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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, Zanskar, 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.


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


Reviewed by Dinesh Kafi

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 final part, titled “Failed State,
Nation in Crisis,” Cilano focuses
on the transformation of migrant
migrants 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 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,
delves 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
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of the 1947 Partition but faced
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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.

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


**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