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# Review of 'Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State' by Cara Cilano

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Of particularly impressive quality are the maps that show historical information of smaller regions in greater detail.

Christian Jahoda on *A Historical Atlas of Tibet*.

Romanization” which is observed in this volume for rendering Tibetan words and place-names.

Unfortunately the publisher’s proofreading is responsible for a number of flaws throughout the text sections of the book, such as wrong transliterations of Tibetan names (for example, *gRong* for *rong*, valley, p. 8), (partly recurring) inaccurate bibliographical entries (including omission of German umlauts), or inconsistencies with regard to historical information (for example, in the case of the Great Translator Rinchen Zangpo, 958–1055) or spelling of names (Sibkyi Pass but Sibkye Village, p. 74–5). These deficiencies should be remedied in a second edition of this work. In addition, a glossary of words and names in Tibetan, Mongolian, Chinese, and other languages would increase the usability of this atlas for advanced students and scholars from one of the related area studies.

It is to be hoped that in the future this pioneering work will inspire others, ideally a larger team composed of scholars from various disciplines (including archaeology, Chinese studies, geography, history, linguistics, Mongolian studies, etc.) to start a mapping project of historical Tibet and its border regions (including Ladakh, Zaskar, and Kinnaur in northwestern India as well as Mustang and other areas of Nepal) on a bigger collaborative scale.

The constantly growing amount of historical source materials and digital data available, on the one hand, and demand, on the other, would certainly make this a legitimate enterprise.

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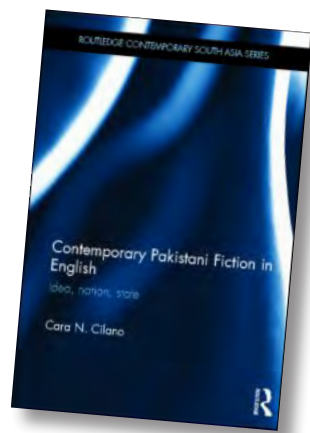
### ***Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State.***

**By Cara Cilano.** London: Routledge, 2013. 263 pages. ISBN 9780415682763.

### **Reviewed by Dinesh Kafli**

Cara Cilano’s *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English* delineates Pakistan’s arduous evolution from an idea to a turbulent state through a critical analysis of the Anglophone fiction coming out of the country from Partition to the present. Focusing on the concepts of idea, nation, and state, she explores the possibilities of multiple alternative constructions of the nation through an individual sense of belonging rather than dwelling upon the perceived failure of the idea of Pakistan. By her own account, her attempt is to explore “how literary texts imaginatively probe the past, convey the present and project a future in terms that facilitate a sense of collective belonging” (p. 1). This is a remarkable endeavor that celebrates the popular construction of many ‘Pakistans’ by accommodating multiple national identities, thereby subverting the dominant narrative of the nation.

The book is divided into four parts, comprising seven chapters. In the first part, titled “Idea to Nation,” Cilano deals with fictional texts representing the 1947 partition of India and the 1971 partition of Pakistan. Questioning the popular



notion of Pakistan as a harmonious nation, she asserts that Pakistani national unity is “a condition the nation hasn’t enjoyed or achieved at any point in its history” (p. 16). To this end, she takes up the study of six partition-related novels, including Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, Shah Nawaz’s *The Heart Divided*, and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*, each of which explore different thematic standpoints, such as regional and local practices, bureaucratic structures, gender, memory, and syncretism, among others, with no singular theoretical stance. These themes appear at various points throughout the book as she ruminates upon the state of the Pakistani nation as represented by its Anglophone literature. In her discussion of the novels based on the events of 1971, Cilano uses the figure of a child to reflect on questions of belonging and identity assertion in Pakistan in the wake of East Pakistan’s secession and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh, which has remained what Cilano calls a ‘national amnesia’ for Pakistan. In her reading of Ghazala Hameed’s *Bengal Raag*, she considers the emotional involvement of adolescent twin sisters, the daughters of a civil servant, as they grow up from childhood to adolescence during the turbulent time in the years leading up to the 1971 war, as symbolic of unbiased and innocent view of history. Critiquing the twins’ father’s attempt to protect them from having

their independent perspective in the name of ‘safety,’ Cilano argues that “the twins’ perspective endows the 1971 war with emotional consequences that prioritize the ‘safety’ of the west, as well as a deep-seated belief in differences anchored in racial essentialism” (p. 67). Thus, through her critique of the shielding of the children’s innocent perspective on historical events, Cilano reiterates how the construction of narrative in Pakistan is far from being impartial.

