

AIPS Short-Term Research Grant Final Report

Project Title: Bounding Nations: Making Citizens: Partition, Citizenship and Evacuee Property in Postcolonial South Asia

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Dates for Project: December—February 2023

Location: Bangladesh, United Kingdom

1. Significance to Pakistan Studies

My work examines the evacuee property regime that developed after India and Pakistan's partition in 1947. In doing so, my research makes three primary contributions to scholarship on modern South Asia—both India and Pakistan. First, by focusing on the law, I emphasize how individual agency shaped lived histories of the top-down legal and bureaucratic regime that I outlined above. Lawyers who deployed new citizenship provisions and constitutional rights to challenge these laws and individuals who tried to privately exchange their property emerge as key actors in my dissertation. Second, my proficiency in Bengali, Punjabi, and Hindi-Urdu along with English has allowed me to research in archives in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the UK to bring out the common logic—to 'fix' nationals on the territory of both states—which underlay the two widely divergent approaches to evacuee property. Current research has neglected Bengal's evacuee property regime, focusing instead on mechanisms crafted on the western border. Third, by foregrounding the many cooperative mechanisms that both evolved to create remarkably similar legal and bureaucratic mechanisms on either flank, I resist tropes that postulate India and Pakistan's relationship as one of unremitting hostility since independence. In doing so, I situate my examination along with other mid-century examples where national borders became contested sites of identity and material relationships. As this project shows, the rise of a strong, unitary state, the increasing role of passports and "hard" borders, and the rejection of minority protection treaties after World War II impacted the choices Indian and Pakistani legislators, lawyers, and bureaucrats made. In turn, the political, legal, and bureaucratic solutions they evolved circulated globally across borders as other states emulated their example.

I am extremely grateful to AIPS for their generous funding, and for their help and support despite visa and travel issues during the pandemic for making my research possible, and look forward to a continued association with AIPS.

2. Key Outcomes and Deliverables

Outcomes:

- a. My time at the British Library allowed me to examine material on currency in India and Pakistan after the partition, and this shall form part of a future research plan on the circulation of the rupee in South and West Asia.
- b. At Bangladesh, I was able to find material on exchanges of property, which shall form part of the eventual book project.

Deliverables:

- a. During my research stint at Dhaka (January 2023), I was able to find material on two chapters for my dissertation on evacuee property in Bangladesh and on *zamindari* abolition in East Bengal.
- b. At the British Library in February 2023, I found petitions relating to the Boundary Commission for Punjab, which have been very useful for the first chapter of my dissertation that I am currently drafting (June 2023)
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