

CONCEPTUALIZING FROM THE SOUTH:

MEDIA MINORITIES AND MARXISM IN PAKISTAN

The conference is organized by the Freigeist Project "Populism of the Precarious"
at the Institute of Social- and Cultural Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin

DESCRIPTION

At this conference, we want to celebrate the various theoretical contributions emerging from studying trans-local Pakistan. We aim to position empirical studies of different subjects to show blind spots in current scholarship claiming global significance. Following an “anthropology of becoming” (Biehl and Locke 2017), our project promotes analytical openness and theoretical innovation. We foreground how focusing on Pakistan’s everyday life can introduce non-Eurocentric knowledge into academic theory. Sound historical, ethnographical, and vernacular studies on the Islamic Republic’s political practices and discourses are essential for our attempt to analyze current discussions on, for example, populism, (progressive) activism, patriarchy, citizenship, antisemitism, left-wing movements, religious difference, and the struggle of khwaja sira and LGBT people.

DATE

30. June – 1. July, 2023

LOCATION

Harnack-Haus, Tagungsstätte
der Max Planck Institution,
Innestr. 16-20, 14195 Berlin

SPEAKERS

Dr. Yaqoob Khan Bangash	Harvard University
Erin Kelso	Freie Universität Berlin
Dr. Naveeda Khan	Johns Hopkins University
Dr. Paul Rollier	CéSor-EHESS
Dr. Sadia Saeed	University of San Francisco
Dr. Jürgen Schaflechner	Freie Universität Berlin
Dr. Saadia Toor	College of Staten Island, CUNY
Dr. Philipp Zehmisch	Heidelberg University



DAY ONE

June 30, 2023

9:30 Introduction & Welcome
Jürgen Schaflechner & Erin Kelso

Moderation: Erin Kelso

10:30 Paul Rollier (French national centre for scientific research (CéSor-EHESS))
"Jesus Loves Pakistan": Televangelism and Pentecostal "Crusades" in a Muslim Land

11:30 Coffee Break

12:00 Yaqoob Khan Bangash (Harvard University)
Whose "Promised Land"? Post Partition Christian Politics in the (West) Punjab

13:00 Lunch

Moderation: Sarah Holz

14:00 Jürgen Schaflechner (Freie Universität Berlin)
*Alleged Jewish Life in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan:
Secret Ethnography, Ethnography of a Secret*

15:00 – Coffee Break

15:30 Erin Kelso (Freie Universität Berlin)
*Emerging Khwaja Sira Voices: Online Activism and Capture
in Pakistani Transgender Politics*

18:00 Dinner at 'Trattoria Romana'

DAY TWO

July 1, 2023

Moderation: Max Kramer

9:30 Saadia Toor (College of Staten Island, NYC)
The Left & the National Question in Pakistan

10:30 Coffee Break

11:00 Sadia Saeed (University of San Francisco)
*Populism and Religious Nationalism in India and Pakistan:
a Comparative and Historical Perspective*

12:00 Lunch

Moderation: Juergen Schaflechner

13:00 Philipp Zehmisch (Heidelberg University)
*Transcultural Ethics in Southern Translation:
Notions of "Doing Good" among Urban Progressives in Pakistan*

14:00 Coffee Break

15:30 Final Discussion & Afterword by Naveeda Khan

18:00 Dinner at 'TBA'

DR. YAQOOB KHAN BANGASH



Yaqoob Khan Bangash is a historian of modern South Asia. His research interests lie in the emergence of Pakistan as a post-colonial state, with broader interests in decolonisation, modern state formation, formation of identities, and the emergence of ethnic and identity-based conflicts across South Asia. Dr Bangash's first book was published by Oxford University Press as, 'A Princely Affair: Accession and Integration of Princely States in Pakistan, 1947-55,' in 2015, and he has recently completed another book: 'Between the Sword and the Pen: The History of the Lahore High Court.' Furthermore, he is working on a monograph on the imagination of Pakistan as a country after its creation, using the debates of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (1947—56) as primary material. Currently, he is the Fulbright Fellow for 2022-23, at the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute, Harvard University, USA.

WHOSE "PROMISED LAND"? POST PARTITION CHRISTIAN POLITICS IN THE (WEST) PUNJAB

As the British Indian Empire gave birth to Pakistan and India in August 1947, the provinces of the Punjab and Bengal were divided along Muslim and non-Muslim majority lands. In this clinical division, the large majority of Punjabi Christians, themselves about half a million strong, sided with the Muslims and wanted to be part of Pakistan. Not only did all the elected Christian leaders support the Muslim League, some Christian families even migrated to West Punjab in order to be in the 'promised land' of Pakistan. By the end of 1948, due to the violence and migration of the Sikhs and Hindus, Christians then became the largest non-Muslim group in the Punjab.

