The Making of the World of Espionage: A Brief Political Economic Analysis of the Popularization of Ibn-e-Safi's *jasusi* Novels in 1950s Karachi

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This paper was written and submitted as the thesis for the completion of Master of Arts at the University of Chicago.

Abstract:

"But political economy is not technology... Production also is not only a particular production. Rather, it is always a certain social body, a social subject, which is active in a greater or sparser totality of branches of production." - Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*. (Marx [1939] 1973, 19–20)

Asrar Ahmad, widely known as Ibn-e-Safi, is one of the most popular detective novelists in South Asia. He was born on July 26, 1928, in Uttar Pradesh, India. In August 1952, Ibn-e-Safi migrated to Pakistan with his mother and sister. He founded Asrar Publications and started publishing *Jasusi Duniya* series simultaneously in Pakistan and India. Why have Ibn-e-Safi's *jasusi* (detective) novels been so popular since the 1950s across the South Asian subcontinent and in various languages? The author, inspired by the "distant reading" approach and Marxian political economy, tries to understand the social relations and structure that are underneath the popularization of his novels. The author uses several primary sources including prefaces and advertisements for Ibn-e-Safi's novels and other writings, the directories of booksellers and publishers in Karachi and Sindh, the national bibliography of Pakistan from 1947 to 1962, and the census of manufacturing industries in Pakistan in 1955 and 1957. In terms of specific approaches, this article includes discursive analyses, multivariate regression, and geographical information analyses. This article argues that the popularization of Ibn-e-Safi's novels should be explained in terms of a larger process of social (re-)reproduction, in which the production and circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's books benefited from a particular set of social relations embedded in the historically developed commercial publishing industry and reading culture. And, Ibn-e-Safi took advantage of the material conditions for the production and circulation of reading materials available at the time in Karachi.

Keywords: Ibn-e-Safi; Marxism; quantitative history; society and economy; Pakistan

Introduction: relations, forms, and structure

One of the most credible and oldest English newspapers in Pakistan, *DAWN*, published an article in 2011, which details why Ibn-e-Safi could be considered the representative of the *zeitgeist* for the Pakistani nation-state and beyond(From_Inpaper_Magazine 2011). Behind this news lies an indisputable truth: Ibn-e-Safi's *jasusi* novels do not simply tell the best crime stories or provide the best Urdu learning materials, but there is something *socially generative* in and about his novels that helps constitute the cultural, the social, and the political in Pakistan[1] and beyond. By focusing on 1950s Karachi, the initial headquarter of Ibn-e-Safi's literary activities, this paper aims to apprehend moments when the *zeitgeist* was revealed in the production and circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's novels.

So far, in the field of contemporary South Asian literature, scholars have written about the rise of the *jasusi* novel and Ibn-e-Safi's novels in particular. Francesca Orsini argues that through the process of translation and adaptation of *jasusi* novels from English to Bengali then to Hindi and Urdu, a "Bengali Modernity" got replicated in North India where the policy was still "self-regulated, self-policed by local elites," and was still adapting itself to the colonial rule (Orsini 2004). On Ibn-e-Safi's novels, Khurram Shafique has pointed out that Ibn-e-Safi "was in a way reconstructing the genre of dastan for modern times" (Shafique 1997). According to Christina Oesterheld, Ibn-e-Safi was abreast of the current affairs and contemporary Western crime fiction, which are reflected in his novels (Oesterheld 2009, 4–6). Laura Brueck and Francesca Orsini have argued that the setting in most of Ibn-e-Safi's novels is generic, so readers in both Pakistan and India can easily contextualize the plot in their surrounding environment (Brueck and Orsini 2022, 141–59).

Although literary historians have done a great job of analyzing Ibn-e-Safi's novels from both literary and historical perspectives, the question regarding the popularity and wide circulation of his novels remains half-answered. When books that have achieved such popularity both across time and space are concerned, the political, economic, social, and material contexts in which they were produced and circulated become tremendously significant if we want to understand the reasons behind their popularization. This paper argues that the popularization of Ibn-e-Safi's novels should be explained in terms of a larger process of social (re-)reproduction, in which certain types of social relations, categories, ideologies, and people are (re-)produced for capital circulation and accumulation. Also, he took advantage of the material conditions for the production and circulation of reading materials available at the time in Karachi. However, the extent to which his intentionality behind his choices and actions contributed to his success is not the focus of this paper.

Methodologically, a "distant reading" approach is adopted in this paper, as Franco Moretti says, "where distance is however not an obstacle, but a specific form of knowledge: fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection. *Shape, relations, structure. Forms. Models*" (Moretti 2007, 1). In terms of specific approaches, this article includes

[1] I want to point out several historical and linguistic facts about Pakistan. Pakistan was founded as an Islamic state in 1947 after Partition of India. Urdu was chosen to be the national language, even though most of the population at the time and even nowadays do not speak Urdu as their first language. Punjabi, a regional language in Punjab, is the most widely spoken language, which is followed by Pashto, which is mostly spoken in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and northern Baluchistan.

discursive analyses of the prefaces and advertisements for Ibn-e-Safi's novels, a multivariate regression analysis of the literary books published from 1947 to 1961, and geographical information analyses by GIS.

Theoretically, this article adopts a Marxist framework without restricting itself to any specific Marxist school of thought. In my analysis, books, raw materials, human labor, and so forth are considered commodities, each of which contains a use value and an exchange value simultaneously; the exchange value, based on socially necessary labor time, renders commodities commensurable, exchangeable, from which social relations between things arise (Marx [1976] 1990, 165). Also, for analytical purposes, publishers, laborers, writers, and readers are mainly viewed as social actors, who enter the market as guardians of commodities for sale. Their commodities may come out of their individual talents or may satisfy others' individual needs. Ultimately, they must meet social needs, which can be constructed and reconstructed historically. Material relations emerge between people (Marx [1976] 1990, 165–66).

