**[Slide 5]** The sixth largest nation by population, Pakistan has a dizzyingly diverse array of ethnic, linguistic, regional, and religious identities—rife with conflict for sure, but, as with any other place, these conflicts need to be historicized in order to understand the shifts therein. The popular and news media narratives, however, paint a homogenous picture of Pakistan as a place of mindless violence and frenetic religiosity. The scholarly discourse has not fared that much better either. Studies of Pakistan are saturated with political scientific studies of the state under the head of “failed state,” and, lately, with security centered studies of terrorism and fundamentalism under the head of “Radicalization”. To this discourse, Pakistan seems to have no politics—only Islam.

Anthropologist Magnus Marsden (2010) points out that Islam is a gate-keeping concept for scholarship on Pakistan. “Gatekeeping concepts” map certain theoretical questions and fields onto particular regions. Such as hierarchy in India, honor and shame in the Mediterranean etc. are all examples of ‘gate-keeping’ concepts. In what follows, I try to historicize the “Islamic identity” of Pakistan and locate it within other historic processes.

**[Slide 6]** To state the obvious, but oft-forgotten, what are now the states of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are the same landmass ruled by the British as one entity before decolonization in 1947 that came with the partitioning of this land into two states, India and Pakistan entailing mass violence and mass movement of people in both directions. I do not have time here to go into Partition historiography but suffice it to say that while religious identity had something to do with it, it did not in a simple straight-forward way, namely, that the Muslims of India wanted their own state where Islam would reign supreme, and hence the violent partition of the land and people into two state entities. The split had been in the making for a while. Colonial historiography laid the foundation of the two nation theory by positing Muslims and Hindus of India as not only historically separate and distinct, but also fundamentally different and mutually hostile. It did so by lining up Indian history into three periods: The Hindu golden age (static), Muslim Period (invasions and pillage), and British Period (restoration to India’s former glory). Language had a part to play. In the mid nineteenth century Hindustani, the lingua franca of pre-Partition India, split into two: Hindi favored by Hindu factions and Urdu by Muslims, particularly of North India, the constituency that pushed hard for the birth of Pakistani state.

**[Slide 7]** The newly formed state of Pakistan comprised of four contiguous provinces to the West of India, and Bengal to the East of it. The status of Bangla (the predominant language of Bengal) language became a contentious issue almost immediately after the creation of the state of Pakistan. It did not appear on coins, stamps, and official forms. Bengalis demanded that Bangla should be the national language because a majority of Pakistanis spoke Bangla, albeit mostly in East Pakistan, while Urdu was the first language of just 5 percent of Pakistanis. Pakistani state power, centered in the Western part, remained belligerent to the issue of language rights and parity between its two parts. Pakistani elite’s anxieties over Bengal’s demographic majority remained and led to the declaration of emergency rule and the unification of West Pakistan into one administrative unit by executive order. One Unit united the four provinces in Western Pakistan to counter Bengal, then termed East Pakistan. Bengali demands met with state’s force of arms would turn into an insurgency which Pakistan met with a genocidal counter insurgency war.

This state of Pakistan split in 1971, a second Partition, if you will, into Pakistan and Bangladesh. Bengal had played a crucial role in the Pakistan movement and founding of Pakistani state, but within a little over two decades after the creation of Pakistan, a political movement with broad popular support in East Bengal turned secessionist and sounded the death knell for the State of Pakistan as it had existed. Different conceptions and models of the state animated ideas of Pakistan in the two so-called wings of Pakistan. The West Pakistani model of the state, in scholar Philip Oldenburg’s words, “saw the state of Pakistan as inseparable from the Muslim nation of the Indian subcontinent, a nation locked in combat with the Hindus,” and Urdu formed a central plank of this narrative. India intervened and ended Pakistan’s assault on Bengalis, resulting in the Independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

**[Slide 8]** In the age of Global War on Terror, the current prevalent and post 9/11 regional designation of Pakistan is “Middle East” (Middle of what, East of whom? – such regional categorizations have particular imperial pedigrees and histories) by which is usually meant the Islamic world excluding of course the largest Muslim population, Indonesia, and other South and East Asian countries. The West’s naming of Pakistan as Middle Eastern is not the only reason (though it is a powerful reason) why the designation stuck. Pakistan itself has been repositioning and reorienting itself towards the Arabo-Islamic world. Let’s pick up this story from the 1971 moment.

