

THE POLITICS OF URBAN LAND IN SOUTH ASIA

Current Challenges and
New Directions

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(im)permanent settlement

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Introduction

Recent debates in urban studies have urged a rethinking of the urban land question, particularly, but not only, in relation to prevalent processes of 'massive urbanisation' in cities of the Global South (Simone 2022). The large-scale expansion of land, speculative accumulation, and extraction of land value across the globe have gone hand in hand with the conflictive (re) production of precarity, a remaking of the social and the emergence of new modes of collective life, not least through processes of social and attempted political mobilisation (Verloo and Davis 2021). Within South Asia, Pakistan is one of the fastest urbanising countries; half of its population already lives in what effectively counts as an urban environment (Qadeer 2014), even if official statistics continue to depict most of the population as rural (UN-Habitat 2022). According to Qadeer (2000, 2014), urbanisation in Pakistan refers not only to the processes of urban sprawl of recognised cities, but also to unrecognised urbanisation dynamics transforming rural areas into 'ruralopolises' of urban-level population density. What would often be considered rural households in official statistics in Pakistan turns out to be not prototypical rural because household members engage in non-agricultural sectors and derive income from non-agricultural settings, including from domestic and international labour migration. Similarly, the periphery of Lahore has undergone fast rates of growth – pushing population densities beyond the 400 persons per square kilometer threshold beyond which rural landscapes become difficult to service – due to demographic growth, dislocation of poor city dwellers to the extensions of the city, and migration from rural districts.

In urban Pakistan, the burgeoning real estate market since the 1990s (Javed and Riaz 2020) and, in particular, the fast-paced land development in the peri-urban fringes of cities like Lahore since Musharraf's military regime (1999[2001]–2008)¹ have resulted in increasing land contestations at the city extensions. These contestations not only have caused the loss of agricultural land and the widespread development of vacant plots and scattered upper-middle class residential projects, but have also challenged the ability of low-income dwellers to secure permanent residence due to practices of encircling, isolating, and ultimately dislocating local communities (Cermeño 2021). According to Mallick (2018, p. 6), this re-structuring of space at the extensions of the city has become “a major vehicle for the socio-spatial articulations of the middle class in Pakistan at the expense of labouring classes and subordinate social groups”. One particularity of the Pakistani context is that the tandem of financialisation and land/real estate development includes not only public actors (such as the city development authorities) and private investors, but also the military establishment as one of the leading actors (Siddiqa 2007) operating in opaque urban governance frameworks that allow and even strategise with the planning of ‘grey zones’ of exception.

In this contribution, we draw on ethnographic data from two settlements at the peri-urban fringes of Lahore to analyse the processes of and towards (im)permanence of low-income settlements in the periphery of Pakistan's second largest city. We first sketch out our conceptual lens, that is, how we understand urban inhabitation as a continuously reassembled complex of relations, trajectories, and temporary arrangements. Adopting a relational approach and building on Simone's notion of ‘people as infrastructure’ (Simone 2004, 2021), we then analyse the two case studies based on data obtained over the course of several years. In the main part, we explore in depth the genealogy and related ongoing contestations of one low-income settlement inhabited by Christians (a religious minority in Pakistan) that has taken several turns over decades with its relatively cohesive community (in terms of congregation) whose individual members have become experts in securing access to urban opportunities at the periphery of the city. A second location is subsequently introduced as contrasting case from the periphery of the city to provide a complementing picture with the attempts of rural to urban migrants of different faith and origin-backgrounds to settle on land at Lahore's extensions since 2011. Both cases reveal similar mechanisms in the processes of attempting permanent settlement but different modes of control and governing practices from above versus subaltern agency/ies, residents' ‘labour’ and bottom-up practices of ‘being governed’. However, no matter which approach of social and political mobilisation is taken by local communities aspiring permanent inhabitation, we find

that land rights are not being robustly secured; they “take what they can get” (Simone 2019a, p. 130) and remain in permanent impermanence. We conclude that uncertainty and improvisation constitute the everyday mode of existence for low-income masses seeking permanent residence at the extensions of Lahore. Uncertainty must be navigated in laborious efforts to exploit any possible type of agency to remain a player in the game of urban land politics. Both cases evidence that processes of becoming and dwelling at the margins are contingent to resident’s multiple alliances and underlying operations in a difficult context.

People’s infrastructural labour: horizontal and vertical ties

The massive urbanisation of Lahore’s periphery has paralleled the way Lahore, like other cities in Pakistan and many other urban areas across the globe, has been envisioned and developed from a modernisation and neo-liberal capitalist development perspective. For decades, urban visions and planning models in Pakistan have followed a linear social and spatial modernisation rationale (Mielke and Cermeño 2021), from which all Lahorites were supposed to – but did not – benefit. Modernisation-inspired planning has not achieved its intended objectives, and the restructuring of the urban-rural space in consequence is not granting all different segments of society opportunities to access land, housing, and services. Instead, it has produced differential rights to the city, triggered displacements of vulnerable populations (Akhtar 2015), and is continuously fuelling contestations over land (Rashid and Moulvi 2021).

Recent studies of land struggles and peri-urban land contestation processes in Pakistan’s Punjab (Rizvi 2019; Cermeño 2021; Mielke and Cermeño 2021; Rashid and Moulvi 2021) show that access to land involves processes of multiple property transfers, land appropriations under state-sanctioned acquisition provisions, and land grabbing – locally referred to as *qabza* (Ewing 2012; Hull 2012a). They also reveal that sites of struggle, contestation, and conflict over land turn into arenas for negotiation, cooperation, and bargaining in which dwellers recalibrate their range of possibilities within their changing socio-spatial and political environment. Different groups of local actors (*katchi abadi* dwellers, government representatives, real estate agents, criminal outfits, party workers, and civil society activists) become thereby interwoven in a micro-web of politics involving constant negotiation and bargaining around urban land. Against this backdrop, we employ a relational perspective to analyse and reflect how processes of inhabitation, accessing land, place-making, becoming, and (un)settlement at the margins are contingent to residents’ multiple alliances and underlying operations.

We deem Simone's work particularly relevant here as it emphasises that collective life, assembled in complex relationships, allows forming different and uneven patterns of capacity that are constantly reshaped due to learning (Simone 2011, 2019a). People situate themselves in a social context to evaluate and understand what happens in their surrounds (Simone 2021). According to Simone, this takes place in a background which is "not simply a context or a cognitive construct, but is experienced as actual terrain, something which is engaged, navigated, and acted upon" (Simone 2019b, p. 991). Such a standpoint entails considering that (peri-)urban dwellers are receptive to their continuously changing background which allows them to learn how to operate within a constant state of impermanence and provisionality and within transient contexts to assess the constraints and the range of possibilities they can engage with. An emphasis on residents' ability to adapt and recalibrate their operations is, however, not to be interpreted as a conceptualisation of subaltern agency as a means only of resistance in response to urban challenges (Ong 2011; Simone and Castán Broto 2022). Instead, such a proposition aims to set the focus on forms of intricate collaboration, where collective life is seen as temporary yet productive, shaping social and material entanglements and itineraries, webs of interdependencies and affiliations through which (peri-)urban dwellers attempt to secure permanence. For Simone, these temporary encounters and horizontal ties constitute "a critical *infrastructure* for the endurance of a territory, a people, a community" (Simone 2021, p. 1343, emphasis added). Simone also observed that urban life for low-income dwellers is highly labour intensive, merely to secure a certain state of (im)permanent settlement – "what the periphery has to offer" (2019a, p. 137) – and not fall back behind this level of achievement. According to his analysis, the labouring rests on residents' horizontal alliances of care for each other, underpinned by a subtle understanding of solidarity which he calls 'politics of peripheral care'. He finds the latter, for example, in Muslim socialities of a Delhi Muslim majority district (2019a, p. 110) and varied socialities at the fringes of African cities (Simone 2004, p. 419). The notion of 'people as infrastructure' is therefore derived from related observations of horizontal affiliations, social relations, economic ties, and other collaborations among disenfranchised residents that enable life at the urban margins because they increase access to support (2004, p. 423).

