

Masters Not Friends: Land, Labor and Politics of Place in Rural Pakistan

Draft for AIPS Summer Research Grant

Project Overview

I am applying for the Summer Academic Grant to conclude fieldwork research for my book manuscript entitled “Masters Not Friends. Land, Labor and Politics of Place in Rural Pakistan”. My book is a historical and ethnographic investigation of a peasant mobilization that defied the most formidable state institution in Pakistan, the Army. The central focus of my monograph is on the rise of a peasant land rights movement, the Anjuman Mazarin Punjab (hereon AMP, circa 2000-Present) that represents Muslim tenant farmers and historically marginalized Christian tenant sharecroppers. Strikingly, these two communities came together to resist the Pakistan Army’s attempt to privatize state-owned farmland. The provisional success of AMP shattered the widely held view about Army’s absolute dominance to illustrate the contingency of rule in Pakistan.

The Summer Grant will allow me to share extracts of my manuscript with my interlocutors in Pakistan (AMP activists, NGO workers, tenant farmers) to get feedback through follow up interviews and focus groups. The outcome of these exchanges will be written as an afterword that will consist of reflections from my interlocutors and research subjects (Lassiter 2004). This collaborative approach will ensure a level of transparency and accountability to my representations of AMP and provide a crucial ethical dimension to my research. As Junior Assistant Professor this Summer Grant is a crucial resource to meet my research goals and finalize my book revisions.

With the support of the Summer Grant I will be able to facilitate presentations on my research findings with AMP activists, leaders in rural Punjab. I will present my research findings and conclusions through oral presentation in Urdu and Punjabi (through interpreter) to AMP members and leaders in the four villages where I conducted bulk of my field research. These presentations will be followed up with interviews, and focus group discussion on the book’s findings and on the changing circumstances of the movement. I will ask AMP member and leaders about their comments on my research findings.

A second portion of this feedback/follow up study will be carried out AMP’s urban “civil society” allies in Lahore, and Islamabad. I will distribute my monograph with four research collaborators who were instrumental in creating solidarity network with the AMP. These interviews will focus on my chapters on the collaboration between AMP and civil society allies. In my interviews, I will ask about best practices in terms of collaboration with grass roots mobilization. Here I will ask if these organizations employ when working with livelihood struggles: What policies and procedures does your organization employ in giving funds to local movements? On what basis does your NGO (or political party) forge alliance with peasant movements? How does the “professionalization” of activism via the NGO model effect grass roots mobilization? What kinds of translations were made between your party platform, or NGO mission and AMPs demands? The data I gather will help me get a better sense of how the tenant farmers and their collaborators see the successes and losses of working with AMP.

My research offers a rich empirical case study of grass roots politics can both flourish and diminish depending on how they ally with NGOs. The case of the AMP shows how the collaboration of peasant with civil society allowed a historically marginalized group of peasant farmers to them to challenge monolithic state institutions but also limited their political vision.

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