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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dam(n)ing the hills: Indigeneity, American aid, and Cold War politics in the Kaptai Dam, East Pakistan, 1957–1964

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Abstract

In the late 1950s, work began on the Kaptai hydroelectric dam, a massive project in the verdant Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), an area bordering northeast India, east Pakistan (today Bangladesh), and Burma (now Myanmar), largely populated by indigenous hill communities. At the time, the CHT was situated in newly created East Pakistan, and Kaptai had become a focal site for the development of hydroelectric power. In the process, Pakistan relied upon international networks, including global aid organizations and American multinational construction firms, to fulfil its development dreams; in return the United States found a useful ally to contain Soviet influence and the growth of communism in Asia. In the high stakes exchange of economic aid for political alliance-making, East Pakistani administrators, US State Department officials, and American corporations became inherently entwined in a shared vision of development, to the detriment of local ecologies and the indigenous peoples who lived within them. This article will explore how both the public and private sectors used the language of primitivity, wildness, and atavism to marginalize minority 'tribal' populations in the devastating name of development and modernity.

Introduction

> Sometimes we came upon a recess in the bank of verdure which rose on either hand; and there the tinkling of a cascade would be heard behind the veil, its entry into the stream being marked by a great grey heap of rounded rocks and boulders, toppled and tossed about in a way that showed with what a sweep the water came down in the rains. Scarlet dragonflies and butterflies of purple, gold, and

> azure, flitted like jewels across our path; while silvery fish, streaked with dark-blue bands, flew up the stream before us, like flashes of light, as we poled along.[1]

In the late 1950s, work began on a massive hydroelectric dam project in the verdant Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), an area bordering northeast India, east Pakistan (today Bangladesh), and Burma (now Myanmar). What became known as the Kernaphuli Multipurpose Project in American government records, or more generally the Kaptai Dam, would have devastating consequences on the environmental history of the region and its people.

The Kaptai Dam was built over the course of several years between 1957–1964.[2] A place lush with rivers, streams, green mountains, forests, and fertile valleys, with a wet and productive monsoon season, the CHT was long known for its sweeping beauty. Accounts by Mughal governors, British colonial administrators, and contemporary indigenous poets describe its haunting landscapes and vibrant ecologies. Perhaps nothing so defined the region as its wide, glistening rivers; gentle bubbling streams; and dramatic waterfalls, as memorialized in the description above. Water, and the way it could be harnessed, became one of the primary ways in which this area was perceived and defined.

From the first, outside forces, whether European colonial administrations or post-colonial South Asian governments, attempted to master and tame these natural environments, particularly water bodies and hillsides, to the detriment and marginalization of the indigenous people and wildlife who lived in them. The Kaptai Dam, which was originally conceived in 1906, when the CHT was still a part of the colonial province of British Bengal, was perhaps the most intrusive of such interventions.

Following independence and the partition of India in 1947, when the CHT was placed in newly formed East Pakistan, Kaptai became a focal area of renewed interest. In the 1950s, Pakistan along with its Asian neighbours, India and China, embarked upon large-scale development projects to fulfil emergent energy and infrastructure needs[3]—none more destructive than the hydroelectric dam. In the process, Pakistan returned to colonial-era policy

[1] T. H. Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein with Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialects* (Calcutta: Bengal Printing Company, Limited, 1869), pp. 3–4; also reprinted in T. H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India* (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1870), p. 13.

[2] Bijoy P. Barua, 'Development Intervention and Ethnic Communities in Bangladesh and Thailand: A Critique', *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 2, 1 (2010), pp. 372–400, p. 382; Arnab Roy Chowdhury, 'Deluge amidst Conflict: Hydropower Development and Displacement in the North-east Region of India', *Progress in Development Studies* 13, 3 (2013) pp. 195–208, pp. 201–202; Ishtiaq Jamil and Pranab Kumar Panday, 'The Elusive Peace Accord in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and the Plight of the Indigenous People', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 46, 4 (2008), pp. 464–489, p. 468; Lailufar Yasmin, 'The Tyranny of the Majority in Bangladesh: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 20, 1 (2014), pp. 116–132, p. 122; Amena Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1997), p. 102.

[3] Sunil Amrith, *Unruly Waters: How Mountain Rivers and Monsoons Have Shaped South Asia's History* (London: Penguin, 2018), pp. 177–179.

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schemes and relied upon international networks, including global aid organizations and American multinational construction firms, to fulfil its development dreams. The United States, alongside the Soviet Union, defined this era of global development due to its postwar engineering and technical prowess. However, American engagement was by no means altruistic, but driven by strategic Cold War era concerns relating to containing the Soviet Union, which lay across Pakistan's border, and the broader threat of communism in Asia.[4] In the process, both Pakistani and American aid officials would largely ignore the objections of local, indigenous leaders, such as the CHT tribal chiefs or rajas, who expressed grave concerns over the dam's potential destructiveness. The dam would have catastrophic consequences, leading to 40 per cent of the total land being flooded,[5] the disappearance of countless native species of animals,[6] and 100,000 people being forced to flee.[7]

In the high stakes exchange of economic aid for political alliance-making, East Pakistani administrators, US State Department officials, and American corporations became inherently entwined in a shared vision.[8] The dam, as a modern marvel, was a violent symbol of the physical devastation and reconstruction of rivers in the CHT as well as the forced displacement of indigenous peoples from their ancestral homelands. In the process, Kaptai illuminates mid-twentieth century transnational, neocolonial attitudes regarding the benefits of economic development and industrial technology,[9] and the ways in

[4] Postwar Soviet and American involvement in global development megaprojects, like large dams, in decolonized nations was associated with broader ideas of modernization and Cold War geopolitical strategy. Engineers and development planners saw dams as ways to revolutionize society through generating new forms of electricity and irrigation systems, and the United States used 'water resource development' as a way to broker political alliances with newly independent postcolonial states in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Christopher Sneddon, *Concrete Revolution: Large Dams, Cold War Geopolitics, and the US Bureau of Reclamation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 3.

[5] Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers 2003), p. 24.

[6] Philip Gain, 'Life and Nature at Risk', in his *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Life and Nature at Risk* (Dhaka: Society for Environment and Human Development, 2000), pp. 1–41, p. 37.

[7] Barua, 'Development Intervention', p. 381; Raja Tridiv Roy, *The Departed Melody* (Islamabad: PPA Publications, 2003), p. 176.

[8] As David C. Engerman has argued, the 1950s saw the American and Soviet governments engaged in various development projects in India to address issues of food scarcity, agricultural machinery, investment capital, or military hardware, which resulted in what he has termed an economic Cold War. David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). I would argue this idea applies more broadly to South Asian nations, including East Pakistan.

[9] Here I refer to neocolonialism as the continued exploitation of former European colonies by more powerful developed nations. In the American context, the United States sold military hardware, intervened in domestic trade and commercial activities, and advocated for democratic systems of government in exchange for the establishment of American military bases and the market dominance of American corporations in Third World countries. As William H. Blanchard argues, acts of American neocolonialism were not merely limited to formal American government intervention but also pressure by American corporations, who often behaved like states in

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which the voices of indigenous peoples, their geographies, sacred spaces, and traditions are all too often drowned out by the rising floodwaters.

Such accounts of contested borderlands and their environments have largely been sidelined, not only by colonial and post-colonial governments, but also by South Asian scholarship. Indeed, hilly liminal borders, which cross geopolitical boundaries between South and Southeast Asia, like the CHT, have often been neglected in broader national or imperial historiographies. Most scholars of the Indian subcontinent have emphasized the trajectories of nation-states, whether India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma, and less the cultural and political histories of border regions and their indigenous tribal populations who are often seen as 'stateless' and marginal.[10] This article is indebted to the pioneering concept of 'Zomia' which links parts of South, Southeast, and East Asia:[11] it has furthered our understanding of Asian borderlands that often fall outside the boundaries of contemporary geopolitical states. Such hilly interstitial borderlands have historically evaded control by governments located in lowland centres.[12] A plethora of recent scholarship, including the environmental history of transnational South Asian frontiers,[13]

miniature. William H. Blanchard, *Neocolonialism American Style, 1960–2000* (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 7–8.

[10] Jonathan Saha, 'Is it in India? Colonial Burma as a "problem" in South Asian history', *South Asian History and Culture* 7, 1 (January 2016), pp. 23–29, p. 24; Erik de Maaker and Vibha Joshi, 'Introduction: The Northeast and Beyond: Region and Culture', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 30, 3 (December 2007), pp. 381–390, p. 382; Joy L. K. Pachuau and Willem van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram, Northeast India* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 3; Joy L. K. Pachuau and Willem van Schendel, 'Borderland Histories, Northeastern India: An Introduction', *Studies in History* 32, 1 (February 2016), pp. 1–4, p. 1. Historic states, which fell outside contemporary national borders, such as British Burma, were also largely excluded in scholarly or popular histories of South Asia. Saha, 'Is it in India?', p. 25.

[11] Willem van Schendel, 'Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, 6 (2002), pp. 647–668; James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); David N. Gellner, 'Introduction', in *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia*, (ed.) David N. Gellner (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 1–23.

[12] Nicholas Farrelly, 'Nodes of Control in a South(east) Asian Borderland', *Borderland Lives*, (ed.) Gellner, pp. 194–213, p. 198.

[13] Sunil Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortune of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Gunnel Cederlof, *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers, 1790 – 1840: Climate, Commerce, Polity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); Indrani Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends: Monks, Marriages and Memories of Northeast India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013); Rajib Handique, *British Forest Policy in Assam* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2004); Sanghamitra Misra, *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India* (London: Routledge, 2011); Joy L. K. Pachuau, *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); Arupjyoti Saikia, *Forests and Ecological History of Assam, 1826–2000* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011); Yasmin Saikia, *Fragmented Memories: Struggling to be Tai-Ahom in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire's Garden: Assam and the Making of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia* (London: Anthem Books, 2005). There have also been a number of journal special issues dedicated to the region including: Erik de Maaker and Vibha Joshi (eds), 'Special Issue: The Northeast and Beyond: Region and Culture', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 30, 3

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addresses these border regions. New accounts on the colonial history[14] and post-colonial politics and ethnography[15] of the CHT are among them.