While Simone suggests the social infrastructure to emerge from mainly horizontal ties through marginalised people's engagement in complex and dynamic arrangements of spaces, people's experiences, artifacts, and practices, our case study extends the notion to include vertical ties by pointing out the crucial networking and engagement of low-income and

immiserated residents with all kinds of patronising representatives and related social assemblages from outside the settlements. We argue therefore that the acknowledgment of both vertical and horizontal ties is particularly important for the context of Lahore, with view to the political context in which urbanisation and land transformation in the peri-urban fringe accelerated since the year 2000. This coincided with the Devolution Plan, the Local Government Plan (LGP) 2000, and later the Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001, rolled out in the country under General Pervez Musharraf's military government (e.g., Cheema et al. 2006; Mohmand and Cheema 2007; Akhtar and Karriaper 2009). While intended to enhance the capacities of local communities for self-organisation and implementation through horizontal voluntary associations within a 'self-help' development paradigm, devolution in Pakistan was entrenched within the wider framework of neoliberal international aid agencies and supranational development institutions (Harriss 2001) and constituted a neoliberal rollback of the state. This entailed assigning significant development responsibilities to citizens in Citizens Community Boards (CCBs) and self-help projects, while retaining power within landowning elites and (re)centralising it under the then-existing military regime (Mohmand 2008). The non-partisan nature of local government elections prevented citizens' real representation and participation in decision-making (having a voice) in rural and peri-urban Punjab. Here, patron-client relations and *biraderi* affiliations – power structures embedded in hierarchical arranged kinship groups that involve a notion of occupational castes – prevailed and were even reinforced. Mohmand (2008) pointed out that, as a consequence, citizens' access to development and service delivery in rural Punjab remained limited and contingent to their capacity to also mobilise vertical (hierarchical) affiliations (Mohmand 2008, p. 407).

In the absence of government-provided services through working decentralised governance arrangements, alternative vertical (hierarchical) ties are necessary for the (peri-)urban poor to access resources. This implies considering class/caste differentiations, as well as the networking and engagement of low-income citizens with different forms of patronising representatives both within and outside the formal structure of the state. They condition access patterns, from hardware infrastructure (e.g., roads, sewerage, electricity, water), to religious institutions and buildings, Non-Objection Certificates (NOCs), First Information Reports (FIRs) of government authorities and departments, welfare organisations that compile beneficiary lists, and so on. Thus, we expand the notion of 'people as infrastructure' to explore the forms in which vertical and horizontal ties combine and manifest in social and material relations and are mobilised to seek permanence at Lahore's extensions.

Struggles and bargaining towards settlements' (im)permanence

Building on the previous conceptual thoughts, we now turn to the empirical material and reflect on disenfranchised residents' evolving socialities and activities undertaken to establish permanent residence at the margins of Lahore. These encompass operations attuned to serve different purposes, such as struggle, bargaining, and negotiation for land (rights) and services, as well as cooperation, calculation, or anticipation underlying mobilisation processes, while residents seek to maximise access to land and urban opportunities in a context of persistent vulnerability, uncertainty, and a permanent state of provisionality. The case studies focus on the non-linear genesis of settlement-becoming and the relational alliances and mobilisation efforts relevant for remaining on the land, even if never for certain.

We have chosen an analytical approach of contrasting cases to allow a critical discussion of mechanisms of alliance-making and mobilisation and to avoid the pitfall of romanticising immiserated people depicted as infrastructure for mutual protection and care. The contrasting case has been chosen because the settler community in question is not homogenous and was researched in its evolution, while the primary case study draws on decade-long established impermanence subjected to constant anticipation of change. For both cases we draw on ethnographic data collected in the two selected sites and neighbouring villages during several fieldwork research stays between 2012 and 2017. This includes, as basis for the analysis, informal and in-depth interviews with dwellers of peri-urban settlements, influential residents (often also local public representatives), and low-ranked but powerful land record officers (*patwaris*), together with material documentation produced and/or archived by residents themselves over the years.

Youhanabad No. 2: from 'model village' to urban land scam

Youhanabad No. 2 is the name of a Christian settlement that was established in 1998 on the periphery of Wahga Town Lahore (Cantt) in the southeastern outskirts of Lahore (Ayate Asr 2000) (Figure 10.1). Situated in close vicinity to Youhanabad, the largest majority Christian area in the city, it is also known as 'Bishop John Joseph town' – in memory of the Catholic Bishop of Faisalabad who served from 1984 to 1998 and committed suicide in protest against the abuses towards Christians in Pakistan. The history of the Christian community's settlement on 15 acres of agricultural land outside the city goes back to their initial eviction from inner-city spaces, subsequent resettlement as a model village, and the renewed threat of eviction, processes significantly influenced by both the Pakistan army and representatives from a Lahore-based branch of the international Christian organisation Caritas.

Back in 1998, 'Caritas Pakistan, Lahore' (CPL, further just 'Caritas'), one of the seven diocesan units in the country operating on the mandate given by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan, undertook the resettlement of approximately 350 Christian families that had faced eviction after the demolition of their *katchi abadis* 'Etihaad colony', 'Shera kot', 'Benazir colony', and 'Gulab devi'. Broadly translated, *katchi abadis* signify 'informal settlements'; in this case they comprised four tent settlements, with first settlers reportedly living there since 1952. The religious organisation granted displaced residents access to Caritas-owned land at favourable conditions: Five *marla*-plots (one *marla* being equivalent to 272.25 square feet and 25.29 square meters) were offered at a total cost of Rs 15,000 with the possibility to provide a Rs 2,300 upfront payment and subsequent Rs 500 monthly instalments. At the time, down payments entitled to secure 'immediate occupancy' (*fori qabza*), were considered by the communities as good enough tenure to start constructing houses on their own. Given that the area was disconnected from the main road and lacked basic infrastructures, residents approached different non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government officials to 'get the development work done', with requests for electricity supply, water provision, connecting roads, sewage and drainage, as well as educational and medical facilities.

Leveraging existing connections with Caritas facilitated further networking. In 1999, the Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP), a developmental private-run non-profit organisation, strategically established by the government to 'strengthen civil society' amidst local government reforms, and with a specific emphasis on community mobilisation and participation in self-help initiatives (already operational in the neighbouring Youhanabad), initiated its development activities in the settlement. PRSP assumed its (self-defined) 'external catalyst' role fostering collaboration among various government departments, NGOs, and locally established partner organisations that represented the community in its efforts to engage in local development, such as 'Community Based Organisations'. Residents referred to these entities in different reports as 'welfare associations', 'Local Development Committees', or simply 'Community Organisations'. In accordance with PRSP's mandate, the respective organisation took on the planning of development activities and the distribution of responsibilities among the growing network of partnership stakeholders, an increasingly complex constellation of various public and private actors and institutions, all coalescing under a persistently advocated self-help (*apni madad ap*) developmental approach (PRSP 2000).

