detailing their trauma, the

pittance their land was exchanged for, and the confusion surrounding the project in which they were forced to make deals. They have also recently protested outside the RUDA office with banners stating they will not back down and made their demands clear as pictured above.

Miraftab offers one way to understand this politics that is produced through the RRDUP project. She writes that for post-colonial nations the “post-independence state, a connoisseur of state- centered modernist planning, development projects shaped the drama of modern citizenship”, a claim which is hugely useful for understanding the Pakistan government’s treatment of RRDUP (Miraftab, 2009, 40). She identifies that these projects supposedly crafted for the people inadvertently lead to people creating a new space to stake their claims once the State falls short on its promises and denies participation. This is the “invented space” occupied by those on the margins, denied participation in processes that directly affect their lives. The protesting farmers inhabit this very space and Miraftab writes that here “collective actions by the poor that directly confront the authorities and challenge the status quo” take place but also makes clear that this space stands in a “mutually constituted, interacting relationship” with “invited spaces” of participation (Miraftab, 2009, 39). As per her articulation citizenship is not constituted just because of the state’s institutions and functioning’s but is instead growing “under the skin of the city” produced through the “disjunction between formal and substantive inclusion that motivates the contemporary practices of insurgent citizenship” (Miraftab,2009,41). This formulation highlights the need of an “insurgent planning” to expose the “the role of Western urban imaginary in enforcing exclusionary cities and

citizenship” (Miraftab, 2009, 45). It is this form of planning that accounts for the brave protesting farmers outside the RUDA office who refuse to back down.

However, Wafer and Oldfield help flesh out how imperfect the politics of participation really is by pointing to how in everyday life “invited and invented spaces are frequently blurred” and “messy actuality” is a closer depiction of the enmeshed relationship of the state and its citizens (Wafer and Oldfield, 2015, 2). This “messy actuality” is the space beyond the participatory sphere that is often harder to pin down and articulate as it is “entangled in a politics of imaginations of the state” as well as in the “trajectories of state institutions, non-government organizations, social movements, and in the intimacies of family and neighborhood life” (Wafer and Oldfield, 2015, 5). Given the way RRUDP is deeply enmeshed with the political landscape of Pakistan as well the notions of development and progress that are historically rooted, this entanglement is a useful way to make sense of the project. It offers the idea that citizenship is fostered within this confusion and disjuncture and that these ‘complex webs’ are where the “states project is projected, implemented and remade” (Wafer and Oldfield, 2015,12). Perhaps this messy actuality also partly explains the RUDA legal officers’ comment on hundred percent legality I discuss earlier .If we understand urbanization as a ‘thickening of fields an assemblage of increasingly heterogenous elements into more complicated collectives” then RRUDP is a site to study this thickening as it happens (Simone, 2004, 408).To see this thickening is to pay attention to the various forms of politics that come to light as and to always remember as Ballard writes that to” acknowledge the immediate and concrete realities of activism

and everyday life” is to “understand any gains as imperfect, tenuous and contingent” (Ballard, 2015, 218).

One instance of visible protest that made very clear the clash between the state and citizens and the pervasiveness of this “messy actuality” was in September of 2022, when RUDA began to forcefully acquire land in the Ferozewala area of the project and farmers refused to back down. They filmed the private security company the government hired to supervise the takeover of their land and drew media attention to the crisis. One prominent landlord Suleman Muhammad Sajjad Warraich who over time has become the face of the protest was particularly vocal about the Authorities brutal takeover. His visibility also points to something crucial in the protests around this project: not all landowners are equal and power differentials are built into everyday protest. While the farmers own small plots of land that they raise their family from but those like Mr. Warraich own much larger pieces of land holdings which have been in the family for generations. Mr. Warraich was quoted by a large media organization in the country, Dawn as saying:

“We will never allow anyone to use our land for the project, which is disastrous.... During the last few days, they (RUDA people) have suddenly appeared and started development work at our land by destroying the crops, vegetables, fodders etc on hundreds of acres.... It is really a great tyranny against us as well as with the country,” he mourned” (Hasnain, 2022).

