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Barricade Urbanism:
The Case of Contemporary Fortifications in Lahore

Ayesha Sarfraz and Arsalan Rafique

Lahore, the second-largest city in Pakistan, has been witness to one of the highest numbers of bomb attacks in the region. Situated near the heavily guarded border the country shares with India, the city's relevance as a case study for urban transformation in the age of asymmetric warfare and contemporary conflict is amplified when considered in the light of its history as the imperial capital to various rulers and, as such, its having been repeatedly fortified and refortified, with each instance revealing frameworks of control used to create borders and barriers that curtail the right to the city. This is exemplified in the present-day remains of its ancient walls, which encompass the old quarters torn down by the British after the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, after which the city was expanded and replanned using techniques that afforded the colonizers greater control over the territory and helped curb civil unrest. The recent trend of securitization illustrates that the territory is again being shaped to absorb the violence and conflicts that seem to be on the rise globally. If the urban language of any human settlement is indicative of its sociopolitical environment, then the ubiquity of barricades, blockades, and checkpoints in Lahore speaks volumes about the prevalent state of (in)security. The architectural vocabulary of these overdetermined borders has been legitimized by

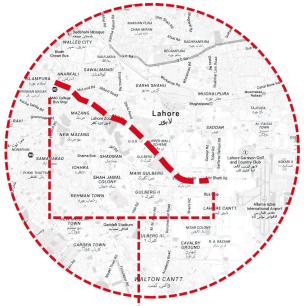
the state through a discourse based around anxiety, fear, and threat. This apparatus of control is further reinforced with extreme measures of electronic and armed surveillance techniques that make no distinction between security for the public and against it. The advent of "barricade urbanism," largely justified by the assumption that a public setting can be a potential target of violence, correlates with a decrease in civilian liberties throughout the city, as manifested in the widespread erasure of democratic spaces from the public domain.

One of the most important arteries in Lahore, the Mall, is a significant example. A nineteenth-century British colonial boulevard flanked with government buildings, religious centers, universities, and commercial areas, it regularly functions as a stage for political demonstrations. Its historical and current relevance to the territory makes it a highly charged area, affected by numerous bombings and violence in the last two decades, resulting in an aggressive landscape of security paraphernalia. Whereas barricades are usually introduced in space, and at times validated, because of their ephemeral properties of mobility and impermanence, many on the Mall have been concretized over time as both formal and informal states of exception were declared. The Punjab Assembly building at Charing Cross on the Mall is a significant case in point. The barricades and armed checkpoints adorning the perimeter of the building have devolved into permanent concrete

SECURITY APPARATUS AGGREGATION MALL ROAD - LAHORE

(AS OF SEPTEMBER 2017)

LAHORE MAP

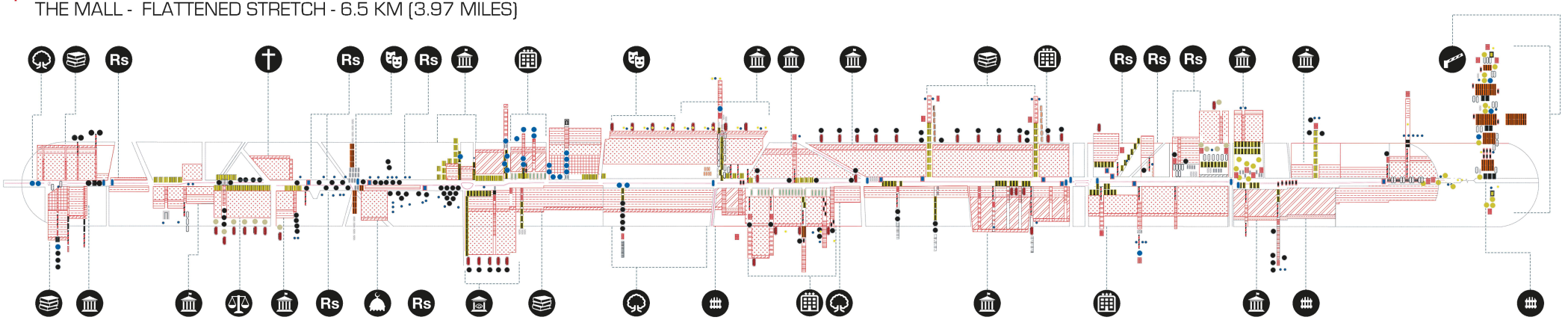


THE MALL CONNECTS THE BRITISH-MADE CANTONMENT TO THE OLD QUARTERS OF THE CITY. MADE IN THE LATE 1800s IT IS ONE OF THE PRIME ARTERIES OF LAHORE, THAT HAS WITNESSED BOMB BLASTS AND ARMED ATTACKS IN THE LAST TWO DECADES. IT IS ALSO A PROMINENT SITE FOR POLITCAL DEMONSTRATIONS AND PUBLIC PROTESTS.

