



## REPRESENTATION OF KARACHI AS A DARK CITY: A RE-ORIENTALIST READING OF SABA IMTIAZ'S *KARACHI, YOU'RE KILLING ME!*

**Muhammad Abdullah**

Department of English, Division of Arts and Social Sciences,  
University of Education Lahore.  
[abbasabdullah051@gmail.com](mailto:abbasabdullah051@gmail.com)

**Bilal Asmat Cheema**

Lecturer (English)  
Department of English, Division of Arts and Social Sciences,  
University of Education Lahore.

**Ahmed Zulqurnain**

Department of English, Division of Arts and Social Sciences,  
University of Education Lahore.

### Abstract

*This research article explores the representation of Karachi in Saba Imtiaz's Karachi, You're Killing Me! through the theoretical framework of Re-orientalism. Orientalism refers to how the West depicts the East as chaotic, violent, and unstable; Re-orientalism explains how the Eastern writers portray their view of the East. Themes of urban chaos, violence, and political instability draw clear parallels to Western portrayals of Eastern cities by emphasizing the clash between locals and global perceptions. This research paper seeks to understand whether the portrayal of Karachi challenges or endorses the Western perception of the East, contributing to a wide discussion on the representation of post-colonial urban cities in Pakistani literature. Countering the Orientalist stereotypical representation of Karachi.*

**Key Words:** Chaos, Instability, Karachi, orientalism, Post-colonialism, Violence

### Introduction

In recent years, South Asian literature has given Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, quite some spotlight for it being an unstable yet a place for opportunities. This portrayal is often criticized and celebrated, as Karachi is a unique blend of endurance and instability within Pakistan. Saba Imtiaz's *Karachi, You're Killing Me!* offers a fresh perspective on the city, portraying it as a place of endless struggle and grit. Imtiaz's work only offers a part of Karachi but that too mostly the darker side where a young female journalist has to face the dangers and problems of the city regularly. These are shown when the protagonist lives through various contemporary problems afflicting the city for example; urbanization, lack of equality, and rampant violence. As much as urban fiction entails portraying hope, cultures, and change, everything in Imtiaz's work is different – a grim, raw, and realistic portrayal of Karachi. This depiction is more realistic for the city, nonetheless, it elicited the issue of whether it conforms to the stereotypes that the West has of the East – as a violent, rambling land. This pressure between genuine and stereotypical views forms the premise for this article's analysis of Imtiaz's work using the critical lens of re-orientalism. In operationalizing the concept of re-orientalism, this article explores *Karachi, You're Killing Me!* Re-orientalism is the term used to describe the analytical perspective through which native authors of the East narrate the representation of their country and culture they wish to put forward – in support or defiance of stereotyping by the West. Lau (2009) states that re-orientalism is how

Eastern representations are manipulated and shaped by Orientals themselves. These representations, coming from the life experience, may still reflect Western perception creating a nuanced mix of internal and external perspectives. In *Karachi, You're Killing Me!* Imtiaz's emphasis on Karachi's harsh reality can be depicted as a re-orientalist portrayal. One that not only acknowledges the city's struggle but also magnifies it through the lens of Western assumptions of East's urban settlements. Through an analysis of Karachi's portrayal as a dark city, this study foresees whether Imtiaz's text reflects the challenges faced by locals or reinforces the West's idea of the East as a chaotic region. For a native audience, Imtiaz's portrayal may echo as a raw reflection of life in Karachi, untampered and realistic. However, for a global audience, it may turn to sensationalism feeding to stereotype not only the city but the whole of Pakistan as unstable, and in constant conflict. Thus, the narrative Imtiaz creates offers a discourse for both a 'here' and a 'there,' as it oscillates between the roles of the analyst and the arbiter, questioning and reinforcing, at a certain level Western convention. This study is relevant to the existing body of literature on re-orientalism to explore how self-representation can serve both, a challenge, and a reaffirmation. In this study, the researchers will try to develop the knowledge of participants of the double function of literature by analyzing how Karachi is portrayed. In the end, this fiction wonders how depicting a city like Karachi, it comments both within and outside the Pakistani context and thus, embodies the potential of literature to construct different global identities. Lau (2014) emphasizes that the commodification of culture and identity through re-Orientalism entails a negotiation where the Orient is simultaneously authentic and exotic, familiar and Other.