Reportedly, following an initial phase focused on 'capacity building' and (top-down) 'social mobilisation', after which residents were deemed 'ready to undertake participatory development', residents and their community organisations, in collaboration with the PRSP, conducted a situational and

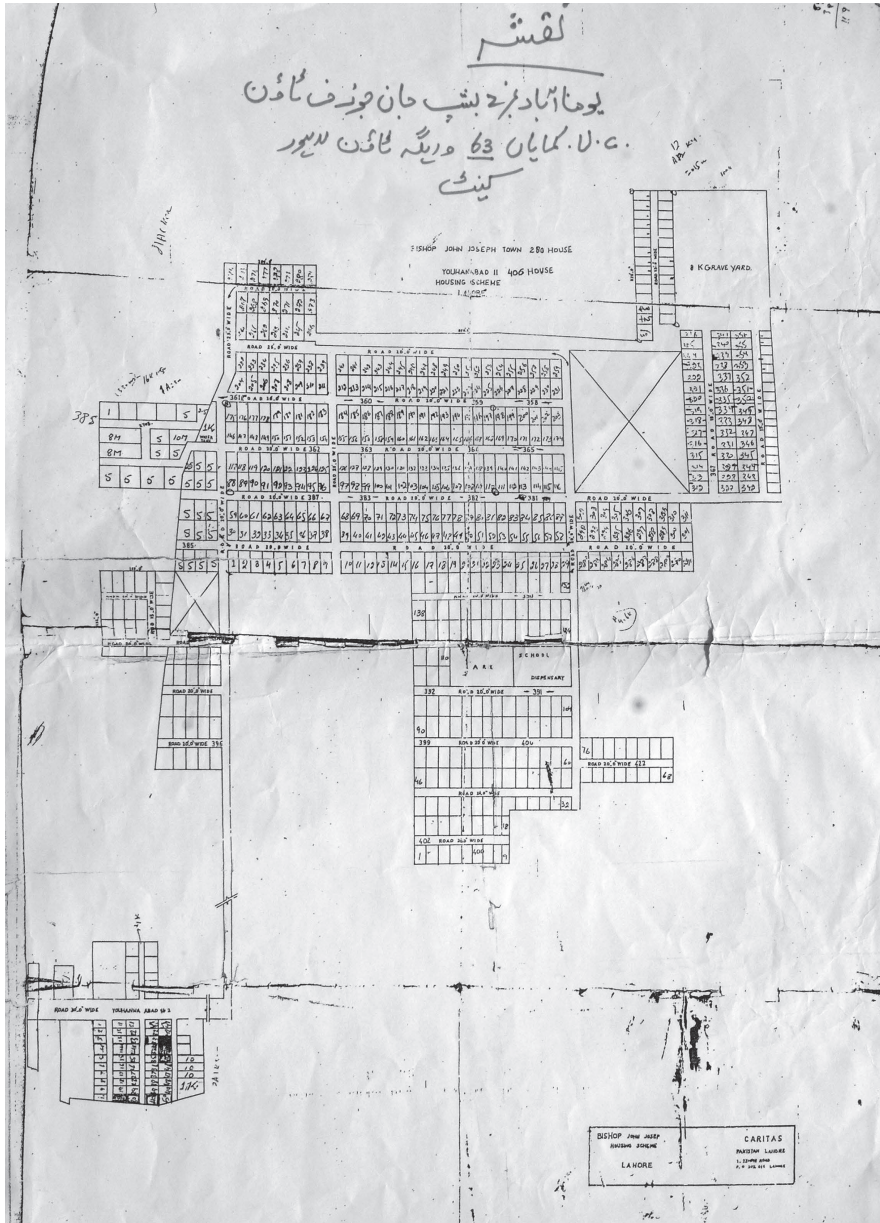


FIGURE 10.1 Map of Youhanabad No. 2 – Bishop John Joseph town, UC (Union Council) Kamanian 63, Wahga Town Lahore.

Source: Resident's copy of a document presumably created by Caritas Pakistan Lahore (CPL). Copy collected during fieldwork in 2012 with permission from the interviewed resident.

needs assessment. Although not explicitly mentioned in PRSP documents, Caritas remained in the background, connected to the community organisations. For instance, a designated ‘Caritas animator’ – a role akin to a social mobiliser – repeatedly appeared in various documents collected by residents. Additionally, in July 2000, the District Development Committee of the Integrated Rural Development Programme of Pakistan mobilised financial resources from the governmental Poverty Elimination Program/Fund (Syed 2018)² for the development work in the settlement.

Decisive were the multiple visits to the village in 2000 by General Pervez Musharraf, the then-Army Chief Executive of Pakistan, who later served as the president of Pakistan from 2001 to 2008. Following his first official visit, the settlement not only gained increased visibility but also received direct support from the army. The symbolic relevance of Musharraf’s presence is evident in various residents’ accounts including interviews, written documents, request letters, and media reports, all of which consistently highlight this event. In particular, residents employ this narrative to legitimise their settlement and permanence in Youhanabad No. 2, using it as a basis to assert their claims and “right to [an adequate standard of] living” (*Jeenay ka haq*), as stated, for instance, in a resident’s letter directed to the Chief Minister (CM) of Punjab, dated 18 October 2011.

The array of development actors, alongside the army, spearheaded infrastructure development initiatives, which included constructing a link road, surfacing streets, installing drainage systems, establishing a disposal pond, electrification, and creating a public park – all of which were finalised by the end of 2000. Additionally, progress was made on a school, a dispensary and a tree plantation (PRSP 2000). With the completion of basic infrastructure, the settlement was revisited on 22 August 2000 by General Musharraf, officially ‘inaugurated’, and acclaimed as a ‘model village’ (PRSP 2000). Subsequent commemoration events gathered diverse personalities including the Deputy Commissioner (DC), Assistant Director Local Government (ADLG), Director of PRSP, representatives from army and military, Caritas, and residents, among others (see Figures 10.2 and 10.3). The increased visibility facilitated the attraction of additional donors contributing to the subsidisation of various projects, including the construction of churches and schools.

As a result, residents’ welfare associations expanded their capacity for networking with national and international actors. This is evident in numerous documents, including a special PRSP brochure on Youhanabad No. 2 (PRSP 2000) (Figure 10.4), interviews, photographs, handwritten notes in guest-books, and letters of appreciation, all collected and archived by residents themselves over the years. Notably, one letter from the Caritas Pakistan NGO (see Box 10.1) gained distinct significance in the subsequent years as the land became contested.



FIGURE 10.2 Setting up an archive: residents' collected and archived pictures (1). Collage of photographs capturing the inauguration of the village by General Pervez Musharraf, depicting development activities and the distribution of sign-plates.

Source: The collage was created by an interviewed resident, drawing on different sources and public documents. It was obtained with consent from the resident during fieldwork in 2012. Faces and names in the images and texts have been blurred to protect privacy and ensure confidentiality.

