“I Will Obey Whatever Orders Will Be Given to Me . . . ”: A Critical Discourse Analysis of an Affidavit from a Slum Upgradation and Rehabilitation Project in Islamabad, Pakistan

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Abstract: Instead of criminalizing slums, the global discourse on slums and urban poor is changing towards integration, rehabilitation, and internationalizing cities. As pleasant as it may look, it is important to critically reflect and evaluate the policies of upgradation and rehabilitation, especially in the global south. Is the change from criminalization to rehabilitation and integration true to its spirit or is it just another policy gimmick? This article uses critical discourse analysis to analyze an affidavit produced in an official report on the upgradation and rehabilitation of katchi abadis (slums) in Islamabad. The report describes the affidavit as the most important part of the process through which the urban poor become eligible for applying to the intended benefits of the development interventions, that is, the legalization of their housing. The affidavit is to be reproduced by the urban poor on a notarized stamped paper to be attested to by a magistrate of the first class (a Civil Judge). The discursive analysis of the affidavit shows that the text attempts to naturalize inequalities, criminalization, and essentialization of the urban poor. Further, having constructed their deviant status, the text shows that the urban poor must surrender some of their rights to access their right to housing in Islamabad.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; urban poor; rights; housing; slums; language; discourse

1. Introduction

This article offers a discursive analysis of the mandatory affidavit that must be notarized by a public notary and attested to by a magistrate of the first class (a Civil Judge in the lowest echelons of the judicial branch) before submission by the slums’ dwellers who want their homes regularized in the first-ever slum upgradation and rehabilitation scheme of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) in Islamabad, Pakistan. The affidavit is an outcome of the Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment (LIFE) and Global Environmental Facility (GEF) programs funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for the upgradation and rehabilitation of slums in Islamabad. Before the implementation phase, namely, before the affidavit is drafted, deliberations and discussions were held among various local, national, international, and transnational actors. Among them, the Islamabad Capital Territory Administration (ICT Administration), Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO), nongovernmental organizations (e.g., Paidar), Sindh Katchi Abadis Authority (SKAA), Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UN-ESCAP), UNDP, CDA, and representatives from the slums are the most relevant to the argument proposed in this article. The goals of the project were to improve living conditions, environmental conditions, and visual impacts of sectoral areas of Islamabad (Capital Development Authority 2000, p. 14). To advance the project, development practitioners and development beneficiaries must interact, offering insights into the development in practice in countries such as Pakistan.
2. Upgradation and Rehabilitation of Slums: Urban Poor and the Affidavit

The text I analyzed is an affidavit of two pages with five clauses and details about the applicant's name, residential address, national identification number, and a list of witnesses. This affidavit was a mandatory part of the application submitted for either upgradation or rehabilitation of the houses in the slums of Islamabad. Alternative plots for housing or regularization of the home on its current location in the slums can only be confirmed once the affidavit is submitted by the applicants. Otherwise, their housing stands illegal and prone to demolition and/or confiscation. The Urdu words اقرار نامہ and حلف نامہ used for the text mean “affidavit” and “declaration,” respectively.

The project report that contains the specimen of the affidavit was published in 2000 in the CDA's project “Upgradation and Rehabilitation of Katchi Abadis [slums] in Islamabad under LIFE/GEF Program,” with the help of approximately PKR 1.394 million provided by the UNDP. The purpose of the funding was the “improvement of katchi abadis in Islamabad” (Capital Development Authority 2000, p. 14). More than two decades later, the report and affidavit remain relevant because they continue to guide the interaction between the urban poor living in slums and the CDA officials. The affidavit is still required and constitutes an integral part of all the applications for upgradation and rehabilitation. The objectives, policies, and goals stated in 1999 for the slums and urban poor of Islamabad remain the same in 2021.

As the report maintains, the increase in the number of slums in Islamabad is a serious threat to the environment and civic life. Slums are labeled as “unauthorized” and “unplanned” in the report and are presented as a “great threat” to the urban environment (Capital Development Authority 2000, p. 7). The urban poor of Islamabad are constructed and described as a threat because of their unplanned and unauthorized housing, which was due to the government’s inaction. This “great threat” was to be mitigated by the authorities and development actors concerned. In this context, the project was envisioned, policies were deliberated, and decisions were made regarding the slums and urban poor of Islamabad.

