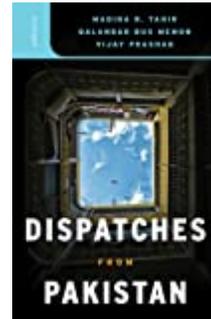




Madiha R. Tahir, Qalandar Bux Memon, Vijay Prashad, eds. *Dispatches from Pakistan*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. xv + 288 pp. \$69.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8166-9223-1; \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8166-9224-8.



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Critical Voices for Pakistan's Futures

As a kind of straddling act across boundaries—geographic, linguistic, and narrative, *Dispatches from Pakistan* offers in twenty contributions an unapologetic collection of liberal, left, radical, even *âinquilabiâ* (revolutionary) critiques and analyses of inequality, injustice, and the abuse of power (p. xiv). Pakistani academics at home and abroad, journalists, activists, and artists respond to ongoing disparities too often perpetuated by state-builders and the powerful yet to fully recognize principles of constitutional representation, the rule of law, and democracy. While progressive voices from emerging civil societies have found publishers in other South Asian countries, fewer such forums have existed for those exploring issues of Pakistani state power and the subaltern politics and lives of farm tenants, industrial workers, feminists, and social activists. This volume's trans-national critical relevance and sensibility is signaled by the participation of co-editor Vijay Prashad (Trinity College, Connecticut), by an original 2012 publication in New Delhi by Left Word Books, and by the current 2014 edition by the University of Minnesota Press.

The volume addresses issues derived from the fact that since independence in 1947 fundamental questions remain unresolved about the meaning of Pakistan, the role and structure of the state, the obligations and identities of citizens, and the nature of civil, religious, and human rights. Verses in Urdu then in translation, by Habib Jalib (*âWhat Does Pakistan Mean?: Pakistan ka Matlab Kya?â*) and Fehmida Riyaz (*âWill You Not See the Full Moonm: Kya Tum Poora Chand Na Dekhogeâ*) begin and close the volume. It is an accessible collection of ten- to fifteen-page essays on thematic and regional issues of political economy, the institutions of state power, women's rights, labor activism, cultural identity and resilience, and artistic representations of a society and culture in transition and conflict. The collection is recommended as a reminder of the complexity of the issues and communities involved and of the reality of day-to-day lives and struggles. It records the enduring, positive attitudes and personalities of those who remain unwilling to accept perceived political, economic, gender, and social hierarchies and inequities.

In their introduction, *Pakistan's Futures*, the editors begin with verse by Ahmad Faraz, in Urdu, then translation, including a first line, *Main ahbi Zinda Hun* (I am still alive). Though the volume details multiple narratives of contemporary violence, trauma, conflict, and natural disaster, the editors emphasize that daily headlines about international and national politics and elite personalities mask the reality that ordinary Pakistanis have continued to get on with their lives, despite often little support from their government or the international community. Indeed, for most, *Survival is a technique, living is an art, and Pakistanis have become masters at both* (p. xiii). In an attempt to account for the voices of the multitude, the editors and contributors take on the challenge of discussing contemporary Pakistan by acknowledging, but not being limited by, the world's received knowledge about Pakistan, including the country's apparent obsession with Islamism, its propensity for terror, and so on (p. xiv). Moving beyond the excessive force of certain accounts of Pakistan, the volume explores other narratives, including those of the laboring worker, the secular separatist, and the socialist intellectual (p. xiv). The editors note the challenge of the delicate and volatile problem of language and nuance as they strive to translate passion, humor, and local experience from multiple languages to the global vernacular, English (p. xiv).

The twenty sections of the volume, including the introduction, essays, and verse respond to ongoing regional and national dynamics concerning power, identity, belief, and the environment. The perspectives and analyses provide deep context for and fresh insight into enduring debates about the intentions and authority of the post-colonial state, the dominance of the Punjab, and the relations of regional and ethnic communities with the center. Essays address struggles involving Okara tenant farmers, Faisalabad textile mill workers (Qalandar Bux Memon,

Blood on the Path of Love), women's rights (Amina Jamal, *Feminism and Fundamentalism in Pakistan*), populist politics (Madiha R. Tahir, *All Be Your Mirror*), development, urbanization, the military, and entangled foreign policies.

Framing essays discuss structures of power (Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, *New Wine in Old Bottles*), *The Neoliberal Security State* (Saadia Toor), and *The Modern Mixed Political Economy of Pakistan* (Maliha Safri). Ayesha Siddiqi maps *The Generals' Labyrinth*, while Junaid Rana critiques *The Desperate U.S.-Pakistan Alliance*. Regional and provincial tensions and issues are deconstructed by Humeira Iqtidar (*Punjab in Play*), Mahvish Ahmad (*Balochistan Betrayed*), Hafeez Jamali (*A Tempest in My Harbor—Gwadar, Balochistan*), Sultan-i-Rome (*Swat in Transition*), Iqbal Khattak (*Inside Militancy in Waziristan*), and Shafqat Hussain (*The Nature of Conservation-Conflict and Articulation in Northern Pakistan*). Verse, imagery, and art are recognized as important critical and cultural responses in contributions by Zahra Malkani (*Several Dawns over the Indus—Three Maps*) and Hammad Nasar (*An Art of Extremes*).

The volume documents abuses of power, including the oppression of women, minorities, and of many on the ethnic, social, and political margins. But equally registered are continuing stories of committed individual agency and community mobilization to confront and perhaps slowly change local worlds. In guarded, pragmatic optimism, as the editors and contributors engage with the most pressing and divisive issues in contemporary Pakistan, they also often point to alternative visions and possibilities. For many, this includes to recover, at least partially, Pakistan's *inquilabi* undercurrents and its hopeful overtones (p. xv). This is a volume of progressive voices.

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