

## NATION, PROVINCE AND REGION

### *Pakistan Workshop 2013, Rookhow, Cumbria, 10-12 May 2013*

This year's Pakistan Workshop, organized by Stephen M. Lyon and assisted by Fiaz Ahmed and Muhammad Aurang Zeb Mughal, focused on the theme of 'nation, province and region'. Scholars and postgraduate students at the workshop discussed the current political situation, contested ethnic and religious identities, and Pakistani diaspora. Although most of the papers discussed anthropological perspectives, some were also inter-disciplinary. In the last few years, issues relating to provincial autonomy and the creation of new provinces have emerged as major points of debate in Pakistan in addition to security and economic concerns. The workshop theme was chosen at a time when, after renaming the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) to Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, some groups were demanding a separate Hazara province for the Hindko speaking population. Similarly, some political parties also raised their voice to divide the Punjab into two or more smaller provinces on either ethnic or administrative grounds.

With its four provinces, Pakistan also includes some other territories, like the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA), which have a different status in the constitution. FATA is a key area in the 'war on terrorism' due to its geopolitical significance. As Alia Qaim discussed in her paper, improving economic conditions is one of the major solutions for dealing with the insecurities and political turmoil in the tribal areas. Her paper also presented the voices of local people and the public administration regarding the poor economic situation and the issues faced by the government and non-government agencies working to improve this state of affairs, due to a lack of concrete financial management policy for these areas. On the other hand, the Federally Administrative Northern Areas (FANA) is a part of the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan; therefore, it had not been formally integrated into the Pakistani state and did not participate in constitutional affairs. The government of Pakistan gave it the status of a *de facto* province and renamed it Gilgit-Baltistan through the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order in 2009, granting self-rule to the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. In his paper, Martin Sökefeld presented public and political voices on the order. He argued that although the region is in Pakistani control, and the people of Gilgit-Baltistan are happy with the order and consider it as a step forward to be recognized as a constitutional part of Pakistan, the disputed status of the region raises some questions about its future as a province. While the recent issues regarding Pakistan's regional identities and administration have a particular background, Muhammad Aurang Zeb Mughal in his paper, presented an historical analysis of state formation in Pakistan since prehistoric times, arguing that the regional identities in the territory now called Pakistan have been fluid, given its cultural diversity. He highlighted that while there are ethnic factors behind the movement for a separate province based on Saraiki identity in Punjab, the poor economic conditions in south Punjab and party politics at a national level are

the major reasons behind the movement for a new province. These issues regarding provincial autonomy raise some questions – for example, whether the change in geographic boundaries and administrative set-up can have a major impact on policies to address poverty, human rights, women’s empowerment, health, and education. Ayaz Qureshi’s paper raised some of these questions by exploring the impact of the devolution of powers to the provinces (under the 18th constitutional amendment) on the country’s response to the HIV epidemic, and more specifically its implications for sexual minorities and other vulnerable groups in the smaller provinces. As the devolution plan unfolded in the latter part of 2010, international donors adopted a policy of ‘wait and see’ whilst the provincial and federal stakeholders of HIV policy busied themselves in a power struggle over limited resources and their roles post-devolution. The consequences for groups at the ideological and geographical margins of the nation-state seem adverse.

The Pakistani diaspora is one of the largest in the world; through it the country extends its boundaries beyond its geographic borders. The workshop also offered insights into this aspect of the Pakistani state, identity, and politics. French political scientist and expert on Pakistani politics and Islam, Mariam Abou Zahab, explained how Afghani and Pakistani Pukhtun diaspora share a sense of unified community in the Persian Gulf countries. She discussed not only their construction of ‘others’ as a means to assert their ethnic identity through the practice of Pukhtun traditions, but also their efforts to relate to a Muslim identity and attain higher status by mingling with Arabs. Similarly, Fiaz Ahmed discussed the struggle of British Muslims for appropriate representation and recognition in public life through participation in British politics. He presented an historical perspective on the electoral process focusing on Pakistani diaspora in Manchester. Another paper, presented by Marzia Balzani, analyzed the diasporic context of a piety movement, Lajna Ima’illah, in London that originated in the 1920s in India for the education, professionalization, religious authority, and identity of Ahmadi women. Bilal Gilani highlighted another dimension of Pakistani diaspora in his study of the relatives of diaspora living in Pakistan. While explaining social remittances, he concluded that there has been less influence of diaspora on relatives in Pakistan in relation to electoral politics, suggesting that local cultural and political dynamics play a major role in shaping electoral behaviour in the country.

Since the workshop always has some flexibility regarding topics for discussion, some papers at the workshop offered a wider view of the Pakistani nation, state, and its cultural dynamics. Pippa Virdee discussed the practice of veiling in Pakistan, particularly in the Punjab, in an historical context. Her paper highlighted that social and economic class dynamics and rural-urban differences exist in the practice of veiling. Sana Haroon’s paper presented a formulation of the past through the tradition of *shajra* (lineage) in the Silsilat Zahab, a branch of the Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiya Sufi order, by use of the internet.

Some papers offered a critique and an engaging discussion on methods for conducting research on Pakistan and invoked some innovative perspectives in the domains of ethnography, computational anthropology, network analysis, genealogies, and history. Pnina

Werbner critically evaluated dialogical and polyphonic modes of representation between ethnography and hagiography. Stephen M. Lyon, in his paper, used records of marital connections between key figures in Pakistan's traditionally mainstream political parties, to chart the flow of ideas, resources, and people within Pakistani political networks. He argued that such marital maps enable one to predict allegiances accurately and contribute to a transparent assessment of political processes, given the importance of kinship relations and marriage strategies in the country.

Scholars and postgraduate students also contributed to the discussions on these topics. At the end of the workshop, we proposed bureaucracy and networks as a theme for next year.

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