The exact number of slums is unknown, but my fieldwork (2014–2019) suggests that of at least 34 slums in Islamabad, 11 are recognized by the CDA. Despite all the changes, the affidavit remains the same: it must be notarized and attested to by a magistrate of the first class and it is the document that connects development practitioners and development beneficiaries in the slums of Islamabad.

The article comprises three sections. The first section addresses critical discourse analysis as a tool to analyze policy as a text dealing with socioeconomic vulnerabilities, such as the urban poor living in slums. The second section contextualizes the affidavit as the most essential part of the project and discusses slums, the urban poor, and their precariousness as social issues. The last section of the article presents a discursive analysis of the texts, to highlight the social nature and ideological effects of the text.

3. Critical Discourse Analysis as a Tool to Analyze Social Vulnerabilities

A critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2013, 2015; KhosraviNik 2009; Martínez Lirola 2016, 2017; Wodak and Reisigl 2001) of the affidavit demonstrated that the urban poor are reduced to what Foucault (1977, p. 136) calls “docile bodies.” First, the urban poor are criminalized and stigmatized; second, their social construction as a socially deviant group leads to the naturalization of their precariousness and hence their docile status. My aim in this article is to highlight the naturalization of contempt, stigmatization, and criminalization of the urban poor. I argue that this phenomenon occurs partially because of the legitimation that states in the global south derive by drawing on the discourses of international development actors and using their emblems and funds to justify the former’s interventions as apolitical. Having justified their interventions in the name of development, states create new avenues and instruments of power to enhance their power, legitimacy, and capacity to regulate social life.
Obsession with the hegemonic discourses of development and modernity leads to complacency in governments regarding slums and urban poverty in most of the global south. As a result of the naturalization of the dominant discourses on social vulnerabilities and their representation as apolitical issues, the reduction of subjects to the objects of the policy is a partially discursive problem. Critical discourse analysis is a theory that promotes social change and considers these hegemonic discourses and their resultant policies as texts to be analyzed to identify ideology effects and social impacts of presumably neutral policies. The relationship between critical discourse analysis and policy studies, theoretically and empirically, has been discussed by scholars worldwide (e.g., Fairclough 2013; Jacobs 2006; Montesano-Montessori et al. 2019).

Critical discourse analysis draws on theoretical traditions of social theory and critical social science (e.g., Fairclough 2013, 2015; Wodak 2012, 2014; van Dijk 2001), focuses on how language operates in social life, and is a set of methods whereby empirical data can be analyzed linguistically to uncover power hierarchies. According to critical discourse analysis, discursive (semiotic) and nondiscursive (non-semiotic) constructions are mutually constitutive and directly contribute to the construction of social identities, social realities, and social relations. The text, in its broadest sense, as written, oral, visual, or multimodal, is the fundamental unit for analysis in critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer 2009).

The perspectives of linguistics and social sciences are diverse because of the diverse traditions and interdisciplinarity of critical discourse analysis. For instance, van Dijk (2001) articulates linguistics and social cognition; Wodak (2012) argues for the articulation of discourse by focusing on social and historical contexts; van Leeuwen (2008) believes in the centrality of human actors in the articulation of discourse; and Fairclough (1995, 2013, 2015) argues for the dialectical relational approach to discourse in which social relations, power, institutions, language, political structures, and cultural norms play a crucial part in the articulation of discourse and social constructions. Taylor (2004) summarizes different traditions and maintains that critical discourse analysis comprises textual analysis of social practices.

Critical discourse analysis focuses on language and its relationship with society, and entails identifying partially discursive social problems (KhosraviNik 2009, 2010; Martínez Lirola 2016; Wodak 2012; van Leeuwen 2008; Jacobs 2006). It aims to use linguistic analysis to highlight social issues. Texts in this sense are mediums that can (re)produce, disrupt, maintain, and transform relations of dominance. Using critical discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological tool offers new insights into social problems and supports explanatory criticism of the policies of social actors on the discourse stage.

The approach also helps understand the linguistic choices of social actors and their relationship with the broader social contexts in which the texts are formulated, analyzed, and naturalized for public consumption. The text, especially policy documents, reflects the construction of identities, which is related directly to the construction of the symbolic order. The construction of identities and constituted social relations are political activities, and reflect the relationship between discursive and nondiscursive moments in social practices (Chouliaraki and Fairclough [1999] 2001). Language, in critical discourse analysis, is a social action. Therefore, the neutrality of language is a mere utopia.