In particular this article engages with broader accounts of South Asian histories of water,[16] including those relating to dam building, such as Sunil Amrith's groundbreaking and evocative *Unruly Waters*.[17] It further delves into Christopher Sneddon's concept of 'technopolitics', introduced in *Concrete Revolution*, which places the discourse on twentieth-century dam building within the larger historical context of American aid during the Cold War, and the resulting environmental devastation and displacement of riverine communities.[18]

Beginning with a brief history of the CHT, this article will then examine the broader period of the 1950s and 1960s during which the Kaptai Dam was built.

(2007); 'Special Issue: Borderland Politics in Northern India', *Asian Ethnicity* 14, 3 (2013) was reprinted in Yu-Wen Chen and Chih-yu Shih (eds), *Borderland Politics in Northern India* (London: Routledge, 2014); Joy L. K. Pachuau and Willem van Schendel (eds), 'Special Issue: Borderland Histories, Northeastern India', *Studies in History* 32, 1 (February 2016).

[14] Lalruatkima, 'Frontiers of Imagination: Reading over Thomas Lewin's Shoulders', *Studies in History* 32, 1 (February 2016), pp. 21–38. See also his larger project: Lalruatkima, '"Wild Races": Scripts and Textures of Imperial Imagination', Claremont Graduate University, 2014; Tamina Chowdhury, 'Raids, Annexation and Plough: Transformation through Territorialisation in Nineteenth-century Chittagong Hill Tracts', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 53, 2 (2016), pp. 183–224; also refer to Tamina Chowdhury, *Indigenous Identity in South Asia: Making Claims in the Colonial Chittagong Hill Tracts* (London: Routledge, 2016); Angma Dey Jhala, *An Endangered History: Indigeneity, Religion and Politics on the Borders of India, Burma and Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[15] Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*; Willem van Schendel, Wolfgang Mey and Aditya Kumar Dewan, (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in a Borderland* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2001); Kawser Ahmed, 'Defining "Indigenous" in Bangladesh: International Law in Domestic Context', *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 17 (2010), pp. 47–73; Barua, 'Development Intervention'; Khairul Chowdhury, 'Politics of Identities and Resources in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: Ethnonationalism and/or Indigenous Identity', *Asian Journal of Social Science* 36 (2008), pp. 57–78; Arun Kumar Nayak, 'Understanding Environmental Security and Its Causal Factors with Reference to Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh', *The IUP Journal of International Relations* VIII, 4 (October 2014), pp. 40–53; Ala Uddin 'Dynamics of Strategies for Survival of the Indigenous People in Southeastern Bangladesh', *Ethnopolitics* 15, 3 (2016), pp. 319–338; Nasir Uddin, 'Decolonising Ethnography in the Field: An Anthropological Account', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 14, 6 (November 2011), pp. 455–467; Matthew Wilkinson, 'Negotiating with the Other: Centre-Periphery Perceptions, Peacemaking Policies and Pervasive Conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh', *International Review of Social Research* 5, 3 (2015), pp. 179–190.

[16] For more on this topic refer to Debjani Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Arupjyoti Saikia, *The Unquiet River: A Biography of the Brahmaputra* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019); Sudipta Sen, *Ganges: The Many Pasts of an Indian River* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

[17] Amrith, *Unruly Waters.*

[18] As Sneddon argues, American involvement in mid-twentieth century global dam building was inherently a hybrid project, straddling constructs of nature, technology, and society, with devastating results. Some 30–60 million people have been directly displaced, while the livelihoods of an additional 500 million people downstream were destroyed. Sneddon, *Concrete Revolution*, pp. 3–5.

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It will subsequently discuss Pakistan's motivations for economic development and position as a desirable ally to the United States during the Cold War; American commitment to providing aid for Pakistan; the important political role of American construction firms; the response of indigenous leaders, such as the Chakma Raja; and the troubling consequences of the dam in the many decades since.

Precolonial and colonial rumblings: Creating a tribal borderland

The CHT is a diverse South Asian borderland composed of several indigenous communities, including the Bawm, Sak (or Chak), Chakma, Khumi, Khyang, Marma, Mru (or Mro), Lushai, Uchay (also called Mrung, Brong, Hill Tripura), Pankho, Tanchangya, and Tripura (Tipra), characterized by hybrid ethnic, linguistic, and religious histories.[19] They practise Buddhism, Hinduism, animism, and later Christianity;[20] are physically close in appearance to their Southeast Asian neighbours in Burma, Vietnam, and Cambodia; speak Tibeto-Burmese dialects intermixed with Persian and Sanskritic, Bengali idioms; and engage in *jhum* or swidden, slash-and-burn agriculture.[21]

In the centuries preceding European imperialism in the region, the CHT and its indigenous peoples were largely autonomous from external forces, even while being globally connected. During the medieval period, it formed part of a vibrant transregional trade route connecting Assam, Tibet, Kashmir, Nepal, Burma, and western and southern China,[22] and saw the migration of pilgrims and merchants from various backgrounds, including Armenians, Afghans, Shans, Europeans, Bengalis, Khasis, Cacharis, and Manipuris.[23] The port city of Chittagong, which was located further inland, linked the region to larger oceanic pathways, attracting the Arakanese, Mughals, Portuguese, Afghans, Pathans, and eventually the British.[24] In the seventeenth century, the region came under the Mughal imperium with the fall of Chittagong in 1660,[25] but the indigenous hill peoples remained largely autonomous.[26]

A century later, after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the English East India Company gained control of Bengal in 1765 and ousted the Mughals as well as other European competitors. Chittagong held strategic significance for the

[19] Rajkumari Chandra Kalindi Roy, *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh* (Copenhagen: IWGIA Document No. 99, 2000), p. 13; Christian Erni (ed.), *The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia: A Resource Book* (Copenhagen/Chiang Mai: IWGIA Document No. 123, 2008), p. 337; Khairul Chowdhury, 'Politics of Identities and Resources in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: Ethnonationalism and/or Indigenous Identity', *Asian Journal of Social Science* 36 (2008), pp. 57–78, pp. 61–62.

[20] Chowdhury, 'Politics of Identities', p. 62.

[21] Erik de Maaker and Vibha Joshi, 'Introduction: The Northeast and Beyond: Region and Culture', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 30, 3 (December 2007), pp. 381–390, p. 382.

[22] Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends*, pp. 22–23.

[23] Cederlof, *Founding an Empire*, p. 2.

[24] Although there was much less influence on the more remote and inaccessible parts of the hill border. Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 26.

[25] Roy, *Departed Melody*, p. 28.

[26] Misra, *Becoming a Borderland*, p. 25.

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British as it provided a bustling seaport, important for an emergent naval imperial power; was a commercial hub in the larger Indian Ocean economy; and provided a buffer zone between Bengal and Arakan,[27] particularly the ambitions of nearby Burma.[28] Despite initial resistance by the indigenous peoples, most notably a rebellion led by the Chakma chief Jan Baksh Khan,[29] the British crushed the opposition in 1787.[30]

In the following century, the British defined the region as uniquely separate from greater Bengal, through emphasizing its distinct geography, regional history, and local culture. Following the Mutiny or First War of Indian Independence in 1857–1858, which catalysed the transition from East India Company to British Crown rule, a number of administrative policies were introduced which separated the hill region and its peoples from their neighbours in plains Bengal. These included the annexation of the CHT and its declaration as an 'Excluded Area', distinct from Chittagong District in 1860, which instituted a colonial bureaucracy with a British superintendent at its helm.[31] The CHT was subsequently divided into the three chieftaincies of the Mong, Chakma, and the Bohmong Circles in 1881,[32] with hereditary tribal leaders under the authority of a newly created British deputy commissioner (DC);[33] the later 1900 Regulation placed even more power in the hands of the DC.[34] Through these policies, the British co-opted pre-existing systems of tribal governance, particularly the authority of the chiefs or rajas, into a system of indirect rule with the colonial government as paramount power.

The CHT thus held an ambiguous position in colonial India, being neither a formally designated princely state, as were several neighbouring semi-autonomous kingdoms with hereditary dynasties, such as Tripura, nor a regular district under the direct control of the Government of Bengal, like the bordering Chittagong district.[35] Indeed, if the CHT had not come under colonial rule, it would have continued as a 'multi-polar-zone' of vying chieftaincies and monarchic states.[36]

In 1920, the region was further demarcated a 'Backward Tract'. Fifteen years later, with the Government of India Act of 1935, it was designated a 'Totally Excluded Area'.[37] Such policies of excluded status, redrawing of district

[27] Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 26.

[28] Cederlof, *Founding an Empire*, p. 3.

[29] Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, pp. 142–143. While the chief received the Islamic title of 'khan', the Chakmas were Buddhist practitioners. Khan was an honorific adapted during the Mughal era.

[30] Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, pp. 28, 143; A. M. Serajuddin, 'The Origins of the Rajas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and their Relations with the Moghals and East India Company in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 19, 1 (1971), p. 56.

[31] Roy, *Departed Melody*, p. 38.

[32] Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 144; van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 24.

[33] Chowdhury, 'Politics of Identities', p. 63.

[34] Mohsin, *Politics of Nationalism*, pp. 33–34.

[35] van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 24.

[36] Pachuau and van Schendel, 'Borderland Histories', p. 1.

[37] Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 34.

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boundaries, and absorption of indigenous systems of governance were in large part driven by colonial needs to create firm borders and ideas of territoriality.[38] As an island people, the British brought a 'seacoast view' to frontier areas, like the CHT, and felt the need for clear boundaries between different tribes and their territories or subregions, even if such borders were often more fluid than fixed.[39] In the process, the colonial state rigidified boundaries and limited pre-existing cultural exchanges.[40] These administrative decisions ultimately separated hilly, frontier zones, like the CHT, from the developing Indian nationalist movement,[41] transregional trade networks, and cultural and intellectual exchanges with greater Bengal which had earlier been largely unrestricted.[42]

Throughout this period of growing territorial control, the British also attempted to tame natural landscapes and make local environments economically productive.[43] Across the colonized world, African, Asian, and Caribbean geographies were integrated into a global capitalist economy, to produce raw materials desirable for European consumers, including cotton, jute, indigo, sugar, tea, and coffee. Much of this was accomplished through domesticating hillsides, rivers, or ocean sea routes for the purpose of trade.[44] Charting landscapes also fulfilled strategic military needs, with imperial armies on the move.

