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Whose Pakistan? Competing Historiographical Traditions and the Case for a Social History Approach¹

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ABSTRACT

The question of what Pakistan was meant to be has divided historians since the creation of the state. This article surveys the principal historiographical traditions that have answered it and argues that all of them stop short at the same point. Three established schools are examined: a materialist school, associated with Hamza Alavi, Tariq Ali, and Sibte Hassan, which explains Pakistan through class interests; a religious-ideological school, running from Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi to Francis Robinson, which reads the state as the fulfilment of a long-nurtured Islamic aspiration; and an ambiguity school, dominant in the international academy through the work of Ayesha Jalal, Christophe Jaffrelot, Farzana Shaikh, and Faisal Devji, which holds that Pakistan was insufficiently imagined. A fourth and younger current, the print-and-public turn exemplified by Sandria Freitag, C. A. Bayly, and Venkat Dhulipala, relocates the question from the intentions of leaders to the arguments of publics, but halts at the frontier of 1947. The article contends that absence of consensus is not absence of imagination, and makes the case for a social history of the idea of Pakistan in the public arenas of the Punjab between 1947 and 1977, where contending publics gave the constitutional formula of an Islamic Republic its content.

Keywords: *Idea Of Pakistan; Historiography; Public Sphere; Public Arenas; Punjab; Social History; Muslim Nationalism; Islamic Republic*

Introduction

Pakistan came into being in August 1947, yet the question of what Pakistan was meant to be has never been settled. Two founding texts frame the difficulty. On 11 August 1947, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the All-India Muslim League and the first Governor-General of the new state, told the Constituent Assembly in Karachi that religion had nothing to do with the business of the state and that citizens were free to go to their temples and their mosques. Barely nineteen months later, in March 1949, the same Assembly passed the Objectives Resolution, which declared that sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Allah and that the state would exercise its authority as a sacred trust. Every history of Pakistan is, knowingly or not, an attempt to reconcile these two documents, and Stephen Cohen has observed that the Resolution came to define both the state and the idea of Pakistan.²

This essay maps the principal ways historians have answered that question and argues that all of them stop short at the same point. We identify three established traditions: a materialist

¹This article is extracted from Muhammad Shafi, "Debating the Idea of Pakistan in Public Arenas: A Case Study of the Punjab (1947–1977)" (PhD diss., Department of History, Institute of Global and Historical Studies, Government College University, Lahore), completed under the supervision of Hussain Ahmad Khan.

²Stephen Philip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

school that explains Pakistan through class interests; a religious-ideological school that treats it as the fulfilment of a long-nurtured Islamic aspiration; and an ambiguity school, now dominant in the international academy, which holds that Pakistan was never coherently imagined at all. A fourth and younger current, which we call the print-and-public turn, has begun to relocate the question from the intentions of leaders to the arguments of publics. Our contention is that this fourth current, though the most promising, has halted at the frontier of 1947, and that a social history of the decades after independence is now the most urgent task before historians of Pakistan.

The stakes of this historiographical quarrel reach well beyond the seminar room. School textbooks in Pakistan teach a version of the religious-ideological school, presenting the state as the destined homeland of South Asian Islam, a tendency documented in detail by A. H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim in their survey of the national curricula.³ Courts have invoked the Objectives Resolution in constitutional cases; military rulers have justified themselves in its idiom; and religious minorities have lived with the practical consequences of each reading. When historians dispute whether Pakistan was an idea, an interest, or an accident, they are also disputing who may legitimately claim the country today. A review of the literature is therefore not an academic courtesy but a reckoning with the intellectual foundations of public life in Pakistan.

We read this debate from the vantage point of the Punjab, the province that inherited the larger share of Pakistan's population and the loudest of its arguments. Lahore, the provincial capital, was the site of the 1940 resolution that demanded separate Muslim statehood, and after 1947 its newspapers, coffee houses, literary circles, and Sufi shrines became the noisiest arena in which the meaning of Pakistan was contested. The observations offered here grow out of doctoral research on those arenas between 1947 and 1977, the year in which General Zia-ul-Haq's coup closed one era of public argument and opened another. Punjab does not stand for the whole of Pakistan, and we do not claim that it does; but no account of the idea of Pakistan can be persuasive if it cannot explain what happened in the Punjab.

