

A Critical Ethnographic of Ziddi Feminist Socio-Spatial Practices in a Modern-Mohalla of Islamabad

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following is a list of terminologies and their meanings used for this research, which stem from my mother tongue, Urdu.

- Abbu- father
- Bazaar - marketplace
- Biryani - local Pakistani food
- Behn-chara - sisterhood
- Chacha - uncle
- Chitai - floor mat
- Chut - rooftop
- Dhaba - informally built tea stall/shop
- Gaon - village
- Ham saygi- neighbourly relations
- Islamabadi - belonging to the city of Islamabad
- Jirga - elderly tribal group
- Katchi gali - unbuilt footpaths
- Mohalla - neighbourhood, community
- Mohalla Dari - neighbourly relations, communal ties
- Nalkiyan - thread reels
- Pashtun/Pathan - people from the province of Khyber Pakhtoon Khawa in Pakistan
- Purdah - privacy maintained by Muslim women
- Punjabi - people from the province of Punjab in Pakistan
- Quran Khwani- a Muslim traditional ceremony marking the completion of the recitation of the Holy Quran.
- Saalan - curry
- Sehn - courtyard
- Urdu Speaking - people from the province of Sindh in Pakistan.
- Ziddi - to be stubborn

Abstract

This research conceptualizes the “Modern Mohalla” in a post-independence Pakistan to explore the interrelatedness of feminist ‘Mohalla-Making practices’ and formal urban planning in Islamabad’s G-9/2 Government Housing Quarters. The study investigates the lived experiences of subaltern women through a critical ethnographic methodology, including interviews and visual translations of spatial practices. The research addresses the systemic exclusion of women from the design process of Islamabad and the Government Housing quarters, feminist spatial discourse, and archival data about feminist lived experiences. By engaging with Doxiadis’ theory of Ekistics, the study further interrogates its potential alignment with feminist Mohalla-making practices. Ultimately, the research aims to develop a historiographical feminist dialogue that highlights unacknowledged female communal networks within a socially stratified and patriarchal urban context.

Keywords: Informality, Modern Mohalla, Mohalla-making practices, feminist spatial practices.

Introduction

At the turn of the mid-20th century in Pakistan, in between the post-war era of 1965 and the two-decade-long rush of the Great Partition, which occurred in 1947, Islamabad came into being as a modern bespoke metropolitan city designed by a foreign architect, Doxiadis. Planned, seemingly clean, and equipped with an organized infrastructure and abundant recurring green spaces amidst a strictly orthogonal street grid, Islamabad post-independence was designed on the concept that symbolized unfettered growth. As Hull (2012) explains, while designing the communal structure of Islamabad, Doxiadis believed in the homogenizing of neighbourhoods

based on their income brackets, thereby employing a bureaucratic approach of socially stratifying the city. This research examines how this approach has impacted the socio-cultural construct of neighbourhoods in Islamabad today by exploring the community's spatial practices within a socially stratified Class-IV low-income¹ 'Modern Mohalla' in the Government Housing Quarters of G-9/2, Islamabad. It seeks to investigate this theme by identifying and studying female lived experiences and their informal 'Ziddi' socio-spatial appropriations in this neighbourhood.

As this research is grounded in the absence of female representation in a communal structure, it examines the lack of designed feminist spaces within a Mohalla of Islamabad that have inevitably given an impetus to 'radical' Mohalla-making practices as recorded via the oral testimonies of the female participants as a part of the research methodology. Introvert spaces that are reflective of the Islamic cultural construct of feminist spaces in a Mohalla, since the time of the Mughals within the subcontinent, in the form of interior courtyards, rooftops, and balconies, are studied as unrealized spaces of the Modern Mohalla. Therefore, addressing this absence of feminist spaces and their reclamation by establishing a deeper ethnographic dialogue with the 'other', as Madison (2020) suggests, the concealed spaces of feminist appropriation that are being explored in this research are imperative to comprehend the complex socio-spatial structure of the Mohalla. The research further grounds itself in De Certeau's (1984) theory of 'strategies', which is associated with Doxiadis' role as the omniscient master planner of Islamabad's communities versus the innate 'tactics' developed as a response by the female residents of the Modern Mohalla. This research seeks to explore this hypothesis while reflecting on the oral testimonies of the female participants as a part of the research methodology.

When one explores Islamabad's existing literature and archival history to address this research inquiry, one notices a glaring gap in the documentation of its people's rich and complex lived histories, particularly women, and their relation with the built environment through their communal practices. Historians and academics like Doxiadis, Daeschel (2015), and Hull (2012) have focused on Islamabad's urban design and policymaking, often highlighting statistical aspects of the city's master planning process. Other scholars, such as Moffat (2024), examine housing communities like Anguri Bagh in Lahore but overlook the female lived experience. Similarly, female author Moatasim (2023) discusses informal slum settlements in Islamabad but fails to capture the role of women in shaping these informal urban spaces, particularly concerning their communal norms. This research fills in this gap by aiming to highlight and call out the paradoxical situation where female representation and their lived experiences in these important informal urban spaces are completely hidden in formalized modernist settlements. By revealing the informal feminist spatial practices of the women in the 'Modern Mohalla' of G-9/2 as an acknowledgment of the female presence in Islamabad's communal structure, which is otherwise buried beneath the profession of their spouses, this research aims to highlight and record the unrecorded qualitative aspect of the female contribution to the community's socio-spatial relationships as a part of the Mohalla culture.

Furthermore, this research examines how Doxiadis' urban planning for Islamabad, specifically in the Modern Mohalla of G-9/2, manifests in the neighbourhood. While the city is considered well-planned, the study reveals that true community diversity is only evident through the women's oral histories. It questions the impact of Doxiadis' design on fostering mixed communities and explores how women's roles in the Mohalla contribute to feminist practices in a patriarchal context. This study, due to time constraints, will not be studying Islamabad as a whole but will focus on one 'Modern Mohalla'/neighbourhood in G-9/2 to investigate how Doxiadis' designs are manifested at that level. It also explores the Modern Mohalla's untold realities by examining its historical formation in the South Asian context by linking Doxiadis' Ekistics theory to the communal structure in G-9/2. It highlights gaps in feminist representation in the original planning and how women's lack of participation has influenced informal Mohalla-making practices. Analysing these practices through Hook's (2021) 'Homeplace' theory, this study looks at how women celebrate 'Behen-chara' (sisterhood) while reinforcing their roles in a patriarchal society. The research also views these feminist practices as a post-colonial space for marginalized women, aiming to bring attention to their previously overlooked lives within the Modern Mohalla's socio-urban fabric.

As its research methodology, this research engages with an ethnically diverse set of women living in the Government Housing Quarters of G-9/2 via interviews to develop a critical ethnography of their lived histories

¹ Doxiadis classifies this neighbourhood as Community Class IV. A systemic classification of communities was established for Islamabad where 20,000 to 40,000 people of the same income bracket in the government sector dwell together.

as drawings supported by calligraphic commemorations of their oral testimonies. By applying Tayob's (2018) methodology of drawing as a research tool to study and portray subaltern feminist Mohalla-making practices, this methodological approach seeks to respect their privacy and maintain their anonymity, which is an integral part of their Islamic culture. The oral testimony of the female participants is collected, which informs this research inquiry of how the historical socio-spatial values are at risk of being lost and can be recovered by deciphering their Mohalla-making practices. Drawing as a tool for ethnographic research is used to shed light on the absence of female subaltern representation within the archival and critical historiographical forefront of Islamabad. This methodological approach illustrates the role of women, namely **Umaila and Laiba²**, in this Modern Mohalla as historical actors, communal leaders, and autonomous social visionaries. Drawing as a research tool in this research paper foregrounds the participants' privacy under Glissant's theory of opacity, whereby the documentation of feminist lived experiences does not need to be seen via the Western lens of explicit transparency.

The History Of Mohallas And Their Rite Of Passage Into Islamabad

This section discusses the intersectionality between Mohallas and modernist planning principles in post-independence Islamabad. It underlines the historiographical context of the Mohalla in the context of South Asia and proceeds to examine how Mohallas exist today in Islamabad as an innate means of informal spatial appropriations within a modernist built environment. To trace the Mohalla's rite of passage into the planned city of Islamabad as a socio-spatial concept, understanding its relationship with Rawalpindi is integral, as they are like 'two peas in an urban pod'. This chapter explores the intersectionality between Islamabad and Rawalpindi and how the latter acts as a permeable membrane for the conceptual diffusion of a Mohalla as a spatial practice in Islamabad's modernist neighbourhood structure.

