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One curious feature of Pakistan's parched academic landscape has been a tendency to clutch at faded intellectual legacies that can serve as reminders of a once lively tradition of critical thinking. The unduly extended reputation of the Pakistani Marxist sociologist, Hamza Alavi (1921-2003), stands as a revealing example. For almost five decades after he first proposed it, Alavi's model of the "over-developed" Pakistani state was regularly invoked as the single most persuasive explanation of postcolonial Pakistan even as it escaped close scrutiny. It resulted in deepening scholarly inertia and eroded an already less than robust culture of independent inquiry.

Much of this lethargy has been attributed, rightly, to a climate of official censorship, which aimed to muffle controversy over the formative weaknesses of the Pakistani state and quell debate about the role of institutional levers of power that controlled the country's political economy. But some responsibility for the stagnation lay also with the Pakistan's left-liberal intelligentsia who were in thrall to Alavi, who in seeking to resist a narrative that privileged religion, namely Islam, as the basis of the state held tenaciously--and often problematically--to the view that class constituted the sole driver of Pakistan's political economy. The ensuing intellectual stalemate stunted scholarship and crippled thinking in the humanities and social sciences. It is therefore to their credit that the editors of this volume and their frankly progressive team of contributors have now moved to break the impasse by challenging Alavi's model and offering new ways to understand "how [Pakistan's] society and state interact and intersect dialectically, a key lacuna in Alavi" (p. 21).

The project to do so was launched during an academic workshop at Wolfson College Oxford in 2016. It brought together a team of mainly Pakistani social scientists to reevaluate Alavi's model of the postcolonial state against the light of what were seen to be Pakistan's current social and economic realities. Setting the tone was a bold proposal, first mooted in 2014, from Akbar Zaidi.[1] He called for an urgent reappraisal of Alavi's thesis of the postcolonial state, warning that it stood to lose its relevance for any meaningful analysis of Pakistan today. It is regrettable that Zaidi's 2014 article as well as his further reflections on Alavi's thesis, published later that year,[2] which dictate the scope and direction of this volume, have not been republished here for readers to engage with directly. It is all the more disappointing given that there is no stand-alone contribution by Zaidi in this volume. The same holds true for the absence of Alavi's seminal piece on Pakistan's postcolonial state,

published in 1972,[3] which somewhat diminishes its place as the vital axis of this discussion.

That said, the outcome of those early deliberations in Oxford represents a welcome step in the right direction. Alavi's key argument which seeks to project Pakistan as a case of an "overdeveloped" postcolonial state, which is held together by a military-bureaucratic oligarchy that is both autonomous from and in alliance with the propertied classes, is vigorously reassessed, remodeled, and revised. But it is also (with some exceptions) repackaged, appearing at times to resemble old wine in new bottles. The category of class, which informed the corpus of Alavi's work, remains the dominant explanatory variable, and most contributors are in broad agreement with Zaidi's judgement that "unless we locate class at the centre of Pakistan's political economy … our understanding and our project will remain incomplete" (p. 19).

This is not to say that the contributors fall prey to a crudely economistic bias in their analyses. Indeed, taking their cue from the editors to heed "the importance of non-economic ideas such as ideology" (p. 17), many attempt to do just that. Muhammad Ali Jan's study of Punjab's segmented rural elite, for example, goes some way (though not far enough) in acknowledging the role of cultural capital accumulated through the exercise of religious authority by landed families over local Sufi shrines to demonstrate the complexity of class and question its materiality (p. 182). Afiya Shehrbano Zia, in her gendered reading of Pakistan's political economy, also cautions against overplaying the class card by arguing that attempts to portray Pakistan's jihadist groups and their religious politics as "simply an expression of class struggle" (p. 102) risk obscuring the objectives of a movement geared primarily towards strengthening an entrenched patriarchy. Finally, Aasim Sajjad Akhtar in his revision of Alavi's class-based model turns squarely to the ideology of legitimation that lends resilience to the existing political order by comparing it to "a Gramscian 'common sense' approach to politics, seeking out patrons as a means of navigating the rigours of state and market … [and] getting things done" (p. 71).

These observations are broadly well taken. But with the exception of Zia few of the contributors provide any sustained insight into the complex relationship between religious ideology and the contours of Pakistan's political economy. This is an extraordinary oversight not only in the context of Pakistan, where the contestation over the terms of Islam continues to define relations between state and society, but also in light of this volume's ambition to deconstruct these relations through a more dynamic reading than that offered by Alavi. Contributors such as Umair Javed and Hassan Javid, who come tantalizingly close to doing so, offer no real conclusions. Javed's fine-grained analysis of bazaar traders in Punjab and their steady entrenchment as key players in Pakistan's political economy alludes only briefly to the nexus between these groups and Islamic religious parties, leaving the impression that these alliances are best judged as instrumental. Javid's skillful analysis of the potential fractures to Pakistan's "patronage democracy" (p. 235) arising from the passage of the eighteenth constitutional amendment in 2008, which strengthened power at local and provincial levels, also does no more than observe that such threats could include "Islam" as well (p. 236). Neither, however, engages with the question of what these developments might spell for a political economy where vital questions of wealth distribution and inequality are still widely framed by a moral discourse of corruption fueled by a state that professes to uphold standards of Islam in public life.