Interests over Ideas: The Materialist School

For the materialist school, Pakistan was made by interests, not ideas. Its founding statement belongs to Hamza Alavi, the Karachi-born sociologist who coined the term *salariat* for the class that, in his account, drove the Pakistan movement: the Urdu-literate professionals, clerks, and aspirants to government employment who feared exclusion from jobs and influence in a Hindu-majority India.⁴ Alavi argued that the demand for Pakistan expressed the material anxieties of this class rather than any religious aspiration, and that Islam served as a flag of convenience under which salaried Muslims pursued worldly ambitions. On this reading the ideological vocabulary of the movement was a language of mobilization, not a statement of purpose, and the new state was captured at birth by the civil and military bureaucracy whose interests it had been created to serve.

Tariq Ali pushed the argument to its polemical limit. A Lahore-born writer long settled in London and associated with the British New Left, Ali asked in 1983 whether Pakistan could survive at all, and answered that a state assembled out of class interests and held together

³A. H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim, eds., *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2000).

⁴Hamza Alavi, "Class and State in Pakistan," in *Pakistan: The Unstable State*, ed. Hassan Gardezi and Jamil Rashid (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1983); Hamza Alavi, "Ethnicity, Muslim Society and the Pakistan Ideology," in *Islamic Reassertion in Pakistan: The Application of Islamic Laws in a Modern State*, ed. Anita M. Weiss (Lahore: Vanguard, 1987).

by coercion possessed no ideological glue worth the name.⁵ The book was banned in Pakistan, which rather proved its author's point about the state's anxiety over its own foundations. Ali's significance for the historiography lies less in his predictions, which the country outlived, than in his insistence that the official narrative of an Islamic destiny could not withstand elementary scrutiny of who had actually supported the Muslim League, who had financed it, and who had profited from independence.

Within Pakistan the most eloquent statement of the materialist position came from Sibte Hassan. A Marxist intellectual of the Progressive Writers' movement who spent years in prison for his politics, Sibte Hassan described the country's history as a running battle of ideas between an obscurantist alliance of mullah and landlord on one side and the forces of enlightenment on the other.⁶ His book of that title, published in Karachi in 1986, gave Urdu-reading audiences a class map of the ideological field and insisted that the argument over Pakistan's identity was at bottom an argument over property and power. For our purposes his testimony matters doubly: he was both an analyst of the public debate and one of its most active participants, a circumstance the materialist school itself has rarely paused to consider. Later scholarship refined the class argument by taking culture seriously. Sadia Toor's study of the Cold War politics of culture showed how quarrels among writers and critics over language, literature, and progressivism became the terrain on which the meaning of Pakistan was fought out in the 1950s and 1960s, while Kamran Asdar Ali reconstructed the world of communist organizers and striking workers in the country's first decades.⁷ Both books complicate the older economism: ideas here are not a veil drawn over interests but the very medium of political conflict. Yet both remain histories of the left, written substantially from the left's own archive. The adversaries of the progressives, the religious parties and the shrine-based networks, enter these accounts chiefly as instruments of state and empire rather than as debaters with publics of their own.

Urdu scholarship carried the same materialist premises to a Punjabi readership. Zahid Chaudhry's study of the political evolution of Muslim Punjab dissected the landed and commercial interests behind the province's politics, and Taimur Rahman restated the class analysis of Pakistani society in an explicitly Marxist framework for a new generation.⁸ These works ensured that the materialist school was never merely an export commodity of the Western academy; it possessed, and still possesses, a vernacular life in the very arenas it describes. That double existence, in the seminar and in the street, is worth registering, because it unsettles the assumption that theory travels only downward from universities to publics. In the Punjab, the class interpretation of Pakistan was itself one of the contending ideas of Pakistan.