The concept of the Mohalla, a community space rooted in Pakistani culture, has persisted since before the 1947 Partition and remains a significant socio-spatial practice. It originated from Muslim immigrants who carried these traditions to Pakistan, reflecting a shared history with pre-partition India. Historically, Mohallas evolved through different regimes, including the Mughal and Colonial eras, shaping subaltern communities' social, cultural, and economic dynamics. Originally autonomous, family-centred, and grounded in Islamic practices, Mohallas now appear as 'cloaked' neighbourhoods in modern cities. They balance private family life and the public sphere, with a focus on social celebrations and communal activities, especially observed during the Delhi Sultanate. The legacy of Mohallas is seen as a form of traditional social cohesion across generations. In Islamabad, the influence of modern planning as implemented by Doxiadis reshaped the Mohalla structure via informal Mohalla-like spaces, persisting particularly among migrants from Rawalpindi. This research explores whether these spaces are a result of deliberate urban planning or a continuation of historical socio-spatial practices. Existing literature about post-independence Islamabad conceptually situates the rite of passage of Mohallas into Islamabad by analysing its complex relationship with Rawalpindi (Figure 1), a much older and colonized city by the British. When designing Islamabad, Doxiadis' initial study about the science of the human settlement in Islamabad can be argued to have been from a broader perspective, where Hull (2012) explains he was required to treat Islamabad and Rawalpindi as a dual force that progressed simultaneously. However, the reality was far from different as Islamabad was designed and actualized in complete isolation from Rawalpindi for not only making administration and surveillance convenient but, also formulating a city that had a tailored, modernist, and socio-economic hierarchical approach regarding its master planning and was thus not similar in its outlook to the dense and complex layout of Rawalpindi. Daeschel (2013) expands on this further by explaining that Islamabad was conceived as a prototype of a subjective 'vernacular modernism' through a Westernized lens, whereby the previously discussed Islamic identity of its residents was sidelined. Thus, this resulted in spaces that locals were not acquainted with, and so they appropriated them as per their needs. For Doxiadis, this was an innate quality that could be preserved by the community members autonomously on a micro-level, which is the argument this research paper seeks to make through the feminist Mohalla-making practices and spatial appropriations in the Government Housing community of G-9/2.

2 All names of participants for this research have been anonymized.



Figure 1. View of the Mohalla settlement around the main Murree Road in Rawalpindi.
Source: Pindi Heritage Tours

As shown in the archival images below (Figures 2 and 3) Daechsel (2013), concerning the Master plan of Islamabad, writes about how it was intended to project a dynamic growth amidst three distinct areas demarcated in the city i.e. 'the new capital' which was roughly triangular and sat at the base of the iconic Margalla Hills, the Capital Park area which runs north-east to the main Islamabad-Rawalpindi Highway also demarcating the southern end of Islamabad and thirdly planning its expansion alongside Rawalpindi. However, Daechsel (2013) argues that this expansion was not thought of in terms of how it could be a complementary relationship between both cities, therefore revealing a displacement of the socio-spatial practices that reflect the city's modernized communal structure intermixed with their informal practices. Islamabad's physical and historical connection with Rawalpindi is relevant to mention as it conceptually grounds Mohallas and their spatial translation into the socio-cultural fabric of the neighbourhoods designed in Islamabad through the practices of its residents. Accordingly, it is important to question how the Mohalla culture was appropriated into the modernist city through the residents' practices. Even if one assumes that Doxiadis recognized the intricate relationship between Islamabad and Rawalpindi's shared socio-cultural heritage, the absence of implementing it within the actualized master plan of Islamabad is observed through the informal feminist spatial practices revealed further.



Figure 2: Model Projection of Islamabad based on Doxiadis plan (conceptual)
Sourced from CADA: Archive Files: 17666 as found in Daechsel, Markus. Islamabad and the Politics of International Development in Pakistan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

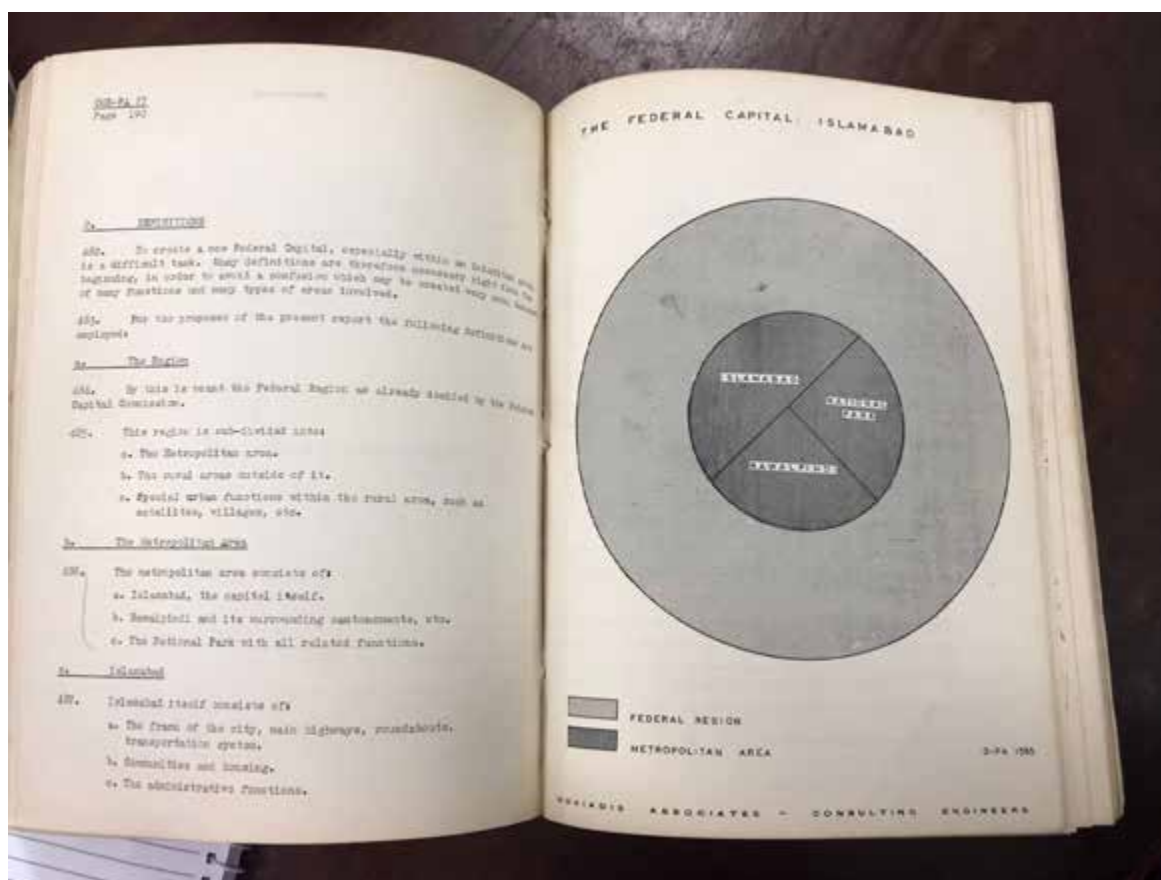


Figure 3: This image is from my visit to the Capital Development Authority Library's informal archives, which exist in the basement of the Water and Tax Revenue building in Islamabad. As the diagram in this image shows (RHS), Islamabad was meant to be conceived as a whole with Islamabad and Rawalpindi in geographical proximity, but was never actualized. Source: Doxiadis Associates Reports Developed for Islamabad Master Planning Project: DOX-PA 77, pp.190-191.

Despite this strategic separation, the idea of a Mohalla has been carried forward to Islamabad by the residents of Rawalpindi and other rural regions of the country who have migrated to Islamabad. As they keep commuting to Rawalpindi to purchase goods and visit families settled there, the socio-spatial practices are migrating between the two cities through the movement of the people. Doxiadis organized each residential sector with a sense of hierarchy in Islamabad, as illustrated in Figure 4 below, showcasing a strict modernist iron grid in which the communities were allocated based on their income and profession, of about 20,000 to 40,000 people. This modular and utilitarian design was focused on achieving quick and better visual results, not resembling the informality of a Mohalla, especially those of Rawalpindi, that the state leaders felt necessary to exhibit for the Western Powers who had invested in this project, namely the USAID and the Ford Foundation (Daeschel, 2013). In contrast, the so-called 'Ballet of the Street', which Jacobs describes as the surfacing of ethnically vibrant communities in homogenous neighbourhoods, is now observed within the spatial zoning of Islamabad, thereby anchoring the stark visual differences within the formal and informal urban spaces that are a by-product of complex unplanned communal structures of its people.