The CHT was rich in natural resources—rivers and lakes, forests, and diverse botanical and zoological species, including plants, insects, marine life, and land-based animals. Such biodiversity captivated and confounded local district administrators, who devoted much time to the region's natural history in the records they left behind, whether botanical reports, travelogues, diaries, tour journals, gazetteers, censuses, and geographical surveys. Francis Buchanan, a Scottish physician, botanist, and, later, Company surveyor, described in detail the beauty of the CHT when he visited in 1798. He was particularly enchanted by the rivers and waterbodies that dotted the region. As he wrote:

> When the river is much swollen, and all the small cascades united, it must be very grand, as the channel here is very wide, and there are evident traces of its being often completely filled. When I visited the fall, the river was beautifully clear, and full of fish. . . This hill Barcal is evidently a part of that chain, which Mr. Rennell calls Mug Mountains, a term of the most indefinite nature. Interrupted in its course by several rivers, which

[38] Chowdhury, 'Raids, Annexation and Plough', pp. 183–184.

[39] Pachuau, *Being Mizo*, pp. 93–104.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, pp. 34–35.

[42] David Vumlallian Zou and M. Satish Kumar, 'Mapping a Colonial Borderland: Objectifying the Geo-Body of India's Northeast', *Journal of Asian Studies* 70, 1 (2011), pp. 141–170, pp. 160–161.

[43] Amrith, *Unruly Waters*, p. 11. Refer also to Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Vinita Damodaran, Anna Winterbottom and Alan Lester (eds), *The East India Company and the Natural World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodaran and Satpal Sangwan (eds), *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[44] Amrith, *Unruly Waters*, p. 11.

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> pass through from the east to the sea, it runs nearly south to Weealla taung, and terminates at the forks of the Naaf river.[45]

However, while these landscapes and rivers were of avid interest to colonial administrators, they often neglected the indigenous, 'tribal' communities who inhabited them. Many of these colonial accounts described indigenous tribes in pseudo ethnographic terms, addressing their religious traditions, linguistic histories, marital practices, forms of local government, and population statistics, but only after first introducing (largely through reductive lists) the wildlife and biodiversity of the region.[46] For colonial administrators, their principal interest lay in controlling the landscape for economic production or military needs. Natural environments, such as rivers or lakes, became fundamental to colonial studies of geography and cartography, as Kyle Gardiner has argued, in the larger project of forging strategic borders or boundary making objects.[47] However, the indigenous peoples themselves were often an intriguing afterthought in such accounts.

In particular, British administrators believed local forms of agricultural production, such as *jhumming*, were what defined indigenous peoples as fundamentally primitive. The fact that they continued to practise *jhum* cultivation—an inefficient and rudely simple farming method—long after the European world had adopted the economic benefits of settled, plough agriculture and, later, industrialized farming[48] equated them as essentially 'backward', 'premodern', 'wild', and 'uncivilized'.[49] Along with other customary practices, such as that of nudity and the wearing of less clothing, *jhumming* established

[45] Francis Hamilton Buchanan, 'An account of journey undertaken by Order of the Board of Trade through the Provinces of Chittagong and Tiperah', in *Francis Buchanan in Southeast Bengal (1798): His Journey to Chittagong, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Noakhali and Comilla*, (ed.) Willem van Schendel (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1992), pp. 114–115.

[46] See W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal. Volume VI: Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chittagong, Noakhali, Tipperah, Hill Tipperah* (London: Trübner and Co., 1876); Robert Henry Sneyd Hutchinson, *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1906); Jhala, *An Endangered History*, p. 124; Willem van Schendel, 'The Dangers of Belonging: Tribes, Indigenous Peoples and Homelands in South Asia', in *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi*, (eds) Daniel J. Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 19–43, p. 20.

[47] Refer to Kyle Gardner's analysis of the 'water-parting principle' where watersheds were used to form borders in the colonial Himalaya. Kyle Gardner, 'Moving Watersheds, Borderless Maps, and Imperial Geography in India's Northwest Himalaya', *The Historical Journal* 62, 1 (2019), pp. 149–170, pp. 150–151.

[48] The British would attempt to transition the hill tribes from swidden (*jhum*) cultivators to plough agriculturalists from the late eighteenth century onwards. After the 1900 Regulation, the British Raj tried to incentive tribal chiefs and their village headmen to adopt cultivated farming by giving them plough lands in exchange for their official duties. Despite these various incentives, the indigenous hill peoples remained largely uninterested in adopting plough agriculture. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal 1876*, pp. 79–80; R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Chittagong Hill Tracts* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1909), p. 66; Chowdhury, 'Raids, Annexation and Plough', pp. 183–184.

[49] Uddin, 'Decolonising Ethnography in the Field', p. 462; Willem van Schendel, 'A Politics of Nudity: Photographs of the "Naked Mru" of Bangladesh', *Modern Asian Studies* 36, 2 (2002),

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the indigenous peoples' 'otherness' in the colonial mind.[50] Thus the hill people, like indigenous communities around the world, were perceived as childlike—'noble savages' in the words of French philosopher Michel de Montaigne.[51] They were a symbol of what defined India as a whole as 'prehistoric' and timeless,[52] and vulnerable to foreign rule.

Much of this language of backwardness was also adapted from other parts of the British imperial world. Administrators in India invariably used the settler colonialist language of the North American frontier in the way they described 'tribal' communities. In one survey, men of the Kuki tribe in the CHT were labelled as 'braves' due to their fighting skills,[53] invoking imagery that is uncannily similar to colonial North American accounts of Native American warriors. In the process, colonial administrators, scholars, and jurists highlighted ideas of atavism to bolster arguments that legitimized colonial intervention in local institutions. British economic, social, and legal reform would bring India into the modern age, they argued, through new forms of progress, industrialization, and technology.

Perhaps the most powerful technology used to control landscapes and generate energy was the dam. During the British colonial period, the Chittagong Port Authority first proposed that a reservoir be built at Kaptai in 1906, and in 1922, the Bengal government recommended dam construction for both hydroelectric power and silt control at Barkal. However, nothing came of these original proposals. Interest re-emerged during the Second World War, leading to the 1946 Moore Report, which, at the time, suggested an even larger dam construction at Barkal to provide necessary wartime power resources, flood control, and navigation. The military engaged in aerial reconnaissance and prepared a contour map.[54] The project came to a halt, however, due to the tumultuous consequences of the war and partitions caused by growing nationalist movements and struggles for independence.

In 1937, Burma formally separated from British India, creating a contested and problematic border zone for colonial frontier officials in the Patkai, a neighbouring mountainous region similarly composed of indigenous communities, such as the Naga, Zo, and Kachin, who straddled northeast India and Burma. Like the communities of the CHT, these peoples were often defined as 'tribes' in colonial Indian imaginaries and perceived as non-South Asian 'others' due to their Mongoloid features[55] and socio-cultural practices.

pp. 341–374, p. 346; Wilkinson, 'Negotiating with the Other', p. 180; Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

[50] van Schendel, 'Geographies of Knowing', p. 20.

[51] Lalruatkima, 'Frontiers of Imagination', p. 27.

[52] Wilkinson, 'Negotiating with the Other', p. 180.

[53] Hutchinson, *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 46.

[54] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958; Subject: Karnafuli Multipurpose Project: Status Report, p. 3 in 'Kernaphuli Multipurpose', Project Files, 1952–1959; Entry P 421; Box 6; Record Group 469, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD, USA.

[55] Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, 'Tangled Lands: Burma and India's Unfinished Separation, 1937–1948', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, 2 (2021), pp. 293–315, pp. 293–94.

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More broadly, there had long been debates over whether Burma belonged to India or was its own distinct entity[56] with a separate history, religion, culture, and geography.[57] British colonial administrators, such as J. P. Mills, who was an expert on the Nagas and had toured the CHT in the winter of 1926–27, argued that the indigenous peoples of such border frontiers should continue to have separate and excluded status[58] rather than become part of directly governed regions within Burma or India.[59] In 1941 Robert Reid, the governor of Assam and Mill's superior, similarly advocated for reviving a 1920s initiative to create a Crown Colony in Assam that would separate the highlanders from either India or Burma. Reid would again note in 1944 that the peoples of the north-east India border area were 'neither racially, historically, culturally nor linguistically' part of the 'people of India proper'.[60]

Colonial officials, like Mills and Reid, believed that excluded or separate status served to protect and preserve border regions and their inhabitants from outside influences. However, these forms of separation also inadvertently sidelined them in the growing fervour of South Asian nationalism. Such border regions were more often than not forgotten in the larger process of political gamesmanship which marked the decade preceding partition.

By 1947, the CHT faced the impending realities of Indian independence. In the years leading to partition, the peoples of the Hill Tracts had voluntarily opted to join India through plebiscite. As the population was 98 per cent non-Muslim[61] and had long shared interreligious and cross-cultural relationships with Hindu Bengalis in the region, its leaders saw secular India as the only option in contrast to a Muslim-majority Pakistan. Indeed, the Indian National Congress leadership, including Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru, were strongly in favour of the CHT joining India, as was the last viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, and the British governor of Bengal. [62]

Despite this consensus between the Congress leadership and the outgoing colonial administration, Pakistan nonetheless received the CHT based on the 'contiguity clause'. Pro-Pakistan Muslim politicians had argued that the Chittagong District held the Karnaphuli River, the only source for hydro-

[56] Jonathan Saha, 'Is it in India?', pp. 23–29.

[57] Guyot-Réchard, 'Tangled Lands', p. 296.

[58] Wolfgang Mey (ed.), *J. P. Mills and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, 1926/27: Tour Diary, Reports, Photographs*, annotated and commented edition, 2009, pp. 295–296: http://crossasia-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/548/1/J.P._Mills_and_the_Chittagong_Hill_Tracts.pdf, [accessed 18 February 2022]; Jhala, *An Endangered History*, p. 196.

[59] Guyot-Réchard, 'Tangled Lands', p. 300.

