

**Brian Bond / The Graduate Center, CUNY / AIPS Summer Research Grant / May 15, 2015**

***Kāfi* Musical Performance and the Transmission of Locally Embedded Islam**

I propose to conduct one month of ethnomusicological field research on the musical performance of Panjabi-language Sufi poetry in the *kāfi* song genre in Lahore in December 2015. *Kāfi* is a prominent vernacular Sufi song genre of the greater Indus Valley region, sung primarily in Panjabi, Sindhi, and Saraiki. Eaton (1974) has demonstrated how sung Sufi poetry transmitted Islamic teachings in households of the early modern Deccan. My research will approach contemporary *kāfi* performance with a similar understanding, namely that sung poetry shapes Muslim religious subjectivities. I will thus examine the ways in which *kāfi* performance serves as a musical means for the transmission of Islamic and Sufi teachings in contemporary Pakistan. In studying *kāfi* as a musical genre, I will also seek to document musical aspects such as melody types, rhythmic meters, and styles of adapting poetic texts. I will also be interested in profiling individual performers and analyzing performance contexts. Although ethnomusicologists have examined the popular shrine-based *qawwālī* genre (Qureshi 1987), and drumming practices at Sufi shrines in Lahore (Wolf 2006, 2014), little attention has been paid to *kāfi* as a musical genre.

My study of *kāfi* will ultimately seek to understand the ways in which musical performance serves as an emotional entry point into the Islamic tradition. Asad (1986) has written that the anthropology of Islam should approach the study of the relationship between local Islam and “universal” Islam by understanding Islam itself as a “discursive tradition”: scholars must pay attention to the ways in which Muslims engage with the foundational texts of Islam—the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth. I wish to understand how *kāfi* serves as a culturally relevant entry point into the Islamic tradition by examining how musical performances that teach Islamic ideas through locally meaningful symbols are consumed and discussed in Pakistan today. How do listeners and performers engage emotionally and critically with the sung verses of a poet like Bulleh Shāh, whose allegorical renderings of the Hīr-Rānjhā romance convey Islamic notions of the individual’s relationship with Allāh in a way that differs from other Islamic modes of imparting ideals of piety, morality, and devotion? What can this modality of engagement teach us about the role of un-institutionalized Sufism in fashioning religious subjects in Pakistan?

I will investigate the above issues and questions using ethnographic research methods, including participant observation at Sufi shrines in Lahore; in-depth interviews with musical practitioners and listeners; digital audio and video documentation of performances; and consultation of recorded media and Urdu- and Panjabi-language written texts. My preparation for ethnographic musical research in Pakistan includes extensive language study, academic work, and South Asia experience since 2004. I have studied Urdu and Hindi since 2005, including eight months of fully funded intensive Urdu language study in 2009-2010 at the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) in Lucknow, and a year of graduate-level Urdu at New York University in 2012-2013. In summer 2013, I also completed a two-month fully funded intensive program of Punjabi language study at AIIS in Chandigarh. In summer 2014, I conducted one month of ethnomusicological fieldwork on Sindhi Sufi musical practices in Kachchh, Gujarat. I am currently completing my third year in a PhD program in ethnomusicology, for which I have completed substantial coursework in South Asian music, religion, literature, and history.