

Ecologies of water theft in Pakistan: the colony, the corporation and the contemporary

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The research for which funding is sought is a historical-legal ethnography that examines the ways and wiles of people, corporations, states, and bureaucracies. It shows how the changing terrain of water use and land ownership in the Punjab – Pakistan’s most populous province and its agricultural heartland – is entangled in the shoring up and undermining of the law, state sovereignty, corporate power, and projects of ethical self-formation. It builds upon two years of fieldwork in Pakistan’s Punjab, shorter research stints at water fora in the Czech Republic, Sweden, Tajikistan, and the U.S., and archival research at the British Library and archives in Islamabad and Lahore. The book manuscript chapters pursue productions of the distinction between the public and the private by working through what I call, ecological categories – those that ‘gather’ – such as salary, price, crisis, public, the case, and the hydraulic engineering concept of the ‘duty of water,’ and are grouped, broadly, into three nodes along which the public/private distinction is produced: labor, adjudication, and valuation. Further research to bring the project to completion and to submit the book manuscript to publishers, will involve extended research with agriculturalists in Lahore and Kasur – prior fieldwork sites – and Faisalabad (new site proposed to furnish a comparative perspective on the research; Faisalabad was the site of a major irrigation reform under which farmer organizations were introduced; the reform is widely regarded today as a failure).