

Pashtunistan: Postcolonial Imaginaries Along Borderlands, 1947-1954

With the transfer of power in 1947 Pakistan embarked on a project of nation building and state-formation. It is argued that the Pakistani state's modes of governance were deeply rooted in its colonial legacy; this was especially true in its conceptualization of the northwestern frontier, and practices related to administering its inhabitants. By examining the calls for Pashtunistan, this paper explores the construction of a frontier in the Pakistani postcolonial state's imagination. Although a term used for varied purposes, this paper will focus particularly on Afghan claims east of the Durand Line. How did Pakistani state officials respond to Afghan claims challenging its sovereignty? What was the role of Pashtunistan – both as a spatial and conceptual construct – in facilitating the economic and political imperatives of the Pakistani and Afghan nation-states? Looking at the period from 1947 to 1954, when the One Unit Scheme was established, this paper places the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Tribal Areas of Pakistan within a transnational context. It argues that the process of decolonization was accompanied by competing visions of governance and territoriality. Pashtunistan, with its multiple meanings and mandates, played a central role in driving inter-state relations and modes of engagement with native populations.

Amna Qayyum
Graduate Student
Princeton University
129 Dickinson Hall
Princeton, NJ 08540