Following these basic terminologies, we should first ask what kind of social needs, categories, and relations within the Hindi-Urdu publishing world had been perpetuated and expanded to Karachi after mass immigration from North India during the time of Partition? And to what extent was the (re-)production of these social needs, categories, and relations related to the popularity of Ibn-e-Safi's novels? Second, what kind of people had been (re-)produced who could fulfill the social needs of the market as well as the Pakistani nation-state? What role did the mass production and circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's novels play in this process? Finally, in what ways were the material conditions arranged in the publishing and printing industries, which can explain why Ibn-e-Safi's books were preferred over others – which also suggest an expansion of a capitalistic mode of production of reading materials in Karachi during the 1950s?

In this paper, I use several primary sources including prefaces and advertisements for Ibn-e-Safi's novels and other writings, the directories of booksellers and publishers in Karachi and Sindh, the national bibliography of Pakistan from 1947 to 1962, and the census of manufacturing industries in Pakistan in 1955 and 1957. I organize this paper according to the three sequential claims I make based upon my analysis of these sources. The first claim deals with the (re-)production of a set of social categories and relations in the commercial publishing industry. The second claim discusses the (re-)production of liberal-modernist citizenship, personhood, and subjectivities in a post-colonial nation-state. The third claim concerns the material conditions as well as social-economic circumstances in the printing and publishing industries in 1950s Karachi. These claims should be read separately as much as interdependently, since all of them constitute the totality of the capitalistic mode of production (Marx and Engels 1986, 24).

From North India to Karachi: *jasusi* novel industry, Hindi-Urdu divide

The dialectical relationship between the commodity that "congeals" value and the labor process that creates value is a logic and a "philosophy of *historical process*"(Harvey 2010,

34). Thus, the mass production and circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's novels were inseparable from the historical labor processes within the *jasusi* novel-writing and publishing industry. The value formation is only possible in the processes of the commodity exchanges thanks to their exchange values. As Marx points out, value "is something purely social" (Marx [1976] 1990, 149). Therefore, the first thing that needs to be investigated is the set of *social relations*, both *objective* and *ideological*, that started to emerge in North India in the late nineteenth century and have been concealed underneath the apparent use values of Ibn-e-Safi's novels (Marx [1976] 1990, 149), because these social relations have put value in motion or capital (Harvey 2018). As Marx states in *Grundrisse*, "consequently capital is a universal and eternal relation given by nature—that is, provided one omits precisely those specific factors which turn the 'instrument of production' or 'accumulated labour' into capital" (Marx and Engels 1986, 23).

To get a sense of these specific factors in the past and their lingering effects on the present, I try to situate glimpses of Ibn-e-Safi's interactions with his readers in a larger historical span—from the late of the nineteenth century to the mid of the twentieth century. In seeking the interconnection between the social relations of the publishing industry in 1950s Karachi and the social relations of the publishing industry in northern India at the turn of the twentieth century, I hope to demonstrate how society was reproduced in this process, moments of which were, therefore, crystallized in the publishing and distribution of *jasusi* novels in different places and at different times.

The first critical historical juncture worth mentioning is "the gradual process of familiarization with the printed book" in the late nineteenth century India, which gave rise to a "novel-writing industry" (Orsini 2009, 21). As beneficiaries and benefactors of this growing industry, *jasusi* novel publishers and writers, in Hindi and Urdu, were commercially minded in cultivating readership. Detective stories in Bengali, which had been translated or adapted from English novels, were re-translated and adapted into the Hindi-Urdu speaking environment of North India, during which the novelty of the genre was maintained but the narrative was reshaped to be more appealing to the local readers (Orsini 2004, 457, 461). Not only were readers' tastes taken into account by writers and publishers, but writers and publishers also consciously developed the aspect of temporality in novel reading and buying. For example, two monthlies were solely dedicated to *jasusi* novels, *Jasus* (Detective) in 1900 and *Hindi Daroga Daftar* (Hindi constabulary) in 1910, which meant relatively stable consumption and production of stories monthly (Orsini 2004, 444). For Marx, temporality is a foundational feature of capitalism, and a set of legal and institutional apparatuses have been arranged to constantly redefine and reconstruct "time" to primarily discipline the labor force (Marx [1976] 1990, 348). Here, the monthly consumption and production of *jasusi* novels regulated the producing activities of the writers, the publishers, and the labor force, and normalized the consuming activities on the part of the consumers.

From the prefaces written by Ibn-e-Safi, we can also see his attempt to cultivate a regular book-buying and -reading habit among his readers. He tried to accommodate the needs and requests of the readers. For example, he told his readers that although *Jasusi Duniya* is a series of novels, each novel should be considered complete, and one novel is not related to another one. Therefore, new readers can start following *Jasusi Duniya* at any point in the

series (J002, n.d.). Moreover, Ibn-e-Safi is asking readers to take the initiative to actively contact their local agents to order the newest release days before, otherwise, he warns the readers that they might be disappointed for not getting it (J002, n.d.). Thus, Ibn-e-Safi hoped his readers could be attentive to book releases and prepared to order in advance. A sense of activity and temporality was also built into Ibn-e-Safi's strategies of cultivating a regular book-buying habit among his readers. Here, the claim is that some elements of the past did get reproduced over time and form in the present. The relations between Ibn-e-Safi and his readers were not simply spontaneous (re-)actions by the two parties but were part and parcel of the historically developed commercial publishing industry and reading culture in North India.

