

Book Review

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Academic interest in youth perspectives has seen a surge in the context of global concerns surrounding youth alienation and radicalism, particularly of Muslim youth (Dunne et al., 2017). In the post 9/11 geopolitical context, the policy agendas of key international organisations, non-governmental organisations and bilateral agencies are preoccupied with the relationship between education, conflict and international development (Novelli, 2013) and the military activities since then have created a nexus between education and securitisation globally (Novelli, 2017). While the simultaneous framing of youth as a development dividend and security risk has intensified the academic gaze on youth (Durrani and Crossouard, 2020), youth voices and perspectives remain marginalised within the literature (Lopez Cardozo et al., 2015). Academic interest in Pakistani youth is understandable for a range of reasons. Pakistan's geopolitical location vis-à-vis the US-led 'War on Terror', its youthful population, high levels of youth unemployment, levels of fragility and conflict, weak democratic structures and institutions, ethnolinguistic diversity and the place of Islam in Pakistan's state formation, constitution and social life all make '*Youth and the National Narrative: Education, Terrorism and the Security State in Pakistan*' a very timely and much needed contribution to the field of international education and development.

The book explores Pakistan's current social, economic, and political dynamics through the voices of educated youth, charting their relationship to the security state. With around two-thirds of Pakistan's population under the age of thirty, the country 'is uniquely poised to evolve in the next couple of decades, and this book provides a window into how that process is likely to unfold' (p. 11). While there exist several academic journal papers, book chapters and grey literature items on the views and outlook of Pakistani youth, this is the

first book on the topic that draws on large data sets collected over a period spanning nine years (2009-2018). Youth narratives are contextualised by drawing on a large body of multidisciplinary literature on education, politics, international development and security studies. All these features make the book essential for academics, researchers, policymakers, and multilateral agencies interested in youth studies, education and conflict and education and securitisation in Pakistan.

The book begins with a *Prologue* that focuses on Pakistani youth's role in the national and provincial elections in 2018. The election rallies of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for the first time drew crowds of middle-class, educated youth and included entertaining performances by pop stars, DJs and celebrities. Imran Khan, the PTI leader, targeted young Pakistanis in his political speeches, giving an illusion of '*Naya* (new) Pakistan', and his inaugural address as Prime Minister reflected their concerns. The six chapters that follow are centred on the different facets of the relationship between the state and its young citizens.

The *Introduction* sketches seven decades of Pakistan's existence as a nation-state since its independence in 1947. The reader is taken through contemporary security agendas and state strategies of countering terrorism, including the 'national narrative' disseminated through the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines, which outlines the role of every citizen and institution in reducing support for terrorism. After the participation of university-educated youth in terrorist activities, educating young people about the crucial significance of peace and its interconnections with Islam and Pakistan became the state imperative. Nevertheless, the authors argue that by persecuting those using peaceful means to claim their citizenship rights, the state strategy of

countering extremism is counterproductive. As politics and everyday life are being increasingly marked by violence and terrorism, the role of the state is being questioned by citizens. The authors identify three key fault lines underpinning Pakistan's contemporary challenges: i. ethnic or linguistic divisions or regionalism; ii. religious conflict between Muslim and non-Muslims, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and across different Sunni sects; iii. power asymmetries between democratic institutions and the military. A common thread running through all three fault lines is the relationship between the state and the citizens. The chapter contrasts two notions of citizenship: citizenship as a social contract with rights, responsibilities and political participation and citizenship as a shared identity based on shared nationality, religion or language. The latter is seen as more applicable to postcolonial states with a fragmented social fabric such as Pakistan. The term 'youth' itself is not problematised at a conceptual level in this or other chapters.