The study focuses on the need to decode representation in texts and shape our understanding of cities, especially in the global south. Since Karachi and other Largest cities are constantly changing, so do the stories that people have tried to talk about. "Karachi is a city where the best and worst of everything collide—five-star hotels overlooking slums, political rallies that end in riots, and weddings that go on for days despite the city being in lockdown" (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 67). By recognizing the complexity of voices and experiences that impact these cities, storytellers, readers, and academics can collectively foster a much deeper appreciation for urban existence. And so, while there are flaws in Imtiaz's novel, such work should ideally be seen as trigger points for such conversations and debates or to encourage people to think in terms of how the narratives of given cities then fashion the worlds that we inhabit as well as envision.

### **Literature Review**

The portrayal of Karachi as a city of life and living in violence, anarchy, insecurity and political turmoil has now emerged as a vibrant theme in South Asian fictional endeavors. Imtiaz offers glimpses of life in Karachi and her portrayal is complex enough to stimulate more research. In Imtiaz's *Karachi, You're Killing Me* When satirical elements are embedded with dark realism of Karachi, the city emerges as one that is struggling with challenges and dominancy. To situate the research question that underpins this study of Imtiaz's novel, the next section provides a review of literature on re-orientalism, postcolonial theory, and urbanism.

Lau (2014) explains how Indian writers, though included within re-orientalism, use their literature in English to maintain colonial prejudices while simultaneously subverting them at the same time. This intersects with Imtiaz's portrayal of Karachi as it reflects how the city is represented in Western Literature. "Re-Orientalism strategies are not just on the part of the authors, however, but also from gatekeepers, readers, agents, middlemen, and so on" (Lau, 2014, p. 22). Both Lau's work and Imtiaz's exploration of Karachi aim to crush the Orientalist stereotypes that

have long guided Western perceptions of South Asia. They challenge the rigid image of the region of mystery, backwardness, and cultural heritage with the dominant Western discourse. Re-orientalism involves the perpetuation and internalization of stereotypes about the East by Eastern writers themselves, often for a Western audience. “These studies demonstrate how these diasporic Indian authors employ re-Orientalism strategies of depicting the underbelly of India in order to reinforce Western, almost Victorian, stereotypes of India as dirty, dangerous, exciting in a sordid way, full of criminals and corruptions” (Lau, Dwivedi, 2014, p. 26).

Brodsky (2015) analyzes the works of multinational artists, particularly those from India, and how they define their identities in the global literary marketplace. Both Brodsky and Imtiaz's work highlights the effects of globalization on cultural production. “The role of globalization and the internet in perpetuating cliché and encouraging conformity is a major consideration in understanding the phenomenon of Reorientalism” (Brodsky, 2015, p.271). Imtiaz's portrayal of Karachi can be depicted as an answer to the questions of the global market, where emotional and unique narratives often attract more attention.

Lau (2009) suggests that the "Orient" is redefined by writers from the East, often accepting or challenging Western perceptions of the region. “Reorientalism is perhaps, in part, an extension of totalisation that has always been present in literature, imposing the culture, values, attitudes, etc., of a select minority as representative of the diverse majority” (Lau, 2009, p. 573). This theoretical view can be applied to Imtiaz's work, which aligns with and distinguishes Western perceptions of Karachi. Reorientalism is a way of rewriting narratives to challenge or complicate the reductive portrayals of Eastern societies. “In Reorientalism, we have the curious case in which the positionality of the powerful is simultaneously that of the insider and outsider, where the representing power can be simultaneously self and other” (Lau, 2009, p. 572).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Application of the theory of re-orientalism to Imtiaz's *Karachi, You're Killing Me* provides a rich comprehension of aspects related to the representation of urban realities in South Asian writing. “The process of re-Orientalism, while offering a platform for Eastern voices, frequently reproduces stereotypes that reinforce the East as chaotic, primitive, or morally corrupt” (Lau, 2014). This theoretical framework will integrate three key concepts: postcolonial feminism, third-world feminism, and urban geography. Combined, all of these ideas capture how, with its depiction of Karachi as a “dark city”, Imtiaz represents but also rewrites back Western understanding of oriental cities as the interplay of space.

