

Kantor_Narrative Report

When I organized the panel on “*Safarnama* and Self-Construction” for the Madison South Asia conference this October, my purpose was to open up a conversation about the way Muslim intellectuals in South Asia have understood their relationship to the rest of the world from the nineteenth century onward. My own contribution to that discussion was a piece about Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s 1973 journey to Cuba, and the way that trip encouraged him to think differently about the political situation in Pakistan during the same period. While other panelists discussed the *safarnama* as a vehicle for crafting pan-Islamic solidarities or contrasting India and Pakistan to the West, my talk emphasizes the emergence of solidarity between Pakistan and other regions of what are now considered the “Global South.”

Here is a more detailed description of the talk:

In 1962 in Sochi, USSR, the renowned Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz found himself in a private, impromptu, transnational *mushaira* with the Chilean poet and future Nobel Laureate Pablo Neruda. Both men were in town because of the Lenin prize, fellow travelers in the political, as well as the literal sense of the word. Although neither man spoke the language in which the other composed, according to witnesses, they seemed to understand each other’s poetry perfectly. Eleven years after his meeting with Neruda, Faiz was called upon to dust off his apparently preternatural abilities in Spanish, this time for a two-week invited tour of post-revolutionary Cuba. This talk concerns the travelogue, or *safarnama*, Faiz wrote in the wake of that trip. Unlike the “perfect understanding” of his exchange with Neruda, the *safarnama* exemplifies the practical limits of Faiz’s desire for socialist internationalism, cross-cultural understanding, and South-South solidarity. At the same time, Faiz’s story can tell us as much about his view of Pakistan as about the “*dūr darāz gher-marūf jazīra*” (far off, unknown island) it claims to represent. This talk makes sense of the *Safarnama-e Cuba* in light of Faiz’s USSR travelogue *Mah-o-sal-e ashnai*, as well as other post-revolutionary Cuban travelogues such as Gabriel García Márquez’s “Cuba de cabo a rabo.”