[60] Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends*, p. 353; Robert Reid, 'The Excluded Areas of Assam', *Geographical Journal* 103, 1–2 (1944), pp. 18–29.

[61] There are slight discrepancies in population statistics during this time; some scholars believe it was 95 to 98 per cent non-Muslim. See the documentary 'Life is Still Not Ours: A Story of the Chittagong Hill Tracts', dir. Arnab Dewan, 2014, and Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, p. 17.

[62] Saradindu Mukherji, *Subjects, Citizens and Refugees: Tragedy in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (1947–1998)* (New Delhi: Indian Centre for the Study of Forced Migration, 2000), p. 16.

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electric power in the region.[63] Indeed, hydropower dams were all about producing a coveted commodity—electricity—which could be bought and sold, and was critical for the industrialization and economic growth of new nation-states.[64] Thus, early ambitions for energy development shaped the post-colonial history of the CHT from the start. The spectre of a future hydroelectric dam weighed heavily even then on the formation of an independent Pakistan.

In many ways, independence and partition, which aspired to deliver new forms of self-sovereignty and agency to the peoples of South Asia, have done the opposite for border communities. The administrative division of Burma and the partition of the Indian subcontinent had hoped to 'resolve ethnic disputes and save minorities' rights'.[65] In actuality, they did the reverse. As Rajasree Mazumder has argued, 'people suddenly found themselves on a side of a border that made them minorities in a Muslim-, Hindu-, or Buddhist-majority population. And despite the lofty promises of Indian, Pakistani, and Burmese leaders, each state perceived these newly minted minorities as internal enemies.'[66] This internal colonialism influenced how East Pakistan would stigmatize the multireligious and multiethnic peoples of the CHT, and nowhere more powerfully than in the language of development.

In the name of development: Dam building, post-partition politics, Cold War alliances, and American aid in the CHT

Following independence, the drive for development, particularly the earlier colonial ambition to harness hydropower, would be inherited by postwar, mid-twentieth century international aid organizations and both Western and post-colonial South Asian governments. Pakistan was eager to accelerate economic growth through Western-style development[67] and dams were a key part of the strategy.

Dam building was of particular interest during the period of interstate competition between India and Pakistan in the decade following partition, when regional disputes played out against larger Cold War geopolitics. As India and Pakistan clashed over cross-border disputes and struggled to grow their economies and create stable centralized state administrations, they turned outwardly to the reining global superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Development was both an internal, national agenda—to grapple with food scarcity, address decaying or limited infrastructure, and generate energy resources—but also an external necessity, to foster strategic transnational political alliances and gain international aid dollars. Hydroelectric power became

[63] Nicholas Mansergh, *The Transfer of Power: 1942–47. Vol. XII: 8 July–15 August 1947* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1981), pp. 674, 691, 732, 737; Mukherji, *Subjects, Citizens, Refugees*, p. 16; Mohsin, *Politics of Nationalism*, p. 36.

[64] Sneddon, *Concrete Revolution*, p. 18.

[65] Rajashree Mazumder, 'Illegal Border Crossers and Unruly Citizens: Burma-Pakistan-Indian borderlands from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries', *Modern Asian Studies* 53, 4 (2019), pp. 1144–1182, p. 1149.

[66] Ibid., pp. 1163–1164.

[67] Barua, 'Development Intervention', p. 374.

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a mainstay of this discussion, and reflected the post-colonial nation-state's ambitious agenda to harness nature for irrigation, water storage, river navigation, and energy needs. Such projects received both substantial domestic funding as well as external aid. The Damodar valley project, based in west Bengal in India, for instance, received a US$ 18.5 million loan from the World Bank in 1950.[68] Many of these dams were built in remote borderlands populated by hill tribes, including the CHT, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Tripura, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, and Orissa,[69] who relied upon river ecosystems, forests, and *jhumming* for food security,[70] religious identity, and cultural tradition.

The Kaptai Dam was built alongside a number of other development schemes in the CHT, initiated by the East Pakistani government. These projects included Pakistan's National Pride 'Karnaphuli Paper Mills', begun in 1953, to advance the extraction of bamboo and softwood from CHT forests; rubber plantations in 1959, which led the government in the subsequent decade to acquire 40,000 acres for commercial use; and the Karnaphuli Rayon Mill in 1963.[71] Several schemes were funded by international aid money, including the Karnafuli Paper Mill, which was supported with a US$ 4 million grant from the World Bank[72] and became one of the 'industrial show-pieces' of East Pakistan during the 1950s and 1960s.[73] Pakistan's primary concern was lack of energy, especially electrical power. The entire country had a little over 75,000 kwh at the time of independence and East Pakistan had only a fraction of that, with just 15,600 kwh.[74] The Kaptai Dam would be the most significant initiative to address Pakistan's energy needs, especially in its eastern wing.

Dam building, more than any other endeavour, reflected post-colonial Asia's confidence in reconstructing nature. As Sunil Amrith notes, 'in the post-colonial age, large dams carried enormous symbolic weight. They epitomized dreams of development. More than any other technology, they promised the mastery of nature.'[75] Where the earlier era of nineteenth-century global imperialism had reflected a lateral configuration of space, as steamships and railways connected the world, it was now vertical space that defined progress—tracked by the gradient of a river's fall in the collecting of hydropower.[76]

[68] Amrith, *Unruly Waters*, p. 194.

[69] Chowdhury, 'Deluge amidst Conflict', pp. 201–206; Amrith, *Unruly Waters*, p. 194.

[70] Chowdhury, 'Deluge amidst Conflict', p. 196.

[71] Nayak, 'Understanding Environmental Security', pp. 48–49; Nafis Ahmad, 'Industrial Development in East Bengal (East Pakistan)', *Economic Geography* 26, 3 (July 1950), pp. 183–195.

[72] Roy, *Departed Melody*, p. 180.

[73] van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 190.

[74] Wayne Wilcox, 'The Economic Consequences of Partition: India and Pakistan', *Journal of International Affairs* 18, 2, (1964) 'The Politics of Partition', pp. 188–197, p. 195.

[75] Amrith, *Unruly Waters*, p. 179.

[76] Ibid., p. 193.

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After partition, the earlier British-era Moore plan of 1946 was tabled, since it would encroach upon the borders of neighbouring India.[77] Further explorations along the Karnafuli tributaries, including the northern Kasalong and the Karnafuli downstream, were investigated and in 1950 the East Pakistani authorities, in cooperation with a World Bank mission, agreed on a site.[78] A year later, in 1951, the government began proposing the damming of the Karnafuli River.[79]

The dam project itself was positioned within the larger geopolitics of American military aid to Pakistan during the Cold War period.[80] While Pakistan had no significant output of industrial raw materials or a consumer market for high technology products,[81] it was strategically important to the United States in advancing American policies to contain Soviet influence.[82] The Truman administration (1945–1953) was actively engaged in forging global alliances to thwart the spread of communism in democracies around the world.[83] Pakistan's location, particularly that of its western wing, was significant as it bordered the Soviet Union, China, and India, and was near the Persian Gulf.[84] US State Department officials noted,

> Pakistan is of particular strategic importance to the US because, like Afghanistan, it lies across the invasion routes from Russia to India, and flanks the oil fields of the Persian Gulf; and also because the Pakistan bases in the Karachi-Lahore area are in closer proximity to the Soviet heartland than any other that might be made available to us.[85]

While these strategic concerns largely related to West Pakistan, as we can see, they also had an impact on east Bengal.

Pakistan, wary of India's perceived partiality towards the Soviet Union, both courted the United States and was courted by the Americans.[86] Pakistan's leaders continually stressed the nation's strategic importance to extract further

[77] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 4 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[78] Ibid.

[79] van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 195.

[80] Wilcox, 'The Economic Consequences of Partition', p. 197.

[81] Naheed Zia Khan, 'Foreign Policy Motives of U.S. Aid to Pakistan: The Cold War Years', *South Asian Studies* 12, 2 (1995), pp. 53–64, p. 54.

[82] Robert J. McMahon, 'United States Cold War Strategy in South Asia: Making a Military Commitment to Pakistan, 1947–1954', *The Journal of American History* 75, 3 (December 1988), pp. 812–840, p. 812.

[83] Murad Ali, *The Politics of US Aid to Pakistan: Aid Allocation and Delivery from Truman to Trump* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 31.

[84] Khan, 'Foreign Policy Motives of U.S. Aid to Pakistan', p. 54.

[85] O[ffice of] S[outh] A[sian] A[ffairs] memorandum, 'Military Aid for South Asian Countries', 1 Nov. 1949, [Department of State Records, US National Archives, College Park, MD], RG 59, A1 1447, Box 23, in Elisabeth Leake, 'The Great Game Anew: US Cold-War Policy and Pakistan's North-West Frontier, 1947–65', *The International History Review* 35, 4, 2013, pp. 783–806, p. 785.

[86] Ali, *The Politics of US Aid to Pakistan*, p. 31; McMahon, 'United States Cold War Strategy in South Asia', p. 815.

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significant financial and military support from Washington. Essentially, Pakistan initiated a quid pro quo: alignment with the United States in exchange for American economic aid, even while experts were well aware that Pakistan's primary strategic goals lay not in limiting the reach of the Soviet Union but rather neighbouring India. All Pakistani appeals were carefully couched, however, in strong anti-Soviet language.[87]

India, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, while attempting to maintain cordial ties with both Cold War powers, did not have as sharp an antipathy for communism as the United States and Europe. Soviet calls for the end of colonialism were by no means 'disagreeable' to Indian officials and Nehru, who had visited the Soviet Union in 1927, perceived its egalitarian society, programme of rapid industrialization, central planning, and agricultural collectivism as models of social and economic progress.[88] Hopeful of not becoming entangled in Cold War politics, he had favoured nonalignment.[89] Nehru himself would charge the United States with bringing the Cold War to South Asia, and scholars have argued that American interests would 'fatally' undermine regional stability.[90] Nehru feared that American armaments would lead Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir dispute militarily and that foreign military aid would pressure India into increasing its own military expenditure.[91]

In 1954, the United States signed the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement (MDA) with Pakistan[92] and created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), whose member states included Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines, with further extension to Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam—all in an attempt to limit communism in Asia.[93] The following year in 1955, the American-sponsored Baghdad Pact (renamed Central Treaty Organization [CENTO] in 1959) created an alliance between Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, and Britain to contain Soviet influence in the Middle East. Pakistan was the only South Asian country that held membership in both SEATO and CENTO.[94] According to one Pakistani official, this made it 'America's most

[87] McMahon, 'United States Cold War Strategy in South Asia', p. 818.