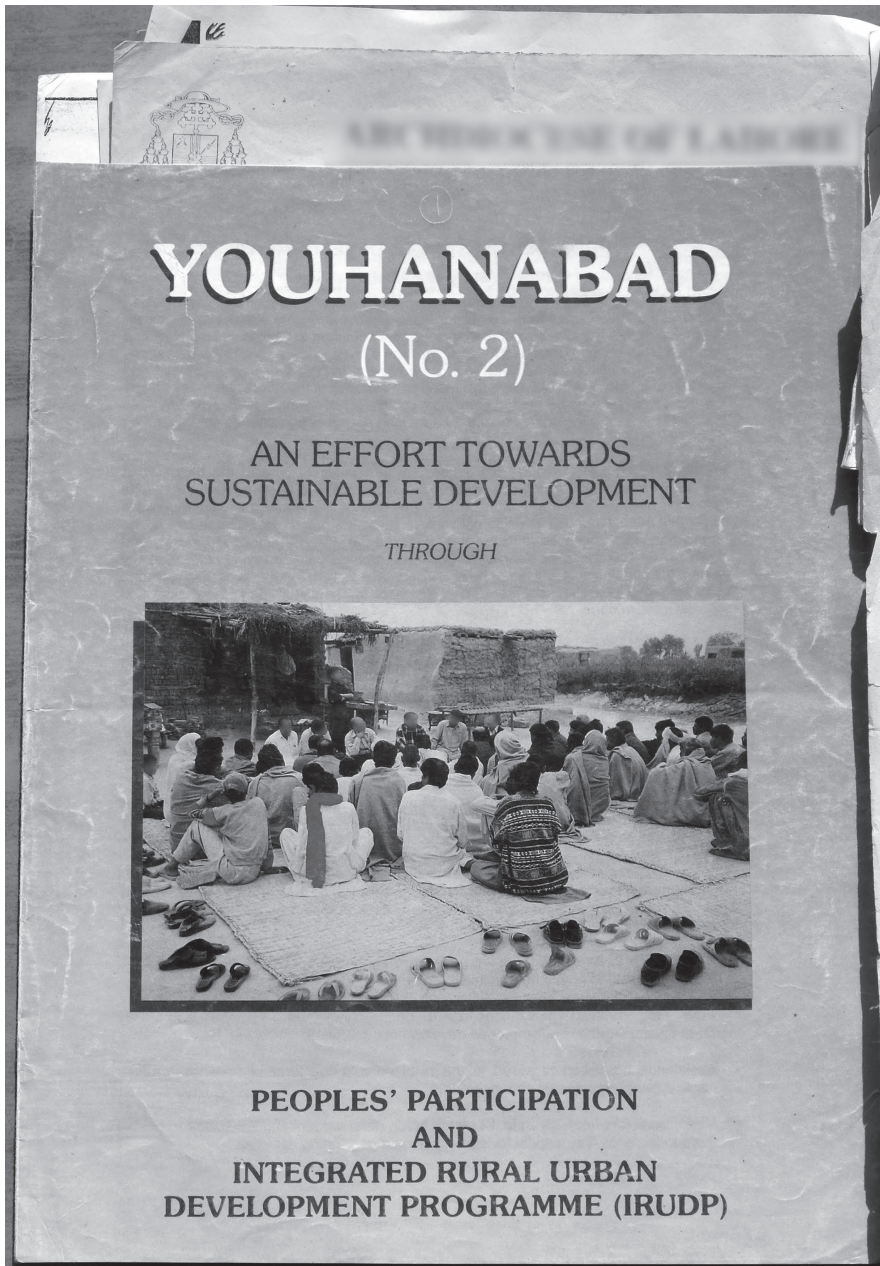


FIGURE 10.4 Brochure from the Punjab Rural Support Programme collected and archived by residents.

Source: A copy of this public document was shared by a resident during fieldwork in 2012.

BOX 10.1 “LETTER OF APPRECIATION TO THE RESIDENTS OF YOUHANABAD NO. 2”, SIGNED BY “R. ROSARIO (DIOCESES DIRECTOR)”, A PROMINENT MEMBER OF CARITAS, DATED 26 SEPTEMBER 2000. (ORIGINAL TYPED IN URDU).

“To the members of the ‘Local Development Committee’ of Bishop John Joseph village:

We are thankful to you from the depths of our hearts, for undertaking all kind of development activities in Bishop John Joseph village; today the current situation of this area is visible to all of us, lots of people have contributed to the progress [*traqqi*] of this area. Other than the ‘development work’ [*traqqiati kam*], the activities that have been undertaken to organise people [*munazam karna*] deserve particular appreciation. As a consequence of the hard work of the local development committee [*muqami traqqiati committee*] people are fully aware of their individual and collective development/progress; they have the capacity to make their own decisions and to undertake any kind of positive steps for their welfare according to the self-help principle [*apni madad ap*]. The current development status of Bishop John Joseph village is a strong evidence for this. In this regard, the exemplary role of all of you people will remain unforgettable; without your support and cooperation none of this would have been possible; we, from our side, appreciate your good work, and we hope that in the future as well, you will play your role for the progress and prosperity of this area.

We hope that in the future all of us will together keep going on the path of development/progress, and this journey of prosperity and progress will continue in this way. Our good wishes will always be with you. And our joint harmony will ensure that we will reach new destinies of success everyday”.

Source: Copy of the original letter kept and archived by a resident of Youhanabad No. 2, member of the welfare association *Almahboob*. It was obtained with oral consent from the resident during fieldwork in 2015.

Before long (earliest collected newspaper clips dating back to 2005), Caritas Pakistan was accused of fraud and embezzlement (*khurd-burd*) by the residents of Youhanabad No. 2. The organisation had allegedly made ‘shady deals’ (*saaz baaz*) to sell the allotted land to property dealers (Daily Insaaf 2005; Daily Khabrain 2006). A few years later, documents surfaced evidencing that the four acres land of the graveyard and other communal (*shamlat*) land including the park, pond, and post office had been sold to the Defence

Housing Authority (DHA) (Conveyance Deeds 2011), an autonomous urban development body owned by the Pakistan Army and under military federal control.³ Due to its ability to bypass planning authorities such as the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) and civilian local governments, DHA expands relentlessly in the urban fringes and accounts for crucial land transformation and dispossession in Lahore. The current planned extensions of Lahore DHA for residential Phases 9 and 10 are posing a threat to the endurance of numerous peri-urban villages in the southeastern periphery of the city, including the Youhanabad No. 2 settlement. At the time of field research (2012–17), several residential plots had already been purchased and demarcated by DHA (Figure 10.5).

