

Yaminay Chaudhri ~ Anxious Public Space (A Preface)

What is the city but the people?" asks the opening sentence of the Capital Development Authority's (CDA) website. The sentence - originally from Shakespeare's play *Coriolanus* - expresses a sentiment appropriate for this government-owned *public benefit* corporation, tasked with running and maintaining the master plan of the capital city of Pakistan. Upon researching the CDA's establishment, I discovered a lineage of military leadership starting with General Ayub Khan and the organisation's first chairman, General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan, who defined the charter of this organisation and its role in building Islamabad. This essay provides a preface to a longer discussion about public space in Pakistan by analysing perceptions of the ideal city, in popular and official discourse.

On a sweltering July day in Islamabad this year, images of bulldozers, riot gear, and protesting men, women and children dragged from their homes in a *katchi abadi*, poured into news circuits and social media. The CDA announced a successful removal of all illegal occupants from sector I-11, who posed (among other things) security threats and sanitation risks to the city. It is almost tragic that a government institution tasked with representing the 'people' of a city, could be responsible for [the eviction of thousands of them](#) from their homes, with no alternatives for resettlement.

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