Not only should the analytical scope of distant reading be vertically extended, but also it should be horizontally broad. Francesca Orsini argues that interdependent relations started to emerge between writers-publishers and readers, in which writers and publishers became increasingly professionalized, and readers became more psychologically attentive to the next installment (Orsini 2004, 447). Yet, I would argue that this particular form of interdependency emerging between writers-publishers and readers, which was crucial for the capitalistic production and consumption of the *jasusi* novel, should be situated in an organic totality of production, pointed out by Marx (Marx and Engels 1986, 24); a process that produces not only the material world but also the social relations, the mental conceptions of the world as well as the ways of conducting everyday life. Marx's insights on the simultaneous (re-)production of the social, the ideological, and the everyday experiences under the capitalistic mode of production horizontally expand our analytical scope to look at the wider phenomenon of the commodification of everyday life – i.e. the society is not just a space to live but a place full of secrets, tales, adventures, crimes – that gradually took off in the publishing world in the late nineteenth century.

For example, C. M. Naim discusses the emergence of the *Mistriz* (mystery) and *Asrar* (secret) novels in Urdu in the late nineteenth century (Naim 2019, 38–39). Modeled on George W. M. Reynold's *The Mysteries of London*, the titles of various novels that Naim have found include *Mistriz af Ravalpindi*, *Mistriz af Pishavar*, *Mistriz af Multan*, and so forth (Naim 2019, 40–41). This coupling of "mystery" and a specific place in the title – mixing fiction with fact – created a "sensational" atmosphere (Naim 2019, 55) where the reader was asked to re-experience and re-live the social; and the reverse side of it was the commodification of everyday life for the mass production and circulation of popular reading materials and other artistic forms, including the *jasusi* novel. The emergence of these "sensational" novels was also probably related to the popularization of other entertainment industries in urban areas, like theatre and music, in the late nineteenth century (Orsini 2004, 440).

Figure 1. Number of Films Released in Karachi

Source: Pakistan Film Magazine: https://pakmag.net/film/

Again, fast forward to 1950s Karachi. In the 1950s, the film industry in Pakistan witnessed an exponential boom, as Figure 1[2]. demonstrates. And the number of Urdu films released increased from 5 in 1949 to 34 in 1960 (Salot and Paracah 1980, 164). In fact, Ibn-e-Safi's early publications were sent to Regal Bookstore, which was near Regal Cinema, for sale, according to Muhammad Hanif, the manager of Ibn-e-Safi's official website (personal communication with Muhammad Hanif, April 15, 2022). Moreover, in the 1950s, colored cover designs started to be adopted by many chapbook publishers in Pakistan (Hanaway 1995, 138), and it is admitted that the cover paintings of Ibn-e-Safi's novels were among the most provocative and sensational. Beautiful, sexy, mysterious, and often Western-looking female figures are often depicted alongside horrific crimes.

Therefore, the point here is that an Urdu cultural production process, which aimed to commodify everyday experiences, started to take off in Karachi during the 1950s. The production and circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's novels were a major part of it. What's happening in 1950s Karachi should also be understood in relation to the historical development of the "sensational" atmosphere created in the late nineteenth century Urdu milieu. Thus, the professionalization of the industry, the reconfiguration of readers' reading habits, and the commodification of everyday life are all parts of the set of social relations that started to emerge in the late nineteenth century North India and put value in motion in the publishing industry and print culture in general.

The of (re-)production of social relations is not a complete project at any historical moment,

[2]I collected the data from the Pakistan Movie Database, which is accessible here, https://pakmag.net/film/ .

because externally, things change outside the purview of capitalism, and internally, capital seeks to expand the scope and intensity of commodity exchanges to increase surplus values. Thus, here comes the second key historical moment, the Hindi-Urdu divide, which have fundamentally changed the subcontinent's literary, social, and political landscapes. I chose to distinguish the second from the first historical moment not because the second happened after the first – in fact, the commercialization of printing and publishing in Hindi was part of the project of creating a Hindi public sphere in part for the purposes of Hindu nationalism (Dalmia 1997, chap. 5) – but because analytically, the set of social relations produced by the second moment is different from the ones produced by the first; and Ibn-e-Safi along with his readers bore the consequences of these two key moments.

It is undeniable that the Hindi-Urdu divide was and still is part of the ongoing politicization of languages, often in relation to religion and ethnicity, across the subcontinent, including the Punjabi language movement, the Bengali language movement, the Hindi controversy in South India, etc. As a corollary, writing, printing, and publishing in a certain language have perpetuated a set of social categories and relations that have laid the foundation for nation-building, communalism, social formations, and conflicts. As a muhajir[3] himself, Ibn-e-Safi deeply understood the intimate ties between Pakistan and India, and tried to reconnect both sides in his work, as he simultaneously published his novels in Karachi, Pakistan, and Allahabad, India. At the same time, being an Urdu promoter himself, he tried to popularize his novels as a political/social project that has solidified the status of Urdu as the primary identity of South Asian Muslims and has reproduced the social and then national body of Pakistan as a nation-state.

A major observation that I have found is that Ibn-e-Safi is proud of his identity as a popular Urdu story writer. In one example, he says almost every Urdu reader in both India and Pakistan knows about *Jasusi Duniya*, and nowadays there is no other language on earth that is offering such interesting literature at such a low price (*fi-zamana duniya ki ko'i zaban itna dilchasp literature itni kam qimat par pesh nahin kar rahi*) (J004a, n.d.). Here, three components constitute his sense of achievement in Urdu literature: high popularity, quality, and accessibility. In terms of popularity, regardless of the tension between Pakistan and India right after Partition, Ibn-e-Safi's ambition was to reach every single Urdu reader irrespective of their nationality, religious affiliation, or ethnicity. Therefore, he was proud of being able to generate mass readership not only in Pakistan but also in India. In terms of quality, it is known that Ibn-e-Safi read and quoted contemporary detective stories in other languages, mainly in English, so the comparison made in this preface at least has some grounding (Oesterheld 2009, 4–6). Ibn-e-Safi believed that a good detective novel should be interesting (*dilchasp*) and sensational (*hairat-angez*), and he managed to achieve that. As for accessibility, Ibn-e-Safi was proud of making his books accessible to people from various economic backgrounds, because they were affordable.