[Pages 4-7 may be too much information and densely packed, so please use as you see fit.]

The loss of Bangladesh brought Bhutto’s civilian regime to power in Pakistan. The Bhutto regime had come to power on a surge of popular protests in the 1960s. This wave of militancy was in response to the so-called “Green Revolution” in Pakistan during 1960s “Developmental era”. Scholar Junaid Rana has argued that the post-independence Pakistani developmental regime under the influence of Harvard economists served as the laboratory for the neoliberal policies implemented later in Africa and Latin America. Gustav Papanek of Harvard’s Development Advisory Services, the architect of Pakistan’s developmental strategy described this strategy as “squeezing the peasant,” that is, downgrading the countryside and exacerbating rural poverty and thereby bloating the ranks of urban industrial working-class, which would cheapen the labor and help build an industrialist class which, in turn, will lead to economic growth—or so the theory goes. The strange logic was that inequalities are necessary to create economic growth, and growth then trickles down to the lower classes. A cold war ally of the United States, union busting had continued in Pakistan through the 1960s. Labor militancy continued into the Bhutto era, and Bhutto cracked down hard on the very unions that had brought him to power, leaving Bhutto with no popular constituency. He responded to this loss of legitimacy by placating the Rightwing. This is the background in which the state of Pakistan explicitly embraces the processes of Islamization through two interrelated moves. 1) Declaring Ahmadis non-Muslims. 2) Turning towards Middle East.

Religion and Politics: Until 1974, Ahmadiyya were a religious minority within Islam, and their legal status was no different than the Sunni majority. In 1974, under pressure from the rightwing, the state declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslim. This declaration though did not constitute the means with which the state could intervene in Ahmadis’ religious practice. No legal means of enforcing this decision were enacted. This allowed Ahmadis, who in their religious praxis were by and large not differentiable from Sunni Muslims, to continue to act and be recognized as Muslims, leaving the anti-Ahmadi agitators legally hamstrung in preventing Ahmadis from being and behaving as Muslims. This changed in the 1980s, with the coming of the third Martial rule in Pakistan. In 1984, the state passed Ordinance 20 which criminalized Ahmadi usage of Muslim terminology. The state was now focusing its Islamization project narrowly on making itself as a Sunni state. Next came Section 295-C, the blasphemy law – a remnant from the British colonial legislation, was enacted in 1986 to criminalize the defiling of the Prophet’s name. This law has been used primarily against minority communities ever since—particularly, the Ahmadis, the Shia, and Christians, but increasingly in the present day, this law is also wielded against academics and left intellectuals and activists.

Geopolitics: The Sunnification of the state and society of Pakistan dovetailed with America’s Jihad on what US President Raegan called “godless communists”. Pakistan’s military-dominated state got evermore powerful by cooperating with the US in the Afghan War in the 1980s, setting up training camps for fighters to be sent into Afghanistan, radicalizing its own population and emboldening the Rightwing within the country. The backflush of drugs and arms from Afghanistan into Pakistan was immense. During this time, America and its proxy Saudi Arabia, fought their cold war with Iran well into the late 1990s in a Pakistan awash with guns.

