

AIPS Summer Research Grant

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: Contemporary global capitalism is marked by the proliferation of novel property forms, undergirded by transnational legal regimes such as the WTO's Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Agreement (TRIPS). These emergent property regimes, sites of new fears and hopes, are refiguring 'traditional' property relations in the global South, profoundly affecting lives and livelihoods. In 2002, the Patents Ordinance was enacted with the goal of making Pakistan compliant with TRIPS. With Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry—in particular cancer medicines—as my ethnographic focus, I will examine how Pakistan's nascent intellectual property (henceforth IP) regime is transforming property relations, and unsettling unidirectional North-to-South narratives of property's futures. The central concern arching over my research will be access to essential cancer drugs. This project will interweave my current doctoral training in Anthropology with my previous experiences, including two and a half years (2011-13) as an IP lawyer in the U.S., and in 2001-2, with an undergraduate student organization I founded at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), supplying free medicines to impoverished patients in Lahore's government hospitals.

This summer, I will do two months of preliminary fieldwork in Pakistan. I will be based in Lahore from June 15-August 15, with occasional trips to Islamabad. I list below some themes I intend to explore, and the corresponding specific sites and interlocutors I have initiated contact with:

- I will visit the Intellectual Property Organization's (IPO Pakistan) head office in Islamabad, and regional office in Lahore. My goal, in addition to learning as much as possible about the IPO's workings and its officials' perspectives, is to secure an (unpaid) internship for when I officially begin fieldwork. There is no streamlined process currently in place for this, so I will need to craft my role; I expect my IP law background to help.
- MNCs own the majority of pharmaceutical patents in Pakistan, evoking protest that TRIPS is an instrument for furthering MNC agendas. To analyze the intimacies between property and Empire, I will trace the colonial origins of IP in South Asia, using the 1911 Patent Act as my starting point. I will secure student researcher access to the National Archives of Pakistan and National Documentation Center in Islamabad, where I will analyze colonial-era IP discourses through official reports, legislative debates, and court cases. I will compare these with contemporary WTO debates, a corpus I am familiar with through a previous WTO project with Aurat Foundation, a prominent Pakistani non-profit. MNCs in Pakistan are well known to be reluctant to engage researchers, and I expect pharmaceutical MNCs to be especially so. That said, I am trying to identify employees at Pakistan's approximately 30 pharmaceutical MNCs who would agree to meet with me.
- Pharmaceutical MNCs demand IP protection for their drugs, and have in some instances succeeded in preventing local companies from manufacturing and selling these drugs at far lower prices. There have been instances of courts accepting patent applications—versus actual patents—by MNCs as valid forms of property. How might these not-quite property rights be conceptualized? I am arranging meetings with partners at two prominent IP law firms in Lahore and Islamabad, and plan to accompany them to court hearings in ongoing pharmaceutical cases. I will also read court judgments in pharmaceutical cases at the law library of my undergraduate alma mater, LUMS.
- Smuggled medicines from India and China proliferate in Pakistan, and since acute shortages of cancer drugs are common, some doctors have taken to prescribing these 'illegal' smuggled drugs. I hope to tease out how these fluid, contested rubrics of legality and illegality determine access to life saving medicines. I will regularly visit Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust Hospital (SKMH), Pakistan's premier cancer hospital and research facility, and speak with patients about their experiences accessing cancer drugs. I have set up a meeting with a pediatric oncologist at SKMH, as well as with a doctor who formerly worked at SKMH and now runs his own hospital in Lahore. Both have offered to introduce me to other colleagues.

- Through a chain of requests to acquaintances, I have contacted the owners of three prominent local pharmaceutical companies. In addition to detailed discussions with them, I will visit their offices—regularly, I hope—as well as their production sites. I will meet with the ex-Chairman of the Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers’ Association (PPMA), and have begun contacting (via email, and once in Lahore, via phone) the 500+ pharmaceutical companies listed on the PPMA website. I will visit the few that respond.
- I will visit several pharmacies in Lahore and Islamabad to learn about the types of cancer drugs they stock—whether branded, generic, imported, or locally made both by local companies and MNCs—availability issues, and comparative pricing. This will require making a few purchases, which isn’t a problem, as most drugs in Pakistan can be bought without a prescription. I am trying to contact pharmacy owners as well, for perspectives different from the ones pharmacists will be able to offer when I visit pharmacies as a customer/researcher.

This summer of preliminary fieldwork will be invaluable in allowing me to hone in on my precise questions for my doctoral project, and to establish contacts who will allow me prolonged access to these sites in the form of volunteer positions/internships during subsequent fieldwork.