

## **Performative Practices: Nations, Borders and Refugees**

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(Summary)

This paper examines the stringent and militarized India-Pakistan borders in South Asia - a byproduct of the violent partition of the Indian subcontinent into two nation-states, India and Pakistan. Due to the prolonged and continuing hostility between the two nation-states, the India-Pakistan borders represent sites of aggression and violence. As strictly fenced and securitized zones, the borders have divided families making it almost impossible for separated family members to meet each other in their lifetimes.

This paper looks at these borders as performative and fluid, despite their highly surveilled, fenced and seemingly inflexible character. It argues that rather than static and fixed, these are dynamic, and are constantly materialized and performed by the nation-states. A constant materialization of borders through various violent and non-violent mechanisms by the nation-state is meant to achieve a secure national identity - a process that always remains unfinished, and thus marks border performances as an endless and ongoing reality.

Focusing specifically on the Rajasthan-Sindh border, a vast Western Indian border with Pakistan, this paper illustrates the various ways in which the nation-state engages in various border performances. One of these performances include staging 'border spectacles' - defining borders as dramatic militarized spaces, exhibiting the presence of border technology in form of intricate fencing, advanced security systems, surveillance infrastructure, and military presence, and even displaying border rituals. Through ever advancing border technologies and spectacles, both nation-states continuously enact borders and assert their nationalist identities. Another performance is through 'culturalizing' and nationalizing the borders, and using various socio-cultural initiatives to gain legitimacy. Borders are also constantly politicized by both India and Pakistan to add to the ongoing spectacle and materialization. Both nation-states have also engaged in overtly violent practices like cross-border firings and wars, causing displacements and dividing families. These enactments that go on in various forms help us to understand borders as processes rather than as fixed or 'accomplished' realities.

This paper argues that apart from the nation-state, non-state actors such as border residents and refugees living in these areas also partake in border performances. Despite the hegemony of the state and its unyielding position on borders, the non-state actors are able to influence and shape the border discourse in specific ways. The paper looks at the practices of mobility and citizenship by the refugees that enable them to negotiate border regimes. Through their cross-border movements, corporeal presence, claims and political strategies, they are able to contest the border rigidities and mobility restrictions envisioned by the state. Notwithstanding their vulnerabilities and situation of marginality, the refugees are able to use their local, cultural and political connections, as well as their religious identity to influence the political discourse of the state. Through ongoing cross-border mobility and shifting nationalist identities (between India and Pakistan), refugees also shape border discourse in specific ways. A border that apparently looks 'fixed' is in reality continuously and dynamically being performed by both state and

non-state actors - albeit not always in opposition to one another (In some occasions, both collaborate in shaping the meaning and practices of borders).