Clearly, Ibn-e-Safi was imagining a market where he should strategize his writing and publishing activities to gain a vantage point over his competitors. And he had a political/social project of promoting Urdu as one of his larger goals. How does the politicization of Urdu

[3]It is an Arabic word meaning 'migrant'. In the context of Partition, it denotes the Muslim migrants and refugees who migrated to the newly created Pakistan.

connect to the (re-)production of social relations that constitute the capitalistic mode of production? As Marx points out, " 'the economic structure of society', is 'the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness' " (Marx [1976] 1990, 175). This essay adopts the view that the economic base, as a process itself, polices the borders of and leads to the formation of certain categories of political and legal consciousness (Williams 1973, 4). While promoting Urdu as the national language, the connection that bonds different parts of the Pakistani nation together, economically, this political consciousness helps to form a set of social relations that make the production and circulation of commodities smooth. In summary, the set of social relations that get (re-)produced are centered around reconfiguring reading behavior, commodifying everyday life, and promoting national language are fundamentally about (re-)producing certain types of people – the working classes in Marxist terms – which leads us to the second part of the paper.

Educating the working classes: private property, functional literacy

The year 1947 is a watershed moment for many reasons; and for South Asian book history, it marks the beginning of the rise of the centralized state power to organize and oversee the producing, circulating, and cataloging of publications and relevant industries. The best examples are the production of the national bibliography of Pakistan and the rise of Library and Information Science (Fatima 1999, A). Whether the state was able to control the publication industry is a historical question; on a discursive and ideological level, this transformation was significant. As Marx remarks on the modern large-scale industry, "large-scale industry, by assigning an important part in socially organized processes of production, outside of the sphere of the domestic economy, to women, young persons and children of both sexes, does nevertheless create a new economic foundation for a *higher form of the family* (my emphasis) and of relations between the sexes... the collective working group (must be) turn into a source of *humane development*" (Marx [1976] 1990, 620–21). Marx makes a crucial point that as the scale of the capitalistic mode of production increases, capital has to educate the working classes in order to (re-)produce the type of people, who are mobile, atomic, and free of their ancestral and traditional bondages, fit for the capital (Harvey 2010, 233).

At the center of this educational project is the law, and its associated ideologies, practices, and apparatuses, from which citizenry is constructed, personhood is recognized, and subjectivity is shaped. Lawlessness and democratization go hand in hand, especially in the postcolonies (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 1). As a "curious product of the post-war decolonization process" (Jalal 1990, 1), Pakistan had suffered tremendous political, religious, economic, and ethnic turmoil throughout the years, which led to military coups in 1953, 1958, 1977, and most recently in 1999. The law or legality, broadly speaking, was always on the verge of suspension, if not total abolition. Detective novels, as a form of representation of il/legality, play the role of communicating as much as caricaturing–vernacularizing as much as fetishizing–the law and its associated ideologies, practices, and apparatuses.

For example, Oesterheld says that although Ibn-e-Safi writes about all sorts of larger-than-life criminal activities such as state-level corruption, international crimes, and criminal-like

institutions and businesses, in the end, justice prevails. The resolution is always accompanied by reason rather than magic (Oesterheld 2009, 9). In a similar vein, Markus Daechsel, who focuses on detective novels produced in the early twentieth century Punjab argues that detective fiction was both "a carrier and an expression of modernity" that is rooted in scientificity, a means by which the true legal spirit is revealed (Daechsel 2003, 21). Ibn-e-Safi agreed that the rule of law was desperately needed in his country. He was undertaking a political project of promulgating, in his words, "a disposition of respect for the law (*qanun ke ihtiram ka saliqa*)" by writing detective novels (Ibn-e-Safi 2013a, 740). "I chose to write jāsūsī novels because my mission is to ask people to respect the law," he writes (Ibn-e-Safi 2013a, 740). Therefore, I hope to capture moments of the (re-)production process of citizenry, personhood and subjectivities, as a result of the legalistic education in the early years of Pakistan, as they appeared in the making and circulating of the novels. I want to point out two pillars of this legalistic educational project, which were revealed in the making and circulating of Ibn-e-Safi's novels: private property rights and functional literacy.

First, in terms of private property rights, the life of the social contract, the foundation of Western democracy, is very much contingent upon the degree to which people respect, out of indoctrination and intimidation, private property (Linebaugh 2006, Introduction). As Marx puts it, in a properly functioning market, an individual relation between people is replaced by a juridical relation between owners of private property, the other side of which is actually an economic relation (Marx [1976] 1990, 178). Historically, the Trade Mark Act adopted in Pakistan was a colonial legacy that had already been in place since 1940 (Iqbal 1971, 19). Ibn-e-Safi founded Asrar Publications in Karachi in 1952, and he started using a trademark designed by Mustafa Mirza, which later became iconic among his readers (Asrar, n.d.). Therefore, from the very beginning, Ibn-e-Safi was conscious of and actively guarded his intellectual property rights, which were not observed by most of Pakistani society at the time. One advertisement for a novel in the *Jasusi Duniya* series, urges people to be careful about fraudulent copies and check on the back of the book for the company's trademark and Ibn-e-Safi's picture. And with an exclamation mark, in the end, it alerts people to pay attention to copies coming out of Karachi or even Lahore (J092, n.d.).

Being aware of individual property and property rights is one thing and knowing where property rights start and where they end is another. This is often a violent and never-ending process of educating, disciplining, and punishing. Moments within the production and circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's novels fit into this larger process. For instance, buyers of Ibn-e-Safi's novels were warned that the publisher was not able to send the book if the publisher had only received the payment for the book without the postal service fee. Therefore, buyers were asked to add another ninety paise on top of the book price and send all of them by money order or postage stamps (J119, n.d.). An unpaid book package would be charged on delivery with double postage that was 10 paise for 50 grams and 3 paise for every additional 25 grams based on the Post Office Guide published in 1979 (Post_Office_Department 1979, 32–33). If 90 paise was doubled due to the lack of payment for the postal service, the postal service fee would be even higher than the price of Ibn-e-Safi's books.