According to members of a local welfare association, residents' payments records were made to disappear, while simultaneously Caritas allegedly 'cancelled' several residents' 'qabza letters' – documents originally intended to secure de facto occupancy right. This was followed by official eviction notices (*be-dakhli ke aadalti*) that sought to get the residential land vacated. Residents recounted receiving threats, enduring physical violence, and facing intimidation as Caritas registered FIRs against them at the local police station (*thana*). Confronted with the fear of a potential forced eviction (*zabardasti khali*) to give way to DHA's urban development (refer to Figure 10.6 for the land transformation around Youhanabad No. 2), affected residents extended their vertical networks and deployed various resistance strategies. These included social mobilisation efforts such as organising demonstrations in strategic

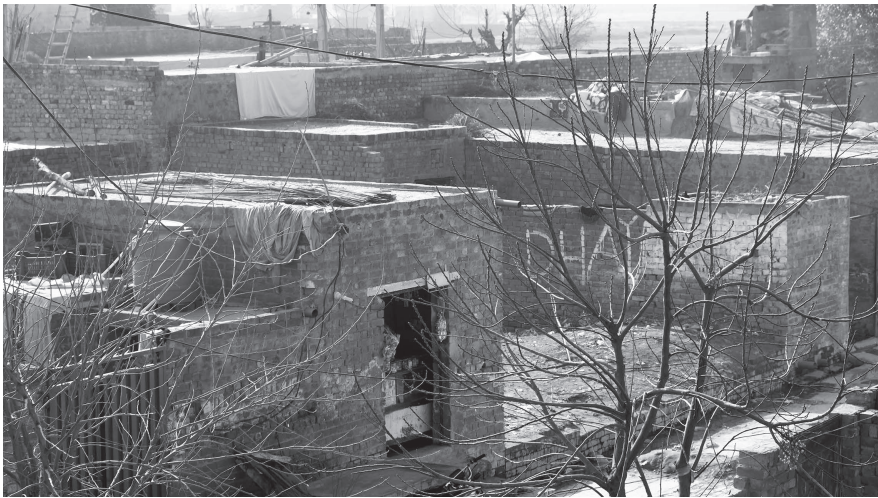


FIGURE 10.5 Residential plot in Youhanabad No. 2 marked with the letters 'DHA' in white paint.

Source: Picture by authors, 2016 (Helena Cermeño)

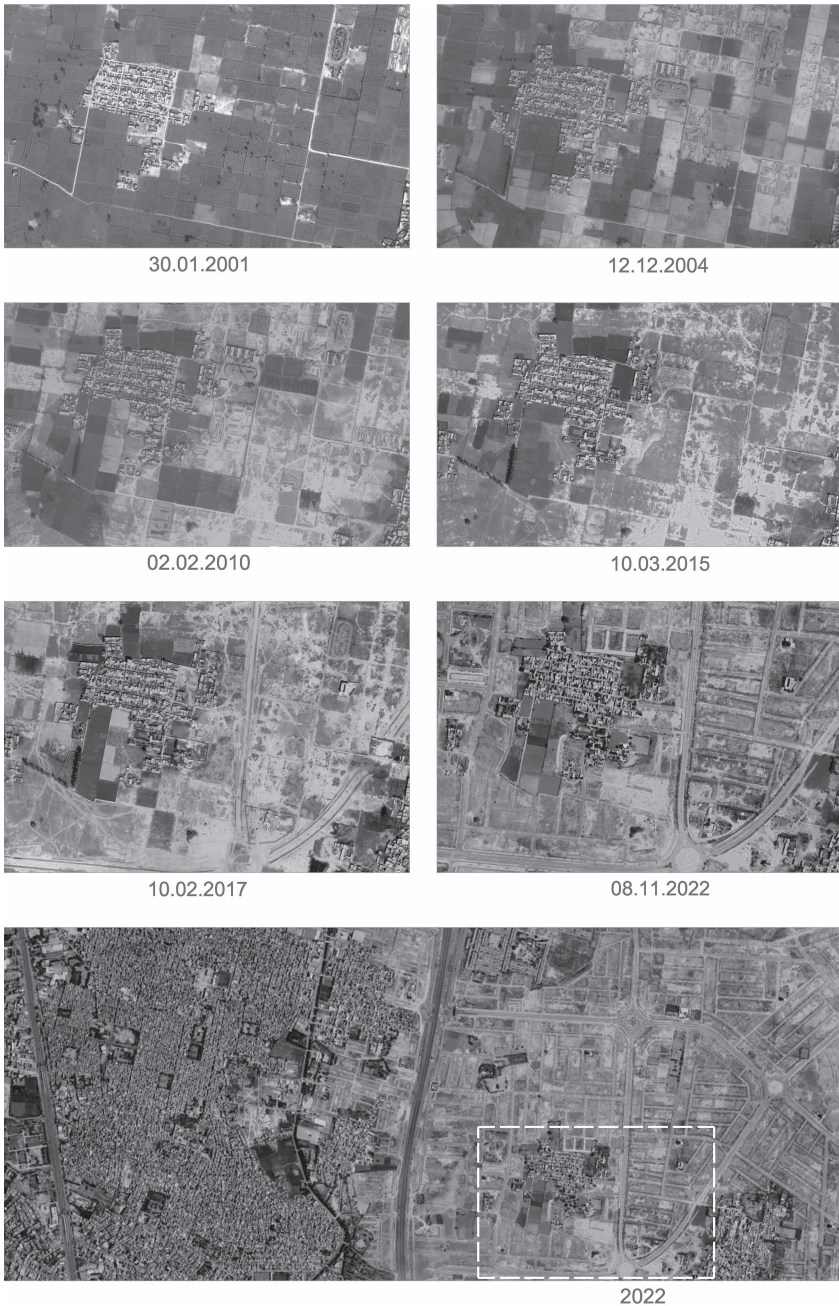


FIGURE 10.6 Land transformation around Youhanabad No. 2 between 2001 and 2022. At the bottom, Youhanabad No. 2 wider surroundings including the layout of DHA Phase 9 (on the right), the neighbouring Youhanabad town (on the left), and the Lahore Ring Road (in the centre).

Source: Authors, based on Google Earth's areal pictures times series.

spaces like the Press Club, filing FIRs and court cases against Caritas – and more recently against DHA too – and reaching out to the media and various government institutions.

Despite actively mobilising networks and connections with prominent public representatives, including the then General Secretary of the Punjab Minorities Advisory Council, who visited the Caritas office in 2001 to lobby for residents' rights, ultimately, formal land ownership could not be obtained. Consequently, residents took their claims and requests directly to government authorities, including the Chief Secretary of Punjab. In a formal letter directed to the Chief Secretary of Punjab in 2011, which was stamped and annotated in technical/legal parlance by different-scale land record bureaucrats supporting the residents' claims, members of the local welfare association – simultaneously acting in their own interest as small-scale real-estate brokers – petitioned for permanent ownership rights (*malikana haqooq*) for the residents of Youhanabad No. 2, to prevent eviction and ensure the permanence of the settlement.

However, Caritas' representative R. Rosario (the same individual in the aforementioned appreciation letter from 26 September 2000 – Box 10.1 – and also identified as the vendor on behalf of Caritas in the property transfer deeds to DHA approximately ten years later, as well as in numerous court cases against Caritas throughout Lahore) argued that the NGO had not been able to obtain the necessary NOC from the relevant government department – the legal document required to regularise and register the plots and properties in the names of residents. Instead, he justified eviction notices on the alleged defaulting of payment by several residents. In hindsight, the land scam is obvious; local Caritas representatives had taken money from dozens of families only in this colony.