[88] Paul M. McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 31; Benjamin Siegel, '"Fantastic Quantities of Food Grains": Cold War Visions and Agrarian Fantasies in Independent India', in *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence*, (eds) Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 23.

[89] McMahon, 'United States Cold War Strategy in South Asia', p. 829.

[90] Ibid., p. 813.

[91] Ibid., p. 829. Indeed, the Americans and Soviets would competitively woo India as well with military technology in exchange for diplomatic and political alliances. Ultimately, however, it would be food and agricultural assistance that proved most persuasive during the 1950s, and in the end American aid far exceeded that given by the Soviets. See Siegel, '"Fantastic Quantities of Food Grains"', pp. 22–23.

[92] Ali, *The Politics of US Aid to Pakistan*, pp. 31–32; M. Z. Khan and J. K. Emmerson, 'United States–Pakistan Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement', *Middle East Journal* 8, 3 (1954), pp. 96–103.

[93] Ali, *The Politics of US Aid to Pakistan*, pp. 31–32; J. Glassman, 'On the Borders of Southeast Asia: Cold War Geography and the Construction of the Other', *Political Geography* 24, 7, (2005), pp. 784–807.

[94] McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia*, p. 21; McMahon, 'United States Cold War Strategy in South Asia', p. 812.

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allied ally in Asia'.[95] Thus Pakistan's geostrategic location and its willingness to support American containment policies rendered it a natural ally during the Cold War.[96]

In exchange for signing the MDA in 1954, the Eisenhower administration began giving significant military aid to Pakistan, including armaments, hardware, and technical assistance, on the understanding that it would be used to thwart the Soviet presence in Asia and thus support American interests in the region.[97] From 1954 to 1965, the United States gave $1.3 billion in military aid.[98]

Alongside military aid, Pakistan received economic assistance, much of which was spent on infrastructure, such as the building of power plants, transportation, and communications.[99] The United States would remain Pakistan's primary source of international aid until the late 1980s and Pakistan received the largest share of American economic support after Egypt, Israel, and El Salvador.[100] For East Pakistan, the Kaptai Dam would be a shining symbol of energy development in the modern nation-state, while for the United States it reflected global alliances and the spread of Western democratic values and capitalism. But for the indigenous people of the region, the dam would have more complex and painful meanings.

Transnational partnerships and the role of American aid in Kaptai

From the first, the project was inherently a global operation, with partnerships between international governments, organizations, corporations, manufacturers, scientists, and engineers.[101] While it was nominally constructed by East Pakistan, the dam was funded with American economic assistance, first through the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA), founded in 1953, and then its successor, the International Cooperation Administration (ICA) (1955–1961).[102] Both organizations managed American economic assistance during this period. As part of such aid operations, foreign engineering firms were often hired, providing lucrative contracts for the private sector.[103] In the case of Kaptai, the International Engineering Company (IEC) and the

[95] McMahon, 'United States Cold War Strategy in South Asia', p. 812.

[96] Ali, *The Politics of US Aid to Pakistan*, pp. 30–31.

[97] Ibid., p. 32.

[98] Nirode Mohanty, *America, Pakistan, and the India Factor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 40; Ali, *The Politics of US Aid to Pakistan*, p. 33.

[99] Khan, 'Foreign Policy Motives of U.S. Aid to Pakistan', p. 59.

[100] Ibid., pp. 56–57.

[101] This was not uncommon. As Sara Lorenzini notes, the United States saw development broadly as a 'cooperative task' undertaken in collaboration with the larger, international community. Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2019), p. 29.

[102] Both the FOA and ICA were predecessors to the United States Agency of International Development (USAID), established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy: https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/469.html#469.7, [accessed 18 February 2022].

[103] Amrith, *Unruly Waters*, p. 199.

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Utah Construction Company received the contract for the dam's construction from the ICA.

Early preliminary work was largely led by Pakistan and faced some initial problems. In 1952–1953, a Pakistani firm cut a diversion tunnel and the projected completion date was set for 1956.[104] However, various setbacks due to problems caused by faulty equipment, lack of planning, and a riot and resulting deaths led to a new target completion date. As the seasonal monsoons further washed away much of the work, the dam remained incomplete up until 1953.[105] Work was restarted later in the year through the assistance of the former Pakistan Italian Development Corporation, a private company which built roads; the upper coffer dam and diversion channel with bricks and cement[106] was built in the following year, 1953–1954. A Swiss company built the lower coffer dam in 1954–1955.[107]

The East Pakistan government formally solicited American assistance in September 1953, initially through the FOA, resulting in a first grant of US$ 750,000 in 1954, followed by an additional US$ 3.5 million for engineering and construction services in 1955.[108] The IEC provided engineering and supervisory guidance. The company was tasked with evaluating previous surveys, reports, data, and structural concerns; overseeing hydraulic tests and studies; establishing a construction project in conjunction with consultants' recommendations; preparing project reports, designs, and drawings; inspecting and controlling quality; purchasing required equipment; and creating construction schedules and progress evaluations.[109]

[104] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 4 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[105] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 4 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[106] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 5 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958. Invariably road building preceded dam construction as dams were built in remote locations that were not easily accessible for construction materials and personnel. For instance, in the American West, when the Roosevelt Dam was built in the early twentieth century, a series of modern roads were built to facilitate travel to the construction site. J. Simon Bruder (ed.), 'The Historical Archeology of Dam Construction Camps in Central Arizona. Volume 2A: Sites in the Roosevelt Dam Area, prepared for U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, P.O. Box 9980, Phoenix, Arizona, 85068', Dames and Moore Intermountain Cultural Resource Services Research Papers, 1994, p. 383. Similarly, in Santa Rosa, New Mexico, in the 1970s access roads were built for construction purposes: see 'Draft supplement to final environmental statement', Los Esteros Lake, Santa Rosa, New Mexico, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Albuquerque District, New Mexico, January 1975, p. 8. This is a fascinating subtopic which could lead to further historiographies on the road–dam nexus and the ways in which hydropower created tangible, physical routes connecting remote landscapes to national infrastructure systems.

[107] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 5 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[108] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 5 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[109] Foreign Operations Appropriations for 1962: Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Eighty-Seventh Congress, first session, Part 1, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1961, p. 353.

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The United States also partnered with transnational companies and entities in the years following. In 1956, the head American electrical engineer involved in the project, E. S. Shinn, travelled to Canada to consult with a Colombo Plan engineer on issues of voltage and transmission lines.[110] The Colombo Plan, founded in 1951, was originally a multinational organization comprising seven member states (Australia, Britain, Canada, Ceylon, India, New Zealand, and Pakistan), which focused on economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region.[111] The following year in 1957, FOA's successor, the ICA, sought turbines from the French company, Neyrpic SA, based in Grenoble, for the dam, chosen for its competitive pricing.[112] The Italian Development Corporation was re-enlisted to build roads.[113] A UN mission aided in settling the location for the dam, and a UN engineer, A. V. Karpov, gave a final review, after Pakistan's own engineer, K. Azeemuddin, approved the project. [114]

These international partnerships paved the way for the Americans to finally begin work and break ground. In April 1957, the Utah Construction Company of San Francisco, a subsidiary of the larger Utah International Company, arrived in the CHT.[115]

The Utah Construction Company: A global American success story and its contested history with indigenous peoples

The Utah Construction Company (hereafter Utah Company) would provide much of the engineering and technical expertise for the project.[116] The company was one of the United States' pre-eminent construction firms. It had been founded in 1887 through a partnership between David Eccles, son of a Scottish

[110] Letter from W. C. Berry, Supervising Engineer, Karnafuli Project to Government of Pakistan, Embassy of Pakistan, Washington, DC, and International Cooperation Administration, 815 Connecticut Avenue, N. W. Washington 25, D.C, 6 March 1957; in 'Kernaphuli Multipurpose', Project Files, 1952–1959; Entry P 421; Box 6; Record Group 469, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD, USA.

[111] The Colombo Plan's members now include 27 countries. See the official website of the Colombo Plan organization: https://colombo-plan.org/history/, [accessed 18 February 2022].

[112] International Cooperation Administration. Unclassified; From: Embassy Paris; Subject: Turbines for the Karnaphuli (East Pakistan) Project, August 15, 1957 Action: ICA Washington TOICA A-43; in 'Kernaphuli Multipurpose', Project Files, 1952–1959; Entry P 421; Box 6; Record Group 469, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD, USA.

[113] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 5 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[114] From the first, these partnerships revealed both cooperation and friction. Karpov would recommend that construction be deferred until final details could be better determined. However, his advice was largely ignored and dam building began under the direction of Azeemuddin and fellow Pakistani engineer, B. M. Abbass. The American Consulate in Dacca opined that the operation could have been much more efficient with better planning. What took several additional 'working seasons' would have been accomplished with more 'proper organization and equipment'. From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 4 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[115] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 5 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[116] van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 195; Roy, *Departed Melody*, p. 180.

