

David Gilmartin

One paragraph to one-page narrative report highlighting the effects of this support on the field of Pakistani studies:

This travel grant allowed me to present the keynote address at a workshop I jointly organized with Matthew Cook of NC Central University, entitled “Locally Sourced: Recovering the Local in History, Culture and Politics in Pakistan.” The workshop consisted of two day-long sessions of papers and discussions focusing on the role of “local studies” in the development of Pakistani history. My keynote address, given on the first day (August 7), provided an overview of the important (if sometimes controversial) roles that “local” histories have played in the larger development of historical studies internationally. It surveyed the debates among historians on the place of local histories in the construction of national histories in Europe, Asia and elsewhere, and then suggested the distinctive twists and turns that those debates have taken in the context of Pakistan’s history. As Pakistan’s history has been marked by considerable tension between the “national,” the “regional” and the “local,” the writing of local histories have often had a problematic place in the development of Pakistan’s history-writing. Yet local historical sources in Pakistan are varied and numerous, and the potential for local histories for reorienting and revitalizing history writing in Pakistan is considerable.

My keynote address, and the larger workshop, were organized with this agenda in mind. The result brought together scholars from a variety of backgrounds and led to some exciting argument about the relationship of the “local” to the “national” in Pakistan. Various scholars from a variety of disciplines (including history, literary studies, and anthropology) presented case studies, ranging from a historical study of local labor organization among railway workers in Lahore, to a study the local press and its role in violence in Karachi, to a study of the role of the Karachi International Book Fair in defining a “literary local,” to the local histories of Hindu castes in Tharparkar, to the relationship between international Baloch networks and the local history of Baloch at Gwadar, to a history of “virtuous” investing in the local market in Karachi, to the history of local patterns of competition between Hindu castes in shaping the events leading to the British annexation of Sind. Each of the papers produced a lively discussion. The conference opened up an arena of discussion for the attendees, from universities all over Pakistan, for rethinking the importance of the “local” in its Pakistani context.