At the time of our last field research visits in 2017, the eviction threat for Youhanabad No. 2 seemed less imminent. At least two residents had successfully won court cases against DHA, with one receiving support from a local Member of the National Assembly (MNA). This resonates with some local respondents' explanation who claimed that DHA was lacking the legal basis to evict the entire place – referring to a law of 1973. And yet, DHA had acquired all the agricultural land around the settlement, and appeared in documents as the purchaser of Youhanabad No. 2's communal land. DHA had continued to isolate and surround the existing settlement, a practice observed in other locations as well, and completed a surrounding wall at the end of 2016. While fears prevailed among some residents that DHA would show up with legal property documents anytime soon, proving that all land had been sold and that they would start evicting families on that basis, other interviewees were convinced that the constructed wall signified the permanence of the settlement. Some residents expressed feeling more secure because the wall would allow DHA to monitor entry and exist to the settlement, and residents

would get a pass-document. This feeling of security originates in the widespread perception of residents' high vulnerability to crime and robbery on the way to and from Youhanabad No. 2.

Habiba Colony: A settlement in the making

In contrast to the first case, Habiba Colony (name changed) represents an evolving settlement that was started in 2011, that is, at a time when Youhanabad No. 2 was already experiencing several years of demise and renewed uncertainty of inhabitation. It was not an already existing or otherwise (religiously) coherent community that resettled to the location (in comparison to Youhanabad No. 2) nearby the north-western part of the Ring Road. Instead, the settlement evolved incrementally based on deliberate incentive-raising by people affiliated with the local party coordinator of the main party in Lahore (PML-N), who was also the relative of the local MNA. The former seems to have pointed out the 'vacant' land at the peri-urban edge of Lahore between a village and a factory, squeezed along a drainage water canal (*nala*), to his Christian aide. Because the land belonged to the Lahore Irrigation Department, the plotting and selling activities of the initial Christian occupiers – according to community members' own accounts the population rose from 10 families in summer 2011 to about 300 less than a year later – faced immediate attempts at eviction.

When a first serious eviction effort took place in 2011, the dwellers resisted successfully; particularly women were said to have stood in the first row facing the police and the bulldozers. Upon mediation of the local party representative, the police and Irrigation Department officials left without having moved anybody and subsequently agreed to not harm the dwellers unnecessarily in future. This gave but temporary security until in April 2012 a second major eviction drive took place where male residents clashed with the police. Consequently, FIRs were lodged against 11 individuals in Habiba Colony, stating they illegally occupied land worth 2 billion Rupees (Rs). Again, the Irrigation Department did not take further steps and local dwellers reported afterwards that the issuing of the FIRs even serves their interest, because the very fact that the complaint document mentions their names in connection with the piece of land they have settled in on would constitute the first step in establishing their legal presence in this place – a history traceable in public records. Moreover, the FIR issuing urged dwellers to continue their struggle for full ownership rights to rid themselves of the status as criminals. As one community leader stated, "once we get the rights, we will not be criminals anymore".⁴

Early residents formed a local committee, collected money among themselves, and organised the solidifying of the ground near the *nala*, several hand pumps and the building of two bathrooms for communal usage. On an

everyday basis, neighbours extended mutual support to watch homesteads and belongings in the absence of one another wherever possible. Besides alliance-building with the local police and the PML-N-party representative, the committee claimed to have applied for 2-*marla* housing plot appropriations to the Provincial Chief Minister (CM) through the same local party worker. One community leader was able to attain some perceived degree of settlement security among residents through a support letter of an advisor to the CM of Punjab, which stated that 'the case' would currently be in the CM House with the request to not bother 'the requested parties' until it is replied to. It did not matter for the residents that the letter was issued by the Forest Department Advisor who the local pastor happened to be able to reach out to, although the jurisdiction of the Forest Department was not related at all to the settlement case.

Threats continued nevertheless, and the flooding of large tracts of the colony's land several months later was blamed on purposeful action and intention by the Irrigation Department. The water flow was only stopped once the media had arrived. After this incident, half of the previous population of about a 300 families moved out bit by bit. However, they did not give up their claim to the occupied plot, even less so after an alleged representative of the office of the Director General (DG) Katchi Abadis appeared in the colony to inform them about the legal situation and how they could claim ownership rights for the occupied plots. He returned with forms for regularisation from the DG Katchi Abadis authority and compiled a survey list of 242 households that claimed residence in the colony on 6 November 2012 (date of submission to the DG Katchi Abadis). Additionally, the relevant local land record administrator (*patwari*) conducted his own assessment of the situation on 9 November 2012 and subsequently submitted a report to the authorities. After the surveys, the further regularisation was said to depend on an NOC by the Irrigation Department, which it denied. The rejection served as pretext of the liaison person in the DG Katchi Abadis to extort a high sum of money from the aspiring residents to bring about the NOC. At the same time, the responsible official in the Irrigation Department demanded he be made head of the local committee and be allotted three *kanal* land for himself (equal to 60 *marla* or 20 average-sized plots). In addition, increasing numbers of residents from the neighbouring village had taken over plots; the (Muslim) landowners and influential people were able to enforce their interests in grabbing the land of the Irrigation Department as the regularisation of the plots seemed to become tangible.

This prospect became solidified by infrastructure development and the use of, for example, places of worship as inviolable markers of settlement. The local committee that the community had established was largely connected with the institutions of faith; initially a building marked with a cross was erected that was turned into a full-fledged church after an international

sponsor (from South Korea) had invested a huge amount of money into it by 2014. A mosque was in the planning stage in 2014, and by 2017 the building of a second one had started. Another major communal investment seems to have been electric wire with which the main electricity connection was tapped, and residents of the colony were provided illegal connections for which local workers of the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), who oversaw metre control in the neighbouring village, received money. Later, metres were installed for share-use by several families. Furthermore, the water connection changed from initial hand pumps to collectively financed motor pumps and the arrangement of regular pipes from government-installed tube wells in the neighbouring village. In 2017, residents were confident that the government would be providing gas connections very soon, marking an important step towards permanence.

However, throughout the years and despite all the laborious efforts at ensuring permanence through vertical as well as the building of strong horizontal ties within the community, the rift between ordinary dwellers and their representatives constantly deepened. The committee leaders strategised with bribing different government officials but themselves became corrupted. At least two generations of initial president and general secretary of the local committee had run off with large sums of money after embezzlements and fraud had been discovered – for example, with money collected by a community leader for installing individual electricity connections. Albeit the discovery of fraud each time resulted in a break-up of horizontal infrastructural ties among the dwellers of Habiba Colony, they literally invested newly at any new opportunity given their moral dependence on intra-communal horizontal ties (chance-taking). Asked, for example, why they would not stop paying putative fees, the reply was “if somebody gives us hope, we pay him money again”.

In the non-linear course of settlement development, successful vertical networking had installed new hope and prospects for permanence, for example, when Christian committee members finally managed to invite the Punjab Minister for Minorities for the second anniversary of the church inauguration in 2016, thus demonstrating their political connectedness and existing interest representation on their behalf. Irrespective of regular small glimmers of hope, many of the ordinary residents of Habiba Colony stayed put because they lacked other options and could not afford other housing. The skyrocketing of the real estate and land prices since 2003 had rendered their hopes to secure a place for living for themselves and their families in Pakistan a distant illusion. A sample survey among the residents showed that they had either paid rents between Rs 1,000 up to 6,000 before or they had lived penned up with a joint family in too few rooms without enough space. Given market prices of *2-marla* plots of at least Rs 400,000, the initial entry fee at Habiba Colony – varied selectively, but Rs 1,500 was the regular amount

charged – and even the subsequent plot prices of Rs 15,000 to 16,000 for initial residents promised to be a valid alternative with the prospect of acquiring own land property and thus permanence. The chance-taking furthermore preserved the option that if things went badly for the initial and second-generation poor dwellers, for example, when they faced an emergency requiring financial investment as in the case of serious health problems or accidents, they could choose to sell their plots at profit for Rs 40,000 to 80,000 after only few years and move on to seek permanence under heavily laborious conditions elsewhere.