Studies based on critical discourse analysis, such as this article, aim to highlight how certain discursive articulations naturalize social injustice by concealing them under the rubric of development and progress. Based on theoretical insights and analytical categories of critical discourse analysis, my aim in this article is to examine and analyze the affidavit’s social nature, its sociopolitical effects, and its discursive constructions vis-à-vis slums and the urban poor of Islamabad.

4. Urban Poor and Slums

The terms urban poor and slums represent more than categorizations and classifications and do not represent fixed boundaries based on which individuals can be placed inside or outside. These labels play an instrumental role in understanding the world. La-
bels are embedded in specific discursive regimes, informing definitional aspects of policy (Wood 1985; Eyben 2007; Cornwall 2010; Fasoli et al. 2014). Thus, despite their apolitical claims and neutral appearances, labels as categorizing devices are highly political, and their implications cannot be ignored.

Labels influence how individuals act, think, and understand their surroundings. Thus, researchers of social vulnerabilities should use caution when applying categorizations and classifications, for example, “urban poor” and “slums,” because they naturalize the conditions of segregation, vulnerability, and deviance, creating convenient images that lead to the naturalization of the temporary conditions of poverty, segregation and criminalization such that they become a permanent state of affairs (Huddleston and Vink 2015; Groothuis 2020). UN-Habitat defines slums as settlements “in which the inhabitants suffer from one or more of the following: (1) Lack of access to the improved water source; (2) Lack of access to improved sanitation facilities; (3) Lack of sufficient living areas; (4) Lack of housing durability; and (5) Lack of security of tenure” (UN-Habitat 2018, p. 8). A label for these individuals is “slum dwellers.” This label, however, neither legitimizes the labeling process nor label itself. It may not be possible to suggest a neutral or non-implicating label to refer to people living in slums. Nevertheless, labels such as “slum dwellers” do categorize and standardize policy approaches towards hundreds of different people living in one slum. These categorizations individualize and standardize the urban poor to satisfy bureaucratic needs of public policy and state interventions (Schaffer 1985). However, the category of “slum dweller” is ironic and humiliating: dweller means that the person has an address, the security of his/her housing tenure and that he/she is entitled to access basic facilities, such as gas, electricity, and sewerage; however, these facilities are precisely what a “dweller” in slums does not have. The absence of these fundamentals is one of the main reasons why these neighborhoods are labeled “slums” (UN-Habitat 2018, p. 8).

Categorization and classification naturalize differences such that individuals do not perceive themselves by their individualities but their individualization (Camargo 2009). Further, classifications such as ‘poor’, ‘rich’, ‘slums’, ‘residential sectors’, etc., legitimize differences and therefore naturalize social injustice by discursively camouflaging the relations of inequality (Anthias 2021; Parigi 2014; Lingard et al. 2012). These relations of inequality should not be perceived as temporal problems, but as an expression of the sociopolitical process that constitutes a broader symbolic order through which differences, discrimination, and hierarchies are established and presented as natural social settings.

The increase in urban poverty and the substantial growth of slums in urban Pakistan reflect the precariousness of the urban poor. The situation is further deteriorating with the neoliberalization of the economic and industrial models. Poor individuals who migrate to cities to escape their rural poverty traps commonly find immediate support in impoverished neighborhoods in these urban centers. This phenomenon has been observed worldwide (e.g., Harris 2018; Khan and Kraemer 2013; Ravallion et al. 2007; The Economist 2019; Zanuzdana 2019).

The increase in urban poverty manifested through the growth of slums has been observed across developing countries (Duque et al. 2015), including Pakistan. The substantial growth of slums in urban Pakistan, especially in Islamabad, is related to a rural exodus whose impetus is an attempt to avail improved socioeconomic opportunities. The area of the slums of Islamabad increased from 5.53 km$^2$ in 1990 to 28.98 km$^2$ in 2018, for nearly 9.36% of the urban area (Liu and Jiang 2020). Ravallion et al. (2007) call this shift in poverty from rural to urban areas “the urbanization of poverty.” The definition of the urbanization of poverty is a set of conditions such that the “poor urbanize faster than the nonpoor” (Ravallion 2002, p. 435).