The strengths of this school are genuine, but so is its blind spot. No serious historian now writes about the Pakistan movement without attending to the *salariat*, to the Memon and Khoja trading communities of Bombay and Calcutta whose donations filled the Muslim League's coffers, or to the bureaucratic capture of the postcolonial state. What the school cannot explain is why the argument was conducted so passionately in an ideological register,

⁵Tariq Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

⁶Sibte Hassan, *The Battle of Ideas in Pakistan* (Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1986).

⁷Sadia Toor, *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010); Kamran Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam: Communist Politics and Class Activism in Pakistan, 1947–1972* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁸Zahid Chaudhry, *Muslim Punjab ka Siyasi Irtiqa* (Lahore: Idara-e-Mutalia-e-Tarikh, 2013); Taimur Rahman, *The Class Structure of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

why millions who had no government job to gain marched and voted for Pakistan, and why the quarrel over the state's Islamic character persisted for three decades after the material question of partition was settled. A theory that treats ideas as mere by-products of interest is poorly placed to write the history of a country that has never stopped arguing about an idea.

Fulfilment of an Idea: The Religious-Ideological School

A second tradition inverts the materialist premise: for these writers, Pakistan was an idea before it was anything else. Its most industrious exponent was Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, the historian and educationist who migrated from Delhi at partition and later served as vice-chancellor of the University of Karachi. His account of the struggle for Pakistan presented the state as the culmination of a Muslim political consciousness reaching back through the colonial period, a consciousness that the events of the 1940s merely brought to maturity.⁹ In Qureshi's telling there was nothing accidental or negative about the demand for Pakistan; it flowed from the historical experience of a community that had always understood itself as distinct, and that required sovereignty in order to live according to its own lights.

Qureshi also supplied this school with its account of the religious classes. His study of the ulema, the formally trained scholars of Islamic law and theology, in politics argued that the men of religion had been indispensable to the mobilization of Muslim India, carrying the message of the League to mosque congregations that no barrister could reach.¹⁰ The claim contains an important truth, for sections of the ulema did campaign vigorously for Pakistan in the elections of 1945 and 1946. But it performs a quiet sleight of hand, absorbing into a single narrative of fulfilment the considerable body of religious scholars who opposed the League, and passing lightly over the awkward question of what kind of state the pro-Pakistan ulema believed they were voting for. The idea, in this school, is always singular.

The scholarly high point of this tradition is the exchange between Francis Robinson and Paul Brass over the United Provinces, the heartland of North Indian Muslim politics now known as Uttar Pradesh. Brass had argued that Muslim elites selected and manipulated religious symbols instrumentally, in pursuit of worldly advantage; Robinson replied that the religious and political self-understanding of UP Muslims was no elite invention but a deep structure of belief that constrained what any leader could do with it.¹¹ The debate mattered because it lifted the question above polemic: if Robinson was right, the idea of Pakistan had roots that no accounting of interests could reach. His later essays extended the case, insisting that Islam in South Asia possessed a history of its own which the reductions of political science could not dissolve.

The Pakistani state made this school its official memory. From the 1950s onward, and with mounting intensity under military rule, textbooks presented Pakistan as the destined homeland of South Asian Islam, its history a straight line running from the first Muslim landfall in Sindh to the person of the Quaid-e-Azam. The survey compiled by Nayyar and Salim documented how thoroughly this narrative saturated the national curricula, flattening the movement's internal quarrels into a story of unanimity.¹² Officialization has been a mixed blessing for the school's intellectual standing: what began as a historical argument hardened

⁹Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1969).

¹⁰Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *Ulema in Politics* (Karachi: Ma'aref, 1977).

¹¹Francis Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹²Nayyar and Salim, *Subtle Subversion*.

into a catechism, and scholars who might have refined the tradition from within found themselves instead defending it at the barricades or abandoning it altogether.

The most sophisticated work in this vein located religion in institutions rather than doctrine. David Gilmartin's study of the Punjab showed how the Muslim League's breakthrough in the 1940s ran through the mediating structures of rural Islam, the Sufi shrines and their hereditary custodians, whose authority translated the demand for Pakistan into idioms the countryside could recognize.¹³ Khalid Bin Sayeed's older account of the formative phase had similarly traced the movement's organizational sinews rather than its slogans. Work of this kind rescued the religious interpretation from piety: religion here is not a timeless essence but a set of networks, hierarchies, and performances. It is no accident that Gilmartin's book, though usually shelved with the ideological school, points forward to the public-arena scholarship discussed below.