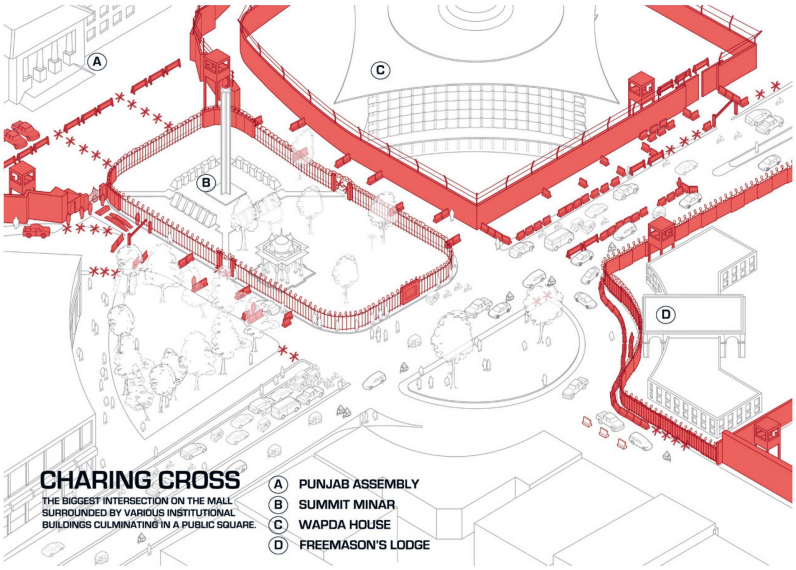
LEGEND

- COMMERCIAL CENTER
- EDUCATIONAL
- PARK & OPEN SPACES
- CHURCH & SEMINARIES
- CULTURAL CENTER
- HOTELS & HOSPITALITY
- MUSEUM
- GOVERNMENT BUILDING
- LAW COURTS
- MOSQUES & SEMINARIES
- GATED COMMUNITY
- FREEMASONS LODGE
- STEEL RAILING
- CORRUGATED STEEL SHEETS
- RAISED BRICK WALL
- GATE
- STEEL FENCE
- GUARD POST
- CONCRETE WALL
- BARBED WIRE
- HMVS1
- HMVS2
- HMVS3
- RAISING ARM BARRIER
- FLOODLIGHT
- SECURITY CAMERA
- ELITE FORCE GUARD
- POLICE PERSONNEL
- PRIVATE SECURITY
- MILITARY PERSONNEL
- PLASTIC JERSEY BARRIER
- CONCRETE JERSEY BARRIER
- EXPANDABLE BARRIER
- METAL DETECTOR
- MILITARY VEHICLE
- POLICE VEHICLE
- STEEL FRAME BARRIER
- STEEL MESH BARRIER
- STAR BARRIER
- WATCHTOWER
- DRUM
- PLANTER BARRIER

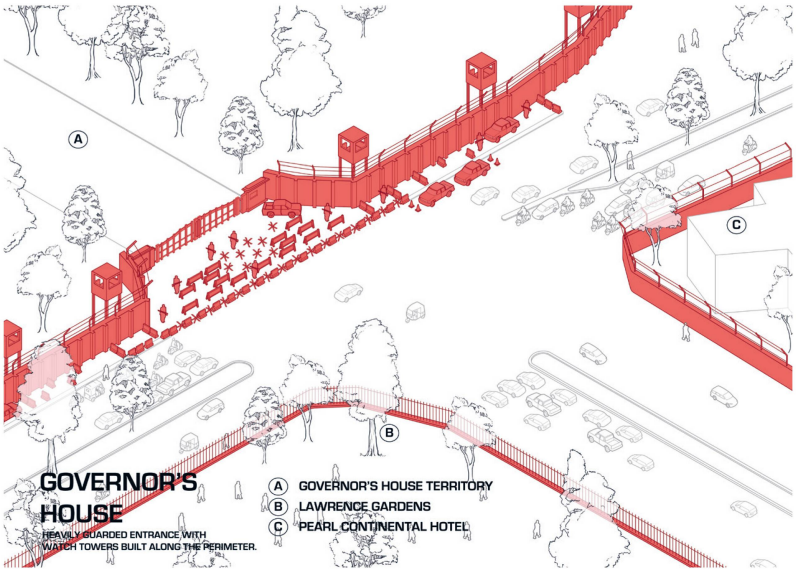
THE MALL - FLATTENED STRETCH - 6.5 KM (3.97 MILES)



walls of up to fourteen feet in height, reinforced with metal fences, barbed wire, and surveillance equipment. However, despite such measures, in February 2017 a suicide bomber attacked a protest at Charing Cross, killing fifteen and injuring about one hundred. As a result of these physical and symbolic security tactics, which were previously limited to controlling accessibility, transparency has been replaced with permanent visual and physical obstruction. Spaces previously open to the public are subtracted from the urbanscape under the guise of mitigating the threat of violence, rendering them remote and exclusionary.