Since he is formally educated and of a higher social class than many other land owner, he can speak more easily to media channels and raise awareness of the farmers concerns. However smaller farmers also remain focal in the struggle challenging the “established assumptions that the masses were ‘silent and mostly ignorant citizens who were incapable of making competent decisions on their own and who needed to be brought into modernity by an enlightened elite and their plans for development” (Ballard, 2015, 220). His enhanced visibility has also come at a cost. In December 2022 Mr. Warraich was arrested by the state for resisting the land acquisition RUDA claims is legal. A video of his arrest has been made public by his son, where Punjab police is roughly taking him away while he is on the contested land they are trying to develop. RRUDP enlisted the Punjab police to arrest him and quash protest and made use of a private security agency to guard state ordered tractors that were razing the land. These agents act as arms of the state to cement violence and are crucial to understand how dispossession comes about. The video has brought to light the reality of brute force RUDA is willing to use to push through the project. Baker’s work on evictions helps make sense of this violence surrounding eviction and dispossession when he writes we must think of the actors of eviction, in this case the Punjab police and private hired security firms, as “active agents in the creation and reproduction of spatial power” (Baker, 2017, 147).

Additionally, equally important are smaller acts of resistance and survival that surround the project and create the wider ecosystem in which larger protest is possible. Salwa Ismail sheds light on this when she writes about political action taking place in spaces that may seem unassuming and every day. She says that while the sort of protest that takes place in

public squares in city centers is often studied “ this optic however, does not capture the diversity of oppositional politics that develops in a multitude of city spaces, including, but not restricted to, popular neighborhoods” and redirects our attention to another kind of everyday politics that takes place is one where “informality is a vector of power and resistance” (Ismael,2014,269,270). She draws attention to the young men in their doorways in postures of resistance, and to the ordinary alleyway as a site where politics plays out and how these smaller sites and “everyday interaction furnish resources and capacities and establish infrastructures for the kind of revolutionary action” we see at a larger scale (Ismail, 2014, 277). This is a reminder to see as valuable smaller forms of political resistance- those of refusal- even when they do not seem to of consequence given the forces they are up against. The countless accounts of small landowners refusing to sell land and having cases filed against them for this refusal is one such example . Then perhaps RRDUP is best understood then as a site of “encounter” between the state and citizens, as a space for producing and contesting citizenship like Wafer and Oldfield put forth where the state even when it seems “elusive” in delivering basic services through such projects maintains “political and cultural relevance” and asserts itself (Wafer and Oldfield,2015,3).

This paper looks at the urban everyday policies that emerges around the RRUDP project and the many forms it takes. I make a case for how through this everyday politics and interaction with the state, citizenship is produced and upheld because it needs “constant material and social pressure to be maintained” (Anand, 2011). By looking at the “messy actuality” of urban life it sheds light on the politics of resistance and survival in the city that shape the experience of its residents. It illustrates how alternative futures are imagined

and current realities are contested through RRUDP and how all gains must be seen as “inherently disjunctive – not cumulative, linear, or evenly distributed among citizens but always a mix of progressive and regressive elements, unbalanced, heterogeneous, and corrosive” (Ballard, 2015, 220). This is in part because cities are complex and multifaceted and urban practice and politics in Southern cities is best understood as “incremental, uncertain, temporally fluid, speculative, transversal and rooted” (Bhan, 2014, 14).

REFLECTIONS

During the course of my research many moments lead me to think of my role in my research. There is never a time I conceived of my research without putting myself squarely within it. I am the observer, the interviewer, the research grant recipient, and the student. I am also a person heavily invested in the project in my home country with a position towards RRUDP, one that I defend vehemently and question frequently. To most people familiar with the Pakistani context of development, whenever I mention my project, I am met with a quiet (or sometimes not so quiet) sort of skepticism. Why should we care about another mega development project? Why care about RRUDP when it might never be fully built? One friend of mine misses no chance to say are you *still* writing on the Ravi City, isn't the project dead yet? I have had to push aside my knee jerk reaction to defend and justify my interest and instead try to offer an answer that is coherent and useful and to make sense of this feedback by fashioning a question for myself: Why does my work matter? Who does it matter for? I have many iterations of an answer, which I unpack in the conclusion.