Securing permanency: creation, dismantling, and remaking of ties

The (im)permanent settlement of Youhanabad No. 2 and Habiba Colony has been both facilitated and instrumentalised by the different actors involved. The creation of Youhanabad No. 2 in the first place and its fast consolidation and development in the first years can be seen as the conjunction of efforts and interests by both the rural-urban and military government(s) and civil society organisations in line with the then dominant ‘fashion’ of participatory development approaches. The settlement remained, however, a top-down experiment of citizens’ participation and decentralisation. Horizontal ties of trust, solidarity, and collaboration underlying community-building and development in the initial phases constituted a disciplinary/governing exercise prescribed by the logic of the neoliberal (self-help) development and political (devolution) agendas. The activation and mobilisation of a sense of mutual cooperation and interdependency by both Caritas and PRSP conformed ties that were more apparent than real, as evidenced, for instance, by the varying and evolving names of citizens/community boards and welfare associations. Given their fragility, these ties of collaboration progressively dissolved, and ultimately shattered with the fraud of Caritas and the expansion threat of army’s DHA. Youhanabad No. 2 residents have been over the last twenty years, (first) relocated, (then) temporarily mobilised, neglected, and (ultimately) misused; their initial collective formations and people’s infrastructure thereby have largely been dismantled.

Habiba Colony in turn exemplifies a more bottom-up social mobilisation process in its initial phase where rural to urban migrants from different backgrounds settled in the same place. Out of joint interest, they accepted an oversight committee, which however from the very beginning was dominated by its leaders’ own agenda for profit-making – in which poor dwellers’ interest in achieving permanent settlement figured well. Mutual interests preconditioned that residents contributed money for various installations that led to basic development works while substantial parts of it got embezzled. The instrumental mobilisation of collective action served mutual

interests as well; residents who settled upon an entry fee of Rs 1,500 for a prospect of ownership rights and permanence allowed their female family members to use their bodies to resist eviction drives and ensure continued occupation of government land for dwelling purposes. Although the case confirms how horizontal ties of trust, solidarity, and collaboration based on the recognition of mutual interest and interdependency are crucial to the initial phases of development, it also shows the significance of vertical connections, in this case, with political parties and minority representatives. The mediation efforts of the local PML-N coordinator, his relation to the MNA, and the liaison with the Provincial Minority Minister proved instrumental in several episodes where a new sense of hopefulness was instilled among ordinary residents.

Beyond the initial settlement and development phases, both cases show how land fraud and disputes over land at the extensions of Lahore managed to dissolve initial relatively stable horizontal relations. As respondents in Habiba Colony stated, they grew increasingly tired of the regular extortion of the community leaders or committee members and became torn between dependence, connected with hope that the alleged purposes of money contributions (e.g., for individual electricity connections, gas supply, NOC-issuing for regularisation as *katchi abadi*) would actually be realised and thus sustain permanence at the site of the colony versus the tacit knowledge that ‘even genuine documents would not be a solution’ and that they would continue to face a permanent risk of eviction because ‘powerful people can do anything’ in Pakistan. Consequently, joint interests and collective action became increasingly fragmented, and cohesion dismantled. In Youhanabad No. 2, residents were suddenly confronted anew with (the threat of) dispossession after the settlement had been hailed by government and military institutions as a model of rural development and of civil society engagement over twenty years. The subsequent land conflict and fraud by Caritas representatives dissipated the once-relied-upon (religious-based) ties of solidarity with the organisation, uprooting residents from familiar domains (of ‘good enough tenure security’, even without permanent landownership rights). In this new context of land contestation, residents had to reorient themselves, looking for a remaking of affiliations and profitable opportunities through new forms of interactions with other actors, and by engaging in new forms of relations with their now antagonists (via, for instance, legal documents and court cases against Caritas and the expanding DHA). Confronted with the processes of trickery by Caritas representatives and the state (the army), residents of Youhanabad No. 2 developed a sense of alertness, a readiness to switch gears, and learn from their changing environment. It is against this background that conflicts over land can be interpreted as productive points of tension between existing, lost, and new vertical and horizontal relations of solidarity, belonging, and clientelism.

‘(In)visibility in the struggle for permanence’ manifests in both settlements. The involvement of the PRSP in Youhanabad No. 2 (with the reporting of the development progress) and the alleged pro-active engagement in Habiba Colony of the Katchi Abadis Directorate (with the gathering of data on the settlement, listing of families and supporting residents in the filing of applications for regularisation) show how communities, their interests, and desires, including their claims for land, development, and permanent settlement, only count, as Simone argues, “when they are manifested in behaviours that can be measured, subjected to the probabilities of specific outcomes, and ally with political and economic projects that seek to define and mobilise them” (2021, p. 1344). Youhanabad No. 2, initially established as model village (with increased visibility), then forgotten (rendered invisible) and later (potentially) deemed disposable, exemplifies how the lives of certain residents are significantly discounted, disappear, or are made to disappear. In response, its residents deploy a range of operations and strategies to (re)gain visibility.

(In)visibility hence becomes crucial when considering residents’ struggle for permanence. In Youhanabad No. 2, some residents have invested substantial resources in rebuilding vertical ties following the deception by Caritas representatives; in Habiba Colony, vertical ties, for example, with religious sponsors, helped the initiation of the settlement from the very start. Contacts with the media/press have proven particularly relevant for the sustenance of settlements (even as occupation) through (staged) social mobilisations and the systematic documentation and archiving of visual and written materials (including analytical notes by residents themselves) related to the settlements’ becoming and their (past and current) visibility, for example, as role model of development and civil society self-help engagement in the case of Youhanabad No. 2. At times, these archives transcended the borders of the settlements. For instance, some residents started collecting evidence of Caritas’ fraud in other areas of Lahore or observing the demolition of comparable (in size) Christian *abadis* (such as those on Kasur Road) which were described as being ‘much more *pukka* (stable/consolidated)’ than Habiba at that stage. Youhanabad No. 2 residents sought, for instance, to extend horizontal solidarity ties with other deceived communities to jointly mobilise for filing (synchronous) FIRs in anticipation of possible future legal cases against Caritas and DHA. Through these material interactions and documentation, residents experienced new forms of solidarity and sociality, even if temporary and ephemeral. The case of Habiba Colony confirms this heavy investment of residents in opportunities to become socially visible, to thereby *learn* how the changing environment operates and how they can potentially act upon it.