Of course, from the perspective of a businessman, it would be terrible for the business. The underlying message is that people should recognize that if they pay the price of the book,

they only secure the book as their property, not the postal service, which should be paid for on its own. Hence, a type of subjectivity was being forged in the circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's novels—-a subject that is aware of property rights and what their boundaries are. One of the first two postal training centers was established in Karachi in 1953 (the other was in Dacca) (Post_Office_Department 1964, 3). From 1953 to 1961, approximately 470 postal staff were trained annually in Karachi, the highest compared to Lahore, Rawalpindi, Dacca, Chittagong, and Rajshahi (Post_Office_Department 1964, Appendix 2). Thus, the educational rhetoric did not just happen discursively, but there were recruiting and educational programs being undertaken in Karachi during the 1950s.

In another advertisement, buyers in India were informed that they should send money orders first to Nakhat Publications in Allahabad and then send the postal office receipt along with the book order to the branch in Karachi to get a copy (I008, n.d.). The message being expressed here is unequivocal: no matter how complicated the process of securing a copy looks like, buyers should trust the postal service, the customs of two countries, and the publisher, all of which would respect and feel responsible for the buyers' property rights. The trust and sense of responsibility associated with property ownership laid the basis for being a person recognizable within/out a nation-state.

Regarding the second pillar, literacy, the idea that improving mass literacy, in a functionalist sense, could help a nation-state "develop" was accepted and implemented as a state agenda, often under the auspices of various international organizations, by most post-colonial states (Slaughter 2007, 281). Underneath this functionalist interpretation lies the liberal-modernist understanding of society, which sees law and norm, including the correct or normative usage of a language, are the fabrics of social order-and their violation as pathology. In one didactic piece on the importance of Urdu grammar (*qavaa'id urdu*), Ibn-e-Sai says to young people who get beaten up at home or feel sick that the reason is their lack of knowledge of Urdu grammar. If a person does not know Urdu grammar, he/she is handicapped, lame, mute, deaf, and blind (*lula, langra, gunga, bahra, andha*) (Ibn-e-Safi 2013b, 741). Regardless of all the exaggerations in this remark, Ibn-e-Safi thinks that speaking Urdu correctly enables people to form harmonious households and society. This embodied understanding of the correct usage of Urdu was not merely Ibn-e-Safi's idiosyncratic wish for his fellow young Pakistanis; however, it was part of the political discourse since the 1950s that viewed the growing body of young people in various newly independent developing nations as "new literates" ready to be instructed in their national language and to be educated as citizens, often based on the image of a liberal-modernist subject.

For instance, one UNESCO evaluation report of the Regional Centre for Book Development in Asia done by the center in Karachi clearly states that what the Asian countries "need is the same in 1974 as in 1954," and was "the planning and the production of reading material especially designed for new literates." The objective was two-fold: first, to help most young people achieve functional literacy, and second, to cultivate the long-term reading habit in them (Ferrer-Vieyra and Joint_Inspection_Unit 1974, 16). My argument here is that discursively, Ibn-e-Safi's ideas and contemporary political discourses conflated with each other, which contributed to the (re-)production of the working classes with designated habits and traits. Following this functionalist line of understanding and managing reading materials,

ultimately developing countries were expected to integrate the production and circulation of reading materials into their economic and social development, and new literates would be the source of labor for this cause (Ferrer-Vieyra and Joint_Inspection_Unit 1974, 4). As a corollary, libraries were understood to be repositories of knowledge and library-going was promoted as the means of disseminating knowledge which was economically affordable and socially convenient for people. Unsurprisingly, from the 1950s and '60s onwards, libraries were often seen as the bedrock for developing social solidarity and, by extension, national strength, and unity in Pakistan (Doms and Usmani 1964).

And we can certainly see how these political and social agendas were crystallized at moments in the circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's novels. In one news article, the author describes that in November 1963, libraries in Karachi raised banners and posted posters to welcome the coming back of their hero, Ibn-e-Safi, who had been ill and stopped writing for a while (Dutta 2011). Again, going back to the Marxist notion of the totality of production, what I am trying to suggest is that the mass production and circulation of his novels should be understood as part and parcel of this political and social project that intended to (re-)produce liberal-modernist subjects and a capitalistic-oriented society, independent of what Ibn-e-Safi's own intentions, as a writer and publisher, were.