However, the research that I gather for my project, the interviews I conduct, the pieces I read and the pictures and maps I have access to bring up other questions of what is available to me and what parts of my identity mediate access to them. For one my class privilege is key, my “in” to the RUDA office, I am allowed access through a contact. Social capital plays into the way I am treated in the office, I am served tea in the same waiting room the *kisaan* is ushered out of. I am met with openness, albeit guarded, on most fronts because my point of access into the office is seen as valid and as I mention earlier I am a *mehman*(guest). At the start of this paper, I make some comments on my discomfort in seeing the *kisaan* looking out of place, and how our modes of waiting are very distinct. I carry that feeling with me, of the privilege I have and what it accords me specially in Pakistan where I am seen as an internationally qualified student. In my interviews I am often asked if I speak Punjabi, and here my urban elite identity bars some opportunities of access. I speak Punjabi it, but it doesn’t seem like I do, my accent is distinctly urban, and Urdu and it sets me apart. Often, I find my interlocutors speaking Punjabi after I confirm I understand it still translating into Urdu for my perceived benefit. In other spaces my English gives me an edge, the real estate agents for instance take me a little more seriously as a woman inquiring about Chahar Bagh Housing Scheme when I sprinkle some English into our conversation. In some places when I talk to women my gender serves as some sort of a common ground. A female RUDA employee takes interest in my plans post-graduation and what I am studying, drawing parallels with her own interests. When she finds me in the office at least 2 hours after meeting her and exclaims in surprise “You are still

here?”(Abhi bhi yahan hai?) I am amused at her surprise, those in the office go about their work in a largely insulated sphere and my interest in the project as an outsider is hard to understand. ⁷⁰“Contact us once you have graduated”(contact kijie ga) she says to me, and I smile and nod and thank her. I think I have been given a job offer of sorts and given what my work takes the shape of I find this comical, endearing even if misguided. It shows something particular about the way I am perceived, and the way my interest in the project is perceived. At some level everyone in the RUDA office thinks I am vying for a job.

Finally, I very recently read this lovely book recently by Shenila Khoja Moolji titled “Forging the Ideal Educated Girl” which deals with the figure of the educated girl in development and educational reform in colonial India and Pakistan, a topic of inquiry that despite being fascinating is far from the current subject of this paper. At one juncture she talks about her positionality in the research she carries out and it really made an impression on me. She says she grew up in the town she carries out research in, she volunteered with the community there, and she is embedded in the area. Most strikingly she says her contribution is to bring an” ethic of empathy” to the communities she works with(Khoja-Moolji, 2018, 106). I was struck by her simple and powerful contribution and self-awareness and immediately worried about my own position. I am not embedded in the community in the same way; I did not grow up by the Ravi even though my home city is Lahore. I am half Punjabi, half Urdu-speaking for starters. The Ravi was a backdrop in my

⁷⁰ RUDA employee C, July 2022 ,Lahore.

daily life. It was the occasional picnic spot and summer holiday excursion.⁷¹ In fact in many ways, I benefit from the forces that argue in favour of RRUDP, for as a foreign educated young upper middle class citizen wanting to have a home in Lahore. I do however believe that I share a commitment to an ethic of empathy, which I understand as a commitment of care for people and communities affected by the project. I believe that as a planner my contribution to planning is to preserve the rights of vulnerable communities and to embody this ethic of empathy. It means to produce work that takes seriously opposition to development projects and that attempts to have it taken seriously by those in planning and policy in Pakistan. In that sense Khoja-Moolji gave me a vocabulary through which to articulate what I hope my contribution to Pakistan is through this project. This piece serves as a piece to advocate for better treatment of those affected by RRUDP and as a reminder of the cost of development by a chronicling of one project and its affects.

