

AIPS Summer Research Grant Final Report - Addendum

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The significance of research for Pakistan Studies

My research will contribute to the study of social movements, contentious politics, and state formation processes within the context of peripheral regions of Pakistan. In so doing, it will fill empirical gaps and make broader contributions to important theoretical debates.

Empirically, my work will provide an ethnographic account of contentions around water related development projects and disasters. The focus on southern Balochistan will bring to light a region that has been largely ignored by scholarship on Pakistan; in particular the study of the politics of ordinary people and communities from Baluchistan are almost non-existent. The study also moves away from the usual focus of scholarship on water, dams, and development, which focus on high politics and policy debates and fail to study the complex experiences, grievances and demands of the affected communities.

My study will engage with broader scholarship on the issue of politics around water. While there are plenty of studies of the displacement and dispossession caused by water related development and disasters in the South Asian context, these have largely focused on India and Bangladesh. By focusing on Balochistan, the study will bring to light certain theoretical dimensions not present in the existing literature. For example, the historical different development of state institutions and structures of power in southern Balochistan. The politics around water is also being done in the violent context of the conflict between Baloch separatists and Pakistani state – a dynamic that informs and feeds into the local politics. Furthermore, the prevalence of underground water tunnel based irrigation system, known as karezat, and the complex socio-natural worlds constituted around, are a unique factor in the politics of water in South Asia.

These elements mean that the theorizing of the politics of the dispossessed communities in South Asia does not sufficiently address the context-specificity of southern Balochistan. My study will address these significant limitations. It will provide a resource for scholars interested in the study of social movements and politics around water in Pakistan and South Asia in general.