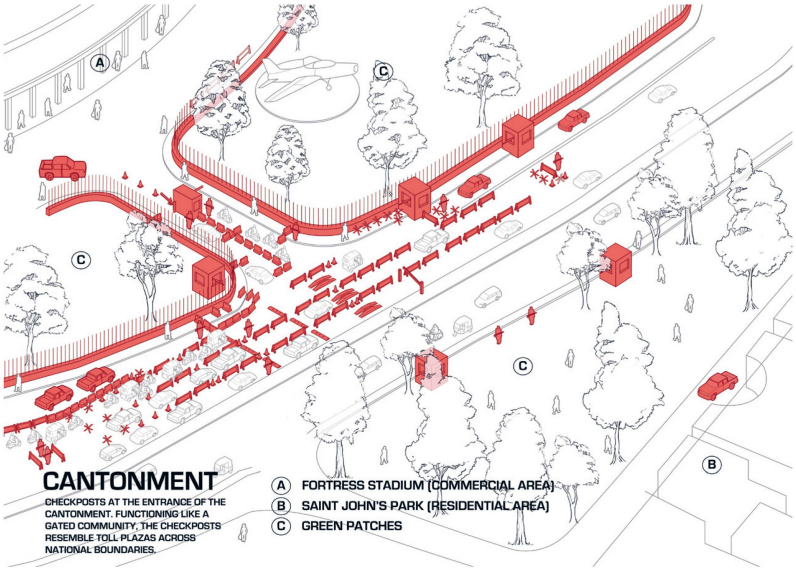
Similar examples of security have been concretized at numerous government and religious buildings, as well as schools and universities, all of which have been targeted in recent years. A significant example is Data Darbar, a thirteenth-century Sufi shrine to the patron saint of Lahore, where thousands, irrespective of sex, age, cul-



ture, or religion, pay their respects every day. After Data Darbar was targeted by a suicide bomber in 2010, killing more than fifty people while injuring around two hundred, security was drastically heightened at all major Sufi shrines in the country. The state now requires visitors to go through slaloming barricades and severe security measures before entering the premises, which are deemed "secure" through both active and passive surveillance methods. As increasing numbers of formerly public spaces are subtracted from the urban realm, we must examine the long-term value and social and political repercussions of such strategies, especially since the intensity of security sometimes seems to increase not in proportion to physical threats but in response to political campaigns. These fear-inducing security tactics fuel a culture that discourages people from venturing out into the public sphere and helps the state to exercise control over the narrative of contemporary conflicts that plague Pakistani cities.

As the state intensifies its efforts to securitize "sensitive" zones, parallel civilian initiatives have been undertaken to create checkpoints and limit access to neighborhoods that fall outside the government's interest and control. The increase in new and retrofitted gated communities in Lahore is testament to the variety and ad hoc nature of the security strategies deployed by various actors. The legality of these acts of self-defense is questionable from the perspective of the planner but is unofficially endorsed by

the state, if not readily sanctioned. As a result, the number of private security companies has increased across the country, promising safety the government has failed to provide. The Cantonment, a military-controlled area containing army infrastructure as well as an elite residential and commercial neighborhood for civilians, is an extreme example of a retrofitted gated community. Once open, it is now physically fortified with concentric wall constructions guarded by labyrinthine weaponized checkpoints and barricades. Checkpoints, whether within the Cantonment or otherwise, have been frequent sites of attacks throughout Pakistan. Rather than the opacity of walls, checkpoints are semipermeable thresholds, implying that all civilians are potential suspects who are subject to all forms of interrogation. The permeability of these barricades fluctuates with the level of perceived threat, allowing and restraining mobility as required. Although increased opacity and inaccessibility have rendered these physical boundaries mostly untraversable and rigid, the polysemic nature inherent in any barricade serves as a tool of selective exclusion and social division.



While questions about the effectiveness and legality of barricade urbanism are impending, its ubiquity will continue to be mandated because it helps to establish a perpetual state of fictitious emergency regardless of the presence of clearly identifiable dangers. The impact of these temporal structures on urbanscapes and human sensibilities are of prime importance. The most relevant of these effects is the physical and social fragmentation of the city, evident in the aggressive encroachment onto previously public domains such as parks, marketplaces, and shrines. Barricades, as temporary forms of architecture, produce disruptions in territory by changing, almost retarding, the agency of urbanity while framing the transient and permanent in antagonistic ways. Furthermore, strategies of surveillance and increasing limits born of physical or administrative control are reducing the already confined pockets of democracy or democratic space. While the issue of insecurity is still evolving and gaining momentum both locally and globally, cities are on the frontline where diffusive geographies of threat and conflict materialize into built fabric and its destruction as well. These matters must be handled with a critical understanding and a multipronged approach that caters to civilian safety but does not

forget that cities are ever-evolving and ever-adapting organisms and that the concretization of security alone will not contain, mitigate, or eradicate threats and conflicts.

figs. 1–4 Mall road securitization diagram; security at Charing Cross; security at the Governor's House; security at the check post at the entrance of the Cantonment. Illustrations by Ayesha Sarfraz and Arsalan Rafique, 2018.
figs. 5–10 Lahore Barricades: perimeter wall and approach to the Punjab Assembly; entrance to the Sufi shrine; police blockade; concrete barriers by the Wapda House. Photographs by Ayesha Sarfraz and Arsalan Rafique, 2018.