The study draws from the propositions of post-colonial literary theorists as it is expressed that “Diasporic and exilic representations frequently mediate between self-authenticity and the market's demand for otherness, creating works that are at once resistant and complicit” (Naficy, 2011). The premise of re-orientalism forms the fundamental structure to this deduction. Said (1978) suggests that the Orient was almost a European invention and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, and remarkable experiences.

Re-orientalism suggests how the native authors from the East represent the presentation of their own land and culture; whether they endorse or negate the stereotyping by the West. “The Re-Orientalist author, while ostensibly representing their own culture, functions as both an insider and an outsider, negotiating cultural authenticity and Western demands for difference” (Lau, 2011). Consequently, these authors contribute to a multifaceted construction that is simultaneously constructive and constraining when it identifies with an external view. However, in the light of

*Karachi, You're Killing Me!* one may thus represent Imtiaz's narrative as an orientalist text that characterizes the city's turmoil with violence, corruption, and instability. "Karachi's skyline is a lie—glass buildings towering over the reality of broken streets" (Imtiaz, 2014, p.101). It provides us with a realistic view of the lives of Karachi's residents but also responds to such expectations from the external world about urban societies in the Eastern zone. The fact that Imtiaz focuses on the less optimistic sides of Karachi is good for explaining the real state of the city, but it merely fortifies the Western stereotype of the city as chaotic and hazardous just as Imtiaz portrayed in the novel. "Karachi doesn't know what it wants to be: a cosmopolitan hub or a sprawling mess. It's both, all at once" (Imtiaz, 2014, p.89). It helps to understand how her representation can comply with Western expectations as well as subverting them. The realistic aspect of stereotype perception seen in Imtiaz's portrayal gives rise to important questions as to what extent the author's implications for Karachi and similar city representations within Pakistan and internationally.

Another theory central to this theoretical framework is the urban studies that define the social, political, and economic principles of urbanism. This field has been studied about stress in the estimation of conflicts, identity, and cultural production in urban societies. When the analysis unfolds this text in relation to Karachi, it will also discover how Imtiaz narrates it as a violent city for personal narrative but as a dynamic, multi-faceted source for the lives of inhabitants. "Where else can you find goats blocking traffic and armed guards outside a bakery on the same street?" (Imtiaz, 2014, p.36). From the perspective of urban anthropology, the image of the city as a "dark city" of Karachi turns into an active work full of remarkable stories and memories. "One street is all glitz and glamour; the next is crumbling under garbage and neglect" (Imtiaz, 2014, p.87). Such approaches understand the relation between individual problems and larger urban processes, explaining how the sociopolitical issues of Karachi's inhabitants are intertwined with the city's experience. The application of themes like migration, displacement and socio-economic differences in the text contributes to sustaining the notion of the city of Karachi as a space of people's lived experiences, suffering, and survival. "You can live in Karachi your whole life and still feel like a stranger, as if the city is constantly trying to keep you at arm's length" (Imtiaz, 2014, p.103).