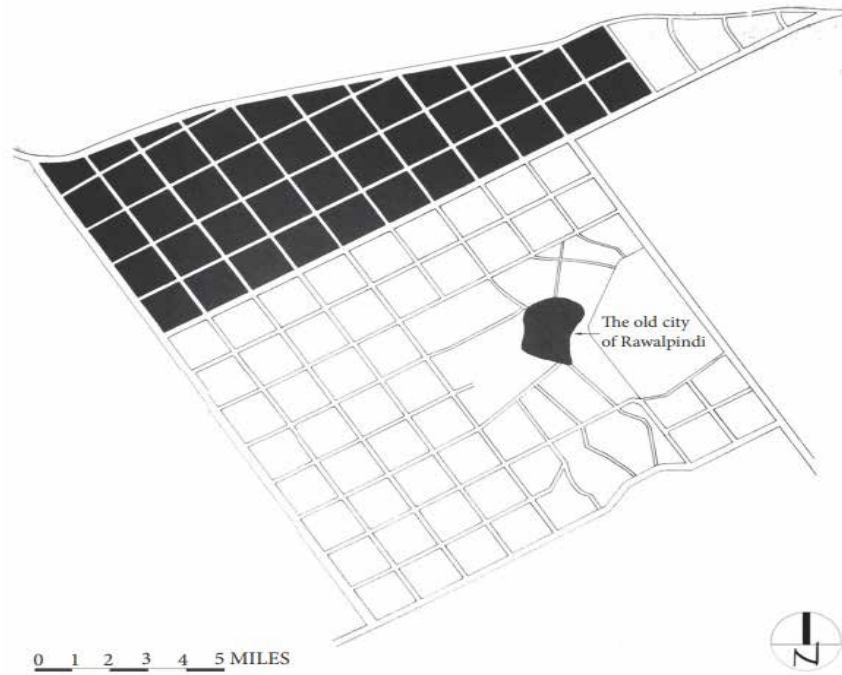


Figure 4: Conceptual plan for the iron-grid development/master planning for Rawalpindi (in white), which was meant to coincide with the planning scheme for Islamabad (in black) but never actualized. Sourced from Moatasim, Faiza. Master Plans and Encroachments: The Architecture of Informality in Islamabad. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023



Figure 5: Elevation of the Government Building Blocks from the courtyard. Source: Author

The Government Housing Quarters were one of the first building typologies within Islamabad that were proposed by the Capital Development Authority to be built separately from the surrounding residential zones of their respective sectors³. The government housing quarters in G-9/2 were constructed in the early 80s, a little after Islamabad was established. With sixteen of these apartment blocks in the vicinity, they house a hundred living quarters each, where six to ten family members reside in one living quarter on average. The Government Housing Quarters in G-9/2 portray a socially stratified community of low-income families of government servants who reside here based on their income bracket (Community Class IV⁴) as predetermined by Doxiadis via his spatial zoning for the city. This planned stratification, as explained by Yanagisawa and Funo (2018), is reflective of the historical practice of formulating the social structure of the Mohalla based on the caste of its residents, an administrative practice originating from the Delhi Sultanate. Similarly, this is also observed as a modernist urban principle of social planning pertinent within the Mohalla of G-9/2, whereby the creation of a community, as Moatasim (2023) explains, is accomplished via the spatial bundling of low-grade government servants in a mid-rise vertical building exclusively. The socio-economic indicator of the residents in a vertical settlement here is being given precedence as a factor in establishing a neighbourhood demographic rather than dealing with intermixed communities based on their religion or ethnicity. As Daeschel (2013) explains, the insulation of the government servants from the wider society, despite being an issue that had been present since the colonial regime and even in Rawalpindi, posed itself as a newfound socio-spatial issue for Doxiadis. To avoid this issue, lower-income families were mainly housed in the rectilinear G sectors of Islamabad due to their proximity to their workplaces (industrial and government workers). It can be suggested that this was done to preserve the social stratification and keep at bay the potential ties of kinship between neighbourhoods that could otherwise consequentially threaten the social and bureaucratic hierarchies (Hull, 2012) that Doxiadis was asked to maintain categorically while designing Islamabad independently from Rawalpindi, as discussed earlier. The Government

3 The whole metropolitan area is subdivided into sectors, called Communities Class V, each for about 20,000-40,000 people and each according to the income group it will serve. The sub-division of the metropolitan area into sectors resulted from the adoption of a pattern of principal roads placed 2,200 yards apart in both- directions.

4 Each sector in Islamabad is named after an alphabet with subsequent subsectors denoted by numerals. So for Sector G, subsequent sectors are G-9/2 onwards.

Housing Quarters in G-9/2 on the surface level appear as the act of 'ghettoising of civil servants' in a designed colony of Islamabad. On the contrary, this act of 'ghettoisation' has further sparked an informal Mohalla-esque character that seems to remain imbibed inherently within the practices of the women of these government quarters in G-9/2 and is thus further explored through the documentation of female lived experiences.

Radical Rooftops

This section, through the lived experiences of the female participants, explores how their Mohalla-making reveals informal socio-spatial relations in a modernist housing community that has not been documented before. Their oral testimonies depict the rich and paradoxically heterogeneous nature of the communal fabric within the formal modernist built environment they reside in. As a post-colonial city planned on modernist design principles that did not aim to spatially replicate the essence of a Mohalla within its master plan or modernist housing complexes realized later, the memories and oral histories of the female participants in this research being collected seek to substantiate the argument that a Mohalla is indeed an intrinsic socio-spatial propeller of cultural relations in the modern-day neighbourhood of Islamabad.



Figure 6: A Kameez, which Umaima has tailored and brought to the interview. Source: Author

'I stitch for the women here... I also have clients from Rawalpindi, my previous home... Sania's Libas...I made it for her.'

Umaima is the Mohalla seamstress. She has the gift of creating a tangible product, i.e., Libas (Figure 6), that marks the intangible heritage of the shalwar kameez, the national Pakistani dress. As a housewife with a family of five living in a two-bedroom apartment, she migrated from Rawalpindi to these government living quarters with her husband.

'...Rawalpindi was nice... but too busy... people were too nosy. I like it here...'

For Umaima, migrating from Rawalpindi to Islamabad has been a breath of fresh air. She feels content with the order that the Mohalla brings to her lifestyle. The complexity of the Mohalla in Rawalpindi, where she resided previously, was far too overwhelming for her.

'...it is easy, commuting by foot instead of hiring a taxi for menial everyday tasks such as purchasing groceries

or buying my 'nalkiyan' (stitching supplies) from the 'Bazaar'.. it is across the block, so it is convenient for me...'

She recalls the richness of the Mohallas of Rawalpindi. Still, she feels more secure in a modernist environment with infrastructure. She has created an introverted yet unconventional feminist node on her building's rooftop, which she can visit anytime without being questioned.



Figure 7: A platform for a 'stickier' social practice in the Mohalla. Source: Author

'...we cannot go freely in public spaces... rooftop was left... so I use the stepladder... my husband doesn't even have a problem...my friends and I get together and go...'

The symbolic approach towards the 'Chut' (rooftop) as communal spaces in Mohallas has been present in the subcontinental region during the Mughal and Colonial periods and also post-partition (1947 onward) in Rawalpindi where rooftops (Yanagisawa and Funo, 2018) were understood to be spaces of congregation that supported commotion, community, and privacy for women.

'...The rooftop for this building block serves the sixteen families who live here, but also draws in women from neighbouring building blocks...'

However, regarding the Government Housing Quarters of G-9/2, rooftops were not designed as inhabitable social spaces, let alone as spaces for women. Due to its concealed accessibility, which is only viable from inside the building via a flimsy stepladder, it gives the women of the Mohalla the freedom to socialize without the 'male gaze', much to the consent of their husbands. Again, one observes the female struggle to secure a space to freely socialize as a radical exercise of feminist communal appropriation, reeling in Hook's (2021) argument of women redefining the domestic realm as an act of social emancipation, yet decrying that this is an act of forced labour for them.