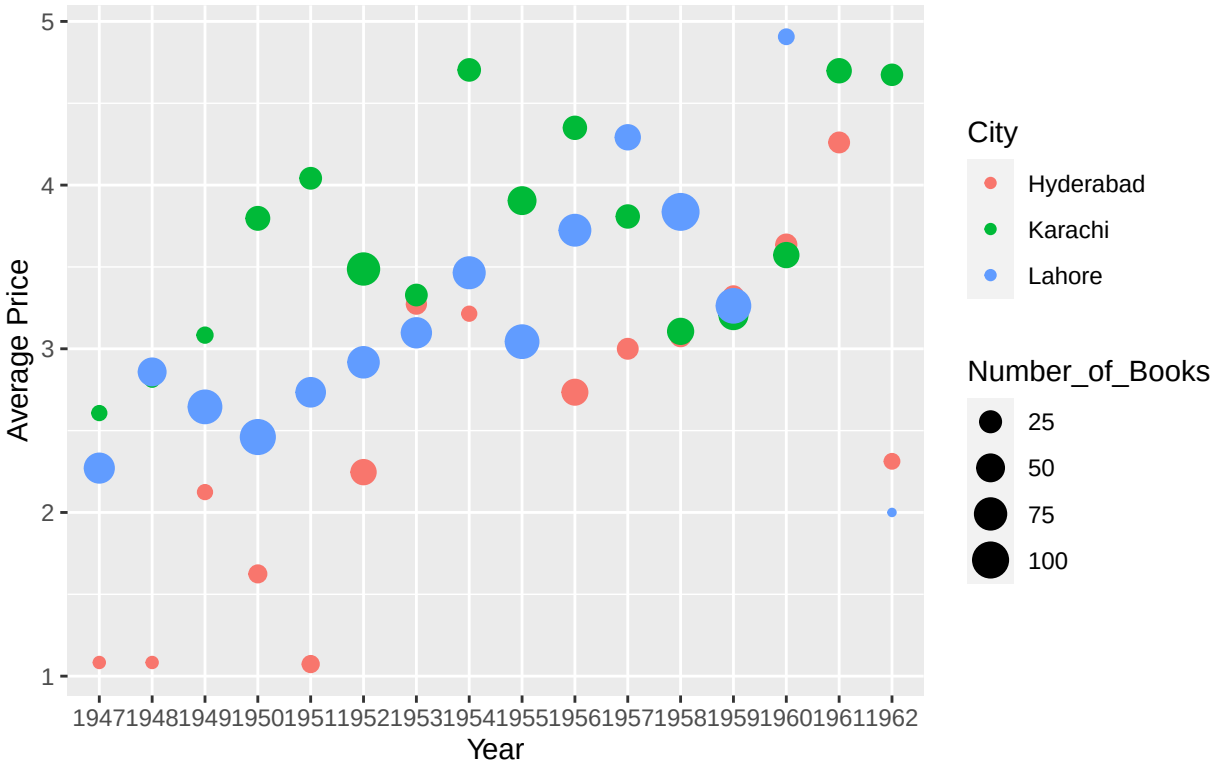
Karachi in the 1950s: publishing industry, chapbook business

Having argued that the production and circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's novels were part and parcel of the social (re-)production process – the (re-)production of social relations and working classes – my argument shifts towards the material conditions in 1950s Karachi. Society could be (re-)produced only if material conditions allowed products to be produced, their value to be realized in the market, and social relations and categories to be objectified. Material conditions could be arranged in a way for capital circulation and accumulation only if society is constructed in the interests of capital.

The major dataset that I am leveraging in this part includes approximately 1,880 books related to literature in general (including collections of poems, fictions, dramas, etc.) in various West Pakistani languages and English, which had been published in West Pakistan between 1947 and 1961 (Pakistan_Bibliographical_Working_Group 1972).[4] I collected the information on price, title, publisher, author, page, language, category and others of these 1,880 books from *The National Bibliography of Pakistan, 1947-1961*. Figure 2. visualizes the average price and page of literary books published in the most productive cities, Karachi, Lahore, and Hyderabad throughout this period.

[4]The entries of literary books are found in the third fascicule of *The National Bibliography of Pakistan, 1947-1961* under categories like 'Punjabi poetry', 'Urdu literature', etc.

Figure 2. Average Price and Number of Books Published in Hyderabad, Karachi, and Lahore



Source: National Bibliography of Pakistan, 1947–1961

We can see that in terms of total output, Karachi was not the most productive until 1960, but the average price of books in Karachi remained the highest for most of the 1950s and continued after 1960, which is way above one Rupee. I chose one Rupee as the baseline comparison because the prices of Ibn-e-Safi's novels during the 1950s were set at around one Rupee (personal communication with Muhammad Hanif, April 14, 2022).[5] Considering the fact that thousands of refugees flooded into Karachi, who could not even afford basic housing or necessities, we can infer that at least the books being published by major publishers and recorded in the national bibliography were luxuries for most people in Karachi.

One report from the National Book Center of Pakistan in 1967 says that due to the low literacy rate and poor economy, the publishing industry was small. Therefore, publishers had to keep the profit margin of individual unit sales high to make any profit. The report gives a detailed breakdown of the individual unit price, revealing that the published price was usually three times of the production cost, and if the publisher was also the retailer then the publisher could recoup almost 50 per cent of the published price (Ali 1967, 22–23). Therefore, many publishers and booksellers rushed into the textbook publishing industry, which at least had relatively secure demand from schools. Statistically, roughly 80 per cent of the publishers and booksellers that had existed before 1960 were involved in the textbook business (Buk_tred_Da'irektari 1988). Textbook publication, as a part of nation-building project, could be seen as a form of state interference into market competitions within the

[5]Muhammad Hanif informed me that the cost of the first novel was 9 Annas, and then the cost gradually increased to one Rupee for a 125-page novel and one and half Rupees for a 170-page novel. I confirmed this information with the prices given on various prefaces and advertisements of Ibn-e-Safi's novels.

publishing industry. Therefore, my main point here is to suggest that in terms of price, Ibn-e-Safi, as a publisher himself, did not face much competition from other major publishers and booksellers. In fact, booksellers that had ordered Ibn-e-Safi's novels often could make more profits by setting the prices higher than their original prices (Muhammad Hanif, email to author, April 15, 2022).

Building upon the first two parts of the essay, we can infer that two variables might have influenced how well a book was sold in Karachi from the late 1940s to the early 1960s; one is Urdu and the other is fiction. Therefore, now I turn to regression analysis to test the effect of Urdu and fiction on the publication price. First, publications written in Urdu language should have lower prices because the Pakistani government systematically promoted Urdu as the national language for political purposes as well as economic efficiency. Thus, *I hypothesize that Urdu language is associated with lower price compared to publications in other languages* ($H1$). Second, fictions should also have lower prices because the cultural industries, like films and publications, capitalized on the aspect of "sensational," and the popularization of fictions was part of it, as I argued earlier. Thus, *I hypothesize that fiction is associated with lower prices compared to publications in other genres* ($H2$).