Even the re-orientalist reading of *Karachi, You're Killing Me* shows how the audiences may have different perceptions of the representation of the city, compared to Pakistani readers. "The narrative voice in re-Orientalist literature often oscillates between authenticity for local readers and exoticization for global audiences, negotiating complex cultural expectations" (Lau, 2014, p. 6). "Karachi is never the same city twice—it shifts, it grows, it decays, it adapts. But somehow, it's always falling apart" (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 110). For the global audience, the novel might serve to provide fuel to the global clichéd imagination of Karachi as an exoticized 'dark city'. On the other hand, a native reader is likely to identify satire, irony and genuine reality in Ayesha's story, and consider it as a truthful and bitter yet realistic representation of the South Asian woman's fight. Since both receptions are readings of cultural texts that are concerned with mapping the modern city, this duality serves to underscore not only the role of audience positionality in the process of deciphering the textual representations of a spatial complexity but also the difficulty of addressing this complexity to different readerships.

Analyzing the changes in power relations and their impact on culture is an opportunity provided by postcolonial theory. As a follow-up to this, this framework will look at how Imtiaz's art engages history as a referent of South Asia. Through postcolonial concepts, the analysis can

identify how Pakistani colonialisms form the native images, or how those formed images are used to address the current discussion on identitarian nationalism and cultural imperialism. “Karachi thrives on chaos—it’s what keeps it alive, even when it feels like it’s falling apart” (Imtiaz, 2014, p.147). From this point of view, one can opine that the portrayal of Karachi as violent, unjust, and complex, can be motivated by historical problems and socio-political situations. It also facilitates analyzing the existing problems within the Premier city and understanding that it is a result of colonial history.

Compounding the three theoretical frameworks of re-orientalism, urbanism, and postcolonialism; this reading of *Karachi You’re Killing Me!* elucidates the structure of identity, representation, and power. As such, it analyses how, in Imtiaz’s text, identity and representation intersect and how local and Western looks of the world are interwoven with the themes of identity, representation, and power. It examines how Imtiaz’s text explores the complexities of authenticity and stereotypes and the balance between local experience and Western perception. In addition, this framework contributes to the elucidation of the part literature occupies in the representations and reconstruction of cultures. Therefore, this theoretical framework gives complicated approaches to understanding Imtiaz’s humor in *Karachi, You’re Killing Me* which reveals the processes of constructing Karachi as a dark city. Through utilizing these critical approaches, this research will endeavor to broaden comprehension of how literature responds to and rectifies concerns of cultural discursivities within a progressively globalized society. Finally, the study of these topics will advance discussions on the purpose of literature in the social construction and contestation of space in South Asia and help extend understanding of identity, agency, and representation in the current literary terrain.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

Imtiaz's *Karachi, You’re Killing Me* presents a multifaceted critique of the city, intertwining elements of personal narrative, satire, and social critique. This analysis focuses on the novel’s portrayal of Karachi by engaging with the registers of re-orientalism, the deployment of the entire apparatus of postcolonial critique and contestation, and the urban settlement disputes. Both theoretical perspectives provide ways of understanding the relationship between the novel and the dynamics of identity, space, and socio-political environments. “Karachi is the kind of city where you can have a candlelit dinner during a blackout caused by a bomb blast” (Imtiaz, 2014, p.74).

Re-orientalism was coined by Lisa Lau to refer to how Postcolonial writers perform Orientalism in which they rightly tell Western readers about Orientalist points of view of their cultures as simple and unique ones. “Re-Orientalism operates by constructing identities that simultaneously embrace and distance themselves from Oriental stereotypes, allowing the Oriental subject to critique yet cater to Western audiences” (Lau, 2014). “You can live in Karachi your whole life and still feel like a stranger as if the city is constantly trying to keep you at arm’s length” (Imtiaz, 2014, p.103). In *Karachi, You’re Killing Me* the narrator at times subverts and at other times reinforces these archetypes. On one hand, there is a story exploring Ayesha Khan, a young and aspiring journalist who is working in Karachi – a city in a state of chaos and very often, hostility – so the readers can receive a full and personal depiction of the city. Equipped with a sharp tongue, fast thinking and dark humor Imtiaz effectively resists the stereotypical portrayal of Karachi as a city consumed by nothing but hopelessness and abandon. As to the experiences of the protagonists in case they encounter a corrupt cop or participate in conflicts over steady blackouts – vividly reconstruct an oppressive and multilayered picture of a city that actively struggles