The increase in informal work opportunities due to the neoliberalization of production sectors worldwide plays an instrumental role in the concentration of poverty in urban centers (Harvey 2007; Samson 2015). The majority of these opportunities are in informal sectors of the economy, and the individuals who accept them are too poor to pay for housing in formal housing markets. Therefore, they reside in slums, one of the most
important geographies of their survival. Slums are not strictly illegal in the context of the planning rationalities and territorial logic of urban planning in the global south (Roy 2012). However, the poverty that motivated individuals to migrate to cities continues to guide their mobility in terms of employment and residential options.

With the commodification of public spaces, Pakistan’s urban spaces are more reflective of the spatial inscription of its socioeconomic realities. Thus, urban space has become a contested terrain, and state authorities play a vital role in the regulation of class relations. Slums, for example, those of Islamabad, are neither distant nor suburban geographies. They are pockets within the residential sectors housing economically privileged classes of the city. The privileged and the underprivileged coexist spatially but inhabit different social worlds. This paradoxical arrangement of mutual coexistence in Islamabad is evolving and was observed during the construction of the city in the 1960s.

The history of the urban poor of Islamabad began with the planning and construction of this city. Greek architect and urban planner C. A. Doxiadis knew of the rise of slums in newly planned Islamabad and suggested strong measures to curb such developments (Doxiadis Associates 1960): to construct temporary labor camps where poor construction workers could reside during their employment and discourage their permanent settlement by tasking the police and other law enforcement agencies with guarding these camps. The “cheap labor” required for the construction and “development of newly planned Capital [sic]” was invited formally and informally from across Pakistan (Capital Development Authority 2001, p. 9). As Islamabad was planned as a capital of hope and a symbol of development (Daechsel 2015), thousands of Pakistanis traveled to Islamabad in search of economic opportunities. Despite knowing about the poor conditions of the available work, limited capacity of camps to house labor, and precariousness of social living, these individuals arrived in search of their share in the celebrated and publicized development of Pakistan embodied through Islamabad.

Those temporary labor camps proved to be templates for slums in the city. Some individuals with years of schooling and experience in menial labor were employed in the lower ranks by the CDA. A few of those who were still poor were in a better position now because they were employees of the CDA. The remaining majority of the workers remained stuck between the temporariness of the labor camps and the permanence of their human needs. Subsequently, those camps were removed to appropriate land for the construction of parks, hospitals, and colonies for low-ranking officials, and this process was not smooth. Individuals asked for their share in the city and showed their intent to remain an integral part of the future of Islamabad. As the commodification of the urban space did not provide these individuals with acceptable housing options, officials allowed them to occupy any free land to construct their homes. Those settlements are now known as the older slums of Islamabad.

For employees of the CDA and other workers, the conditions in which the urban poor have been living since then are those of social apartheid, for example, no permanent address and no access to fundamental facilities available to other residents of the city. Additionally, their homes were denied the very essence of home—security, and stability in this fast-changing world—and the urban poor were constructed as the deviant other of Islamabad who should be segregated from the rest of the inhabitants of the city. They were denied their share in the planning of the city and were considered unnecessary, threatening, and unqualified to reside in planned residential sectors. To become unnecessary and unqualified implies being ready to be eliminated, symbolically or physically. Denying these individuals their identity as human beings and presenting them as an embodiment of social deviance is one of the main reasons for the social apartheid conditions of the urban poor in Islamabad.

Social deviance is any act considered objectionable, disvalued, and offensive by society at large. The criminalization and essentialization of the urban poor, as this article argues in the following sections, are the strategies through which the urban poor are constructed as a socially deviant group of Islamabad. Criminalization is understood as a process—
discursive or otherwise—by which certain individuals, ideologies, actions, beliefs, and so forth are transformed into criminals, criminal activities, and crimes. Essentialization signifies attributing natural and essential characteristics to members of specific cultural groups. Essentialization is akin to stereotyping, and results in the overgeneralization and homogenization of different social groups into convenient—often discriminatory—images in an individual’s mind.

The criminalization and essentialization of any social group, especially the urban poor and their housing settlements, are not either discursive or nondiscursive matters but represent sociodiscursive constructions in which essentialization and criminalization are naturalized and presented as the natural order of things.