The chapter ends with a description of primary empirical data, which is massive in scale. The voices of over 1900 youths across different regions of Pakistan and from different types of educational institutions at both school and university levels were gathered over nine years between 2009-2018. Nevertheless, these multiple waves of data were neither necessarily collected using a uniform research design or data collection methods, nor were the samples accessed at different points similar in their composition. The themes covered in different cycles are not identical either, although broadly all phases covered youths' understanding of citizenship identities, rights and responsibilities. This limits the longitudinal aspect of the study, resulting in some chapters analysing changes or stability in youth's perspectives over time while other chapters refrain from such analyses.

Chapter 1, *Youth and the Social Contract*, explores youth perspectives on their social contract with the state, including their views on contemporary challenges facing Pakistan, youth alienation, rights and responsibilities, and youth identification with democracy and the military. As these cohorts of young people have experienced 'democratic rule' more than any other form of government, their views of state-citizen relations are shaped by their experiences growing up under 'democratic governance'. Nevertheless, they believed that the state's responsibility towards its citizens has declined with time. The politics of aid underpinned by neoliberal agendas pushed by Western development partners has further reinforced the absence of the state, making it harder for it to reinstate its connection with its young citizens. In 2009, around one in two youths reported high or very high levels of alienation, with alienation specifically higher among ethnic minorities. No reduction in youth alienation is observed over time. The privileged youth either did not reflect on the complicity of their own class in socio-economic inequality in Pakistan or felt powerless and pessimistic to change the status quo, leading them to lose interest in politics. Notably, very few youths raised the issue of the rights of religious minorities. While youth are critical of democratic institutions and politicians and either 'ignorant or dismissive about their rights

and responsibilities as citizens', the vast majority of youth hold the military in high esteem and a guarantor of 'justice and security' (p. 55).

The main focus of Chapter 2, *Youth and the Changing Political Activist*, is how young people enact political activism. The reader is taken through the shifting political space available to youth. Before Pakistan's creation, as staunch political allies of the Muslim League, the youth furthered the Pakistan cause. The patronage of student unions both by political parties and the military in the 1980s and 1990s, however, resulted in youth organisations becoming an instrument of political repression within university campuses. Despite youth participation in the lawyers' movement of 2007 against the imposition of emergency by President Musharraf and their increasing mobilisation in electoral processes by the PTI, few youths acknowledged being politically active. Young people across the different school and university sectors cited several reasons for shying away from politics, including corruption and a lack of trust in politicians, the fear of violence, the lack of role models, and a sense of responsibility primarily towards their own family than to the country. The political awareness of students did not extend to university and college-level politics but instead was limited to critiquing the actions and discourses of mainstream political parties. In addition, parents discouraged their children from participating in political protests. Socio-demographics also played a role in political engagement. Youth in rural and smaller localities reported more involvement in politics relative to those from urban centres. Likewise, students in NGO/civil society-run schools and madrassas expressed slightly higher levels of political engagement, although the activism of the latter was associated with religious obligations. The most politically active and engaged youth are concentrated in political science departments in universities. The involvement of women in politics was deemed inappropriate as it was seen as conflicting with their proper place in Islam, although a small number of women were more open to activism in solidarity with their ethnic or religious (sect) groups. Although the evidence is inconclusive, there seems to be a trend in declining political awareness across generations, particularly in Sindh. This chapter is the best in analysing differences among youth perspectives. The depth at which these are analysed varies across the chapters. The nuanced analysis of how political activism varies across different youth constituents in this chapter is not apparent across all chapters.

The relationship between education and the formation of youth citizenship perspectives and identities is the subject of Chapter 3, *Youth, Education and Citizenship*. As a backdrop to youth narratives of citizenship, the chapter offers an extensive review of education policies, curriculum reforms and existing academic literature on the topic. The chapter historicises the ways different governments, both democratic and military, have used education as a political tool to garner support for Islamic ideology and a nationalist Islamic discourse as a marker of national unity. This discourse fosters exclusivist notions of citizenship, intolerance towards the internal and external 'other', uncritical patriotism and 'loyalty