This paper traces the politics of Punjabi Christians in the immediate aftermath of the partition of the Punjab and assess how they engaged with their citizenship in a 'Muslim Zion.' Pakistani historiography has largely ignored this engagement of Christians at the critical juncture of the country's 'formative phase' and has largely focused on their fate post the creation of Bangladesh (and the separation of the largest country wide minority, the Hindus), the subsequent nationalisation of institutions and the even later Blasphemy ordeals. In doing so, the earlier attempts by Punjabi Christians to exercise their agency in the development of the Pakistani state and polity have been ignored. This paper thus examines how Punjabi Christians interacted with the state, tried to create a space for themselves in its polity and maneuvered to become consequential in the debates on its future during this early phase of national development.

EMERGING KHWAJA SIRA VOICES: ONLINE ACTIVISM AND CAPTURE IN PAKISTANI TRANSGENDER POLITICS

The Khwaja Sira community, also sometimes called transgender or third-gender, is highly visible, yet little-understood by the wider public in Pakistan. Their connection to Sufi spiritual lineages and engagement in traditional professions such as begging, dancing, and giving blessings at life cycle functions has made the khwaja siras legible primarily as “faqeer” and “bechara,” though details of their everyday lives remained mysterious. Activists in the burgeoning khwaja sira rights movement of the early 2000s strategically played on this ambiguity and faqeer/bechara tropes to gain sympathy for their cause while avoiding potential backlash (Khan 2019).

In August of last year, the community suddenly became the target of a vicious online campaign promulgated by the Jamaat-i-Islami. As a prominent Islamist party, Jamaat rhetoric has historically relied on a binary between Islam/Pakistan vs. the West, which they have weaponized to exclude various undesirable groups (most notably, religious minorities and women) from the body politic and public life. The khwaja sira community is the latest minority group to come into the Jamaat crosshairs. In this case, Jamaat rhetoric seeks to interpellate the community’s gender nonconformity as fahash, anti-Islamic, and part of the so-called Western LGBT agenda.

In this paper I identify the rhetoric adopted by a new generation of highly public khwaja sira activists in response to the JI’s latest hate campaign as one that leaves the Islam/Pakistan vs. West binary intact, while attempting to place khwaja siras solidly in the “native” category. In doing so, they problematize the Jamaat’s conceptualization of what it means to be a “proper” Muslim/Pakistani and challenge the Jamaat’s authority to determine who falls on which side of the binary. However, I argue that by adopting the structure of the Islam/Pakistan vs. West binary as its ground, this rhetoric leaves out some of the community’s most marginalized members; namely, religious minorities and LGBT-identifying people.

ERIN KELSO



Erin Kelso is a Research Associate and PhD candidate with the Volkswagen Freigeist project “The Populism of the Precarious: Marginalization, Mobilization, and Mediatization of South Asia’s Religious Minorities”. In conjunction with this project, she is researching the role of Christian and Hindu women in political movements in Pakistan. Through her fieldwork, she will investigate how minority women mobilize and represent their communities in Pakistan in the era of social media. Erin completed her MA in South Asian Studies at the University of Heidelberg in 2020 with a minor in Communication, Literature & Media in Modern South Asian Languages. Her research interests include religious minorities in South Asia, the anthropology of values, and the Muslim diaspora in Europe.

DR. NAVEEDA KHAN



Naveeda Khan is associate professor of anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. She is the author of *River Life and the Upspring of Nature* (2023), *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan* (2012) and editor of *Beyond Crisis: Reevaluating Pakistan* (2010) with *In Quest of a Shared Planet: Negotiating Climate from the Global South* forthcoming. She is working on two further manuscripts "Householding on a Warming Earth" and "Schelling and the Romantic Method."



DR. PAUL ROLLIER



Paul Rollier is a research fellow at the French national centre for scientific research (CéSor-EHESS). His main research interests are in the anthropology of religion (Islam and Christianity) and the cultural logic of justice and political representation in South Asia. His work draws on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in working-class neighbours in Pakistani Punjab.

