

This year's theme for the South Asia Conference of the Pacific Northwest was "Gaps, Frontiers & Blindspots in South Asian Studies." With this paper presentation, I turned my attention to a striking genre of comedic videos which poke fun at the ubiquity of phone-snatching on Karachi's streets. As I dove deeper into these videos, I realized that the vast majority were produced in the mid-2000s, with a sharp dropoff after the beginning of the Rangers operation in Karachi. I sought to uncover how Karachiites, in tandem with these cathartic and unsettling videos, were articulating concerns and fears related to street crime and the threat of phone snatching in other outlets. I began to come across a surprising amount of content (opinion pieces in major news sites, YouTube comments, etc) praising Rudy Giuliani and the implementation of broken windows policing in New York City. Ultimately, I found evidence that Sindh officials deliberately attempted to emulate Giuliani, despite the lack of credible evidence supporting broken windows theory, and the Rangers, rather than local police, were given expanded latitude in support of civil power. Crime statistics in Karachi show that, at the height of Ranger operations in Karachi, phone-snatching actually increased from the previous year. By turning to these videos, I sought to untangle how Karachi residents experience and express the constant threat of violence and phone-snatching. These comedic performances tell us a great deal about what Massumi terms "the politics of everyday fear" which creates opportunities for increased privatization and expansion of capitalist power. Ultimately, I open questions about the 'visibility' of the state and the ambiguous effects and potential of humor as political resistance, noting the persistent (if somewhat diminished) presence of comedic Youtube videos within this phone-snatching genre.