to an Islamic Republic, with limited understanding of civic duties and responsibilities' (p. 105). The relationship between education and youth citizenship is further problematised by highlighting the ways different school types might portray different visions of the state and citizenship through how and what they teach. Youth narratives of citizenship identity show the failure of education in shifting 'the concept of citizenship from its primordial ethno-nationalist basis to an understanding of rights, responsibilities and political participation' (p. 112). Most young people viewed the 'right kind of Islamic education' as a cure for all of Pakistan's problems, rendering non-Muslim citizens invisible. Nevertheless, some respondents highlighted the crucial role that education could offer in instilling civic mindedness and inculcating 'the importance of duties and responsibilities of citizens towards the state and vice versa' (p. 112). A crucial context that is pivotal to shaping youth narratives is the normalisation of terrorism and conflict across the country, particularly in the urban centres, even if only certain areas of Pakistan have experienced the brunt of terrorism and militancy.

Chapter 4, *Youth and Terrorism*, sketches the landscape of ethnic and sectarian violence, militancy and terrorism, and the normalisation of the security discourse through everyday lives. Young people's trust in the military remains unwavering in the conflict-affected context of Pakistan. Only a few questioned the security state, while the vast majority 'believed that the military and its war were not to blame for sectarianism', even when most do consider sectarianism a problem (p. 121). While some youths acknowledged that 'the army had overstepped by interfering in the democratic process', they justified this by expressing the view that the corrupt politicians had not left the military any option. The chapter ends with a discussion of the 'national narrative' constructed through the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines (NCEPG) to combat intolerance and extremism. Two key areas of intervention include strengthening citizen engagement and integrated education reform. The extent to which these interventions have been implemented and to what effect, particularly the role of education in promoting critical skills or social cohesion, would be productive areas for future research.

Youth views are shaped not only by educational discourses but also by those that dominate social media. Chapter 5, *Youth and Social Media*, focuses on how youth engage with social media and how the latter is used as an instrument of surveillance. As in previous chapters, the reader is given all the essential contextual details of the use of social media in Pakistan. However, unlike other chapters, the empirical data here is not extensive. The majority of those whose views were accessed in 2015-16 used social media sites, but Facebook was more popular than Twitter. They see social media as predominantly a space for connecting with friends and family rather than as primarily a platform for political activism. While the potential of social media as a source of promoting political literacy appears potent, its role in 'encouraging students to act on this literacy offline' seems limited (p. 155). Young people's reliance on social media for keeping themselves abreast of

political developments in the country is particularly problematic in a context where 'fake news' at the global and national levels continues to shape public opinion. Youth narratives also suggest 'fear' of surveillance and persecution, which is not entirely unwarranted. The state views online activism as a threat, and cracks down heavily on online dissent.

The book ends with an *Epilogue* focusing on how youth feature within the agendas and policies of the PTI in its first year in government. While the promise of equitable quality education and employment opportunities for young people remains unrealised, an intensified clampdown on human rights activists, journalists and free speech is justified in the name of national security. For the youth, however, the security state remains innocent and is acting to protect law-abiding citizens. Despite its many merits, the book ends abruptly without a 'conventional' concluding chapter, missing the opportunity to raise broader questions about the roles of the authoritarian security state and of education in shaping youth citizenship perspectives, political activism, and social media engagement in Pakistan and beyond. The implications of the wide-ranging findings of the book remain latent by avoiding concluding reflections and a discussion that goes beyond the 'findings'. Nevertheless, the preceding six chapters have given rich descriptions of the historical, political, educational, social, cultural and security contexts within which Pakistani youth experience their rights and responsibilities as citizens, articulate their notions of citizenship, and engage in political activism and with social media which should help readers in applying insights to contexts beyond Pakistan. How education in Pakistan is reformed to promote national integration in the post-NCEPG scenario and what intended and unintended outcomes such reforms produce on Pakistani youth citizenship belonging, identity and enactment are fertile explorations for building on the current book.

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