5. A Critical Discursive Analysis of the Affidavit

In this section, I analyze the affidavit based on the following categories of critical discourse analysis: genres and generic structure, assumption, linguistic contrast, and evaluation. Before analyzing the text, I briefly explain these categories.

This analysis of genres and the generic structure of a text aims to explore the relationship of a text with concrete social events. How does text (inter)act, and how does it contribute to social events? Narrative, argument, description, and representation are examples of genres that reflect the use of language in “the performance of a particular social practice” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough [1999] 2001, p. 56). Analysis of the generic structure of a text reveals the performative meanings of texts and their role in establishing social relations.

Assumption is another important category of critical discourse analysis, defined as “unsaid” but given. This given part of the text is believed, inscribed, or said somewhere else. The assumption in texts does not provide openness to texts, but constitutes closure, namely, implying what is assumed is natural, given, and undisputed. Structures of assumption are based on explicit or implicit evaluations in texts. Meanings are established based on not only what is said but also what is unsaid—assumption. These assumptions are of ideological relevance because they serve relations of power (Fairclough 2015).

Linguistic contrast, such as assumptions, is also a crucial category because it is linked directly with structures of constructions in which social groups are represented in contrast with each other. Linguistic contrast in texts, especially related to social issues and discrimination, can be either explicit or implicit. This type of contrast, according to van Dijk (1997), usually comprises positive self-representation versus negative other presentation. To naturalize differences and power hierarchies, linguistic contrasts are usually made to legitimize intervention, control, and surveillance, and to sustain criminalization in the case of marginalized social groups such as the urban poor.

In critical discourse analytical categories, evaluation represents structures of presupposition and the combination of various categories put forth in a text to represent coherence. These evaluations, such as assumptions, are either implicit or explicit. They represent a judgment that texts carry. When combined, all the discussed categories show the potential social effects of linguistic constructions visible in, for example, the universalization of claims and the perspective that a text offers vis-à-vis social issues. In this manner, linguistic discursive analysis generates possibilities to relate texts to their sociopolitical and economic contexts so that policy interventions can be judged, criticized, and democratized to make societies more inclusive.

5.1. Analyzing the Affidavit

The text I analyze in this article is an undertaking, an affidavit to be submitted on a stamped paper by the slum dwellers for either upgradation or rehabilitation of their homes. The genre of the sample text is innovative as most of the affidavits and choices of the contract are decided mutually by all the participating parties. This, however, is not the case with this affidavit. The language to be used by the applicants is not of their choice; it is mandated by the authorities. The specimen of the affidavit is provided by
the authorities, which are to be reproduced exactly by the applicants. However, the commitments, declarations, and oaths sworn in the affidavit are presented as actions and identities taken up by the slum dwellers. The affidavit establishes and reifies the relation of hierarchies in which development practitioners occupy a position of power, and, supposedly, development beneficiaries are internalizing the hegemonic discourses of criminalization and essentialization.

5.2. Naturalization as the Genre

The text uses naturalization as the genre, see excerpt 1:

(1) Neither I nor any of my dependents have any plot(s) in the district of Islamabad/Rawalpindi. Neither have we occupied any housing and neither did we occupy any housing [in the past].

Excerpt 1 is the first statement an applicant must reproduce after providing a detailed description of him/herself and the address of his/her home in a slum. The purpose of the text is twofold: to justify all the assumptions and attributions made by the authorities vis-à-vis the urban poor of Islamabad, and to establish a relationship between development practitioners and development beneficiaries such that the docility of the poor is ensured by both dictating to them and essentializing them as criminals.

In excerpt 1, the use of present tense reflects the attempt to naturalize the assumptions and evaluation of the urban poor as criminals. The use of language in excerpt 1 is mandated by the development authorities and is to be reproduced by the supposed development beneficiaries. These discursive strategies are used to legitimize the categories by which the urban poor are represented in the executive summary of the report, namely, unplanned and unauthorized human settlements. In excerpt 1, the affidavit is an attempt to ensure that these categories of illegality are not perceived as the authority’s verdict on the urban poor, but a fact to which the urban poor, signified as occupiers and illegal occupants, agree. In this manner, the criminalization of the urban poor has assumed the status of a fact—a natural order of things—because of the signatures of the applicant and two witnesses at the end of the affidavit.