Yet the religious-ideological school struggles with an awkward fact: many of the most learned custodians of Islam opposed Pakistan. The seminary at Deoband, founded in 1866 in a small town of the United Provinces and by the twentieth century the most influential centre of Islamic learning in South Asia, produced a leadership largely hostile to the League, and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, the principal organization of Deobandi scholars, allied itself with the Indian National Congress against partition. A school that reads Pakistan as the fulfilment of Islamic aspiration must explain why so many exponents of that aspiration fought the project to the end. It can do so only by conceding what it is otherwise reluctant to admit: that the idea of Pakistan was contested among Muslims themselves, which is to say that it was plural.

Insufficiently Imagined: The Ambiguity School

The third and presently dominant tradition holds that Pakistan was never coherently imagined at all. Its foundation stone is Ayesha Jalal's study of Jinnah as the sole spokesman, which argued from the constitutional record that the demand for Pakistan began as a bargaining counter, a maximal claim advanced to secure Muslim parity within a united India, and hardened into a sovereign state only when the negotiations of 1946 and 1947 collapsed.¹⁴ On this reading the famous vagueness of the Lahore Resolution was not an oversight but a strategy, and the new state arrived without an agreed answer to the most elementary questions about itself. Jalal's thesis has been qualified, attacked, and defended for four decades; it has not been displaced from the centre of the field.

Christophe Jaffrelot gave the school its bluntest formulation: a nationalism without a nation. The French political scientist argued that Pakistani nationalism acquired no positive content of its own, only a negative identity defined against Hindu-majority India, and his later synthesis presented the country's chronic instability as the working-out of that original paradox.¹⁵ The formulation travels well because it seems to explain so much: the failure of constitution-making in the 1950s, the alienation and secession of East Pakistan in 1971, the unending quarrel over the place of Islam in public law. Whether an entire national history can be derived from a birth defect is another question, and one the ambiguity school rarely pauses to ask of itself.

¹³David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988); Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase, 1857–1948* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁴Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1995).

¹⁵Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation?* (London: Zed Books, 2002); Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience* (New Delhi: Random House India, 2015).

Farzana Shaikh traced the uncertainty into the ideas themselves. Her account of the difficulty of making sense of Pakistan located the country's crisis of identity not in events but in an unresolved relationship between Islam and nationalism that long predated 1947, and her related essay followed the consequences forward into the era of Islamization and beyond.¹⁶ Shaikh's is the most intellectually serious version of the school, because she takes ideas seriously enough to find the incoherence inside them rather than merely asserting their absence. Yet her method remains a reading of texts produced by elites, poets, publicists, and statesmen of the first rank, and the verdict of ideological uncertainty is reached without any sustained examination of what humbler participants in the argument thought they were arguing about.

Faisal Devji supplied the school's most provocative analogy. In his account Pakistan belongs with Israel to a rare category of modern states founded upon an idea rather than upon the ties of blood and soil that European nationalism took for granted, a Muslim Zion whose citizens were defined by adherence rather than ancestry.¹⁷ The comparison illuminates the abstractness of the founding demand, and the striking fact that Pakistan was imagined most ardently by Muslims of provinces that would never form part of it. But Devji's very brilliance underlines the school's habit: the idea of Pakistan is examined as a philosophical object, suspended above the crowded meetings, newspaper columns, and shrine festivals in which actual people gave it content. Abstraction is discovered because abstraction is where the search was conducted.

American policy scholarship absorbed the same conclusions and gave them institutional weight. Stephen Cohen's survey, written for a Washington audience after 2001, presented the idea of Pakistan as a contested and unfinished project and treated the Objectives Resolution as the hinge on which the state's identity turned.¹⁸ Cohen wrote as a friend of the country, but the effect of such syntheses was to fix in the international imagination the picture of a state permanently uncertain of itself. The ambiguity school thus completed a curious circuit: born in the archives as a revisionist reading of high politics, it became the common sense of chancelleries, and in due course returned to Pakistan as an external judgement that domestic intellectuals felt obliged either to embrace or to refute.