“JESUS LOVES PAKISTAN”: TELEVANGELISM AND PENTECOSTAL “CRUSADES” IN A MUSLIM LAND

Empowered by new media technologies in the 2000s, Pakistan’s leading pastors have become celebrities at home and within transnational Pentecostal networks. I first situate this phenomenon by documenting the career of Pastor Anwar Fazal, Pakistan’s star televangelist, before examining the “healing crusade”, a type of open-air worship event which increasingly features the presence of American and African evangelists on tour in Pakistan. I argue that the profitability of these transnational collaborations rests on the specific use of images shot during these revival events, and on the moral value ascribed to Pakistan within North American Pentecostal imagination. The final section brings us back to Fazal’s charismatic healing sessions in Lahore. Drawing on ethnographic observations, I discuss the extent to which Pentecostalism reconfigures Christian identity and social relations with Muslims.



DR. SADIA SAEED



Sadia Saeed is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of San Francisco. She is a historical sociologist with substantive interests in religion and politics, international human rights, and global inequalities. Her first book *Politics of Desecularization: Law and the Minority Question in Pakistan* (Cambridge, 2017) examines the contentious relationship between Islam, nationalism, and rights of religious minorities in colonial India and Pakistan. It received the 2016-2017 Book Prize from the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS). She is currently working on a comparative and historical project that investigates how the place of religion in Indo-Persian societies has changed in the course of the transitions from pre-modern to early modern, and then to modern, forms of rule.

POPULISM AND RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN: A COMPARATIVE AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Although India and Pakistan have followed distinct trajectories vis-à-vis forms of political rule (democracy in India and vacillations between democracy and authoritarianism in Pakistan) and state ideologies (secularism in India and Muslim nationalism in Pakistan), both countries are converging on populist forms of religious nationalism in the 21st century. This is most readily visible in the synergies between popularity of Imran Khan in Pakistan and Narendra Modi in India. In this article, I seek to analyze the similarities and differences between the two populist projects of Hindu and Muslim nationalism in India and Pakistan respectively. In both cases, the two populist leaders deploy forms of religious nationalism that seek to distinguish their nation's "inside" and "outside" through imaginaries about their respective nation's place in an international order structured by a competitive nation-state system. At the same time, I argue that right-wing Hindu nationalism is a mimetic project that has its roots in the restructuring of modern Hindu thought that began under British colonial rule. One of the aims of this Hindu nationalist project is to replicate the structure of monotheistic religions that are characterized by doctrinal belief systems and a fundamental distinction between true and false religions. Incidentally, the same impulse characterized Muslim reformist projects in the 19th century that took shape in the context of the trauma of the end of Muslim rule in India.

ALLEGED JEWISH LIFE IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN: SECRET ETHNOGRAPHY, ETHNOGRAPHY OF A SECRET

“Where are Pakistan’s Jews today?” This question has fascinated numerous writers, journalists, and, more recently, digital content producers in Pakistan. While some believe that all Jews have left the Islamic Republic, others claim that a small (and potentially influential) group still lives in hiding in Pakistan today. The arrival of social media has further proliferated reports of allegedly hidden and influential Jewish life, exacerbating the passions surrounding crypto-Judaism. The origin of this fascination is twofold. On the one hand, it can be linked to religious and political discourses in Pakistan, frequently infused with antizionist and antisemitic tropes. On the other hand, it is connected to notions of secret Jewish power found in popular culture and often directly elevated from the fraudulent Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In this paper, I reflect on the intense, ambivalent, and contagious affects surrounding the trope of the hidden Jewish presence in the Islamic Republic. I also show how the practices of secrecy surrounding this mystery have not only provided my interlocutors with novel capabilities within their quite precarious lifeworlds but also caused me to become a part of the very secret I had come to unravel.

DR. JUERGEN
SCHAFLECHNER



Jürgen Schaflechner is a research group leader at the Department for Social and Cultural Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin. He and his team study the political and social movements of religious minorities in South Asia in the advent of social media and communicative capitalism. Jürgen’s research and teaching cover cultural and post-colonial theory, the religious and ethnic minorities in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the socio-anthropology of martial arts, and the role of documentary film in ethnographic research.