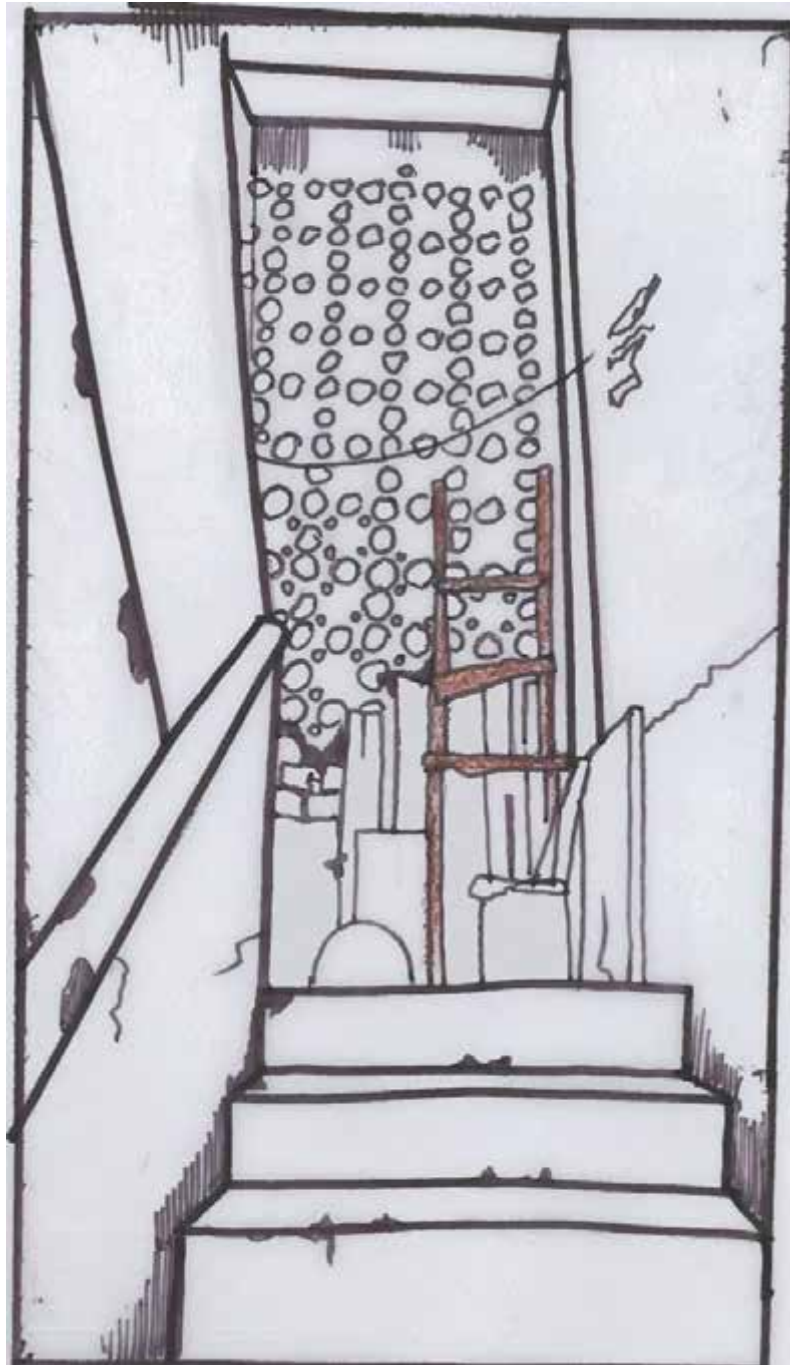


Figure 8: The stepladder used by the women to access the rooftop from inside the building block. This stepladder demonstrates that the roof was not meant to be used in the first place. Source: Author

'...We, the women, gather here in the warm summer evenings and crisp winter mornings... talk about our daily routines, cut vegetables, and babysit... we also have a Quran Khwani⁵ here...'

The association Umaina and her cohort of women living in this neighbourhood have developed with the rooftop while maintaining a sense of purdah through a vertically detached means of communal bonding can be seen as an attempt to reinvent the idea of a Mohalla from Rawalpindi via rooftops, a recurring theme in the majority of the oral testimonies collected. As Gosh (2014) suggests in her scholarly work regarding vertical communities, this

⁵ A local celebration where people of the Mohalla gather to celebrate a child completion's of reciting the Muslim's book i.e. the Holy Quran.

indicates how the Mohalla found its way conceptually into the communal fabric via a collective social practice in newfound spaces, thereby developing a feminist 'stickier dependence' (Gosh, 2014). As shown in Figure 7, the rooftop has been collectively transformed by Umaina and the women of the Mohalla as a usable space, which otherwise was an abandoned building cover.

'We- the women living in this block- get together every month and clean the entire rooftop together... I consider it an exercise for myself...women living on the ground and first floors socialize on the ground level, whereas women living on the second-floor level and above usually visit the rooftops...'

This phenomenon of feminist salvation of rooftops as an act of Mohalla-Making has further enhanced the dynamic and fluid nature of the everyday lives of the women within a Modern Mohalla spatially. This has birthed a unique solidarity among them as the communal exercise of having to clean the rooftop together, lay down a 'Chitai'(mat) to sit on, and then use it to cut vegetables or even counsel each other commemorates the act of coming together in a unique space that is solely for women.

Dissecting Umaina's oral testimony alongside Doxiadis' ideology behind communal arrangements of neighbourhoods in Islamabad, rooftops as feminized nodes in Mohallas are a reflection of the architect/planners 'gaze' that applied aerial visual decoding as a design tool to understand the local culture, as mentioned by Daeschel (2015). As a triptych of vantage points, i.e., De Certeau, Doxiadis, and Umaina, one observes that the authoritative figure envisaging everything from an aerial view can ultimately be challenged through subaltern feminist Mohalla-making practices, even unintentionally. Daeschel (2015) mentions how Doxiadis' surface-level approach to understanding the vernacular cultural context of Islamabad gets lost in translation. This is because, as an architect for a post-colonial city who came across as a 'gora sahab', i.e., white man, Doxiadis, as a Westernized Pakistani planner, planning from above, physically and metaphorically (Figure 9), was seldom challenged by the local Pakistani. Can one suggest that the unforeseen feminist spatial appropriation of rooftops symbolizes a shift in the power dynamic between the makers of 'strategies' and enactors of 'tactics' as an act of feminine spatial resistance?

What is important to acknowledge here is that this unique shift in the standardized relationship between strategies and tactics as defined by De Certeau (1984) has transformed into a radical perspective where women of an Islamabadi Mohalla manage their way up to the rooftops, unintentionally, as the Mohalla-makers of 'strategies' within a community where female appropriation of spaces was not even acknowledged as a part of the overall communal structure. It is an ironic yet critical feminist action to document as it redresses the image of female subaltern identity within the built environment of Islamabad. This intersectionality between the repression and expression of Islamabad's inhabitants and their communal structure today not only transforms the modernist design principles employed by the master planners and architects but also creates diverging poles of interpretation of feminist lived experiences.