Economics: As I mentioned earlier, Pakistan had started moving towards Middle East shortly after the 1971 Bangladesh war. It had been reeling with unemployment and rural-urban migration of the 1960s. So, Pakistan tried to solve this problem of unemployment by funneling its unemployed to the Gulf during the Oil boom post 1973. In the 1970’s and 1980’s approximately half a million Pakistanis—mostly men from rural and semi-rural places— were employed annually as “unskilled” workers on short-term visas of 4-6 years in the Gulf States. At that time, at least one in ten Pakistani households had a wage earner in the Middle East. This regular circulation of Pakistanis to and from the Gulf generated over $2.5 billion dollars every year in remittances, keeping the national economy afloat. These rural men would make their money in the Gulf and return to Pakistani cities. This shift in the class composition of Pakistan would ante-up the cultural and status-based politics in Pakistan, as the established classes attributed the rise in consumerism to this newly upward mobile families from villages and smaller cities.

Urbanization:Said consumerism really kicks on after the economic liberalization in the 2000s when Pakistan opens itself fully to global capital. Consequently, in recent years, Pakistan has seen massive urbanization, particularly, growth of its large cities into megacities. The population of Karachi, for instance, Pakistan’s largest city is 23 million, and Lahore, is over 10 million. Along with this urbanization has been a burgeoning of the urban middle class.

Class politics and culture: “Being modern” is how urban Pakistanis—whether pious or not—place themselves in the present moment. What is at stake in this process of self-making is the relative status of the future and the past. In this self-positioning, the West figures prominently, as does the contest between a Westernized elite and a burgeoning pious middle-class. The middle classes construct the West as a center for modernity, and the aforesaid elites its outposts. This Westernized future is the kind of future the pious middle class seeks to avoid. There is also a kind of past to be purged from the present, and against which an Islamic conception of the modern is constructed. Folk ways of being Muslim, with their amulets and *pirs* (holy-men), for instance, are shunned as backward and irrational, and as cultural residues of Hinduism to be purified. The rural, and the Hindu, thus constitute an undesirable past whose weight is to be shed, and the West as a seductive path to a hedonist future to be avoided. The revulsion of these two temporal poles clears a middle-path, that of an Islamic modern present. Crafting of a coherent, modern Muslim self thusly at the present conjuncture of global Islamophobia, transnational capitalism, neoliberal values of self-fashioning, and the rise of rightwing is at the center of Islamization as a social process.

**[Slide 9-12]** This thumbnail sketch of Pakistani political history has focused on how global, international, and regional forces shaped national politics. But, there are other scales to consider, too. So, for example, I mentioned earlier that Pakistani military dominates the state. Pakistan military, in turn, is dominated by the province of Punjab.

This province is a cultural and economic region in itself that has its own history of statecraft and population management from colonial to the post colonial era. It, too, was cut in two during the Partition of 1947.

Take the Punjab district, Sahiwal, for example. It had its beginning as a small village on the railway line between Lahore and Karachi. In 1860s, the British Colonial state moved the district headquarters to this small village on a ridge and renamed it ‘Montgomery’. In the early twentieth century, this district became a designated areas for the massive infrastructural project of building a wide canal network in the Indus River Basin that entailed a large-scale migration of agriculturalists from North India and other parts of Punjab to settle the newly created canal colonies and agricultural farms. This was the first of many migrations to have shaped Sahiwal: the Partition when the state of Pakistan built residential settlements for the refugees including in this city, the rural-urban migrations of the “developmental era”, and then from 1970s on, we have Pakistanis from rural areas going to the Gulf in large numbers and returning to settle in cities like Sahiwal instead. A small city until the 1980s, Sahiwal has since become home to a sizeable population and an administrative center to several small towns and villages.

Much of histories and the present day global processes I talked about at the national level, I could have done at the scale of the province, or as I hope to through my dissertation research at the scale of the small city. These histories challenge us to conceptualize and teach about places (be it a country, a region, or a city) as places of flux and flows, saturated with connections at multiple interconnected scales of local, regional, national, international, and global, such that the smaller scale shapes the larger scale as much as it is shaped by it.

**Exercise:** Write a description of Pakistan’s largest city, Karachi, based on publicly available information.