Both case studies evidenced the relevance of (*non-*)*human interactions* in this regard as a wide range of documents – artefacts, created and archived materials by residents themselves – were mobilised to gain visibility, raise claims, and mediate in the contentions over the land. The documentation and

the more (Youhanabad No. 2) or less (Habiba Colony) systematic ‘archiving’ conducted by some of the residents as evidence of their settlement process and the progressive development of the colony (e.g., instalment payment slips, land transactions deeds to DHA, written letters to public representatives, FIRs, copies of DG Katchi Abadis registration lists, newspapers clips, photographs of relevant events) proved instrumental in playing along during contentions over the land. For instance, the letter of Youhanabad No. 2 residents addressed to the Chief Secretary of Punjab in 2011 constitutes a powerful tool for struggle as it incorporates different symbolic elements such as the official stamp of the submission in the office of the Secretary of Punjab as well as additional signed notes by different land record bureaucrats. Similarly, for Habiba residents the letter of a putative advisor to the CM from the Forestry Department installed hope. Both documents helped setting a ‘paper-trail’ with a particular narrative of the settlement creation, one (repeated across documents) of suffering and redemption that aims at strengthening residents’ case and legitimising their permanent settlement in the place. They were carefully preserved and stored in anticipation of potential future court cases, should the need arise. These material artefacts can be seen as what Simone (2021, p. 1346) refers to as “distinct forms of technical mediation [. . .] recording techniques, narrative devices, architectural forms, infrastructural arrangements and modes of visual and cognitive display” mobilised to set a trace of paper that can support residents’ claims to permanent settlement. As residents move from office-to-office writing applications and letters and seeking support among, for example, street-level bureaucrats, the created (non-)human interactions constitute artefacts for resistance but also of collaboration. The implied dynamism of the system supports the perception (and real possibilities) that one is not stuck in place, that there are forms of ‘working out’ the situation, and that this allows for (a sense of/new forms of) agency.

Possibilities to learn through social relations require, however, the maintenance of spaces of collective life or the creation of socialities. Thus, the selling to DHA of the communal (*shamlat*) land in Youhanabad No. 2 meant an attack to the very social intimacies of collective life. The initially created socialities among low-income Christian rural to urban migrants in Habiba Colony fractured upon witnessing fraud by community leaders and contesting occupations by neighbouring strongmen after prospects for permanence had occurred. These public and social spaces had functioned as community support systems, serving as spaces of enclosure and encounter, whereby acts of *sharing* extended beyond mere provision to encompass *caring*, essential for sustaining the “critical infrastructure for the endurance of a territory, a people, a community” (Simone 2021, p. 1343, emphasis added). The selling-off of *shamlat* land, the dismantling of common areas, and the constant risk of occupation instilled fragmentation and distrust in the communities that led

to the disintegration of people's (as) infrastructure. Just as vertical ties were essential to sustain poor dwellers' position in insecure settlement environments, vertical power hierarchies and inequity posed risks of dispossession for them.

Conclusion: impermanence as the better life?

As elsewhere, massive urbanisation in Lahore has become strongly intertwined with the way land at the extensions is purchased, acquired, appropriated, developed and transformed into new urban spaces. The cases of Youhanabad No. 2 and Habiba Colony have elucidated on different modes of mobilisation, development, control, and governing practices. They have also shed light on various forms of subaltern agency/ies, encompassing both collaboration and resistance, which involve a non-negligible amount of infrastructural 'labour' that is set in place by mobilising both horizontal and vertical social and material relations. Despite the turns taken in Youhanabad No. 2 over the last two decades, the settlement manifests endurance with its relatively cohesive community and individual members having become experts in securing access to land at the periphery of Lahore. Habiba Colony, in turn, continues in a permanent state of non-linear becoming with affiliations and materialities constantly being remade to secure the prospect of permanence. Taken together, the cases allowed reflecting on how processes of becoming and settlement at the margins are contingent to residents' multiple alliances and underlying operations.

Speaking to the volume's interest in 'good practice', the analysis pointed to several instances of (non-)human interactions, where institutional artifacts – even if fragmented and ephemeral – such as buildings of different congregations as prayer places (Hull 2012b; Khan 2012) or paper documents gain significance for mediating relations among people, objects, ideas, places, and multiple interests (Hull 2012a). The relevant role of materialities manifested clearly in some residents' practices of archiving and mobilising a wide range of documents, setting a 'paper trail' for claim-making and anticipating resistance, thus maximising their access to urban opportunities.

The case studies pointed out how certain kinds of populations (socio-economically and politically marginalized urban dwellers) are subjected to specific policies, political agendas, and interests; and are often relocated, temporarily mobilised, neglected, or misused. It is here, where collective formations and people's infrastructure get dismantled (Simone 2021, p. 1345). The analysis also showed that modes of becoming involve fragile articulations among social, ethnic, kinship, and religious networks, where individuals operate at times through public offices, in private capacities, in clientelist networks, or through political parties. Conversely, the cases allowed tracing specific conditions that enable disenfranchised residents, despite the

threats of eviction, displacement, and dispossession, to mobilise precarious modes of (sometimes collective) action that yet effectively support hoped-for permanence. In this context, our insights expand previous findings by bringing to the fore urban dwellers that have been silenced so far in the literature of land transformation and peri-urbanisation in Pakistan, namely disenfranchised landless Christian and poor communities that within the development of the peri-urban fringe seek – and to a certain extent succeed – to make the most out of their transient surrounds.

Having delved into the inequities and power differentials underlying the case studies and examined residents' adaptive learning through social interactions and relationships, it is striking how impermanence appears to constitute the (accepted) best available life for low-income dwellers at Lahore's margins. This acceptance, however, raises profound questions about equity and multi-dimensional inequality. The endurance of impermanence becomes a tangible expression of the ongoing perpetuation of precarious living conditions for economically and politically marginalised urban dwellers in Lahore. And although adaptive strategies devised by residents showcase resilience, they also underscore the persistent challenges rooted in current urban development trends of massive urbanisation at the city extensions. To enhance the quality of life at the margins of Lahore, and elsewhere, there is a pressing need to not only acknowledge but actively support 'people's infrastructural labour' towards permanent settlement.

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Notes

- 1 General Pervez Musharraf was Army's Chief Executive of Pakistan from October 1999 to November 2002 and 10th President of Pakistan from June 2001 to August 2008.

- 2 Syed (2018) points out that after 9/11, given the new role of Pakistan as a frontline state in the war on terror, several international donor agencies provided substantial funding/aid to the Pakistani state, which served as background for the implementation of the LGO 2001. Large amounts of resources were allocated for capacity building of local governments and elected representatives and to finance participatory projects.
- 3 In Pakistan, army-run Defence Housing Authority's (DHAs) urban development schemes are found in all major cities since 2002; in particular, DHAs have become popular in Karachi, Islamabad/Rawalpindi, and Lahore. Developing low-density housing projects and displaying high-quality standards of planning and development – which contrast with many poorly serviced areas in the city and rural villages – DHA settlements seem to represent the aspirations of the emergent upper-middle classes and are often legitimised with exclusionary claims over urbanity, modernity, and security. For more details on the role of DHA in Lahore urbanisation processes, see Cermeño (2021). As Akhtar (2015) notes, it is well established that Pakistan military personnel have developed a vast corporate empire in which land and real estate development have become their most important businesses. In this context, Cermeño (2021) shows how the spatial expansion of the DHA's urban land developments in the peri-urban fringe of Lahore has acquired massive proportions to the extent that one third of the city landscape falls under army-controlled land.
- 4 Interview with General Secretary of local community committee of Habiba Colony, May 12, 2012.

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