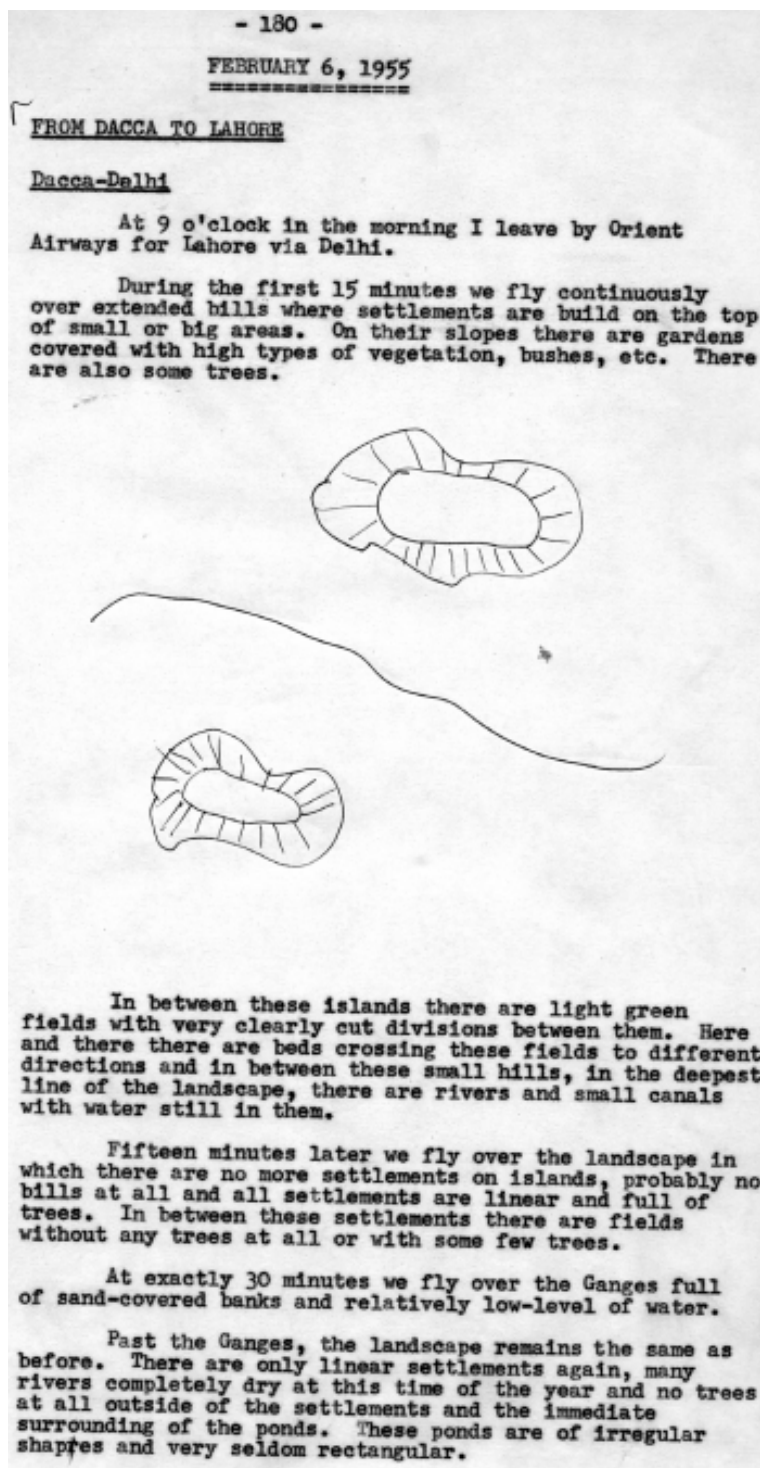


Figure 9: The romance of aerial surveillance. Aerial topography was sketched and interpreted by Doxiadis in his diary en route from Dacca to Lahore. Seen as a planning 'strategy' used by Doxiadis, this is from one of his diary entries, which demonstrates how he addressed the challenge of master planning in Islamabad from a literal aerial view. Source: CADA: Pakistan vol.4, Diary DOX-PP 40, Jan.-Feb. 1955, p.180 (Archive Files 23556)

Courtyards And Feminized Aerial Occupation

This section discusses the Mohalla's most obvious spatial feature, i.e., 'Sehn' (courtyards), due to its massive scale, amidst an aerial entanglement of washing lines. Courtyards, which have been a symbolic architectural element for Muslim neighbourhoods, in the context of the site, were not intentionally designed for Mohalla-making in

this neighbourhood of G-9/2. They were pieces of barren land connecting the building blocks. Through the lived experiences being studied in this section, one observes how the practice of feminist Mohalla-making redefines the modernist and homogenous socio-spatial construct as well.

The courtyards, or 'Sehn', in the government living quarters of G-9/2 (Figure 10) are key architectural features, historically central to Muslim design for their space, ventilation, and ability to create introverted environments, particularly for women. Each residential block, housing sixteen families, is linked by a large courtyard, serving as a communal area for various activities like weddings, funerals, cooking, and laundry. While courtyards traditionally offer privacy, in this case, they transform into extroverted public spaces, reflecting an unconventional approach to Mohalla-making that encourages communal interaction across blocks.



Figure 10: Aerial view of the Mohalla in sector G-9/2, Islamabad, with courtyards in between housing blocks. Rectangles shown in the middle represent the courtyards in between the housing blocks. Source: Google Maps



Figure 11: The Washing Line Phenomenon of the Modern Mohalla, i.e., the pulley system. Source: Author

Laiba, a Pashtun woman, and her family of six moved to the government quarters from Kohat, Peshawar, when her husband secured a job as a driver for the Capital Development Authority in Islamabad.

'...back in the village, there were open spaces, and the houses were very spacious. My home is much smaller here...'

Her migration to the city has been for the sake of the three holy necessities that she deems as 'electricity, gas,

and water'. She enjoys the richness of this Modern Mohalla with its infrastructure, which was absent back in Kohat. Laiba's chronicle commences with her narration regarding the aerial reclamation of space via 'washing line clusters' and the formation of micro communal friendships based on this. ,

'...These washing lines in the Mohalla are spaces of interaction for us... It is our routine in the morning, after our husband leaves for work, we used to go down to the courtyards... women who put their clothes in the same area... children go to school...we run the machine...also have to put clothes out to dry today...'

The drying of laundry itself is an act of Mohalla-making by the women, illustrating the rich ethnic blend of its residents, where women of all ethnicities congregate to dry their laundry based on which floor they reside on. What adds to the character of this social space within the Mohalla is the authority that different residents from the surrounding blocks exert on the courtyards surrounding the building blocks concerning drying their laundry.

'...We leave our kids with each other and ask for *saalan* (food) from each other.. we cook for each other.. we clean each other's homes (shared spaces like the central staircase and main entrance of the building)...also look out for each other's laundry, we don't fight for space on the washing lines. We don't throw away other neighbours' clothes to dry our own...sometimes it is a problem, so my husband made this for me...'

For Laiba, living on the second floor is problematic. She mentions that the families living on the ground floor feel more entitled to use the space for their laundry compared to the other residents residing on the upper levels. Due to this conflict, many families, like Laiba's and Umaima's, have installed a pulley system from their living room window where they hang their washing lines thereby introducing an alternative 'modern' practice of drying laundry in the Mohalla that transcends the traditional drying occurring at ground level in the courtyards and relieves the 'laundry load' on ground level.

'...my husband does not like me putting our family's clothes on public display in the courtyard downstairs, so he fixed this pulley from my living room window... See, I will show you... Now I hang my clothes here and we do not need to wait for other families like we did before on the ground...'

Umaima's narrative concerning the aerial retrieval of space to avoid conflict with other residents of the Mohalla shows a means of facilitating socio-spatial hierarchies through the *Sehn*, which is translated as a feminist socio-spatial agency that can assimilate into the aerial space as well.

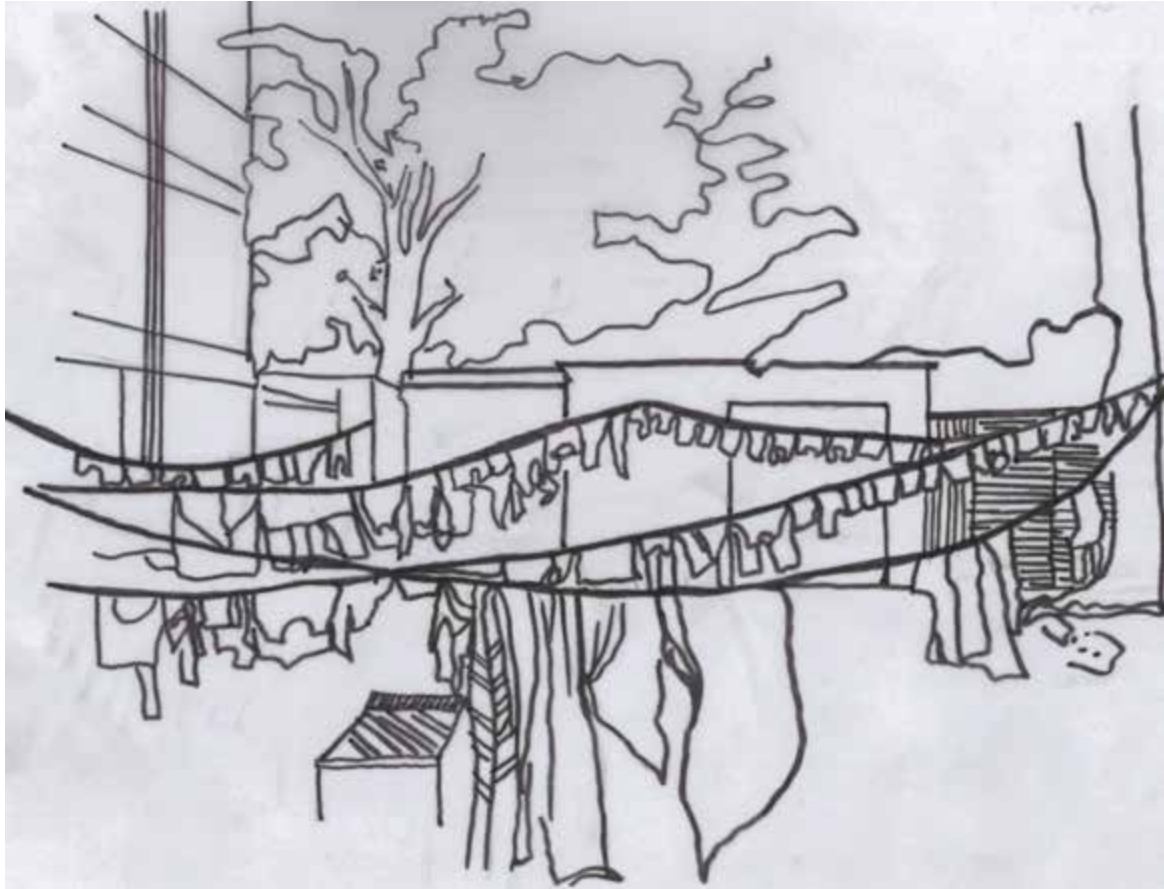


Figure 12: Drying laundry on ground level (in the courtyard) is a Mohalla-making practice versus the aerial pulley system that is illustrated in Figure 10. Source: Author

'...we usually go here (as written in Figure 13), to the playground... my kids enjoy it. We go there in the evenings as it is summer now... we go early morning in the winter...'