between these trials of overwhelming hopelessness and the amazing resourcefulness to cope with them. However, it is also important to see that there is a reorientalist approach in constructing Karachi as a ‘dark’ city, full of mystery and danger. The very title of the film, *Karachi, You’re Killing Me* constructs this representation of the city as one that is seriously hostile and potentially lethal at every turn. Such a portrayal has the potential to diminish Karachi in the eyes of its viewers, reducing it to a mere locus of ceaseless disorder and chronic ineffectiveness, reflecting deeply entrenched stereotypes that are frequently advanced and propagated by Western media outlets. “Re-Orientalism perpetuates an image of the Orient as chaotic, Other, and morally ambiguous, even when constructed by insiders” (Lau, 2014).

“Everyone in Karachi has a survival story. It’s not about living; it’s about figuring out how to stay alive” (Imtiaz, 2014, p.56). These powerful images resonate with the audience present in this particular place, individuals familiar with some of the knotty and massive challenges and issues that Karachi has to deal with on a daily basis. At the same time, these visuals also situate Karachi with some kind of broad global orientalist narrative, one that caters to and fits the external voyeuristic interests of observers from afar. To make matters even more complex, humor and satire more than add another layer to this interpretation. Using a self-deprecating tone, Imtiaz effectively establishes a clear demarcation from the conventional Orientalist perspective. This earnest work provides a devastating analysis of what people have to say about Karachi both locally and internationally and it challenges the way the city is discussed in general. On the other hand, one thing needs to be said at once: The distinction between critical position and acting in accordance with orientalist norms, however, is rather thin. “Re-Orientalist authors mediate between insider authenticity and outsider expectations, producing narratives that are both resistant and complicit in stereotyping” (Lau, 2014). “Karachi is never the same city twice—it shifts, it grows, it decays, it adapts. But somehow, it’s always falling apart” (Imtiaz, 2014, p.110). This suggests that there is a myriad of complications associated with the attempt to write the narratives of postcolonial locations, not least of which is the broad manifest under the generic umbrella of the global literary space teeming with hybridity and polyphony. “The relationship between the Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said, 1978). Such fragility speaks of the multitude of challenges involved with trying to write stories about postcolonial places, especially within the generalized framework of a globalized literary sphere full of multiple influences and voices. Postcolonial theory provides an additional and insightful analytical lens through which one can gain a deeper understanding of complexities presented in *Karachi, You’re Killing Me* “Post-colonial urban spaces are often constructed as microcosms of the broader nation, with their dysfunctions symbolizing systemic societal issues” (Lau, 2014). This theory examines the socio-political ramifications that arise from the historical context of colonialism, which have played a significant role in shaping urban environments like Karachi. In this regard, the fragmented features of this bustling metropolis of the South Asian Peninsula, a narrative reflection of post-colonial displacement and colonial exploitation, migration waves after partition, and displacement and alienation of new generations are reflected coherently. In addition, it portrays the political instabilities that have followed the city since it gained its independence. Karachi is therefore representative of postcolonial urbanism as a city that has been sorely dislocated in both its spatial emergence and its social and economic fabric. “Karachi is a city of contradictions—where art exhibitions happen in the middle of shootouts, and Sufi music plays while the news reports yet another explosion” (Imtiaz, 2014, p.78). The fragmented and surreal

nature of Karachi emerges touchingly through the description of Ayesha navigating a city where a prosperous mall superimposes on a vast, sprawling slum. In addition, the cosmopolitan liveliness inherent in the concept of the city is, perversely, juxtaposed against an “everyday” context of political dysfunction and threat. This statement can be placed into a broader sense of postcolonial development that gradually developed over time. The paradigms developed in the process of designing the Architecture frameworks and the governance systems inherited from colonial dispensation have for a long time delivered very profound marginalization in society.