The use of the present tense is important in this regard. For instance, excerpt 1 signifies more than a mere declaration of not owning or occupying any house in the districts of Islamabad or Rawalpindi. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough [1999] 2001, p. 259)) classified such statements as “reader-directive” because they represent authority, completion, and less possibility of change. This strategy also shows that the naturalization and popularization of the fact presented is ensured by the development authorities by mandating witnesses, a public notary, and a magistrate as a part of the process. That is, to participate, the urban poor must believe that they are occupiers of public land. It is justified to use the metaphor of criminality and assume the urban poor as inherent occupiers of public land; however, if they prove that they are deviant in their class, namely, they did not occupy public land, they can benefit from development interventions.

Through the affidavit, intertextual relationships are established between the urban poor and the development authority. The presence of the authority, however, is implicit and implied as a living subject whose position is taken as given. The text establishes a relationship in which discursive constructions are shown as the choice of the urban poor. It completely disguises the aspects of internalization of hegemonic discourses by the urban poor. Although phrases such as “occupied housing” appeared only twice in the text, the essentialization and criminalization of the urban poor as occupiers and illegal occupants prevail throughout the text. The text produces discourses of criminalization vis-à-vis the urban poor, and the affidavit ensures that these discourses are reproduced by the urban poor.

5.3. Evaluations and Assumptions: Modes of Linguistic Contrasts

Evaluations of the urban poor are facilitated by various structures of assumptions throughout the text. For example, excerpt 2 reveals assumptions regarding the urban poor:
(2) I will formally construct a home (گھر) on the [given] plot; and if I change [the construction/map], it will be per prevailing laws of the CDA; also, I will obey whatever orders will be given to me by the CDA during the process [of construction of home].

Excerpt 2 indicates structures of assumptions through which the urban poor are evaluated as transgressors, prone to illegality, and a problem group threatening the ordered development of Islamabad. They must commit to the formal construction of their houses because they are assumed to be doing otherwise. Unlike others in Islamabad, the urban poor must notarize their commitment to the “formal” construction of their homes. They are negatively presented. Given the assumption that the urban poor and slums are sources of trouble for planned Islamabad, they further had to assure the authority that they would observe the “prevailing laws” of the CDA of Islamabad. Although nobody has memorized the building bylaws, the urban poor had to blindly accept and submit to the supremacy of the development practitioners.

This essentialization of the urban poor is camouflaged in the rhetoric of modernist development where order, legibility, and planning are synonymized with pillars of progress, growth, and development (Scott 1999; Ziai 2013). Similarly, excerpt 2 shows another important aspect linked directly to the essentialization of the urban poor. After establishing that the urban poor are prone to criminality, the excerpt shows an attempt to legitimize and naturalize the docility of the urban poor. They must “obey” unconditionally “whatever orders” were to be given by the CDA during the construction of homes. For everything from the allocation of a plot to the construction of a home, the urban poor must act as docile bodies—there to merely accept, internalize, and reproduce discursive order.

The purpose of essentialization and negative evaluations of the urban poor is to ensure surveillance and control, by reducing them to mere objects of the policy. This reduction is explicit in excerpt 3, from the third to the last point of the affidavit:

(3) I shall be bound to unquestioningly (چون چرا) accept the instructions of the CDA if the CDA feels (حساس) any need of correction or changing in my home during the construction [period] or after its completion.

After establishing the deviant character of the urban poor as a group of individuals who occupy public land and do not engage in formal construction, the affidavit then explicitly constructs them as docile bodies. As stated in excerpt 3, the supremacy of the CDA is established and must be internalized by the urban poor. They must accept the judgments of the CDA “unquestioningly” regarding the construction of their homes. Regardless of the status of the home, constructed or under construction, the urban poor must submit to the subjective interpretations of “need”, of “correction” or “changing.” Criteria of correction or change are not provided. The only power that can decide on the matter belongs to the CDA, and the authority decides based on how it “feels.” Empowering state authorities, especially those related to the development of Islamabad, based on their subjectivities, ensure both the supremacy of state authorities and the docility of the urban poor, where the latter can only comply instead of raising their voices.