As a woman of Pushtun descent, Laiba explains that her Mohalla-making activities vary distinctly from women of different ethnicities around her. Pashtun women are expected to be introverted, and the men expect their women to observe purdah and avoid public spaces of gathering. However, in Laiba's case, the aforementioned unique situation is observed by her interaction in the public realm within the Modern Mohalla of G-9/2, which is ironically propelled by her youngest children, a set of twins, who regularly visit Mohalla Park, i.e., the courtyard readapted into a playground. It must be noted that the adaptation of the courtyard into a playground was not a part of the original design plan for the housing block.

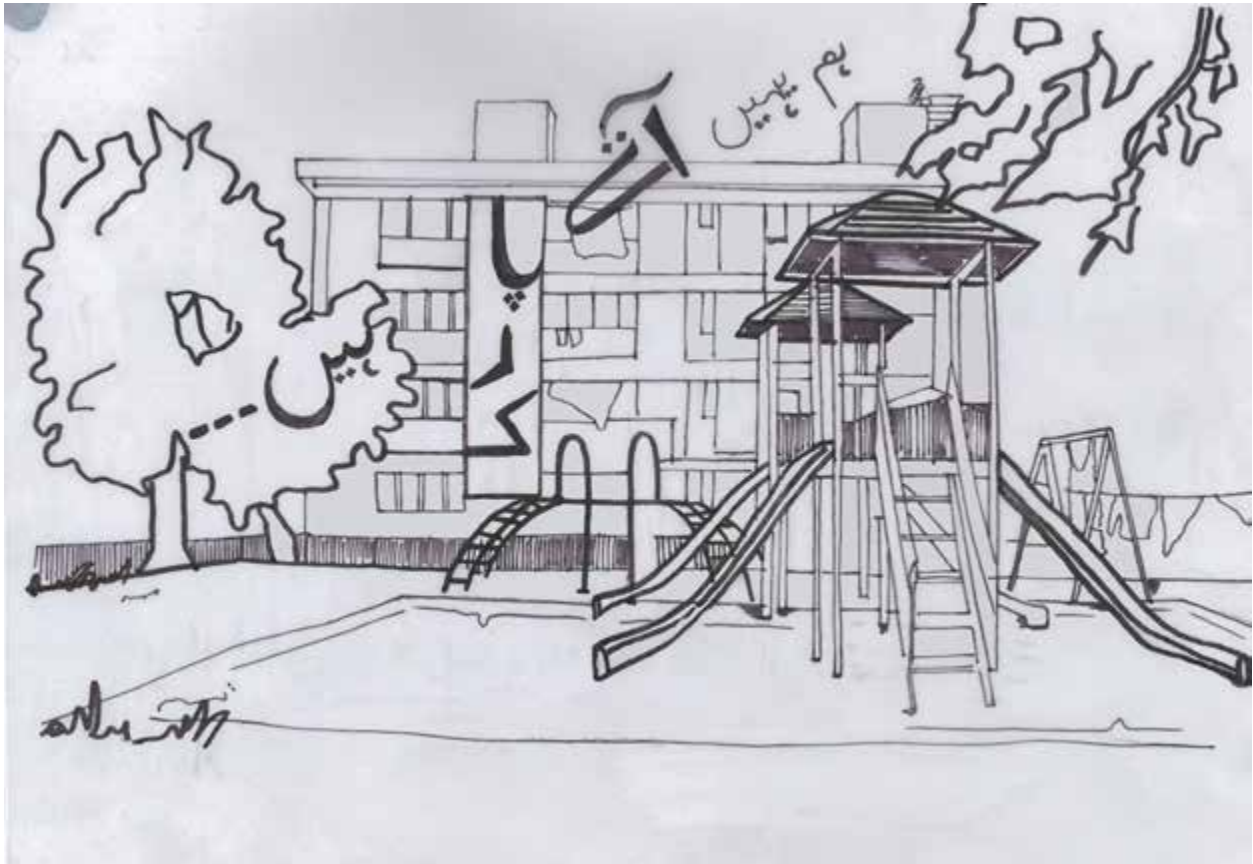


Figure 13: The transformative nature of the Mohalla courtyard, now a playground, serves as a means of social interaction for the Mohalla mothers.

Laiba visualizes a Mohalla as a playground where mothers of the community, together with their children, can socialize freely. In contrast to the women who socialize on the rooftop, Laiba and her cohort of women do not visit the rooftops because their husbands do not see the space for women as 'socially appropriate' i.e., they prefer their women to be using conventional spaces for communal gatherings, the idea of a rooftop is strange to them.

'...it is preferable to see children playing in the park on a ground level where they can also be seen from their kitchen or living room windows...'

'...This is where we come, the park is within walking distance from my house... only takes us five minutes... it has fences around so it is safe for children to play while we talk...'

Questioning how efficiently the park is designed and to what extent it satisfies the needs of its users, it is important to point out that it is not a green space. It comprises some playground items fixed onto a barren courtyard inside a sand pit lined with bricks. The park is more of an informal playground that serves as a recreational facility for the women and children of the Modern Mohalla. As discussed further, parks are a design element of the original communal structure that Doxiadis planned in his archival illustration (Figure 15), however, Laiba's testimony illustrates this space as an afterthought brought to the forefront through the feminist appropriation of courtyards as play areas for their young rather than the design process itself.

Laiba defines the idea of a Mohalla as an 'act (s) of caring' that she appropriates to a play area, as that is where she embodies the concept as a tangible space. Facilitating her children's and her social needs through a playground is an act of Mohalla-making that can be carried through for generations. As shown in the written calligraphic image of Figure 13, 'this is where we come', courtyards, despite their extroverted nature, are seen as spaces used by women like Laiba, who otherwise belong to an introverted culture where using public spaces for Pashtun

women is not the norm. Therefore, Laiba's Mohalla-making is seen as a socially reformatory act where women like her can identify and meet their communal needs by informally establishing newfound Mohalla-making traditions in a modernist urban setting.

By reflecting on the oral testimonies of Umaima and Laiba, the theme of socio-spatial interrelatedness becomes more apparent as the idea of a Modern Mohalla and its physical manifestation via their unconventional practices of Mohalla-making can be traced to their consistent intangible communal practices linked to their lifestyles before migrating to Islamabad from Rawalpindi and Peshawar, respectively. As such, a trajectory of concepts regarding traditional spatial formations is seen in a modernist built environment, a requirement that Doxiadis blanketed under the homogenous zoning as a part of his master planning exercise. This is further explored in the next section, where Doxiadis' theory of Ekistics is studied as a facilitator for feminist Mohalla-making in Islamabad.

Islamabad And Ekistics: How Does Ekistics Facilitate Mohalla-Making?

This section investigates Doxiadis' theory of Ekistics and how it impacts the structure of a community in Islamabad and ultimately Mohalla-making. It addresses the research inquiry of how the Mohalla-making practices of women are facilitated by Doxiadis' illustration of a communal structure. Viewing this research inquiry through a post-independence lens and Doxiadis' theory of Ekistics, questions whether female representation was a consideration during the design process of Islamabad's neighbourhoods and whether feminist spaces were conceived as a part of the overall communal structure of Islamabad and the site of study in particular.

Doxiadis defines Ekistics as the understanding of social interaction between and within human groups and societies. Doxiadis uses his science of human settlements to develop a coherent social structure of how neighbourhoods should be designed in Islamabad, thereby shaping their future social practices. Concerning the layout of communal structures, Doxiadis grounds his theory of Ekistics on the following units, which are sourced from his archival works (Doxiadis, 1972): Nature, which is the site on which settlements are built, Man who creates and inhabits them, Society which is formed within them via people and whose social Networks allow people to grow, and lastly Shells which are translated as the built environment housing the other three elements (man, society, and networks). By connecting these units as building blocks of a community, this research examines how they collectively impact the structure of a neighbourhood in Islamabad and consequently the Mohalla-making practices of the women in the Modern Mohalla of G-9/2.