The dependent variable is *unit price*, measured in Rupee. The two independent variables of interest are *Urdu language* and *fiction*. Urdu language is a dummy variable coded as **1** if the book is written in Urdu and **0** if it is not. Similarly, fiction is a dummy variable coded as **1** if a book is a fiction and **0** if it is not. Furthermore, to reduce the influence of confounding variables, I control for *page* and *year*. *Page* is a continuous variable ranging from 32 to 762. *Year* is a fixed effect to account for time trend. Table 1. provides the summary statistics of the variable included in the model. We can see that the majority of books published in Karachi from 1946 to 1962 were Urdu books and fictions.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std.Dev	Min	Max
Price	463	3.966	2.363	0.4	15
Page	463	255.568	135.08	32	762
Year	463	1955.577	3.85	1946	1962
Urdu	452	0.152	0.152	0	1
Fiction	310	0.67	0.471	0	1

Table 2. reports the results from the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model. The coefficient of *Urdu language* is -1.254 and is statistically significant, which suggests that books written in Urdu are 1.254 Rupees cheaper than books written in other languages, after holding everything else constant. This effect is also substantially significant given that the average price of the books in the sample is 3.966 Rupees. This, $H1$ is supported. The coefficient of *fiction* is -0.447 and is statistically significant, which suggests that fictions are 0.447 Rupees cheaper than books in other genres, after holding everything else constant. This, $H2$ is supported.Though I do not intend to make any causal argument given the limitation of the dataset and research design, the findings suggest that overall Urdu books and fictions tend

Table 2: Regression Table

	(1)
Page	0.014 ***
	(0.001)
Urdu	-1.254 *
	(0.526)
Fiction	-0.447 **
	(0.160)
N	463
R2	0.590

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.

to be more affordable. Thus, the statistical test substantiates the analyses in the first two parts.

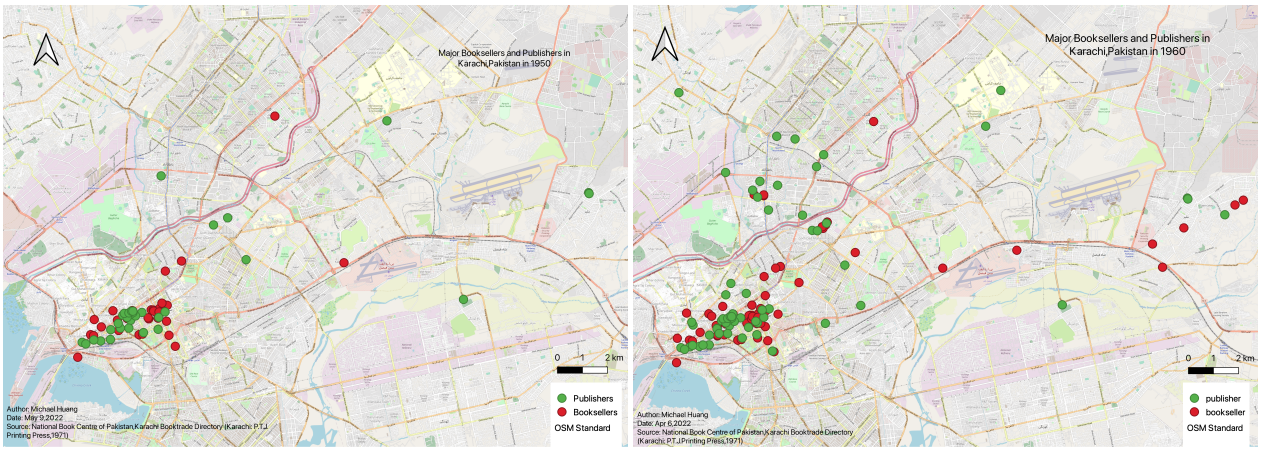
The larger process of capital circulation and accumulation in the entire printing and publishing industries of Karachi during the 1950s is also visible statistically. For instance, let's compare the situation of the entire printing, publishing, and allied industries in Karachi in 1955 with the situation in 1957. The growths of total value (from Rs. 20,282,000 to Rs. 30,127,000) and value added (from Rs. 10,667,000 to Rs. 16,057,000) from 1955 to 1957 were astonishing, approximately 50 per cent for both. However, if we calculate the growth of the daily wage for production workers from 1955 to 1957, it is only 3 per cent, whereas the growth of the daily wage for non-production workers (mainly constituted of executives, professionals, and clerks) is 40 per cent (Central_Statistical_Office 1960a) (Central_Statistical_Office 1960b).[6] Obviously, capital started to be accumulated among certain groups of people, social power started to be concentrated, and class relations started to be crystallized.

In the printing and publishing industries of Karachi in the 1950s, the concentration of capital also is reflected geographically. I found and manually input the geographical coordinates of over 150 major booksellers and publishers in Karachi, that had existed between 1950 and 1960[7]. Comparing these two maps, we can see that booksellers and publishers became more and more concentrated within the city center, where more and more infrastructures, shops, public facilities, schools, cinemas and others started to be established. As Harvey points out,

[6] In 1955, the no. of daily production workers is 2,790 and the total amount of wages paid is Rs. 3,692,000. The no. of daily non-production workers is 438 and the total wages paid is Rs. 1,107,000. In 1957, the no. of daily production workers is 3,231 and the total wages paid is Rs. 4,421,000. The number of non-production workers is 483 and the total wages paid is Rs. 1,658,000.

