

AIPS Short-Term Research Grant Final Report

Project Title: Local Expressions, Global Arenas: Shia Muslim Pilgrims in the *Arba'een* pilgrimage

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1. Significance to Pakistan Studies

This dissertation highlights the role of global pilgrimage with respect to the religious practice in everyday life of Shia Muslims in Pakistan. Beyond the thick description of religious practice and belief in the life of Pakistani Shias, this dissertation contextualizes this practice in the global Shia world and the impact of Pakistani pilgrims on religious practice, global political economy, and Shia sacred geography. Through my dissertation, I wish to elaborate on the global imaginaries of Shia Muslims as they engage with sacred spaces made accessible to them as they persist with their localized version of religious practice. My work speaks to scholars of religion who conceptualize Islam in legalistic terms and Pakistani Muslims as ardent supporters of rigid, standardized practice. On the contrary, Pakistani Shias are conscious actors within religious fields who see religious diversity as not a challenge but a positive feature of global religious practice in sacred spaces.

2. Key Outcomes and Deliverables

This short-term grant helped me obtain the data necessary to form the basis of my dissertation. By the end of the trip, I had obtained 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews of pilgrims, group leaders and religious scholars on the topic of *Arba'een* pilgrimage. For the sacred annual mourning period (Muharram 1 – Safar 9, 1444 AH), I observed 39 days of Muharram observances and visited four imambargahs within the Islamabad-Rawalpindi area for this purpose. I visited peoples' homes and was able to talk to them about their experiences during this phase. This has set me up to draw a comparison with *Arba'een* experiences within the cities of Karbala and Najaf in Iraq to see how Pakistani pilgrims position themselves within the Shia religious community.

In the future, this data has helped me schedule more interviews over Zoom and phone as they come to me. It added data to a journal article I hope to submit in the next few months and will be the basis of two chapters in my dissertation. I have presented my findings on this trip at two major national conferences (American Academy of Religion, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion) with the help of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies. I hope to carry on the work based on my experiences in my fieldwork with the generous support of AIPS.