The use of the modal verb “shall” signifies conviction and a pledge that must be reproduced by the urban poor to access one of their fundamental rights, that is, housing. Additionally, the structure of the text is in the present and future indefinite tenses, showing closure. Nowhere does it mention that the affidavit has an expiry date. Once a slum dweller submits the affidavit in question, she/he remains dependent on the CDA’s feelings for the remainder of his/her life, that is, “during the construction or after its completion.” This, I would argue, establishes permanent structures of hierarchies and inequality between the CDA and the urban poor of Islamabad.

The sociotemporal permanence in excerpt 3 is given in excerpt 4 explicitly:

(4) I, about this house, shall remain bound to follow all of the legal requirements of the CDA, or any existing laws (مراجع قانونی), or if the CDA introduces new laws or new
orders anytime whatsoever (کسی بھی وقت). I shall remain bound to follow them [new laws or new orders] as well.

In excerpt 4, the CDA ensures that the supremacy of the authority is established forever. Using the law as a normative frame and using legality as the sole marker to differentiate between development practitioners and development beneficiaries, the docility of the urban poor is constructed as a natural arrangement of social relations. The CDA is positively represented as a body that is the source of “legal requirements,” the interpreter of “existing laws,” and who legislates “new laws or new orders” and is, therefore, a custodian of legality, order, and development. On the other hand, development recipients are required to remain “bound” to the laws enunciated by the CDA. This arrangement is not temporal but permanent. Intertextually, excerpt 4 signifies two groups in Islamabad: the group who embodies development, order, rationality, and wisdom because of their connection with the state, and the group who must be tamed, controlled, and shepherded because they are supposed to “follow” the CDA.

The structured arrangement has a hidden aspect: it establishes the relationship contrary to fundamental rights and the basic logic of the law of the land. Any action can be judged only according to the established laws. New regulations or legal enactments do not criminalize past doings, especially when they were performed according to the then prevailing laws. By changing any rule or law, the housing of the urban poor can be criminalized. This act would add to the precariousness of the urban poor of Islamabad that was supposed to be addressed by the development intervention of 1999, of which this affidavit is an integral part. The purpose, in this case, is not to help but to regulate the lives of the urban poor, under the guise of labels such as development, law, and rule.

Being citizens of the country, the urban poor are equally law-abiding citizens and supposed to be trusted as such. Nevertheless, asking them to follow the law at least four times in the affidavit of two pages is the essentialization of the urban poor. This discrimination at the hand of the CDA is an attempt to reproduce and reify the sociospatial segregation and differentiation of the urban poor from the rest of the society. The final clause that must be reproduced by the urban poor, before his/her signature and the signatures of two witnesses, summarizes the essence of the relationship between the CDA and a slum dweller:

(5) [ . . . ] whenever it comes to knowledge of the CDA that I conceal anything or I transgress from any clause of this affidavit (افزار نامه + الاقترار نامه) then the CDA will have complete authority (قرار اخیار) of confiscation of land along with the constructed home (تحصیر شدید); and, in such case, I shall neither demand nor shall I have any entitlement to demand compensation of any type.

Excerpt 5 summarizes the communication between the urban poor and the CDA in a manner that the CDA intends. Themes of criminalization, essentialization, deviance, the supremacy of the CDA, and the docility of the urban poor conclude the affidavit. Believing in the essentialization of the urban poor, that is, criminality and concealment, the CDA reproduces and naturalizes the stereotypical evaluation of the urban poor. Using “conceal” and “transgress” as a verb associated with the pronoun “I,” the urban poor are required to accept these evaluations and judgments made by the authority. Further, after accepting their essence as concealer and transgressor, the urban poor are supposed to assure their compliance with the law by waiving their fundamental rights associated with contestation, housing, and private property. The CDA, by mandating these linguistic choices to be reproduced by the urban poor, empowers itself to the status of a sole arbitrator in case of any conflict.

In excerpt 5, the urban poor, to benefit from the development interventions, are supposed to surrender their fundamental rights—that too without any voice or choice. The affidavit is a prescription, not a recommendation. This prescription, in excerpt 5, essentializes the urban poor, that is, further legitimizes the relationships of inequality and exploitation. In the case of any new law (as described in excerpt 4), excerpt 5 shows that the
CDA would have the legitimacy to seize the land and confiscate the constructed home once entitled to the urban poor. The adjective “complete” with the noun “authority” signifies the completion of the intended meaning, that is, sociolegal and moral authority to confiscate the land and the housing of the urban poor if the “CDA feels any need of correction” (excerpt 3). The source of this sociolegal and moral authority is not limited to the legal structure. A part of the authority of the CDA is derived from the urban poor through the affidavit. This arrangement, however, is camouflaged under the rubric of development and provision of housing to the urban poor of Islamabad.