Postcolonial theory provides an additional and insightful analytical lens through which one can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities presented in *Karachi, You're Killing Me*. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) implies that Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and disjunction of all sites of discrimination and domination. This theory examines the socio-political ramifications that arise from the historical context of colonialism, which have played a significant role in shaping urban environments like Karachi. Within the narrative, there is a profound reflection of the fragmented identity of this bustling metropolis, which not only showcases the lingering effects of colonial exploitation but also highlights the waves of migration that were prompted by the partition. Furthermore, it captures the political turbulence that has characterized the city in the aftermath of gaining independence.

Karachi is quintessentially a postcolonial city and represents a unique condition marked by very severe dislocation in spatial development together with deep fractures within its socio-economic composition. The fractured and uneven character of Karachi comes out poignantly through the description of Ayesha traversing a landscape where affluent and prosperous neighborhoods awkwardly coexist with vast and sprawling informal settlements. “The allure of Eastern cities lies in their perceived disorder and exoticism, creating a spectacle of otherness for Western consumption” (Lau, 2014). “Karachi is a city where you check for riots and roadblocks before you leave the house like other people check the weather” (Imtiaz, 2014, p.29). Besides, the cosmopolitan dynamism so very characteristic of the city often is paradoxically set against an “everyday” backdrop of routine political instability and insecurity prevailing. This statement reflects the broader postcolonial context that has evolved over time. The legacy of the architecture frameworks and governance systems set up during the colonial regimes has, over time, produced very significant inequality and social exclusion within the society.

Imtiaz also condemns the strong neoliberal agencies that are proactively designing and creating a new reality in the city. In the novel, the commodification of space in the city is easy to discern through the dynamics of gentrification, where elite interests and profits triumph at the expense of marginalized communities who are literally pushed aside. Indeed, Ayesha narrates her anxieties over how terrible the transport situation in Karachi is, hinting at how public transportation has dutifully been sacrificed to the privatized alternative. This describes very typical neo-colonial patterns in cities where such transformations occur according to the persistent forces unleashed by the global economic order. Forgetting the most problematic parts of the urban fabric where the poor are forced to live, as well as concentrating on the bright and fast-paced life in some of the better restaurants, bars, and media houses underlines the rather selective approach. This selective voyeurism that is also typical of Western fictional treatments of urban space thus points to more general questions regarding narratorial authority and the global discursive construction of Karachi.

The novel also elaborates extensively on the complex psychological implications that arise from living in such an unsubtle complex metropolis, which is informed by postcolonialism. Alienation with a desperate need to 'hold on' to stability amidst an unpredictable urban situation comes alive in the themes that reflect Ayesha's deep and even severe disconnection and alienation. "In Re-Orientalist narratives, urban spaces are often portrayed as chaotic, lawless, and ungovernable, reinforcing the exotic and dystopian image of the East" (Lau, 2009). Such described existential unease is indeed symbolic of the urban life characterizing postcolonial scenarios, in which so many promises and hopeful expectations surrounding this type of modernity have yet to be fulfilled for far too many. In this sense, the novel leads the readers to think past such caricaturing of Karachi, where the plain of oppositions such as light and darkness, order and chaos cannot fully capture. It problematizes the ways in which the city has been represented as a 'troubled', 'difficult,' or 'unworkable' urban space; although the editors too, at times, tend to reproduce such recipes of the city paradigm. "Postcolonial urban spaces are sites of cultural contestation, where historical legacies and modern aspirations collide to shape collective identity" (Lau, 2014. p. 22). It is this that highlights the socio-cultural relationships governing urban portrayals, especially of cities in the global south where discourses are framed as much by internal insecurities as they are extraneous influences.