What unites these authors is a story of circumstance. Pakistan, in their telling, issued from a conjuncture: the fear of permanent minority status under a Hindu majority, the ambitions of the *salariat*, the disruptions of the Second World War, the Muslim League's sweeping success in the elections of 1945 and 1946, and the tremors of disaffection running through the colonial armed forces. From these materials a state was assembled in a hurry, and no significant rational debate about its character, they conclude, took place in public before it existed. The conclusion is stated sometimes with regret and sometimes with relish, but it functions identically in either mood: it licenses the historian to ignore the public arena, since nothing of consequence is presumed to have happened there.

The inference, however, does not follow, for absence of consensus is not absence of imagination. The ambiguity school reads the vagueness of elite documents, the Lahore Resolution's silence on frontiers, Jinnah's studied refusals to be pinned down, and concludes that the idea itself was empty. But a state can be intensely imagined in a dozen incompatible ways at once, and the incompatibility is then evidence of debate, not of vacancy. The

¹⁶Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (London: Hurst, 2009); Farzana Shaikh, "From Islamisation to Shariatisation: Cultural Transnationalism in Pakistan," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2008).

¹⁷Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (London: Hurst, 2013).

¹⁸Cohen, *Idea of Pakistan*.

pamphlets, public meetings, poetry, and press of the 1940s, and still more of the three decades that followed, record Punjabi society arguing about minorities, about the place of the ulema, about land, language, and law, with a seriousness that the word insufficient cannot survive. The question is not whether Pakistan was imagined, but by whom, where, and against whom.

The Print-and-Public Turn

A fourth current shifts the question from what leaders intended to what publics argued. Its theoretical charter is Jürgen Habermas's account of the structural transformation of the public sphere, which described how, in eighteenth-century Britain, France, and the German lands, private persons gathered in coffee houses, salons, and the columns of journals to reason publicly about matters of common concern, creating a sphere of opinion that stood between state and household and which rulers eventually had to acknowledge.¹⁹ Habermas confined his public to the literate bourgeois male and mourned its later decay into consumerism; but the concept escaped his restrictions almost immediately, and historians of regions he never considered have found in it a way of asking who talked politics, where, and with what effect.

Habermas's critics made the concept usable outside Europe. Geoff Eley and others showed that even in the nineteenth-century West the public sphere was plural and contested, crowded with workers, women, and dissenters whom the bourgeois model excluded, while Sandria Freitag, studying North India, proposed the deliberately looser term public arenas to capture spaces where community was performed as much as debated, in processions, festivals, and collective ritual rather than in rational conversation alone.²⁰ Freitag's revision matters greatly for any student of Pakistan, because it admits into the analysis precisely those sites, the mosque congregation, the shrine festival, the anniversary procession, that a strict Habermasian would be obliged to dismiss. An arena, unlike a salon, does not check religion at the door.

C. A. Bayly demonstrated that India possessed a dense information order long before the categories of European social theory arrived to describe it. His study of intelligence gathering and social communication between 1780 and 1870 reconstructed the world of newsletter writers, bazaar rumour, and itinerant learned men through which North Indian society kept itself remarkably well informed, and through which the colonial state struggled, often vainly, to listen.²¹ Bayly's lesson for the historiography of Pakistan is methodological: public argument is a social formation with its own history, not a by-product of print capitalism or of constitutional reform. A society that had debated its rulers for centuries did not fall silent in 1947, whatever the ambiguity school's silence on the point might suggest.

For the specifically Muslim public, K. K. Aziz assembled the record decades ago. The Punjabi historian, better known for his assault on official textbook mythology, edited a documentary collection on public life in Muslim India between 1850 and 1947 and compiled a history of the idea of Pakistan that traced the proposal through generations of schemes, pamphlets, and

¹⁹Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

²⁰Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²¹C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

speeches.²² Aziz wrote without the theoretical apparatus of the public sphere, and his collections have been quarried more often than they have been argued with. But they establish beyond dispute that the idea of Pakistan enjoyed a long, crowded, and documented public career before the Muslim League adopted it, a fact with which any claim of insufficient imagination must somehow reckon.

