

## **The Dynamics of Change in the Pakistan-Afghanistan Region: Politics, (Dis)integration and Reformation in the Borderland**

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Conference

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Location:

Pakistan

Subject Fields:

Cultural History / Studies, South Asian History / Studies, Political Science, Political History / Studies

Defined by diverse spatial realities, the Pakistan-Afghanistan region has been subject to varied invasions, complex contestations and intense power plays by regional and international stakeholders. The physical interference of both local and major powers in the geographical landscape of the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands has, over the centuries, made conflict a permanent feature of the region. Such intervention entailed 'new' forms of political spatiality to the region by (re-) defining and (re-) demarcating boundaries and in the process opening it to the concept of 'modern statehood' based on territoriality, sovereignty and population. The colonial practice of graded border management, however, complicated the process of boundary definition and frontier management for the states of the region. It further problematized the process of extension of centralized control over the 'peripheral border spaces', denying these areas many benefits of development, earning them the titles of the 'unruly/wild frontiers,' and 'ungoverned spaces.' Dynamics in the borderland have assumed a more nuanced face with the emergence of new militant ideological movements. These religio-political movements have challenged peace and security in the border region with new forms of extremist and violent radicalism. However, after a lengthy counter insurgency operation on the Pakistani side, mixed with social turmoil and militancy influences, the old structures and institutions stand substantially weakened. State introduced reform processes, such as the proposed merger of FATA with the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa pose the next big challenge for the region - constitutional, legal and political integration with the larger polity of Pakistan. A new paradigm of power sharing and transformed socio-political structures must now contend with challenges that emerge in the post conflict scenario. With the notion of 'Reconciliation' reverberating across the border in Afghanistan, it is important to assess what sort of dynamics are expected to take hold in the near future, especially as the fragility of the state building process in Kabul shows the tenuous nature of governance in Afghanistan. However, rather than being helpless victims of contentious political games in the region, the inhabitants of the Pakistan-Afghanistan region have dynamically influenced the regional/global through the local. Traditionally, the borderland has maintained a semblance of structured order and organized living through indigenous and localized governance institutions. Informal systems have organized lives in the borderland for both Pakhtun and non-Pakhtun ethnicities alike. Conflict and the non-state actors in the borderlands have transformed the tribal belt socially and politically. This dynamism of the socio-cultural setup in the region is an often-neglected subject for academic research. The unwritten code of conduct, Pakhtunwali, has organized social life for the Pakhtun tribes in the border areas for centuries and Jirgah (council) as an informal community

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body for dispute resolution and has been instrumental in dispensing justice related functions. Such informal institutions of governance, however, constantly interact with and play upon the formal state institutions and its authorities. The dynamic interplay of formal and informal institutions is paradoxically promoting and at times impeding with achievements of state building processes in the region. However with the Pakistani state now moving towards merging the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, the mainstreaming of FATA and integrating it in the state becomes the most challenging task. This spatial reality in the borderlands is further complicated by a strong gender divide both in the private spaces of homes and family relationships, but also the public spaces, which are considered to be too 'public' and 'privileged' for women. Since the public spaces by virtue of being 'male dominated' reinforce male control over politics, religion and economy, issues of dominance and gender divide are further aggravated. But apart from these public spaces, which are more readily open to and incorporate predominantly male voices, there are other channels such as social media or poetry through which opinions, grievances and political dissent are being expressed. In order to gain a more holistic view of the dynamics of change in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region, the Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar and the Hanns Seidel Foundation, Pakistan Office have been jointly organizing a series of international conferences since 2011. The Department and the HSF invite proposals for the 8th International Conference to be held in Bara Gali on 4 and 5th September 2019. The 2019 Annual Conference explores the following major questions:

- Given the hitherto marginality of the local voices and traditions, what are could ways and sources of knowledge that can help to further the common understanding of the region?
- What makes the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland a socio-politically complex borderland?
- In what ways does the recent scholarship on borderlands contribute to problematizing as well as understanding the various dynamics of the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland?
- How is the state building process unfolding in the region and what are the political and economic challenges to state building in both Pakistan and Afghanistan?
- How do the key global challenges of our time affect the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland and vice versa?
- In what manner are gender relations being transformed in the wake of socio-cultural and political transformations in the region?
- How are local economies changing under neo-liberal influences and conflict (and post conflict) dynamics?
- How are alternative religious discourses challenging the dominant discourses in the Pakistan Afghanistan region?
- What modes of societal resistance are emerging against extremist voices/actions?

A further division of the areas of interest is following:

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- War, Genre, and Critique
- Religion, Difference, and Violence
- Law, Human Rights and Gender Rights
- Democratic Governance, Public Space, and Resistance
- Youth and Radicalization
- Economic Transformation and Development
- Trade & Economic Integration
- Globalization, Conflict and Local Economies
- Migration, Diaspora, Refugees, and Internally Displaced Persons
- Borders and Transnational Mobility
- Periphery within a Periphery? Non-Pakhtun Ethnicities on the Border
- Politics of Identities
- Art, Sports, and Politics of Aesthetics
- Sub-national Governments and Governance
- Governance Reforms in FATA: Mainstreaming and Challenges of Merger with KP
- Changing Electoral/Political trends
- Theoretical Engagement of the Borderland
- Border Management/ Border Control
- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – Economic Dividends/Politics of CPEC
- Social Networking and Political Mobilization: Online & Offline
- Power Contestations, State Institutions and Spaces of Governance
- Reconciliation and Changing Geo-Politics of Afghanistan and its Impact on the Region
- Development Narratives: Donor Fatigue and the Question of Sustainability
- Economic, Political and Social Consequences of US Withdrawal from the Region

We request abstracts of no more than 500 words from academicians and practitioners on either of the

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topics listed above, along with a short biography, to be submitted to the conference organizing committee by May 15th, 2019. Abstracts should include a title, research question, information about potential methodological and theoretical frameworks, and a summary of the main argument. After being reviewed by the conference organizing committee, the selected paper presenters will be contacted by May 25th, 2019. The final date for the submission of complete papers is August 31st, 2019.

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