

“Dislocating Pakistan: Reconstituting People, Reconstituting Space” Conference-Workshop held at NC Central University (Durham) and NC State University (Raleigh) on April 11-12, 2014.

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AIPS granted \$3,500 for a conference-workshop on contemporary approaches to Pakistan Studies that North Carolina Central University (a Historically Black University & College) and North Carolina State University held jointly. The conference-workshop participants met at NCCU on April 11 and at NCSU on April 12. David Gilmartin (NCSU), Matthew Cook (NCCU) and Iqbal Sevea (UNC, CH) organized the conference-workshop. Attached are the event’s program and publicity materials.

In addition to research presentations and discussions, a particularly significant part of the program at NCCU was a keynote lecture by Alyssa Ayers (former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia and, now, Senior Policy Analyst at the Council on Foreign Relations). Ayers’ lecture addressed the importance and challenges of studying Pakistan in the United States. She gave her lecture to a 30-person audience of advanced students, university administrators and academics interested in Pakistan. The lecture stressed the importance and practicalities of academic and policy careers that relate to Pakistan Studies. Ayers discussed both the critical need and the funding structures for students who wish to study Pakistan. She also emphasized how popular perceptions of Pakistan (both in the U.S. and globally) make the country difficult to study and how these perceptions impact the study of its languages.

The workshop’s research presentations and discussions focused on ways to move Pakistan Studies beyond the nation-state as a frame for analysis while, simultaneously, stressing how that the idea of Pakistan idea “reconstituted” the ways that local, regional and diaspora spaces/people are conceptualized. Specific papers focused on changing patterns of migration, what it means to be a “refugee,” politics and perceptions about the natural environment, language and the reconfiguration of caste, film and popular cultural identity and nationalism/subversion. An estimated 25 people attended these paper presentations and their subsequent discussions.

After the research presentations and discussions, there was a final open-floor discussion about the conference-workshop. This discussion was wide-ranging but addressed the conference-workshop in relationship to the current state and future directions of Pakistan Studies. (Unfortunately, one participant [Sheetal Chhabria] could not participate due to a family illness.) The audience for this discussion was relatively small (about 20 people), but this made for good/focused discussions. While the conference-workshop did not produce any immediate plans for a publication, it did lead to discussions about potential follow-up activities, including possible conference panels and ways that the academic and policy communities could increase their conversations about Pakistan.