

The “Development Decade” and Higher Educational Planning in Pakistan, 1958-1969

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The Cold War project of international development was promoted, across the decolonizing world, as a means to not only economic growth but also national integration and social modernization, capable of transforming politically immature “subjects” into proper “citizens.” The university, as I argue, was a key site for such interventions in the new nation-state of Pakistan, which relied heavily on foreign technical assistance to build its higher education infrastructure after independence (1947). This paper examines the impact and influence of transnational educational planning ideologies on Pakistan’s burgeoning higher educational landscape, through examples drawn from the American “university contract” programs of the 1950s-1960s. Moving between ICA records, Pakistani Education Ministry files, American university program archives, and the writings of Pakistani educationists, I trace how the logics and values of these development projects — particularly ideas of organized growth, wastage, and “human capital” — became intertwined with state agendas for national integration, population management, and controlled democracy. Transnational discourses of planning, manpower projection, and efficiency were deployed, in uneven and contentious ways, to elaborate hierarchies of merit and “usefulness” against demands for educational access and opportunity. This served not only to recast the university as a kind of disciplinary or demographic technology but also to generate unique contestations around the categories of “youth” and “student community” in the imagination of a new national body-politic.

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