Dietrich Reetz and Mushirul Hasan demonstrated that religious identity itself was forged in public debate. Reetz's study of Islamic groups in India between 1900 and 1947 followed movements as they competed for followers through print, disputation, and spectacle, extending the public sphere concept to actors Habermas never imagined, while the collection edited by Hasan explored how Muslim identities in South Asia were made and remade in argument among communities rather than handed down from scripture.²³ Together they dissolved an assumption shared, oddly, by the religious school and its materialist critics: that Islam entered politics as a finished object. If religious identity was itself a product of public contest, then the contest over an Islamic state after 1947 becomes not a betrayal of the founding idea but its continuation.

Venkat Dhulipala brought these strands to bear directly on Pakistan and detonated them under the ambiguity school. His study of late colonial North India argued that Pakistan, far from being insufficiently imagined, was debated threadbare in the Urdu public sphere of the United Provinces, where ulema, publicists, and politicians argued in print and on platforms over the new state as a future Medina, a successor to the Prophet's polity, with opponents answering in equal detail.²⁴ Whatever one makes of his conclusions, and critics have questioned how far the UP can stand for India, Dhulipala transformed the terms of trade: the question of what publics said about Pakistan before 1947 now commands a large and contentious literature. The question of what publics said after 1947 still, remarkably, does not.

Megan Eaton Robb has carried the enquiry into the texture of a single newspaper. Her study of the Urdu paper *Madinah*, published from Bijnor, a small qasbah town of the United Provinces, showed how print created a Muslim public that was neither metropolitan nor elite, sustained by subscribers, correspondents, and readers-aloud across the small towns of North India.²⁵ Robb's book, appearing in 2021, signals that the print-and-public turn is still gathering pace and still refining its instruments, moving from the grand concept down to the individual institution. It also, once again, ends where the Pakistani historian's problem begins: at partition, with the public it describes divided by a new frontier and the presses of Lahore about to inherit the argument.

The Missing History: Publics after Partition

For all its vitality, the print-and-public turn halts at the frontier of 1947. Freitag's arenas are colonial; Bayly's information order is colonial; Dhulipala's Medina is debated in a province that remained in India; Robb's newspaper public is dispersed by partition on the last page. The implicit assumption, nowhere argued, is that public debate about the idea of Pakistan

²²K. K. Aziz, ed., *Public Life in Muslim India, 1850–1947* (Delhi: Renaissance Publishing House, 1993); K. K. Aziz, *A History of the Idea of Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1987).

²³Dietrich Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere: Religious Groups in India, 1900–1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1998).

²⁴Venkat Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁵Megan Eaton Robb, *Print and the Urdu Public: Muslims, Newspapers, and Urban Life in Colonial India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

concluded once the state was achieved, as though a question could be closed by the founding of a country whose entire subsequent politics consisted of asking it. The assumption would have astonished anyone who lived in Lahore between 1947 and 1977, when the meaning of Pakistan was contested daily in print, on platforms, and at shrines with an intensity the 1940s scarcely exceeded.

The postcolonial decades are instead still written as the history of state institutions. The standard narratives move from constituent assembly to constitution to coup, and the idea of Pakistan appears in them as a matter decided in chambers: the Objectives Resolution of 1949, the constitutions of 1956, 1962, and 1973, each parsed as an elite compromise. The partial exceptions prove the rule. Toor recovers the cultural debates of the period but frames them through the Cold War and the progressive movement; Asdar Ali recovers the communists but not their religious adversaries; both leave the rightist publics, and the enormous shrine-based public of rural Punjab, to be inferred from the polemics of their opponents.²⁶ No study yet joins the contending sides into the single arena in which contemporaries knew themselves to be arguing.