A myriad of problems with the urban settlement forms the central nucleus around which Imtiaz's Karachi revolves. The problematic features that characterize the story vividly to the fore come from the various and complex issues that are confronted by the city's denizens, starkly defined by rapid growth that outstrips resources, poor infrastructural facilities, and difficulty in coping with the demands of the population, and a deep social division that throws into relief the differences between the city dweller. "Karachi's slums are an entire world on their own—vivid, alive, but forgotten by the rest of the city" (Imtiaz, 2014, p.140). The urban culture of Karachi, as skillfully depicted in the novel transforms into a dynamic site of constant negotiation and adaptation, people continuing to cross and navigate through material and social obstacles to their everyday lives and interactions. "There are places you can go in Karachi where the streets are spotless, the air smells of freshly mowed grass, and the guards at the gates keep the chaos out. But just beyond the walls, the real Karachi waits" (Imtiaz, 2014, p.36). These pictures depicting those informal settlements across Karachi are quite revealing of the city's failure to offer adequate and suitable housing stock for a growing population. These are so, as these settlements are rather described as lively and full of people resourcefulness while at the same time are areas of social frailty. For instance, they lack the kind of basic services that are common to human life so basic needs and services such as clean water, constant power supply, and reasonable toilet facilities. This approach narrows down interaction with real existing experiences and realities of such diverse groups to a great extent. What used to be an embracing of many voices and opinions, thus the inclusion of many in the decision-making process became a thing of the past when only a selected few were allowed to have a say while the rest were sidelined.

Imtiaz further academically analyzes and appreciates the extremely ineffective and corrupt governance systems that exist within Karachi. It has unreliable utilities that turn into a problem of its people and has areas of shortcomings of police patrols. Besides, institution collapse seems to manifest in several forms and phases to add to and worsen the already demanding urban tasks that this growing city encounters. In the novel spatial interactions that are subtly intricate for the two cities are also there to unravel other social cleavages hidden within Karachi as a mega city. This



very sharp dichotomy of a rich area and a poor area is revealing yet another facet of a type of spatial apartheid in that city—a legacy of colonial city planning that has been handed down to the city’s present-day incarnation in Karachi. “The city has two faces: one for the rich, where life feels like a holiday, and one for everyone else, where life feels like a punishment” (Imtiaz, 2014, p.45). “The Re-Orientalist framework frequently underscores the vulnerability of women in urban spaces, portraying their lives as precarious, shaped by intersecting axes of patriarchy, culture, and modernity. These portrayals both challenge and cater to global perceptions of gendered oppression in the East” (Lau, 2014). “I watch men take up space in Karachi’s streets like they own them. Women are always careful, always watching” (Imtiaz, 2014, p.71). The novel portrays Karachi as a patriarchal space where a woman is very much in the negotiation of her presence east of a dangerous city.

Imtiaz also adds humor to his pen and serious critique to his arguments, to solve the above-mentioned problems. A bigger problem for women living in the larger postcolonial urban scene is Ayesha's feelings about society's norms and the absence of a good public space for women. This novel contributes to a feminist discussion of gendered urban experiences, thereby making a voice to many existing male narratives that appear in city representations.

At once personal, social critique, satire, and engaged, *Karachi, You Are Killing Me!* is a very multi-dimensional description of Karachi, differentiating various aspects of the city. The novel narrates the tensions and contradictions out of which its subject was born through this reorientalist method, postcolonial theory and urban settlement issues. “Re-Orientalism emphasizes the agency of local authors in crafting representations that complicate and subvert traditional Orientalist tropes, yet often reconfigure them to cater to global consumption” (Lau, 2014). “Karachi is a city where the best and worst of everything collide—five-star hotels overlooking slums, political rallies that end in riots, and weddings that go on for days despite the city being in lockdown” (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 67). Though the text does a good number of fights with stereotypes and simplistic narratives, it also engages with representation limitations since it strengthens the difficulties of apprehending a city as wide and energetic as Karachi. The novel indicates the struggles of the city through the eyes of a very common protagonist who gives human form to them. Nevertheless, it alludes to the difficulties of writing about postcolonial spaces for global readership given its re-orientalist tendencies and relative lack of involvement with certain critical approaches. “Postcolonial cities are depicted as fragmented and unstable, embodying the tension between tradition and modernity, perpetually negotiating their identities in a globalized world”

(Lau, 2014, p. 18). As the novelist puts it, “Karachi doesn’t know what it wants to be: a cosmopolitan hub or a sprawling mess. It’s both, all at once” (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 89). Ultimately, *Karachi, You’re Killing Me* is a love letter and a slap in the face to Karachi; it praises and pans the city equally. Ultimately it will inspire readers to contemplate the minute details of urban life in a story that is at once very personal and very political.

