

AIPS Fellowship Abstract- Mubbashir Rizvi

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Food markets of coexistence in the aftermath of violence. Mubbashir Rizvi American University The sights and sounds of Karachi are defined by street hawkers selling produce, roadside vendors encroaching on sidewalks and free meal camps [langars] set up under newly constructed bridges and overpass roads. Karachi with an estimated population of 16-21 million people is one of the largest cities in the world, and serves as the economic engine of Pakistan, yielding 25% of the national GDP (ADB 2018). It is estimated that Karachi's informal street economy employs up to 72% of city population (Hasan 2021), and this why Karachi is colloquially known as "the mother for the poor and the indigent." Yet Karachi's streets routinely come to a standstill as a result of political violence in the aftermath of a riot or bombing. Karachi remains synonymous with violence in CNN headlines, even as it serves as a refuge to millions who migrate to the city every year. The paradoxical concurrence of cooperation and violence, mutual-aid and predation on Karachi's streets is characteristic of what Laurent Guyer calls "ordered disorder" (2014). To date, the limited ethnographic research on Karachi has focused on ethnic violence, and sectarian strife with a nod to the city's "resilience" as in its' ability to quickly bounce back after riots (Verkaaik 2004, Guyer 2014, Khan 2010). Missing in these analyses is a deeper theoretical reflection on the mechanics of "resilience" (see Ring 2006, Ali 2011 for notable exception). An uncritical use of "resilience" depoliticizes, thus naturalizes the difficult work of repair, the renegotiation of socio-spatial rights and relations on the street (Keck and Sakdapolark 2013). In this project, I study the role of Karachi's food markets in creating the conditions of coexistence and commensality on its streets. I focus on how food markets operate as sites of informational material exchange to informally structure relations of labor, consumption and reciprocity? These markets are often built around the logic of informality, as in the negotiability of vendors/merchant's right to appropriate and utilize public lands for commercial activities. I focus on food because of the importance given to offerings of sustenance.