

Project Title: Between Speculation and Dispossession: Pakistan Military's Urban Coup d'etat

Abstract

Just a few months after taking power through a Coup d'état, General Musharaff established the Defence Housing Authority (DHA), a gated residential and commercial housing society, through an executive order that remains effective to date. This put the DHA in a state of exception, legally and spatially, since it allowed the DHA to function beyond the jurisdictions of the municipal Lahore Development Authority (LDA), and the City District Government (CDG) since 2001. Backed by such powers, the DHA has become the largest residential housing society in Pakistan within a decade through speculative place construction targeting the affluent classes. Spatially, the DHA is modelled like any other high end private housing enclave anywhere in the world; fortified boundaries, Mediterranean villas, golf courses, shopping malls, cinemas, etc. Much of this urban development is taking place on the peripheries of major cities, and entails the annexation and transformation of agricultural land and villages into urban land. To date, there has been no comprehensive scholarly work on the expansion of the DHA in any of the major cities. How are we to understand such model of military led urban development? To address this lacuna, my study will follow the DHA expansion in the South-East of Lahore in order to illuminate the speculative dimension of such forms of urbanization; the economic, political and legal strategies adopted by the military to practice urban development; the conflictual alliances they forge with other classes and state functionaries; and the consequences of these transformations on the local communities, specifically the small land holding peasantry, upon whose land these housing projects are being built.