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Document 1: Significance of Presentation on Pakistan Studies

The panel that this paper contributes to was organized with the explicit purpose of increasing the presence of Pakistan Studies at the Annual Conference on South Asia. Specifically, intention of the organizers was to place Pakistan Studies and Indian Studies in conversation through the common frame of property. The history of property in South Asia is largely a shared one, ranging from landed property laws introduced during the Mughal Empire, colonial property regimes established under British rule, and the massive transfer of property following partition. But in many ways, the concept of property took on different meanings in Pakistan and India after independence, with the former pursuing models based upon Islamic conceptions of value, ownership, and inheritance, and the latter embracing first a state-led model of development and second economic liberalization. What does property mean to bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, and citizens across India and Pakistan? How do such meanings entangle with the shared history and divergent post-independence trajectories of the two nations? What might be learned about property itself by examining it through such a rich sociocultural lens? This interdisciplinary panel (anthropology, history, and law) features three papers on property in Pakistan (land, media, and pharmaceutical drugs), one paper on property in India (real estate), and a discussant with expertise in South Asian colonial property law. My own paper examines the state's effort to digitize centuries-old land records in inner-city Lahore as a way to increase the liquidity of local assets. With Lahore belonging to the agriculturally-rich Punjab province, land has long been intertwined with various political, economic, and social forces. Lahore's inner-city is no exception—with plots inherited and subdivided over multiple generations, land has become fundamental to traditional forms of sociality in the area such as kinship, ethnicity, and religion. Moreover, land records have historically been managed by traditional record keepers who rely on paper-based documentation and continue to be fundamental in the new digital system. In the context of digitization, the paper examines land's entanglement with a number of extra-digital relations. How is landed property produced at the intersection of the digital, the social, and the material? What might this reveal about contemporary processes of capitalism, urban development, and social life in Pakistan? Scaling out yet further, how might the intertwined history and distinct postcolonial presents of India and Pakistan be understood through the lens of property, and what might this reveal about the notion of property itself?