The structure of a community is integral to understanding the investigation of the Modern Mohalla. As a living quarter that is a modernist vertical building, it is not a customary building typology for its inhabitants, who have migrated from non-modern communities to the city for a better lifestyle. Yet their communal practices permeate the modernist built form and birth new informal spatial appropriations as studied via the feminist oral traditions and drawings. Islamabad was a culmination of Doxiadis' vision for a city that operated on multiple fronts, which he believed made a city embody the principles of autonomous growth (Kreutzmann, 2013) while catering to the daily needs of its residents. However, it was not realized particularly via a feminist lens of utility. The entire process of Doxiadis' appointment and the master planning of Islamabad was seen as a bureaucratic strategy that Moatasim (2023) explains envisioned the city according to the modernist ideals of its administrators and patrons rather than its people's intangible or gendered cultural practices. Most academics who have written about Islamabad from a post-independence lens omit the qualitative aspect of documenting the lived experiences and feminine participation as a part of Islamabad's inception because there wasn't any to document in the first place. The female presence as a part of this research is felt as an 'otherly' subject, which Madison (2020) describes, with which a critical dialogue has yet to be made. This 'otherly' characteristic is deeply felt because even more than seventy years after Islamabad's birth, there is no archival record of feminist representation regarding community planning and dwelling design as a part of Islamabad's establishment.

One focuses on the archival evidence of Doxiadis' work titled The Human Community Project (Doxiadis, 1965), a project launched in 1961 in Athens, ironically coinciding with Islamabad's creation, to study the human community level and prescription of relevant communities at a local district level per their social needs as an attempt to situate an informed strategic decision regarding community design. However, despite having a systemic observational technique, one notices the lack of its implementation within the design of Islamabad, especially during its preliminary stages when Doxiadis was attempting to understand the social structure of Islamabad. For whatever reason, this may not have been executed, had The Human Community Project been used

as a participatory socio-spatial tool to understand the sensitive social structure of the neighbourhood culture in Islamabad, their presence today would be mainstream and more cognizant of women's spatial practices on an urban level.



Figure 14: Two images show only male representation during Islamabad's design process. The first image shows Doxiadis presenting aspects of his master plan for Islamabad to the Capital Development Authority, Rawalpindi, in May 1961. A lack of female representation in the meeting is observed. Source: CADA: Photographs No. 30917. The second image shows a meeting in Athens between Doxiadis and General Azam Khan who was Doxiadis; the most powerful supporter in Pakistan and influenced his success in securing Islamabad as a design project. Source: CADA: Archive Files 28557.

THE STRUCTURE OF A COMMUNITY

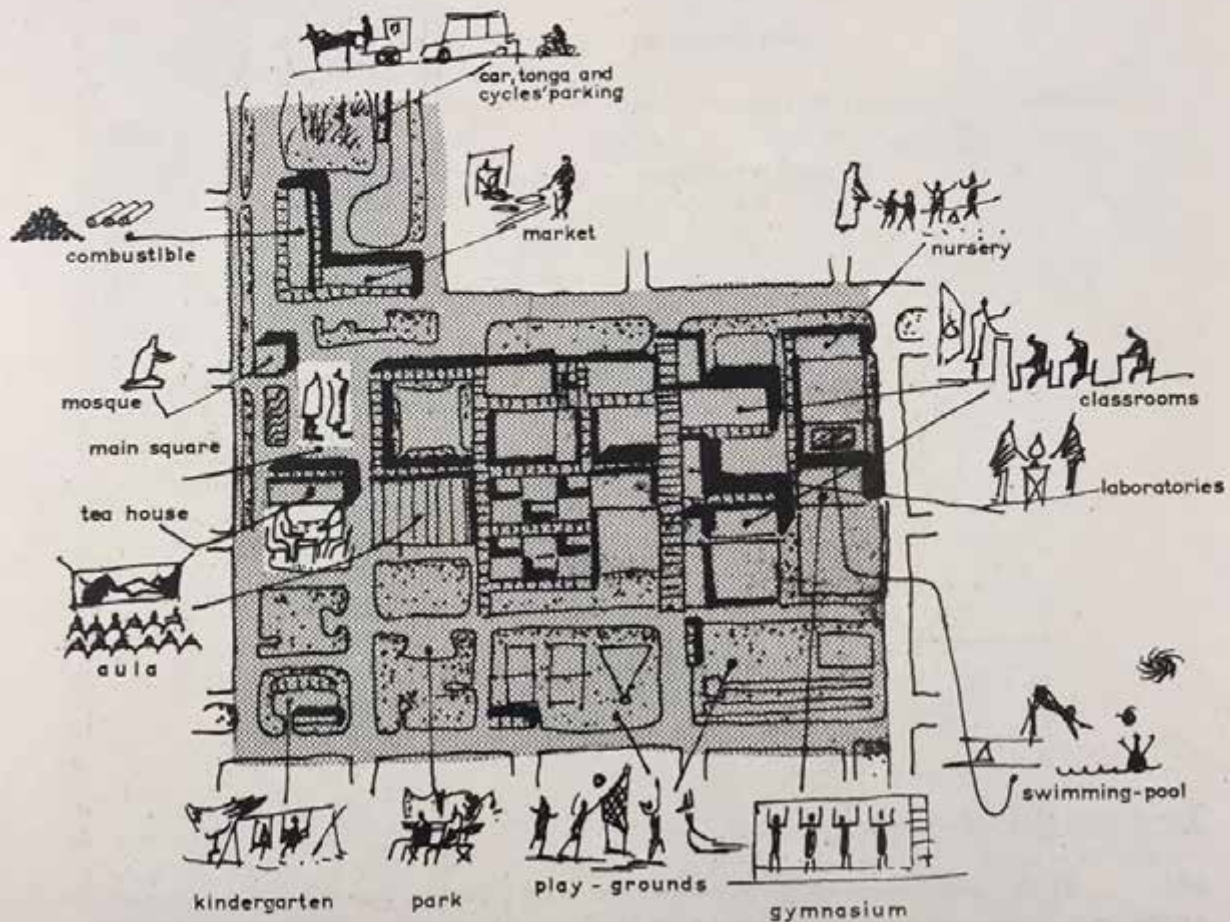


Figure 15: The structure of a community, illustrated by Doxiadis. Source: Capital Development Authority, Islamabad. Doxiadis and Associates- DOX-PA 115.

Stitching together Doxiadis' theory of Ekistics with his illustration of a communal structure, as a modernist master planner (Figure 15), each spatial relation reflects his vernacular interpretations. The spatial typologies assigned by Doxiadis have been translated and transformed by the inhabitants as per their lifestyles, driven by their traditions today. Once again, we notice that this illustration (Figure 15) depicts the socio-spatial relations of a neighbourhood from an aerial view, a recurring theme in Doxiadis' planning approach. When this 'strategy' of Doxiadis is observed via my site visit, on a street level, and through the feminist lens of lived experiences, the Mohalla-making 'tactics' of the residents are noticeably different. For instance, spaces demarcated as 'tea-house' exist informally as 'dhabas' (pop-up tea stalls), cobblers, or fruit vendors, as shown in Figure 16. Can one suggest that Ekistics envisioned Mohalla-making for the locals from a top-down approach? If so, this research argues that this top-down approach is contested through the feminist re-appropriations of his canonized theory of human settlements, another act of feminine resilience that can be connected with Hooks' (2021) proposition of

women doing the work only because they are expected to do so to create alternatives for themselves when none are available. This is explored further via Figure 17, which is seen again but from a feminist lens of occupying communal spaces.



Figure 16: Local fruit vendor's informal stall in the Government Housing Modern Mohalla. These spaces are primarily used by men.