CONCLUSION

Through my paper I unpack the story of RRUDP, as an infrastructure project and simultaneously as a discursive site where contestation occurs, where dreams of what it means to be a modern city are imagined and reimaged. I argue that as a mega-project RRUDP demonstrates the states overt desire to strives to create a city that is environmentally friendly and in line with what global, modern cities ought to look like. Through engaging with texts, media and interviews of those involved in the project I

⁷¹ At other times the Ravi Bridge featured in my life as a site my family and I visited to pay local vendors to throw chunks of meat into the air with the River Ravi banks below for birds to eat- a particular form of *sadaqah*(charity) that is common in the region and not a very environment friendly activity in hindsight.

demonstrate how in practice the project overlooks the rights of many citizens as well as the environment and is driven largely by covert forces of real estate accumulation and dispossession, following a unique local history of development.

The attempt of this project is also to bring into conversation actors which are normally operating in different worlds. These actors operate in insulated spheres where they interact only to protest the other, and this paper offers a mode to witness them in the same space. To this end we hear from the RUDA lawyer who say there is no *ziyadti* and that and how the wily *kisaan* is making profit from his barren land and obstructing *naya* Lahore. We hear the same *kisaan* frame the RUDA office and its employees as ruthless usurpers, taking away the land they call home and making sure their space in the city is lost. We also hear from those like Architect A who say there is no such thing as urban planning in Pakistan let alone a *naya* Lahore- there are only projects and project-based interests. When these worlds and actors collide what happens beyond the resounding reverberations from the shock of witnessing this fractured encounter? What lies in the after math? For one through giving space to all these clashing and intersecting voices and claims we can find and name the “conflicting rationalities” I allude to earlier, where the states imagination and desires are at odds with those of its citizens, and where citizens have diverse formulations too and see how the space where these contestations play out is the “messy actuality” of daily life (Wafer and Oldfield,2015,2). Then we can think of the RUDA lawyer who says nothing is “100 percent legal or 100 illegal” as widening the world of the project, creating room unwittingly to give expression to all that doesn’t add up in what the project

does. Simultaneously we can begin to imagine more fully the complex and rich discursive and material space of the office, indicative of the wider society, within which the *kisaan* is chaperoned to a quiet corner in the same moment in time where the lawyer says nothing is ever hundred percent legal.

Through this unearthing of claims the veiled interests of development projects become apparent and assumptions about what development ought to look like are challenged. This matters because the alternative stories or histories of development and displacement and of belonging in the city that I trace help us develop at least an aspirational framework for what cities in Pakistan ought to look like, and whom they ought to serve the interests of. By naming and pointing out inequalities a framework develops for planning professionals and those interested in fine-grained work focused on drawing out stories that allows for us to better understand RRUDP and what it stands for as well as what is more widely at stake in development projects. While a mega-project like RRUDP may be a story as old time, it impacts real people who only have one lifetime in which they do their best to not become part of the collateral damage in a development project. This to me is crucial because it allows us to look towards the future to see what we can learn to do differently, and what we can do to change the path of development at present.

By drawing on the work of Filip D Boek who in his phenomenal piece *Spectral Kinshasa* writes it “doesn’t really seem to matter whether the new city is physically built or not” I realize that in the same way it does not matter if the RRUDP is ever fully built for my work

to make sense(Boeck, 2020, 325). The power lies in the way it is imagined and the steps taken towards building this imagined city. In fact, the kind of real estate interest in Pakistan that champion this project only do so in part because they bank on it maybe never being built. "Instability and volatility, the main characteristics and qualities of the city, also form its main asset, and generate its main financial opportunities" and are what make it attractive in the first place (Boeck,2020,326). Then, the project is alive even without it being built, and it is important even if it isn't completed. This is a partial answer to my friend's question of why I do this work. To me it is huge. It opens up a whole new space to make sense of RRUDP and helps situate it in the history and context of huge development projects in the city that are imagined routinely but executed rarely. The hope is that this paper adds to a line of work in the field that tries to better understand urban planning projects in Pakistan for what they make possible for the state and its citizens as well as what they foreclose, and for whom.

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