His research and films can be found at www.juergen-schaflechner.com

DR. SAADIA TOOR



Saadia Toor is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the College of Staten Island, and Associate Professor at the Center for the Study of Women & Society at the CUNY Graduate Center. Her research lies at the intersections of culture and political economy. Her book *State of Islam: Culture & Cold War Politics in Pakistan* published by Pluto Press was the first attempt to reclaim the history of the Pakistani Left and its role in battles over culture and ideology. She has worked on: nationalism and state formation in Pakistan; the ways in which liberal discourses around Islam, gender and sexuality are used to legitimize the Global War of Terror; the racialization of Islam and Muslims in the West; the cultural politics of the Cold War as they unfolded in Pakistan; and tensions within anti-war solidarity work in the West. Her most recent work has been on the racial dimensions of the student debt crisis in the US.

THE LEFT & THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN PAKISTAN

The idea that the root of Pakistan's problems lie in the fact that it was a place 'insufficiently imagined' and/or that it was imagined as a 'Muslim Zion' continues to exert influence in discussions of Pakistani history and contemporary politics. In previous work I have offered a counterpoint to this by arguing that when it came to a radical ambiguity around the national project, Pakistan was not an exception among newly-independent postcolonial nation-states, and by showing that this ambiguity did not automatically result in a reactionary nation-state project. In this paper I extend my previous work by looking at the discourse around the 'national question' within primarily left-wing political and cultural circles in Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s. I am particularly interested in seeing how the national project is rethought after the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971.

DR. PHILIPP ZEHMISCH

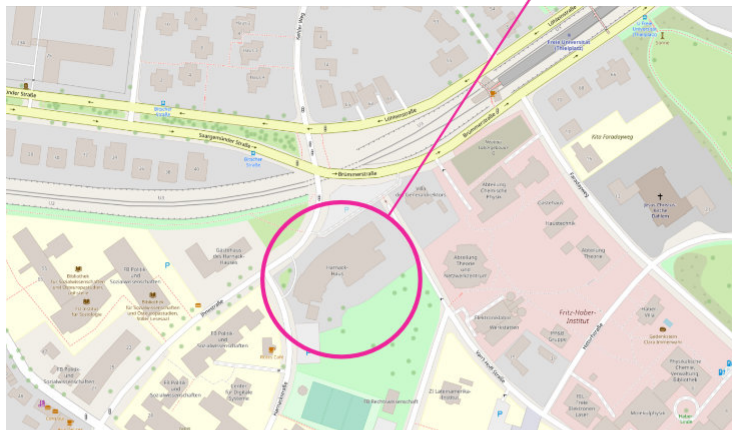
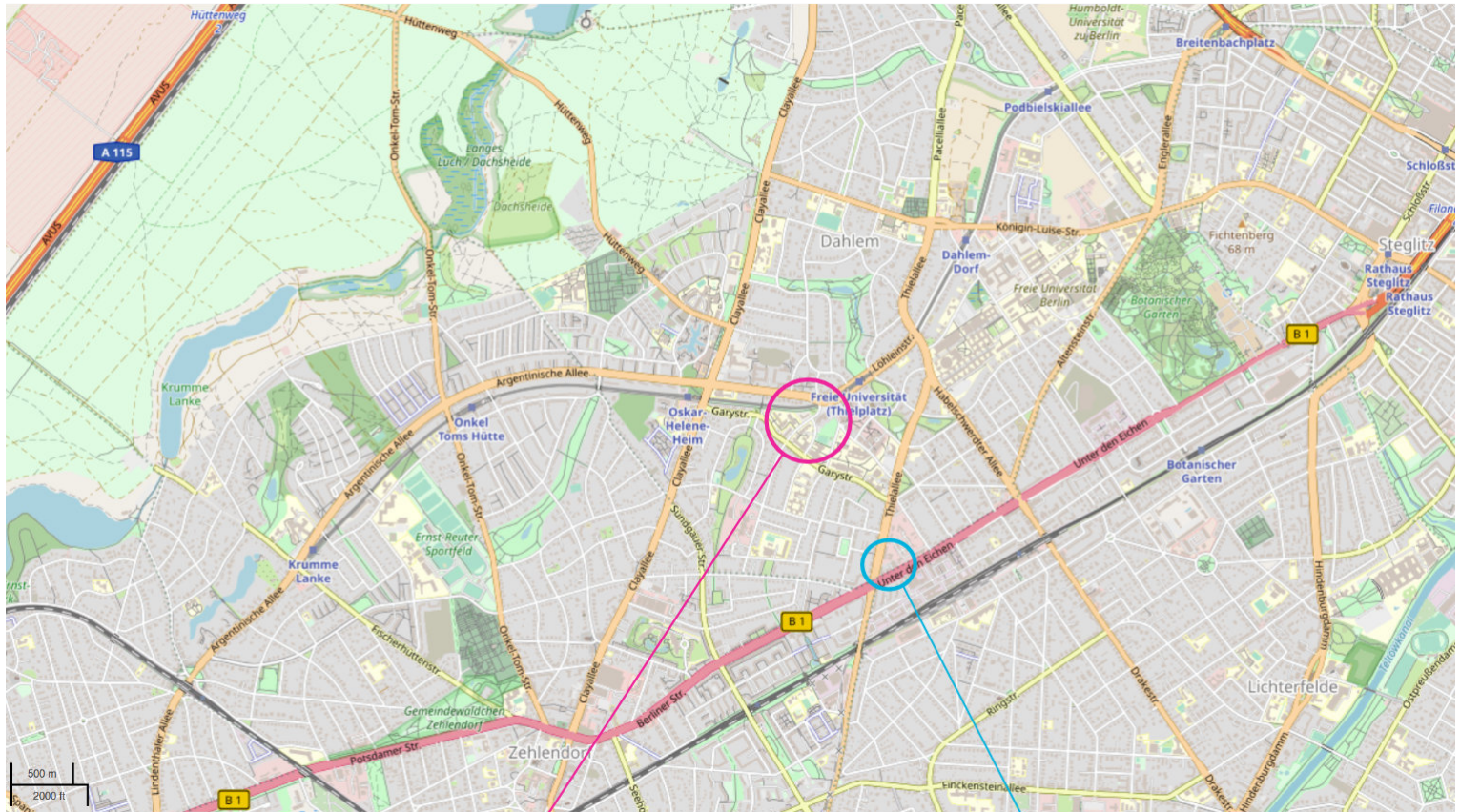