While the novel provides gender roles and structures and mobilizes them to place the protagonist/the male subject outside the home, it also undercuts this framework whereby it provides a very different account of things from the vantage point it offers through the male protagonist’s voice. Ayesha’s still sarcastic and vulgar attitude makes the city more accessible and shows moments of hope, togetherness and the continuity of life despite war. “In Karachi, the mundane and the extraordinary happen side by side: you’ll see a street wedding next to a police shootout” (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 101). A woman’s gaze renders Karachi to readers as not only a seat of

armed conflict, but as a teeming, often messy, and thoroughly imperfect city. This double portrayal is important because it foregrounds an antagonism between the real and the most real, between Karachi as an object of imaginings and Karachi in the living of it. Imtiaz both subverts and reproduces the reorientalist look in his case, to show how stories about Karachi are often hyperreal.

Besides, *Karachi, You're Killing Me* easily provokes discussions about the representation of what kind of Karachi and its ethnographic narrative the public is ready to listen to, and what role creative storytelling plays in crafting future visions of contemporary cities. As a middle-class journalist, Ayesha derives her insight from the realities of Karachi, however, her point of view is definitely influenced by her class. The experiences she has with the city are social class informed and, in this way, she is not fully free to paint a picture of the city in its entirety. "The city has two faces: one for the rich, where life feels like a holiday, and one for everyone else, where life feels like a punishment" (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 45).

### Conclusion

Making a case for Karachi, a city that has been depicted in terms of mayhem, violence, and political and social upheavals, Imtiaz's *Karachi, You're Killing Me* can be viewed as a multiple-layered work of realist fiction. Using reorientalist, this paper aligns itself with the overall discursive construction of Karachi as the 'dark city' about the novel. This creative story actually embodies the typical sitcom comedy narrative however, underlying it is an exploration of Ayesha Khan's personal issues which on some level reinforces and subverts the stereotype that global and local audiences have of the city. A significant discovery made in the course of this assessment is thus the manner in which Imtiaz employs satire and self-reflexivity to portray Karachi. On the one hand, the novel reinforces certain reorientalist tropes associated with the city: crime, corruption, the oppression of women, and the malignant governance of society. The various events that occur to Ayesha take place in the context of persistent blackouts, bombings, political instability, and generalized violence that helps hide a 'dark city' image from both domestic and foreign consumers. These elements are frequently used to reaffirm prior beliefs about Karachi as a place of disorder, which then forms part of a wider agenda of re-orientalism. "The postcolonial city is often portrayed as a site of negotiation, where tradition and modernity clash and converge, producing spaces marked by contradictions" (Lau, 2014, p.18). "This city is an enigma: it drives you mad, yet you can't imagine leaving it" (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 33). This framework locates the city as a site that is always in a state of being threatening and volatile, making it the 'Other' space in the imaginative geography of the world.

### References

- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Brodsky, A. (2015). Reorientalism and Globalization. *Journal of Globalization Studies*, 6(2), 54–68.
- Lau, L. (2009). Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals. *Modern Asian studies*, 43(4), 571-590.
- Lau, L. (2014). *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics: The Oriental Other Within*. Routledge.
- Lau, L., & Dwivedi, R. (2014). *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lau, Lisa, and Ana Cristina Mendes. *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics: The Oriental Other Within*. Routledge, 2011.
- Lau, Lisa. "Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2009, pp. 571–590.
- Naficy, H. (2001). *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton University Press.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, 1978.