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émigré, and W. H. and E. O. Wattis, two Utah Mormons. They were involved in various construction schemes, including timber logging, road building, and railways, in the American West after the Civil War.[117] By the early 1920s, the company was engaged in even larger projects, including building highways in Wyoming and the Hetch Hetchy Dam in California,[118] eventually serving as one of six big construction companies employed in the construction of the historic Hoover Dam,[119] built between 1931–1936 during the Great Depression. The Hoover Dam set the stage for an ensuing 'triumphalist period of global dam building'.[120]

By 1953, when the United States first engaged with Pakistan over the Kaptai Dam, Utah Construction was an established global entity. According to the Utah Company's Annual Report for 1953, it was not only involved in various domestic projects but also significant international ones. In the United States, it was building housing in Topeka and Wichita, Kansas, and military installations in Alaska. Globally, it was involved with increasing production of tungsten mines in Sang Dong, Korea; a zinc fuming plant in Chihuahua, Mexico; a canal and irrigation project and 500 kilometres of highway in Colombia; assisting rice production in Indonesia; bringing Canadian and American iron ore to Japanese steel mills; constructing the massive Big Eildon Dam in Australia; and overseeing a vast mining operation for copper deposits high in the Andes of Peru.[121] Net profit for the year was $2,110,307, equal to $12.02 per share.[122]

Six years later in 1959, the company had expanded further and more than doubled its earnings to $4,337, 969 after income taxes.[123] Not only was it engaged in the Kaptai hydroelectric project, but also similar dam schemes in Thailand, Australia, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, and with the Navajo people in the United States. These projects included the Tantangara Dam on the Murrambidgee River in Australia; the Bumiphol Dam and Power Plant in Thailand, and a US$ 6 million hydroelectric project with a diversion dam, tunnel, and 40,000 KW powerhouse on the San Pedro River near Quito, Ecuador. It was also involved in land reclamation in Mexico; building a bridge over the Yarra River in Australia; and completing the multiplant copper mine in the Andes mountains of Peru, which included a port at Ila with town resources,

[117] Donald E. Wolf, *Big Dams and Other Dreams: The Six Companies Story* (Noman: University Of Oklahoma Press, 1996), pp. 19–21.

[118] Ibid., p. 25.

[119] Lesley A. Dutemple, *The Hoover Dam* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications Company, 2003), pp. 27–29; Arthur Herman, *Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II* (New York: Random House, 2012), pp. 52, 57.

[120] Sneddon, *Concrete Revolution*, p. 18.

[121] Utah Construction Company Annual Report 1953, pp. 4–11, online records, Harvard Libraries, Cambridge, MA 02138.

[122] Ibid., p. 1.

[123] Utah Construction Mining Company Annual Report, 1959, p. 1, online records, Harvard Libraries, Cambridge, MA 02138.

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a railroad and highway to connect plant and port, a 45,000 KW power plant, and water storage facilities.[124]

Many of these development projects, whether hydroelectric dams, iron ores, coalmines, bridges or highways, were in remote, relatively untouched natural landscapes that were scarcely populated or inhabited by largely indigenous peoples, much like those in the CHT. The Utah Company leadership was certainly familiar with indigenous communities and tribal social structures. In 1959, it worked on an agreement between the Navajo people in New Mexico and a utility company for a 35-year contract for a large coal deposit.[125]

Invariably, such development projects devastated the lands and communities of indigenous peoples,[126] who are often described as tribal minorities within larger nation-states. Utah Company engineers, technicians and managers defined tribal communities and their geographies as primitive and wild, whether they were in New Mexico, San Juan, or the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Much of the language used in the Utah Company Reports recreated an imperialist 'discovery rhetoric', where non-European lands are often depicted in lyrical language as virgin territories to be penetrated and appropriated by European military capitalists,[127] earlier employed during the age of sail. This colonial language is coupled with more recent post-Second World War nostalgia. For instance, in the description of the creation of San Juan as a 'bustling seaport' in January 1953, the Utah Company Report emphasized the town's premodern atavism, which was only reversed with the arrival of American development, industry, and technology. The town, on the coast of southern Peru, is portrayed as a 'sleepy desert bay inhabited by a few Indian fishermen', who lived largely 'in much the same manner as their pre-Incan forefathers'.[128] This idea of timelessness and backwardness had often been used to describe colonized peoples around the world, including in British India, and was redeployed here by international aid developers and multinational contractors in defining post-colonial Third World societies and economies.

Into this 'quiet peaceful life' the Utah Company invaded, bringing progress and possibility. San Juan is 'disrupted by a Utah sponsored invasion, spearheaded by an Armada of ships 'hitting the beach' during early Spring'.[129] The language invokes both the imagery of Spanish imperial conquest, with the visual of tall ships battering the shore, as well as that of American wartime power, embodied in the imagery of American soldiers alighting on Normandy

[124] Ibid., pp. 8–10.

[125] Ibid., p. 13.

[126] William F. Fisher, 'Going Under: Indigenous Peoples and the Struggle Against Large Dams', *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*, September 1999: https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/going-under-indigenous-peoples-and-struggle-against-large, [accessed 18 February 2022].

[127] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 201–213; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 22–24.

[128] Utah Construction Company Annual Report 1953, p. 19.

[129] Ibid.

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Beach. Here an American company represents both American military prowess, which recently saved the world from Nazi occupation, as well as European conquest of pre-industrial, non-white peoples.[130]

San Juan's metamorphosis from sleepy bay, lost in the mists of time, to a 'bustling seaport' expresses the language of modernity utilized by nineteenth-century colonial governments in reforming indigenous political, economic, legal, religious, and social practices. It also expresses mid-twentieth century aspirations for international development and modern industrial capital. As the Company notes, this 'amazing transformation' was only possible through collecting iron ore deposits from the Marcona Plateau, some 17 miles inland.[131]

Deploying in Pakistan: The Utah Company at Kaptai

It was a similar story in Kaptai. A uniquely American expatriate community arrived in the CHT for the purposes of dam construction. The Americans created a small colony, complete with paved roads, streetlights, modern bungalows equipped with air conditioning, shops, a petrol station, a swimming pool, and movie theatre, for the personnel and their families stationed at the site in 1957. The colony grew steadily to about 100 employees and their dependents in what was described as two 'self-sufficient little communities': the IEC employees on one side and Utah Company workers on the other. The colony transformed a little hill village into a modern town with a large school and even an elegant mosque for new settlers.[132]

Similar to San Juan, the Utah Company saw its purpose as introducing American knowhow and technology; there was little interest in the indigenous inhabitants or their customs. Few Utah Construction employees explored 'local interests' beyond travelling and hunting, and most served a short two-year stint, saving their money.[133] Such accounts suggest that the American contractors were predominantly concerned with recreating their own social institutions and lifestyles while abroad, and completing their contractual obligations as soon as possible before returning home. There was little thought to how the dam might destroy the very landscape it reshaped.

[130] The American government invariably perceived underdeveloped regions in the newly independent states of Asia and Africa as 'economically backward and politically immature', and feared they were particularly vulnerable to Soviet anti-American propaganda. Sneddon, *Concrete Revolution*, p. 12. In many ways, economic assistance often went hand in hand with military aid, as evidenced in the relationship between the United States and Pakistan, and the perceived global strength of American corporations, manufacturing, and technological innovation was inherently interwoven with American military successes during the Second World War. This relationship between the language of war and development is a rich avenue for scholars to further explore.

[131] Utah Construction Company Annual Report 1953, p. 19.

[132] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 12 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958; van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 195.

[133] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 12 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

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Shared private and public partnerships: The nexus between government and corporate players

This was a view shared not only by private contractors but American aid administrators and diplomats as well. During the same period, members of the American Consulate in Dacca and the IEC stationed in Kaptai mirrored the language of the Utah Company in labelling the indigenous peoples of the CHT as underdeveloped. These attitudes were most perniciously exposed in their resettlement policies for displaced persons.

In 1957, the American Consulate in Dacca articulated three key issues in regard to the building of the dam: clearing land for flooding, resettlement of displaced persons, and the construction of transmission lines to carry power. Officials warned Washington that if the first was not solved, it would lead to the loss of valuable time, and the inability to address resettlement would cause 'civil disturbances' undermining any economic progress.[134] Resettlement became the most pressing issue.

But the Consular staff, reflective of a broader American policy, undermined the abilities and significance of the indigenous peoples. The hill people were perceived as a hindrance to the larger development scheme and transnational partnership. Under a section entitled 'Resettlement', the indigenous people (or 'tribesmen' as they were called in American government documents) were identified as 'hav[ing] a primitive pattern of life', characterized by such antiquated practices as 'jum' farming. Similar to earlier colonial accounts, such references suggested *jhum* production was archaic and outmoded,[135] unfit for twentieth-century life. American officials, like their British predecessors, essentialized *jhumming* in the limiting vocabulary of economic productivity, as mentioned earlier.[136]

The Dacca Consulate further emphasized that the hill people were 'illiterate, semi-animistic tribesmen' who were 'on the edge of civilization'. American officials argued that they were incapable of comprehending and using sophisticated machine technology, such as that involved in dam engineering and mechanics, and noted that it would be 'specious in the extreme' to suggest they could 'come down from the hills and operate power lathes'.[137] Here, neocolonial attitudes on the 'primitive' mind and intellectual incapacity are used to reemphasize the indigenous peoples' technological underdevelopment.

In that same year, the IEC began doing its own research into the history of the indigenous communities. In a lengthy document, entitled 'Reservoir

[134] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 10 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[135] In the document, *jhum* production is described as 'burning over an area, usually "unclassified forest", farming on the land this cleared (and fertilized by the ash) for a few years, moving on and burning another area when that soil is depleted'. From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 11 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

[136] See earlier discussion on plough agriculture versus *jhumming*.

[137] From Amconsul Dacca to the Department of State, Washington; Ref: AmConGen Despatches 28 of August 15, 1957, and 143 of January 9, 1957; p. 11 in Karachi Despatch 873 of March 28, 1958.