To access their fundamental right of housing, the urban poor of Islamabad must surrender their political rights against arbitrary powers of the state. They must seize their right to “demand” and “entitlement” for any type of compensation from the authority if their land or housing is confiscated. By waiving their right to demand or entitlement claims, the urban poor are making themselves eligible for housing in Islamabad. In this manner, they are made to reproduce sociopolitical hierarchies and their docile status vis-à-vis development practitioners. Development practitioners, in this case, are creating their legitimacy and sources of power from development beneficiaries. In the case of the developmental state, the source of the power of the CDA is not only legal structures but also those required to be controlled, tamed, and governed. The modal verb “shall” in relation to the personal pronoun “I” further enhances the sustainability of the inequality and exploitation of the poor in this case.

6. Conclusions

Ideologically, criminalizing and essentializing the urban poor justifies segregation and control. In doing so, the text establishes the urban poor as a socially deviant group, legitimizing the negation of fundamental human rights to a specific social group, that is, the urban poor. Further, assuming that the urban poor are responsible for their plight, the text reifies the normative assumptions and sociopolitical structures to sustain and reproduce relations of inequality and exploitation.

The findings of this article also show the limitations of operational definitions of slums or the processes of rehabilitation or integration that are guiding the global discourse. For instance, if we consider the definition of slums by UN-Habitat mentioned above and the discursive analysis of the affidavit, this article finds that the social vulnerabilities, institutional discrimination, and structural violence are neither sufficiently addressed by international institutions nor by local governments. In fact, the processes of rehabilitation and upgradation may likely produce new avenues through which the urban poor are exposed to new structures of inequalities.

Further, upgradation and rehabilitation projects in the global south aim to make cities more inclusive, equal, and sustainable for all socioeconomic groups as stated in Goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This, however, is far from reality when we critically analyze the urban development policies and projects in countries like Pakistan. The primary focus of the SDGs is to introduce radical changes and reforms to achieve what is still different for different societies across the globe, i.e., development. This form of sustainable development obscures the socioeconomic and political implications of such interventions. The primary reason, as shown in this article, is the gap between expert scientific knowledge (such as GDP, Human Development Index (HDI), statistical analysis of poverty and inequality, etc.) and the everyday experience of socioeconomically vulnerable groups such as that of the urban poor. For instance, “inclusive”, “sustainable”, and “safe” in SDG 11 can mean different things to different people depending upon their sociopolitical and economic status. This article calls out for the indigenization of global discourses of development and urban planning to ‘sustain’ development interventions in local contexts.

The global discourse on slums, development, and sustainability embodied in SDGs (and before that in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)) should be taken as broader categories of knowledge that are inherently selective, Eurocentric, and generic. They cannot and should not be aspired as a ‘settled’ way of progress and development. For instance,
improvement in economic and environmental conditions may bring a sense of sustainable development but at the cost of social cohesion, community living, sense of belonging, and political rights. Localization of global discourses—such as that of development, urban planning, rehabilitation—may create new hierarchies, social vulnerabilities, and sociopolitical inequalities.

As shown in this article, the affidavit does not create these means. By contrast, the affidavit is a means through which the relations of inequality are reproduced and made to be internalized by the urban poor. Internalizing such hegemonic discourses and naturalization of relations of inequality provide a new source of power to maintain hegemonic structures. The text is not limited, spatially or temporally, to its existing boundaries. It serves as a basis for assumptions, knowledge, and evaluations upon which new texts are constructed. In the words of Foucault (1977, p. 191), the purpose is to construct “a document for possible use.” The affidavit is a snapshot of this process.

The use of critical discourse analyses to analyze texts, as this article has shown, involving precariousness, poverty, and marginalized communities, may help dislocate and unsettle the legitimized hegemonic discourses (both on a national and global scale), to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar, to represent a tool against structural exploitation, desolation, and domination. In this way, the critical discourse analysis offers us an opportunity to critically evaluate the policy discourse on both local and global levels to make it more culturally sensitive, inclusive, and democratic.

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