Philipp Zehmisch is Senior Academic Staff at the Department of Anthropology, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg. His postdoctoral research investigates everyday ethics and politics in the Pakistani/ Indian borderlands seeking to understand the long-lasting legacies of Partition. Philipp's doctoral dissertation "Mini-India: The Politics of Migration and Subalternity in the Andaman Islands" was published in 2017 with Oxford University Press. He also co-edited two edited volumes and published journal articles and book chapters on Subalternity, Indigeneity, Labour Migration, Partition, Anarchy, and Love in South Asia.

TRANSCULTURAL ETHICS IN SOUTHERN TRANSLATION: NOTIONS OF "DOING GOOD" AMONG URBAN PROGRESSIVES IN PAKISTAN

Southern Theory seeks to invent theories and concepts based on indigenous Southern frameworks instead of merely decolonizing hegemonic Northern concepts. A challenge for producing decolonized/indigenous knowledge is, however, to acknowledge the transcultural "translation" of broader conceptual and semantic languages of resistance – such as Marxism, Anarchism or the notion of the "progressive" – into local contexts. Ideas that evolved somewhere else are constantly appropriated, enmeshed, and transformed in order to make sense of the contemporary. In the case of Pakistan, transnational ethical assemblages – concerning class struggle, secularism, and the environment – intersect with localised notions of "doing good" among urban progressive activists. Highlighting an example of a transcultural North/ South friction, my presentation is going to analyse the ethical foundations of progressive resistance against the status quo in Pakistan. It elaborates on visions of pragmatic change and utopias aiming to "do good" among a wide range of urban civil society actors and engages critically with the limits of their engagement.

LOCALITIES



CONFERENCE

Venue + Accomodation

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Innestr. 16-20
14195 Berlin

<https://www.harnackhaus-berlinimgp.de/en>

 Freie Universität (Thielplatz)



DINNER

Trattoria
Romana

Unter den
Eichen 84,
12205 Berlin

<https://trattoria-romanaeatbu.com/?lang=en>

Dinner
July 1, 2023

TBA

"THE POPULISM OF THE PRECARIOUS: MARGINALIZATION, MOBILIZATION, AND MEDIATIZATION OF SOUTH ASIA'S RELIGIOUS MINORITIES"

by:

Juergen Schaflechner, Max Kramer, Erin Kelso and Christoph Marx

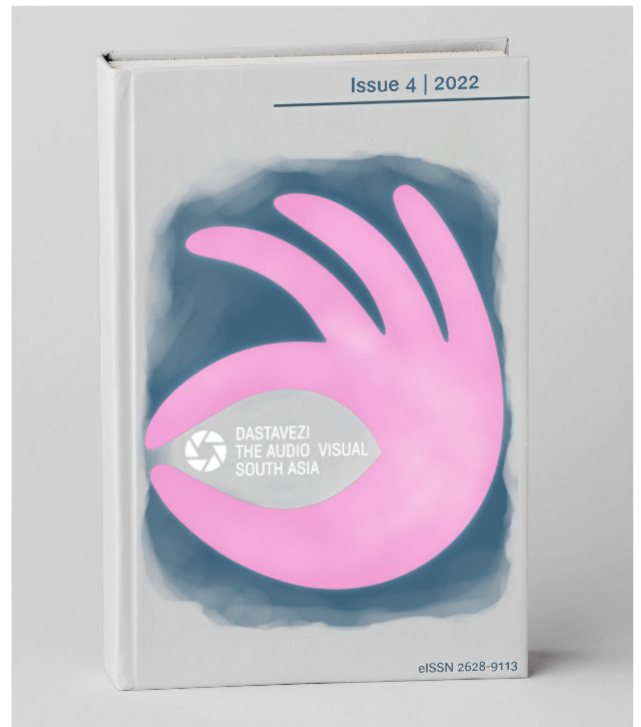
How do religiously discriminated communities in India and Pakistan become political actors in the 21st century? How does the role of the digital in everyday life change the establishment and sustainability of religious minorities' social movements in transnational and local publics and, in fact, their attempts to emerge as 'the people'? And what can case-studies of politically active religious minorities in South Asia contribute to recent discussions on the global rise of populism—whose analysis, so far, has been dominated by European and American examples? On the basis of these and other key questions, this project aims to extend studies on the current life-worlds of religious minorities in India and Pakistan, social media's influence on today's South Asian political landscapes, and, crucially, the nexus of populism and religion in its effort to produce concepts of 'citizenship' and 'the people.'

Focusing on Christian, Hindu, and Sikh minorities in Pakistan and Muslim minorities in India, we will first analyze intersectional frames of discrimination (what we will call 'precarity'). This approach will extend the binary scheme of 'victim' and 'oppressor,' which has frequently been attached to subaltern and minority studies. In a second step, we will investigate and compare the political practices and the practices of 'becoming public' emerging from religious minorities' potentially precarious life-worlds in both countries. In a third step, we will localize global discourses on populism through the results of our research in South Asia. This will pose new and innovative questions about manifestations of populism on the ground.

To methodologically trace the implicit as well as the explicit discourses of discrimination and the various struggles for equality they generate we will take an interdisciplinary approach. We will analyze popular culture (print media such as pulp fiction or TV soaps), new media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc.), and the connected everyday practices of activists and organizations in Hindi, Urdu, and Sindhi. We deem this focus on vernacular languages crucial to champion non-English publics in South Asia. The nexus of text-based analysis (performing close readings of vernacular literature), new methods in the Digital Humanities (computational textual analysis of print and online sources), and anthropological fieldwork (following the actors involved) will reveal the ways in which new communication platforms influence populist forms of constructing 'the people' in the 21st century.

Dastavezi is an international peer-reviewed, open-access e-journal, which seeks to reposition film as a central mode of knowing and thinking about South Asia. It is the first peer-reviewed journal connecting scholarly research from and about South Asia with filmic practices.

The journal is committed to promoting various modes of knowing by offering a platform for knowledge production and research on South Asia in both audio-visual and text forms. It is motivated by our desire to enhance the understanding of contemporary political, economic, and social developments in South Asia. Acknowledging the proliferation of audio-visual material in academic research, the abundance of camera-based research in ethnographic and regional scholarship, and the potential of documentary film to contribute to knowledge production, we consider the division between media practice and scholarly research to be mutually limiting. Instead, Dastavezi seeks to establish a platform for scholars and filmmakers, or both, to evolve new theoretical and practical epistemologies in their engagement with South Asia.



The journal incorporates both audio-visual and textual materials as equal outputs of academic research in order to nourish the various affordances emerging from the nexus between film production and academic writing. With its hybrid and open-access format, Dastavezi not only enables a dialogue between academics and film practitioners, but also provides an interested public with access to audio-visual productions on South Asia and the corresponding discussions.

Dastavezi welcomes submissions that connect academic texts and audio-visual material in creative ways to make a conceptual or empirical contribution to scholarship on South Asia. Contributions can either address existing discussions in new ways through audio-visual productions or introduce new themes that have thus far been overlooked in the field of South Asian studies, and which may be better addressed through an audio-visual approach.

HYPERLINK

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