

Daniel Haines. *Rivers Divided: Indus Basin Waters in the Making of India and Pakistan.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 272 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-064866-4.

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Dividing Rivers and the Making of India and Pakistan

The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) signed between Pakistan and India in 1960 continues to cut both ways. While several contemporary analysts have heralded the treaty for establishing protocols that somewhat evenhandedly enable the two basin stakeholders to harness the waters of the Indus system, others have bitterly criticized the very same arrangements for causing discord.

Daniel Haines's *Rivers Divided* is a significant effort and allows for a fresh rethink on the troubled and continuing saga of the Indus Basin by placing "environmental politics" at the 'heart of a decolonisation story' (p. 13). By coupling historical enquiry with searching questions over sovereignty, territoriality, and state building in the region, *Rivers Divided* ably dispels the standard claim that the contentious apportioning of the waters of the Indus River between India and Pakistan was fundamentally an "engineering question" that needed a "technical answer." Rather, if anything, Haines argues, the IWT was produced by the imperatives for creating national territory and the consequences of decolonization.

The exit of British colonial rule from the Indus Basin in 1947 meant that the vast, irregular mesh of rivers could no longer exist as a single, unified hydraulic unit. Instead, literally overnight, the

various riverine arms of the Indus system were now found to be untidily sprawled and crisscrossing the geography of two newly independent sovereign nations. Reorganizing these rivers along with their extensive canals networks as exclusively controlled national resources was complicated and perplexing—more so given that both India and Pakistan in those early years were also caught up in equally troubling quests to stabilize their territorial claims, assert sovereignty, and establish control over people and terrain. In particular, for these young nations, Haines notes, the urgency to generate legitimacy for their incipient governments spurred them within the initial decades to attempt competitive water development projects on the Indus Basin rivers by further expanding existing irrigation schemes and adding hydroelectric dams.

In the first two chapters, Haines skilfully lays out the troubled context of territory as a central problem for nation-building through water development. For one, aligning people, history, and territory as a national relationship at the very outset itself was cluttered by differing imaginations within their respective national movements. Many Indian nationalists, for example, considered the very existence of Pakistan as an admission of tan-

gible “territorial loss”—“a severed limb.” On the other hand, the Muslim League and a range of ideologues who spearheaded the demand for Pakistan sharply differed along two lines of thought. A section believed that their idea of Pakistan was principally a political concept that acknowledged religious identity as its main marker, while the contrasting view held that their idea of a Muslim nation was foremost a geographical reality that was firmly grounded in territory. Haines does well to rehearse for us these often less-emphasized aspects in which both India and Pakistan had to wrestle with ideas about to being nation-states as they sought to firm up their boundaries, resolve issues of citizenship, and unambiguously settle borders.

Rivers Divided explains how the compulsions for “territorial construction” amplified acrimony and mistrust between India and Pakistan even as they battled over “ownership” of the waters of the Indus system. By drawing upon the notion of “absolute sovereignty,” India argued that water was inseparable from land and therefore all rivers within its territory became exclusively Indian flows. Pakistan, on the other hand, argued on the principle of “prior appropriation” and “territorial integrity,” which meant that past usage of the Indus waters for their canal networks entitled them to stake claims to flows even if the latter did not wholly course their territory. Put differently, Haines concludes, Pakistan sought to privilege history over geography.

It was but inevitable that these heated differences over the ownership of flows ended up colliding with issues of sovereignty. In particular, Haines devotes a chapter to discuss the challenge of Kashmir, with its bitter contention summed up by the then prime minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan, who in a letter to President Truman in 1949 claimed that “Nature has so to speak fashioned them [Kashmir and Pakistan] together” (p. 67). At heart was the fact that long sections of the Chenab, Jhelum, and the Indus—all flows being

the “life blood of West Pakistan”—lay in Kashmir. The Indian quandary given the circumstances, however, was no less. If compelled to entirely commit the use of those waters to Pakistan, did India end up undermining its notion of sovereignty and critically as well would Jammu and Kashmir thereby be prevented from future use? Haines suggests that the IWT, in fact, could only dodge these difficult arguments by getting water allocation decisions to entirely sidestep the debate over sovereignty. That is, Indian sovereignty over the Indus Basin rivers remained unrelinquished even as it acknowledged Pakistan’s needs for the waters.

Kashmir, interestingly enough, was not the only source for heartburn over sovereignty. The Indus Basin rivers that coursed through the Punjab region—divided as it became between a western (Pakistan) and eastern (India) portion—were prone to abandoning channels, spitting up new islands, and radically changing course in a single season. In other words, the changing geography repeatedly disoriented standard cartographic and mapping exercises and brought much grief to officials who were tasked with trying to stabilize the new border. In addition, the canal headworks—notably, the Suleimanki and Ferozepur—required engineers to often weave between borders for maintenance and repair works. The day-to-day practices for realizing sovereignty, in effect, Haines informs us, had to be agonizingly reconciled with environments that were fluid, in flux, and unstable.

In the final two chapters, Haines walks us through the steps that began with the World Bank plan of 1954 and culminated with the signing of the Indus Waters Treaty. An alluring possibility for transcending territoriality was introduced, Haines points out, when David Lilienthal, an American technocrat and founding director of the Tennessee Valley Authority, was able to make a strong case for an engineer-led “cooperative sharing” of the Indus Basin rivers. Lilienthal believed that the en-

tire Indus Basin could be regulated as a natural, apolitical, borderless entity, with both India and Pakistan jointly managing the rivers. These hopes were, however, quickly dashed. Political leaders on either side of the border, “nationalist engineers,” and the severe calculations of Cold War geopolitics edged the treaty instead towards “dividing” the waters of the Indus Basin into two separate hydraulic slices: western rivers (Jhelum, Chenab, Indus) for Pakistan and the eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej) for India. The Indus Basin rivers, thus, Haines argues, were split in order to accord with the imperatives of national territory and exclusive sovereignty.

With *Rivers Divided*, Haines is clear that the success and the vulnerabilities that haunt the IWT in contemporary times can be meaningfully traced to the politics of decolonization rather than the

limitations of engineering. Oddly enough, despite the centrality of the notion of territory in the analysis, Haines seems to have missed out on engaging with Itty Abraham’s much-acclaimed *How India Became Territorial* (2014). According to Abraham, the idea of national territory became a defining characteristic for new nation-states following the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Could India and Pakistan, therefore, have aspired to be otherwise by trying to “share” rather than “divide” the Indus waters?

Rivers Divided is a very important book and Haines’s scholarship, along with the recent writings of David Gilmartin, Majed Akther, and Daanish Mustafa, moves us a step closer to entirely re-envisioning the history and politics of the Indus Basin.

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