Although many of the contributions shed important new light on the rise of "intermediate classes" that point to Pakistan's transition from a rural (some would say, "feudal") to a largely urban economy, all are silent on whether this trend may also be read as a shift in Pakistan's political center of gravity from rural clans to brokers of urban Is-

lamism of the kind explored by Mariam Abou Zahab in her study of sectarian politics. She represents them as vehicles of change in the "feudal" economy of southern Punjab.[4] Nor do any of the contributors wrestle with transformations to Pakistan's political economy arising from transnational migration, especially to neighboring states in the Middle East, and its influence in encouraging so-called "Islamic preferences" in pursuit of economic development. The appeal of Prime Minister Imran Khan's promise to deliver an Islamic welfare state, while arguably in keeping with emerging forms of religiosity that fall midway between the dispositions of Pakistan's established elite and the country's *Navay Raje* (new money), as suggested by Rosita Armytage (p. 170), could also have received closer attention. That would address claims of a middle-class revolution in Pakistan and its promise to upend the country's dynastic politics and dismantle its system of patronage.

The general disregard for religion as an independent variable with the power to shape preferences, constrain choices, and determine the structure of the political economy is, of course, in line with Alavi's neo-Marxist thinking, which assumed that religion served only to promote dominant class interests. For Alavi those interests in the case of Pakistan were historically associated with what he called a "Muslim salariat", whose invocation of Islam in defense of a separate Muslim state he regarded as nominal and whose objectives he believed were secular and informed by the quest for material advancement.[5] According to Alavi, therefore, the discourse of Islam was introduced *after* the creation of Pakistan as an instrument of legitimation to protect the interests of the ruling oligarchy and its allies among the dominant classes. This historical analysis has since been challenged by a subsequent generation of historians, including David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam* (1988), Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam* (1989), Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion* (2013), and Venkat Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina* (2014).

But it would be wrong to infer from this that Alavi conceived of the postcolonial state as simply an agent of class interests. On the contrary, Alavi stood out among his Marxist peers precisely for rejecting the idea of the Pakistani state as mere "superstructure" and arguing instead that it enjoyed a degree of relative autonomy that enabled it to mediate on behalf of the dominant propertied classes. Alavi's departure from traditional Marxist thinking prompts some of the most insightful contributions in this volume, which turn on vital questions of whether the Pakistani state now stands on the cusp of a decisive shift in power from the propertied classes in favor of more assertive state institutions, notably the military. The issue receives close attention from Aqil Shah, who casts doubt on the usefulness of class analysis to understand the Pakistani state and argues instead that it is institutions that matter. This is, he argues, because they are "not mere 'multi-class' coalitions driven by the inexorable march of capitalist development … [but] actors in their own right with distinct agendas, ideas and interests" (p. 76). Shah also gives short shrift to suggestions that weaknesses in Pakistan's state apparatus, such as uneven success in raising taxable revenue or the failure to exercise an undisputed monopoly over violence, and intermittent challenges from the judiciary and the media could amount to "any meaningful decline in military political power" (p. 90). His claims appear to be endorsed by Farooq Sulehria, who maintains that the media, far from challenging Pakistan's "praetorian state" (p. 242), has been co-opted by its military managers. They enjoy the co-operation of what he calls the "white authority in Pakistan's media" (p. 251)—a reference to the control of the Western media by white people—which includes influential media anchors drawn from dominant groups representing ethnic Punjabis and Urdu-speakers who collaborate with the military to extend its reach over Pakistan's political economy.

These observations are bound to stimulate debate about the limits of change in the institutional balance of power in Pakistan as well as the potential of rival institutions, such as the judiciary and the media, to wrest control of the military-bureaucratic oligarchy which defines Alavi's model of the postcolonial state. Yet as this volume makes abundantly clear, Pakistan has changed in ways that Alavi's static (and indeed, statist) model can no longer accommodate. What remains in doubt is the direction of change. The breezy optimism of the editors, which appears to equate change with the onset of resistance from countervailing forces, is hard to sustain. For now sober analysis may require continuing to treat Pakistan as a case of the classic epigram: ***plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose*** (the more things change, the more they stay the same).

Notes

[1]. Akbar Zaidi, "Re-Thinking Pakistan's Political Economy: Class, State, Power and Transition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 5 (2014): 47-54.

[2]. Akbar Zaidi, "Uncontested Engagements", *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, nos. 26-27 (2014): 56-7.

[3]. Hamza Alavi, "The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh," *New Left Review* 74 (1972): 59-81.

[4]. Mariam Abou Zahab, "The Sunni-Shia Conflict in Jhang (Pakistan)," in *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict*, ed. Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (London: Routledge, 2018), 135-48.

[5]. Hamza Alavi, "Ethnicity, Muslim Society and the Pakistan Ideology," in *Islamic Reassertion in Pakistan,* ed. Anita Weiss (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 21-48.

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