

The long hydraulic partition: Producing national space in the Indus Basin

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In *The Long Partition* (2010) Vazira Zamindar argues that the violent partition (or “Partition”) of British India into the Indian and Pakistani states in 1947 was not a discrete historical event. Rather, Partition was a process of nation-formation that stretched into the 1950s as property laws and migration rules forced populations to adjust the newly drawn borders. Thus “Pakistan” and “India” existed on the map well before the consolidation of Indian and Pakistani nationhood. In this paper, I argue that physical infrastructures, along with the legal and institutional actors Zamindar emphasizes, are vital to the creation of national space. I draw on the controversy surrounding the Indian proposal to build the Mahru Tunnel during the Indus Waters Treaty negotiations in the 1950s. The Mahru Tunnel, which was never built, would have linked two tributaries of the Indus in the disputed territory of Kashmir upstream of Pakistan. I analyze the negotiation record for the territorial and security implications of why the tunnel was proposed and opposed. Furthermore, I draw on recent legal controversies around the Indus Waters Treaty to emphasize that the contradictory political geographies of Partition (and partitions more generally) are still emergent today. As the Indus is continually re-engineered by both states in an attempt to achieve water security, the national space of India and Pakistan is also remade. The broader implications of my analysis are that infrastructural interventions enhance state power to secure territory for the nation in some ways, even while restricting the state’s capacity to secure territory in other ways. This paper contributes to materialist state theory, water security studies, and the historical and area studies scholarship on Partition.