New Perspectives on
Pakistan’s Political Economy

This volume makes a major intervention in the debates around the nature of the political economy of Pakistan, focusing on its contemporary social dynamics. This is the first comprehensive academic analysis of Pakistan’s political economy after thirty-five years, and addresses issues of state, class and society, examining gender, the middle classes, the media, the bazaar economy, urban spaces and the new elite.

The book goes beyond the contemporary obsession with terrorism and extremism, political Islam, and simple ‘civilian–military relations’, and looks at modern-day Pakistan through the lens of varied academic disciplines. It not only brings together new work by some emerging scholars but also formulates a new political economy for the country, reflecting the contemporary reality and diversification in the social sciences in Pakistan.

The chapters in this volume dynamically and dialectically capture emergent processes and trends in framing Pakistan’s political economy and invite other scholars to engage with and move beyond these concerns and issues.


S. Akbar Zaidi is Professor at Columbia University, New York, and is also an Adjunct Professor at the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi. His most recent books are Issues in Pakistan’s Economy: A Political Economy Perspective (2015) and Military, Civil Society and Democratization in Pakistan (2011).
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New Perspectives on Pakistan’s Political Economy

State, Class and Social Change

Edited by
Matthew McCartney
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Preface

The genesis of this book lies in teaching a course on the economic development of South Asia, at both Oxford University and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, and in trying to assess and explore ideas about the political economy of regions and states other than those of India. Unlike the rich academic literature on studying India and other countries of the Global South across a variety of schools of thought in economics, politics and political economy, the limited focus on Pakistan has largely been dominated by a single framework, one proposed by Hamza Alavi, which focused on the notion of an overdeveloped state, with regard to Pakistan and, later, Bangladesh, in a paper published in the *New Left Review* in 1972. One option for teaching such a course was to use the comparative nature of scholarship, primarily one based on the Indian academic and social science tradition and historical context, and consider its relevance for Pakistan. However, as academics, researchers and scholars of India, or the other countries which constitute South Asia realise, that while this is how much of the academic teaching and research in and on South Asia usually functions, it is a very suboptimal choice of teaching and scholarship, given the specificities of the different countries. Pakistan, like the other South Asian countries, differs substantially from India, given its political economy and history, and requires an examination based on its own terms and in its own context. While exceptional scholarship of social scientists from India and those who work on India is now increasingly providing theoretical and empirical evidence redefining numerous theoretical paradigms – as we find in this volume as well – what has been lacking for at least four decades now is rigorous assessment of Pakistan’s political economy, which, until recently, has continued to be dominated by the work and influence of Hamza Alavi.

In February 2016, Professor Matthew McCartney and his student Muhammad Ali Jan organised a workshop in Oxford sponsored by Wolfson College and the Contemporary South Asian Studies Programme (CSASP) to address this problem and to assess the state of scholarship in the social sciences and of the political economy of Pakistan, almost four-and-a-half decades after Alavi’s thesis. Their suggestion was to engage with the call to academic arms made by S. Akbar Zaidi in an essay published in *Economic and Political Weekly* in 2014, in which he argued...
that one needs to go well beyond the Alavi thesis and considerably re-think Pakistan’s political economy in a much changed world and in a very different Pakistan. Soon after publication, Zaidi’s *Economic and Political Weekly* essay was critiqued and responded to in the journal by five, mostly younger, scholars from Pakistan in a symposium organised by Majed Akhter, then Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography, Indiana University, Bloomington. Akhter invited Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, Fahd Ali, Umair Javed and Adeem Suhail to engage with Zaidi’s intervention. Zaidi responded to the critiques by suggesting they were not ‘ruthless enough’ and that many of his arguments went ‘uncontested’. The five participants in the symposium in the *Economic and Political Weekly* were invited to contribute to this volume, three of whom eventually did, and they have considerably expanded on their original insight as is evident in this collection.

The workshop held in Oxford in February 2016 had ten papers presented for discussion, five of which have been included in this volume. S. Akbar Zaidi delivered the keynote address to the participants in a public lecture around the workshop. Those who presented papers included Adeel Malik and Masooda Bano, both teaching at Oxford University; Faisal Siddiqi, an advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, based in Karachi; Umair Javed, who was just finishing his PhD at the London School of Economics; Afiya Shehrbano Zia, a feminist scholar from Karachi; Farooq Sulehria and Matthew Nelson (whose paper was presented in absentia), both from SOAS; Adnan Rafiq and Ali Jan, both of whom were completing their PhDs at Oxford; and Matthew McCartney, who teaches at Oxford University and is responsible for organising the Oxford workshop. Subsequently, Aqil Shah, Danish Khan, Hassan Javid, Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, Rosita Armytage and Adeem Suhail were invited to contribute to this collection in response to the Alavi and Zaidi papers.

Both of us, as editors to this volume, have since negotiated the shoals of getting feedback from the reviewers and going through various iterations of editing. We would like to thank all who participated in the Oxford University Workshop, as well as all the final contributors to this volume. We are delighted to see the stimulating contradictions, debates and rigorous arguments emerging in these chapters. We asked the question whether Pakistan needed a new political economy to go beyond the one originally provided by Alavi. Our contributors have answered this question in a wonderful variety of ways and we see this as the start of a new debate about Pakistan and its political economy.

16 February 2019

Matthew McCartney
University of Oxford

S. Akbar Zaidi
Columbia University and IBA, Karachi