[7] I gathered the addresses from *Karachi Booktrade Directory* (National_Book_Center_of_Pakistan 1971) and converted them into geographical coordinates for mapping.

the urban "built environment", conceptually as a "complex composite commodity," primarily serves for financial rather than use-value reasons, which means different components of it should engage in the process of production, exchange, and consumption constantly (Harvey 1978, 115–16). Thus, the geographically concentrated booksellers and publishers were bits and pieces of the *built-environment-in-the-making*. And the appreciation of the value of the built environment depends upon the constant inflow of capital and labour. As a matter of fact, from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, the influx of migrants from India to Karachi caused the total population of Karachi to increase by almost 150%, according to the *Census of Pakistan, 1951* (Government_of_Pakistan 1951, 33).



However, statistics and information generated by the state must be taken with a grain of salt. A lot of book trades were undertaken in "black" markets, including Ibn-e-Safi's, during the 1950s. Therefore, I would argue that the chapbook market, or the "bazaar literature" business, was a place where a significant number of books were produced, circulated, and their values were realized, not necessarily in a capitalistic fashion. A UNESCO report states: " 'bazaar literature' along with Koranic publications were not well included in official statistics. And 'bazaar literature' serves not only as an excellent mass distribution network but also as a mine of reading materials deriving from the most and ancient cultural traditions" (UNESCO 1966). The popularity of Ibn-e-Safi's novels might have depended upon the consumer base, the distributing network, and even the counterfeit impulse of the chapbook industry.

There is an excellent study on the chapbook business in Pakistan by William L. Hanaway and Mumtaz Nasir, who conducted the fieldwork for the book during 1989-90 (Hanaway and Nasir 1996, 339–615) (Hanaway 1995, 127–43). Although there is an almost 30-year gap between the time period that this paper focuses on and the time when they did their research, it is still reasonable to believe that some of the main characteristics and structures of the chapbook industry in the 1980s and 90s remained unchanged since the 1950s. For example, when they conducted the research, most chapbooks were still scribed by professional copyists (Hanaway 1995, 131).

The landscape of the entire chapbook industry was demarcated along the lines of ethnolinguistic divisions. Most Pashto chapbooks were published in Peshawar, Lahore produced most of Punjabi chapbooks, and most of the Urdu ones came out of Karachi, which accounted

for approximately 98 per cent of all chapbooks collected by Hanaway and Nasir (Hanaway and Nasir 1996, 386). Usually chapbook publishers, booksellers, printers, binders, copyists, artists, and designers were clustered in one place in a city, which was the case for Peshawar and Lahore. There was just a few minutes' walk between each one. Therefore, there were intimate and intricate relationships between people, and the basis of these relationships were mutual trust and honor. Since people were so close and the price for everything was clear and settled for almost everyone involved in this business, there were no competitive quotations or biding (Hanaway and Nasir 1996, 391). As for the relations between the publisher and the author and between the publisher and the readers, Hanaway and Nasir state that the entire production process was in the hands of the publisher. The author often approached the publisher individually who decided whether to publish a work or not. Once having accepted the manuscript, the publisher had to make all sorts of decisions regarding the raw materials, aesthetic design, price, advertisements, etc.

Therefore, the type of juridical subjectivity, the foundation of a properly functioning capitalistic market, was less pronounced in the chapbook publishing business. Instead, individual relationships still played a huge role in the chapbook business and the publisher was given total control over the production. We can see traces of these characteristics in Ibn-e-Safi as well. For example, Ibn-e-Safi had good relationships with various cover page designers that had worked with him, like Wilayat Ahmed (Ashraf, n.d.). As both the author and the publisher, Ibn-e-Safi was able to make his own decisions in terms of the content and the form of his books while discerning the changing demands of his readers. Another point about the chapbook industry that might be relevant here is its lack of observance of copyright. Given the fact that Ibn-e-Safi's books were so popular, it is reasonable to see that many of his books were copied without paying royalties to the author and circulated in the chapbook market (Mansoor 2007). This counterfeit impulse of the chapbook market contributed to the popularization of Ibn-e-Safi's books as well.

Conclusion: the expanding world of espionage and beyond

As this paper suggests, the popularization of Ibn-e-Safi's novels was deeply associated with a set of particular social relations, ideologies, and material conditions that had been put into place by the circulation and accumulation capital in North India and then in Karachi, Pakistan. Therefore, I would suggest researchers of South Asian book history to situate the reading, making, and circulating of books and publications in their particular social, political, and economic environments, which might give them a new perspective and open up a set of new questions that were not clear by close reading alone.

Finally, I want to suggest some directions for future research on Ibn-e-Safi. After the 1950s, Ibn-e-Safi kept writing and publishing, and he opened another branch of his Asrar Publications in Lahore. Later, he also dabbled in the movie industry. Until today, his novels have been translated into Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, and English, and published digitally in word and audio, which make them much more accessible to a global audience. As the geographic and linguistic scopes of his popularity expand, the expansionary logic (Harvey 2010, 62) embedded in Marx's dialectical method becomes more appreciable as it reveals the underlying

dynamism of capital – a never-ending process – that has driven not just the popularization of Ibn-e-Safi's novels but also other popular commodities. As the paper argues, the connections between the (re-)production of social relations, the (re-)production of working classes, and the material conditions available for (re-)production are not causal but relational; all of them constitute the organic totality of the capitalistic mode of production. Metaphorically, like an organism that is intrinsically adaptable to its environment, capital adapts itself to the specific situations of post-Independence Pakistan; for example, the production and circulation of Ibn-e-Safi's novels also relied heavily on the "underground" undertakings in the chapbook market. Thus, some bigger and more provocative questions should be asked: What does the trans-temporal, trans-lingual, trans-media, and trans-national popularity of Ibn-e-Safi's novels inform us of our collective aesthetics? To what extent does capital play into the formation of our collective aesthetics? To what extent does the popularization of Ibn-e-Safi's books and crime fiction across languages and media tell us more about capital in its neoliberal form? And what about other major parts of this process, like the rise of nation-states globally, the digitization of everything, and more?

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