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Clearance, Rehabilitation of People & Land Acquisition', E. M. Bowles, an IEC representative based in Kaptai, described the indigenous communities in language that is strikingly familiar to that of a colonial-era British survey, gazetteer, or census.[138] He cursorily introduced the different tribes and their governance structures, stating that the 'system of tribal government is very simple', with a hereditary chief at the apex who was assisted by local village headmen in subdivisions of 25 square miles.[139]

He underlined unequivocally that some 40,000 Chakmas had to move. He suggested that people living under a particular headman should relocate to an area with the same headman, as this would mitigate communal tension. As he recommended, 'If this can be done, there is a good chance that the people will remain content and cause no trouble.' Bowles continued that the East Pakistani government was primarily concerned with rehabilitating Chakmas within the CHT to prevent them migrating across the border to Assam or Burma, and to ensure food supply for refugees during their first few years of resettlement. He noted that East Pakistan thought the resettlement should be done internally without the involvement of other governments or entities, and that the government would pay for resettlement costs.[140]

Bowles argued that the rehabilitation should be managed by small contractors. The then Chakma chief, Raja Tridiv Roy, and the district commissioner of Rangamati hoped that the Chakmas and other tribal groups could be in charge of the relocation of their own communities. Initially, the Pakistanis believed outside contractors were better equipped to complete the rehabilitation on schedule, arguing that supervising a large number of individual contractors would be too 'gigantic' an operation for Pakistani engineers. After several discussions, the tribal peoples were allowed to begin the process.[141]

As Raja Tridiv Roy recalled in his memoirs of this time, his committee submitted a comprehensive report. He calculated that some 87,000 people would be displaced due to inundation as well as an additional 30,000 by virtue of their

[138] It was not unusual for colonial administrators to read the work of their predecessors. When J. P. Mills toured the CHT in the winter of 1926–1927 to determine the effectiveness of tribal systems of governance, he read the work of earlier British deputy commissioners, census reports, and surveys. For more on this issue, see Jhala, *An Endangered History*, p. 203, footnote 39. Further, it was clear, as noted in a 1962 Congressional hearing that IEC employees were tasked with reading earlier surveys and data before creating their own proposals for Kaptai. Refer to Foreign Operations Appropriations for 1962: Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Eighty-Seventh Congress, first session, Part 1, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1961, p. 353. It is very likely that American aid officers, like Bowles, had similarly read the work of their British forerunners.

[139] International Engineering Company, Inc., From E. M. Bowles to P. F. Steinert. Subject: Reservoir Clearance, Rehabilitation of People & Land Acquisition, Kaptai, E. Pakistan, Dec. 29th 1957, in 'Kernaphuli Multipurpose', Project Files, 1952–1959; Entry P 421; Box 6; Record Group 469, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD, USA.

[140] International Engineering Company, Inc., From E. M. Bowles to P. F. Steinert. Subject: Reservoir Clearance, Rehabilitation of People & Land Acquisition, Kaptai, E. Pakistan, Dec. 29th 1957.

[141] International Engineering Company, Inc., From E. M. Bowles to P. F. Steinert. Subject: Reservoir Clearance, Rehabilitation of People & Land Acquisition, Kaptai, E. Pakistan, Dec. 29th 1957.

close proximity to those who would be flooded. If 80 per cent of a village had to relocate, the remaining 20 per cent of the population could not remain marooned in insolation on a deserted island, for instance, with no facilities or cultivatable plough lands.[142] The East Pakistan government responded 'most cavalierly', siphoning off US$ 51 million that was meant for rehabilitation and compensation, instead only awarding a 'paltry' US$ 3 million.[143] He and other tribal leaders took numerous delegations to government functionaries, who responded with empty 'soothing' comments that were without substance.[144]

The hill tribes increasingly began to view the construction of the dam as politically motivated, by forcing the Chakmas to migrate they would be rendered politically and economically weaker[145] in the face of new Bengali settlement. In addition, much of East Pakistan's ambitions as well as that of American aid—such as creating more plough land and generating electrical power—came to naught. The dam inundated 54,000 acres of already limited plough land,[146] while not a single indigenous village was electrified.[147]

Regional tensions: India, Pakistan, and American conflicts over dam building

Not only did the dam's construction reflect global partnerships, but also regional conflicts and disputes. The governments of East Pakistan, India, and the United States were well aware that the dam would displace thousands of indigenous peoples. In particular, India was critically concerned that the dam would force communities across the Indian border, and several missives were sent between the IEC, the Indian deputy high commissioner, and the Pakistan high commissioner over this issue between 1959–1960. India warned that indigenous peoples had a constitutional right and legal protection to protest against displacement caused by flooding. Indeed, the 'constitution and laws India require that before land can be taken for a public purpose persons to be displaced must be given opportunity to be heard in opposition. This requires notice and only after [a] hearing can [a] decision be taken to condemn land' as noted in an official correspondence from New Delhi to the US Secretary of State's Office in September 1958.[148] This legal protection was certainly not a principle upheld by the East Pakistan government, and at first it was a contentious issue.

In addition, New Delhi argued that resettlement of displaced peoples should be resolved between India and Pakistan, not through the intervention (and presumably meddling) of the United States. Indian officials expressed

[142] Roy, *Departed Melody*, p. 175.
[143] Ibid., p. 175.
[144] Ibid., p. 176.
[145] Ibid., p. 174.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., p. 175.
[148] From New Delhi to Secretary of State, No. 707, September 23, 7 p.m., Rec'd September 24, 1958; 8:24 a.m., in 'Kernaphuli Multipurpose', Project Files, 1952–1959; Entry P 421; Box 6; Record Group 469, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD, USA.

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frustration that the Pakistan High Commission envisioned this as a Pakistan-United States issue.[149] This led to a contentious back and forth for the next several months. In January 1959, India sent a telegram to the US Secretary of State noting that India still did not have clarity on Pakistan's position on whether the dam would submerge any 'land which is not normally submerged', while Pakistan expressed surprise that India was unwilling to work on joint surveys. In return, India wanted further clarification on which lands might be submerged and offered to speed up the survey process by sending an Indian engineer to conduct an 'on-the-spot study' of the dam in mid-February 1959.[150] However, by August, Prime Minister Nehru conceded in an address at the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of Parliament, that India would not object to the building of the dam if 'suitable terms [were] agreed between by both countries'.[151] Some months later in January 1960, the Indian Deputy High Commissioner Trivedi informed the Americans that India had shared with Pakistan that it wanted further clarification on the explicit boundary demarcations and promised once again to supply Indian engineers to ascertain what compensation might be given and the quantum of electrical power supplied to India. Trivedi also expressed his fears, after visiting the CHT, over resettlement, warning that if the dam's water levels rose, there would be more displaced people.[152]

Nonetheless, these transnational disputes did not prevent the eventual construction of the dam, and the United States, while well aware of India's hesitations throughout, did not withdraw funds or put pressure on the East Pakistan government in its rehabilitation plans. Indeed, the IEC and Utah Company wanted to accelerate completion of the dam, even when India raised issues relating to surveying possible lands to be flooded or questioned the effectiveness of the Pakistani engineers who were engaged in the project. Ultimately, this correspondence, through government telegrams and missives, suggests that the IEC was as complicit as Pakistan's own government in the treatment and displacement of ethnic, tribal minorities. It is clear that American interests in preserving a strategic geopolitical alliance with Pakistan trumped any concern over resulting environmental refugees.

Conclusions: Migration, displacement, and state-sponsored violence

The dam was widely celebrated in Pakistan as a symbol of modernity, which 'tam[ed]' the 'turbulent' Karnaphuli River. Advocates claimed it would control

[149] From New Delhi to Secretary of State, No. 707, September 23, 7 p.m., Rec'd September 24, 1958; 8:24 a.m.

[150] Incoming Telegram, from New Delhi to the Secretary of State, No. 1529, January 7, 8 pm; Rec'd January 9, 1959, 4:13 a.m., in 'Kernaphuli Multipurpose', Project Files, 1952–1959; Entry P 421; Box 6; Record Group 469, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD, USA.

[151] Incoming Telegram from Karachi to Secretary of State, No. 450, August 20, 5 p.m., Rec'd: August 20, 1959, 10:47 a.m., in 'Kernaphuli Multipurpose', Project Files, 1952–1959; Entry P 421; Box 6; Record Group 469, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD, USA.

[152] Incoming Telegram sent from Dacca to the Secretary of State, No. 223, January 19, 4 pm, 1960; Rec'd January 20, 1960, 7:24 a.m., in 'Kernaphuli Multipurpose', Project Files, 1952–1959; Entry P 421; Box 6; Record Group 469, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD, USA.

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flooding and irrigation, provide high voltage electricity, protect rare wildlife, and create a scenic 'idyllic' location for a holiday resort.[153] In reality, after its completion in 1964, it caused widespread environmental and human devastation, leading to 40 per cent, some 54,000 acres, of the region's total arable land being inundated.[154] While officially only 297 square miles were meant to be flooded, between 400–600 square miles were flooded in actuality.[155] Innumerable populations of local wildlife, including the Bengal tiger, bison, sambur, barking deer, leopard, and panther disappeared,[156] among others. Water pollution, exacerbated by fertilizers and pesticides, contaminated the drinking water and affected the fish life in the reservoir.[157]

In addition, 100,000 people were forced to flee from their ancestral lands as refugees to India and Burma.[158] Chakma and Hajong indigenous peoples lost their homelands, while the capital, Rangamati town, was inundated, leading many to flee over the international border to northeast India, as Indian officials had predicted.[159] Nearly half settled in Assam,[160] others in Tripura,[161] while in Arunachal Pradesh, the refugee population grew to 65,000. The refugees were largely deemed 'stateless' and not given Indian citizenship.[162] As Lailufar Yasmin argues, it created a 'death trap' for indigenous peoples who became 'environmental refugees' in the region.[163] Beyond widespread environmental destruction and displacement of people, places of cultural heritage, such as the Chakma Raja's residence[164] and a great Buddha statue at the main temple in Rangamati,[165] were also lost forever under the rising waters.

The dam itself was largely ineffective due to sedimentation in the Kaptai Lake, and while it had been expected to produce 230 MW of power, it only generated 50–100 MW for industry.[166] Nor did it provide any energy resources for the indigenous peoples.[167]

In this instance, East Pakistan adopted a Eurocentric model, as did many developing countries and silenced traditional, indigenous peoples. In the CHT, the majority of the indigenous peoples are Buddhist Chakmas who have long

[153] van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 201.

[154] Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, p. 24. Chowdhury, 'Deluge amidst Conflict', pp. 201–202; Ishtiaq and Panday, 'The Elusive Peace Accord in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh', p. 468.

[155] Roy, *Departed Melody*, p. 176.

[156] Gain, 'Life and Nature at Risk', p. 37.

[157] van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 141.

[158] Barua, 'Development Intervention', p. 381; Roy, *Departed Melody*, p. 176.

[159] Chowdhury, 'Deluge amidst Conflict', pp. 201–202; Wilkinson, 'Negotiating with the Other', p. 182.