Punjab between 1947 and 1977 offers the natural laboratory for such a history. In Lahore the Pak Tea House, a café on the Mall, sheltered the writers' circle Halqa-e-Arab-e-Zauq and three decades of nightly argument among progressives, liberals, and believers; K. K. Aziz devoted an affectionate memoir to the coffee-house culture of which it formed a part.²⁷ The press conducted the same argument in three languages, with Nawa-i-Waqt upholding the Islamic and nationalist reading of the state while the Pakistan Times and Imroze of the Progressive Papers answered from the left, and Urdu digests and Punjabi periodicals relayed the quarrel outward from the city. Beyond Lahore, the annual festivals of the great shrines gathered publics that no editor could count, and there too the meaning of Pakistan was preached, sung, and disputed.

The sources for this social history exist, though none of them can be read at face value. The runs of the major newspapers survive in the Lahore Museum Library, the Quaid-e-Azam Library, and the collections of Government College University; the debates of the constituent and provincial assemblies are in print; memoirs and autobiographies of editors, poets, and politicians appear continually in Urdu; and the hagiographical literature of the shrines, with its prophecies of Pakistan's destiny, constitutes an archive of popular belief that historians have barely opened. Each genre carries its bias, the partisan daily no less than the miracle narrative, and the method must be corroborative, setting Nawa-i-Waqt against the Pakistan Times, the assembly record against the memoir, the hagiography against the newsprint. Bias, rightly handled, is not an obstacle to this history; it is the evidence.

The payoff of the approach is an answer to a question the other schools leave hanging: why did the constitutions call Pakistan an Islamic Republic? The framers of 1956, 1962, and 1973 each attempted to fuse two categories, Islam and the republic, that the contending publics of the Punjab had spent years insisting were either inseparable or irreconcilable; the requirement that the head of state be a Muslim, the controversy over the dropping and restoration of the word Islamic in the Ayub-era constitution, and the settlement of 1973 register the pressure of that argument rather than the preferences of any drafting committee.²⁸ Read this way, the constitutional documents are not the beginning of the story,

²⁶Toor, *State of Islam*; Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam*.

²⁷K. K. Aziz, *The Coffee House of Lahore: A Memoir, 1942–57* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2008).

²⁸The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1956; The Constitution of the Republic of Pakistan, 1962; The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973.

as institutional history has it, but the precipitate of a public debate, and the social historian's task is to recover the debate of which they are the residue.

Conclusion

Three schools, we have argued, share one blind spot for all their differences. The materialists dissolve the idea of Pakistan into interests and cannot explain the passion of a thirty-year argument; the religious-ideological school fixes the idea into a single fulfilment and cannot accommodate the Muslims who opposed it or read it otherwise; the ambiguity school, mistaking dissensus for emptiness, declares the idea insufficiently imagined and thereby licenses itself to ignore the imagining that actually occurred. Each school, in its own idiom, writes the citizen out of the story, whether as dupe, as devotee, or as absentee. The print-and-public turn has restored the citizen as an arguer, but only, so far, for the colonial period, leaving the noisiest decades of the argument unclaimed.

A social history of the idea of Pakistan would treat its publics as rational actors and their arguments as events. The programme is concrete: the vernacular and English press read against each other; the literary circles and coffee houses reconstructed from memoirs; the shrine festivals and mosque congregations restored to political history; the labour unions, student federations, and religious parties followed into the arenas where they actually met; and the constitutional record re-read as the trace of all this pressure. The Punjab from 1947 to 1977 is the place to begin, not because it is typical but because it is documented, and because its arguments demonstrably reached the assemblies. The tools lie ready in Freitag's arenas, Bayly's information order, and Dhulipala's example; only the chronological courage to cross 1947 has been wanting.

To ask whose Pakistan, then, is to ask who was admitted to the argument. The country that emerged from the debates of 1947 to 1977 was neither the theocracy the religious parties demanded nor the secular republic the left proposed, and that double refusal was not a failure of imagination but the settlement of a contest, provisional as all such settlements are. The historian who would understand it must go where the contest happened, to the newsprint, the tea house, and the shrine, and must listen to people who believed, correctly, that the identity of their state was theirs to dispute. Pakistan has belonged, from the beginning, to those who argued over it. The archive of their arguments is waiting.