In the second part, titled “Islamic Nation? Islamic State?,” Cilano discusses the role of Islamic discourse that formed the basis of the idea of the two-nation theory, which was premised upon the argument that India’s Muslims needed a separate homeland. In her reading of Tariq Ali’s collection of novels, known as ‘Islam Quintet’ (p. 89), she argues that “Ali’s five volumes all evidence a self-consciousness over representation and then use this self-consciousness to examine the politics of syncretistic cultures” (p. 90). In her reading of contemporary novels by Uzma Aslam Khan, Mohammad Hanif, and others that deal with the Islamization of Pakistan under General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, she argues that these novels “champion the idea of dissent in an effort to create a space not only to critique Zia’s Islamization program and its aftermath but also to re-assemble an affectively compelling sense of belonging to the nation” (p. 105).

In the third part, titled “Multicultural Nation, Privileged State,” Cilano uses the concepts of nostalgia, mobility, and corruption as the backdrop of her discussion of novels representing the city of Karachi and those representing the zamindari system. Her analysis of the Karachi novels, such as Kamila Shamsie’s *Kartography* and Bina Shah’s *The 786 Cybercafe*, dwells on the character of the city of Karachi as alienating, with its residents torn between belonging and dislocation. The model cosmopolitan capital city of the newly-formed country, Karachi was the nerve centre of the influx of Indian Muslim migrants, later identified as Muhajirs. The city symbolized hope and the realization of the idea of Pakistan, the perceived homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent, attracting enormous numbers of incoming Muhajirs who enjoyed unprecedented welcome in the immediate aftermath of the 1947 Partition but faced loathing from the natives and neglect from the government afterwards. In her discussion of novels representing the zamindari class, Cilano focuses on the continuing sense of belonging and attachment to the nation by the zamindari class on the basis of autochthonic claims. She critiques the zamindari system, where wealth and power consolidates; hence through the hierarchy it engenders, the zamindari system ultimately fails.

In the final part, titled “Failed State, Nation in Crisis,” Cilano focuses on the transformation of migrant

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**Dinesh Kafle on *Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State*.**

identities in the post-9/11 era when the figure of the migrant became the subject of suspicion even as the 'War on Terror' caused unprecedented migration from the third world to the first. She dwells upon migrant novels such as Moshin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*, and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, which represent characters that move beyond the borders of the nation, thereby transcending the borders of national identities. She argues that such representations "assert revised definitions of the nation or attempt to reach beyond that concept's definitional parameters" (p. 11).

Cilano quite successfully establishes the point that a singular 'idea' of Pakistan undermines the demographic and topographic diversities of the country, and thus she reconsiders multifarious 'ideas' of Pakistan that take into account the multiple subjectivities expressed through differences in class, community, gender, language, ethnicity, and many other identity markers. Even as she uses the issues of the 'idea, nation, and state' as the common thread of her analyses, the book as a whole lacks a single thesis, which makes it complex and loosely structured. Her chapters end abruptly without giving a justified closure to her arguments, just as the book ends without a conclusion. A book that celebrates multiple subjectivities does not necessarily

need to be without a consolidated thesis. Though not a chronological literary history, Cilano's study covers a significant portion of contemporary English-language fiction from Pakistan. Detailed and wide in scope, this book satisfies the long-felt need for a comprehensive book-length critical analysis of contemporary Pakistani fiction in English. Cilano deals more or less with the entire history of Pakistan, from emergence to the present, so the title of the book would have looked equally perfect without the term 'contemporary'. This book is valuable for scholars interested in South Asian literature and indispensable for those trying to understand Pakistan through its literature.

*Dinesh Kafle is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has published two books in translation, and his reviews have appeared in Contemporary South Asia, Indian Literature and The Kathmandu Post, among others.*

***The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal's Maoist Revolution.***

**By Aditya Adhikari.** London, New York: Verso, 2014. 304 pages. ISBN 9781781685648.

**Reviewed by Matjaz Pinter**

Nepal's turbulent political history has been widely discussed from many ideological angles. It has become a popular topic not only in Nepal, but also in other parts of the world. There is a collection of professional foreign and domestically published works from various fields that uptake a multitude of approaches, making it difficult to determine which offers the most comprehensive analysis on the topic. Aditya Adhikari, a young journalist based in Kathmandu, employs a very wide yet clear focus, with coherent intentions and research questions that transport the reader directly into the dynamics of a revolutionary movement. His argument penetrates the history and culture of the 'People's War,' and presents the reader with the insiders' viewpoint of the peasants, guerrilla fighters, and activists. It also succeeds in understanding the role of the movement in the state formation process, with a detailed insight into the political process that was activated by the movement. *The Bullet and the Ballot Box* traces the developments of the complex communist history in Nepal, from small organizations