[160] Eva Gerharz and Corinna Land, 'Uprooted Belonging: The Formation of a "Jumma Diaspora" in New York City', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, 11, 2018, pp. 1881–1896, p. 1885.

[161] Uddin, 'Dynamics of Strategies', p. 324.

[162] Chowdhury, 'Deluge amidst Conflict', pp. 201–202.

[163] Yasmin, 'The Tyranny of the Majority in Bangladesh', p. 122.

[164] Roy, *Departed Melody*, p. 177.

[165] van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, pp. 140–141.

[166] Barua, 'Development Intervention', p. 382.

[167] Roy, *Departed Melody*, p. 175; van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 202.

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practised philosophies which integrated development with biodiversity, protection of local cultures, and traditional forms of forest science.[168] As Bijoy Barua argues, European colonialists never realized that Buddhist principles practised by the CHT indigenous communities were fundamentally tied to the natural world: 'In Buddhist cultures and societies of South and Southeast Asia, trees, rivers, and forests are valued, honored and worshipped as the Buddha generated his knowledge in this diverse natural setting through meditation.'[169] Ultimately, in pursuing capitalist, market-driven economic policies, post-colonial states have marginalized indigenous minorities, like those in the Hill Tracts, by denying their customary practices,[170] perhaps most significantly rights over their own ecologies to live in harmonious co-dependency with the natural world. For indigenous peoples, understanding forest science was not just about timber or wood as a market commodity, trees were seen as a fundamental part of human survival, and forests an essential element of traditional practices like *jhum* agriculture.[171] Further, the loss of natural landscapes or access to them, like forests or rivers, has led to the decline of Buddhist ethical practices such as *dhutanga* in the CHT where both ascetic monks and lay Buddhist communities emphasized 'contemplative learning' and a limitation on greed[172]—ideas antithetical to increasing profit margins and private property so much at the heart of Western corporate models adapted from colonial institutions and perpetuated through post-colonial international aid development.

Indeed, development aid had a complicated role in the history of the late twentieth century. It affected different stakeholders and constituencies in diverse ways. As Sara Lorenzini notes, aid was crucial for post-colonial Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and the history of this period cannot be separated from ambitious development agendas.[173] Such initiatives often benefited former European imperial powers or their heirs, such as the United States, now transformed into global aid providers and Western corporations, who benefited through contracts for development projects like hydroelectric dams. As she argues, the earlier language of the imperial 'civilizing mission' was now used to merge humanitarianism, development, Cold War politics, science, and industrial progress into a shared vision.[174] Invariably, this came at a cost to indigenous peoples worldwide.

After the building of the Kaptai Dam, there were further dramatic changes to the environmental reality and demographics within the Hill Tracts. Pakistan limited indigenous peoples' access to traditional lands, including around the newly created Kaptai Dam. In the 1960s, the government created the Pablakhali Reserve. In the name of ecological preservation, they prevented indigenous peoples from *jhumming*, by creating 100 square miles of untouched

[168] Barua, 'Development Intervention', p. 379.
[169] Ibid., p. 385.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid., pp. 386–387.
[172] Ibid., p. 388.
[173] Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 3.
[174] Ibid., pp. 26–30.

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forest preserve on the Burmese border and an additional 100 square miles of buffer zone, prohibiting local peoples from having access to these areas.[175]

Further, while Pakistan had originally supported the 1900 Regulation, instituted by the former British colonial government, which preserved the region as an 'excluded area' by limiting migration of Bengali plainsmen into the Hills, it abolished the act in 1963, and in 1964 gave up the special status altogether.[176] Many have argued that this shift in policy reflected the state's increasing direct control over the region, which led to the ensuing rapid flow of Bengali settlers into the CHT.[177] It also enabled the government to further mine the region's natural resources and via the 1958 Land Acquisition agreement acquired *jhum* lands of indigenous agriculturalists, which were repurposed as public lands.[178] This was followed by a new ruling in 1964, which became an amendment to the Pakistan Constitution and was passed by the High Court of East Pakistan, that allowed non-tribals who had resided in the region for 15 years to own property. This was a real blow to the region's special status.[179]

Such policies would result in a dramatic demographic shift. In 1901, indigenous peoples made up 93 per cent of the population, with Bengalis at 7 per cent. After independence, the Bengali population only grew fractionally to 9 per cent, but by 1981 it was 41 per cent and 49 per cent by 1991.[180]

The region would face added tragedies after East Pakistan seceded from its western wing, and became Bangladesh in 1971.[181] With the emergence of Bengali nationalism, the indigenous peoples of the CHT would increasingly be perceived as linguistically, culturally, racially, and religiously 'other'. The assassination of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib Rahman in 1975[182] inaugurated a period that saw a far more Islamic, fundamentalist government, and with the army in power, the region became fully militarized.[183] During this period, the Bangladesh government encouraged further migration of plains dwelling Bengali Muslims to the CHT. Both new Bengali settlers and the military engaged in egregious human rights violations, including murder, massacre, gang rape, coerced marriage, and forced conversion to Islam of indigenous peoples up until 1997. Forests were cleared and hill people evicted, leading to an added 54,000 fleeing to India and 50,000 becoming internally displaced people.[184]

[175] Guy Mountfort, 'Pakistan's Progress', *Oryx* 10, 1 (May 1969), pp. 39–43, p. 40.

[176] Nasir Uddin, 'Living on the Margin: The Positioning of the "Khumi" within the Sociopolitical and Ethnic History of the Chittagong Hill Tracts', *Asian Ethnicity* 9, 1, February 2008, pp. 33–53, p. 43; Nayak, 'Understanding Environmental Security', p. 48.

[177] Uddin, 'Living on the Margin', p. 43.

[178] Nayak, 'Understanding Environmental Security', p. 48.

[179] Uddin, 'Living on the Margin', p. 43.

[180] Nayak, 'Understanding Environmental Security', pp. 46–47.

[181] Wilkinson, 'Negotiating with the Other', p. 182

[182] Gerharz and Land, 'Uprooted Belonging', p. 1885.

[183] Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, pp. 166–167.

[184] Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, pp. 34–35; Kabita Chakma and Glen Hill, 'Indigenous Women and Culture in the Colonized Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh', in *Everyday Occupations: Experiencing Militarism in South Asia and the Middle East*, (ed.) Kamala Visweswaran (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 132–157; Meghna Guhathakurta, 'Women's Survival and Resistance', in Gain, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, pp. 79–95,

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Through these tactics, Bangladesh engaged in additional interventionist methods by forcefully taking indigenous lands, silencing indigenous people's autonomy movements, coercing cultural assimilation into greater Bengali society, escalating demographic change, and catalysing the migration of indigenous refugees to northeast India through religious persecution.[185]

Thus, the Kaptai Dam reflects more broadly the disturbing legacy of mid-twentieth century policies of post-colonial nation building, international development, and Cold War geopolitics on remote environments and indigenous peoples. In taming rivers and water bodies, fledging and fragile new states, like East Pakistan, hoped to fulfil energy and infrastructure needs, through mirroring Western ideals of modernity and progress. In the process, they perpetuated the language of colonial 'othering' when addressing indigenous ethnic minorities, who were perceived as marginal to the nation-state. Indigenous peoples, in areas like the northeast India border, were often never given full rights of citizenship and development projects in their regions were accompanied by radical acts of land appropriation by the nation-state.[186] Being liminal geographies, as colonial frontiers in British India and later side notes in South Asian nationalism, hilly borders were often forgotten altogether by the post-colonial state[187] and development projects invariably undermined their natural ecologies and indigenous communities in profound ways. When remembered, East Pakistani and later Bangladeshi administrations would construct the indigenous peoples and their landscapes in the CHT in a paternalistic manner as an afterthought, fondly invoked as 'our tribes'.[188] Invariably, they were perceived as a form of cultural oddity or touristic fascination.[189] In this way, hill people were politically and economically sidelined in a form of internal colonialism by the nation-state itself.[190]

These issues remain alive in the political and popular consciousness of contemporary Bangladesh. In 2019, some 55 years after the dam was built, the Bangladeshi artist, Samsul Alam Helal, opened an exhibition at Shilpakala Academy in Dhaka on the painful realities of life after the dam. His exhibition included replicas of important cultural sites that disappeared with the flooding; stories of activists and students who have been abducted or raped in the decades thereafter; and the displacement of natural hill ecologies with

p. 90; Jhala, *An Endangered History*, p. 217; Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism*, p. 166; Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, pp. 34–35; Jessica Skinner, *Internal Displacement in the CHT and Rights-based Approaches to Rehabilitation* (Dhaka: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, 2008), pp. 8–11.

[185] Nayak, 'Understanding Environmental Security', p. 51.

[186] Chowdhury, 'Deluge amidst Conflict', p. 196.

[187] Ibid., p. 199.

[188] Wilkinson, 'Negotiating with the Other', p. 182; Willem van Schendel, 'The Invention of the "Jummas": State Formation and Ethnicity in Southeastern Bangladesh', *Modern Asian Studies* 26, 1 (1992), pp. 95–128, p. 103.

[189] van Schendel et al. (eds), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p. 211.

[190] Ahmed, 'Defining "Indigenous" in Bangladesh', p. 56.

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gentrification.[191] It reveals the continuing suffering caused by the Kaptai Dam to this day.

The dam serves as a potent symbol of the vast transnational tentacles of mid-twentieth century global development. To fulfil their development goals, new nations needed American aid. In turn, the US State Department and American multinational corporations, energized by postwar economic and technological advancement and the need to support emergent democratic allies in the Third World, were heavily entrenched in international aid. American aid became part and parcel of a global strategy of winning the Cold War and uncannily recreated and perpetuated European imperial policies.

Such development schemes destroyed natural spaces.[192] By attempting to generate energy and champion Western-style democracy, international aid undermined the most valuable resource: the environment itself and the people who lived harmoniously within it. It tamed the waters, until the water swallowed all in its sights.

Competing interests. None.

[191] Surabhi Kanga, 'Tears of a Thousand People: Exploring the Violence of Displacement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts', *The Caravan*, 1 August 2019: https://caravanmagazine.in/photo-essay/exploring-violence-displacement-chittagong-hill-tracts, [accessed 18 February 2022].

[192] Barua, 'Development Intervention', p. 383.

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