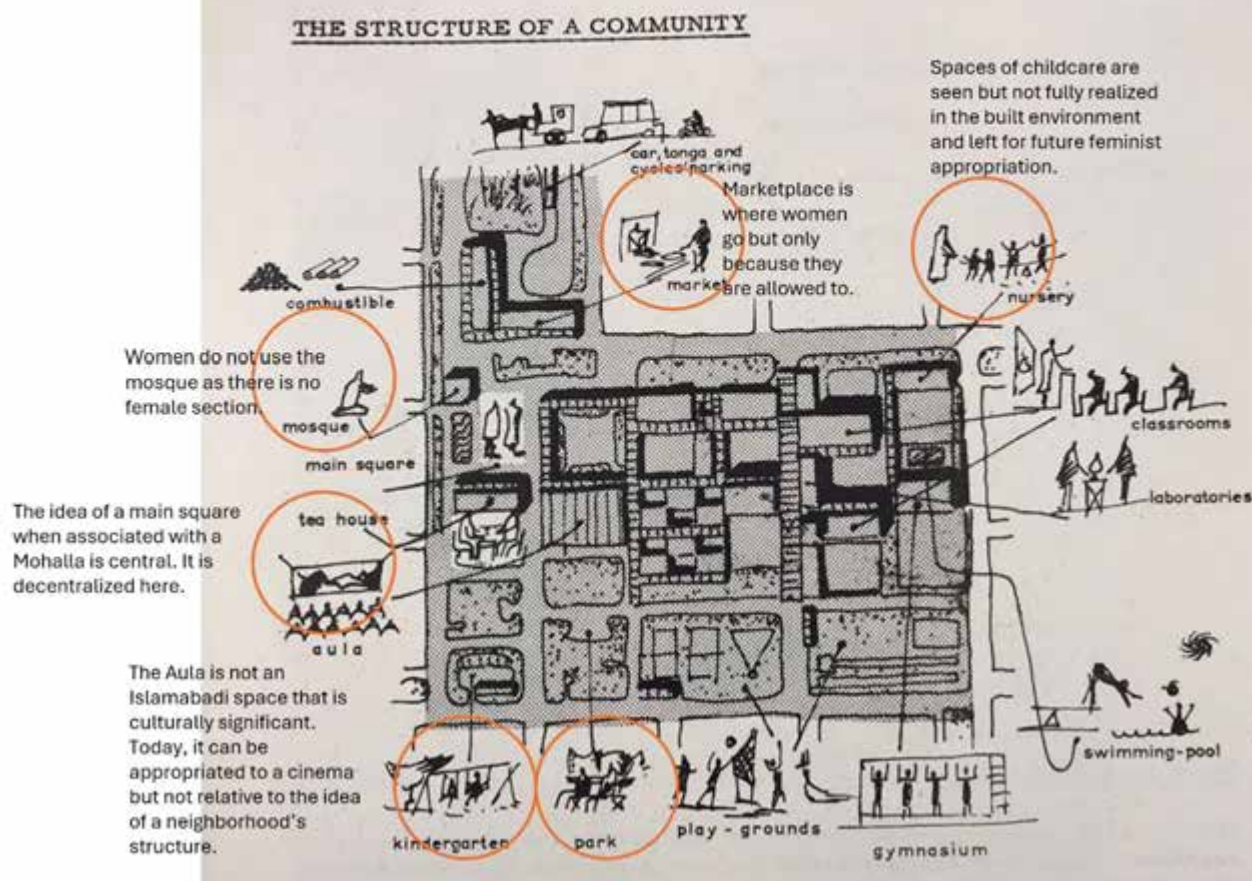


Figure 17: The structure of a community designed by Doxiadis revisited via a feminist lens of Mohalla-making practices.

The extroverted nature of the spaces shown in Figure 15 highlights a disconnect between Doxiadis' urban planning approach and the introverted, culturally specific needs of the community in Islamabad, particularly for women. Doxiadis' designs, such as the 'Aula' (a modern screening area or swimming pool), reflect a Westernized, extroverted vision, which does not align with the introverted Mohalla culture, particularly in terms of feminist spaces and the concept of 'purdah' (female segregation). The absence of women in the planning process of the 1960s and their lack of representation in public and communal spaces (such as mosques) is noted as a significant issue in Doxiadis' illustrations. This research, therefore, explores unique spatial appropriations of retaining privacy by women for women. It focuses on how women navigate and appropriate space to maintain privacy, via oral testimonies revealing that the practical realities of vernacular socio-spatial practices differ from Doxiadis' vision, emphasizing a need for more context-sensitive urban design that acknowledges these socio-cultural nuances.

Conclusion

This interdisciplinary research explores the lived experiences of women in the Modern Mohalla of G-9/2, Islamabad, emphasizing their "Ziddi feminist Mohalla-making practices". The study frames the Modern Mohalla as a space of urban informality where women actively redefine their socio-spatial roles within a post-independence, modernist Islamabad. It portrays the women being studied as independent, radical agents of change, whose contributions to community-building extend beyond traditional roles tied to their spouses' income, asserting their presence in a space that was never designed with them in mind. With my interpretation of a Mohalla's socio-spatial

construct as shown in Figure 18, one of the findings is how the communal life in a Modern Mohalla indicates an unconsciously conceived feminist prototype of dynamic cultural customs as a collective response to the modernist planning principles implemented by Doxiadis. This study is unique because it highlights a paradoxical situation of the qualitative lived experiences of the women as residents of formal settlements practicing informal urban practices. The collected feminist lived experiences in the Modern Mohalla are an unintentional antithesis of the communal structural stratification for government servants that Doxiadis designed, since feminist spaces were not realized as a part of his study, to begin with.

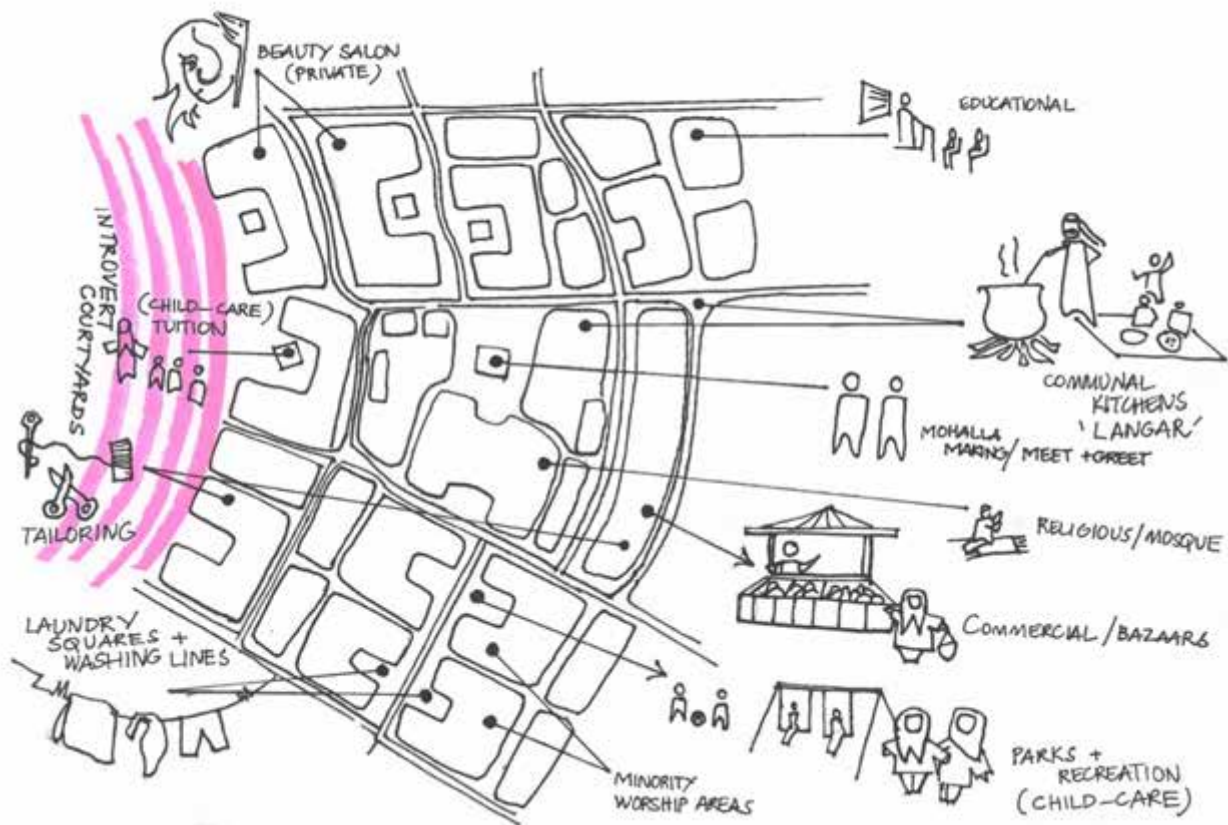


Figure 18: An interpretation of how a Modern Mohalla could be structured if it were seen via a feminist lens of participatory engagement after my site visit. The intersectionality between the formal nature of the built environment and the informal nature of the feminist Mohalla-making practices thrives through a dense interrelated network of streets and buildings as an ephemeral concept of socio-spatial relations.

The approach shown in Figure 17 challenges the rigid, ungendered zoning proposed by Doxiadis, which treats public spaces (market, mosque, square) as functional areas that do not limit women's social interaction. Instead, by reimagining the neighbourhood as a complex web of historical, socio-cultural, and feminist influences, blending private and public spaces, the study envisions a more emancipated communal structure. The Modern Mohalla manifests itself as a hub of intangible socio-spatial relationships passed down through generations, evolving within a modernist framework. As a female Islamabadi researcher focusing on the feminist lived experiences of the Government Housing Quarter of G-9/2, this research explores my role in uncovering and documenting their often-overlooked stories to address their "triple absence" in critical feminist socio-spatial discourse within Islamabad's neighbourhoods. Writing about the architectural history of my hometown as a Pakistani woman is itself a radical act, as it advocates for incorporating feminist spaces into urban design, something that has not been previously considered. By examining the complex Mohalla-making practices, the study allows the researcher and audience to engage with the once-overlooked experiences of these communities. It opens the door to further inquiry, questioning "What more is there to know?" about Modern Mohallas in Islamabad, especially with the low-income government servants and their ghettoised communal structures influenced by feminist practices that

remain largely unexplored.

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