

Bridget Kustin – Abstract

- (1) I propose conducting exploratory research toward my intended dissertation on the relationship between the increasing social, political, and economic prominence of Islam in both urban and rural Bangladesh, and its Saudi Arabia-supported Islamic finance industry. In order to understand the contours of processes of “Islamization,” or public identification with Islamic symbols, versus what constitutes “secular” orientations for individuals and institutions, my research focuses on the following questions: Is the rise of Islamic banking in Bangladesh linked to the increasing public visibility of individual and national Islamic religiosity? Does Islamic banking represent the public institutionalization of Islam and does absorption into this institution produce religious subjects? Are evolving religiosities affected by the religious and financial influence of Saudi Arabia, wielded through partnerships and robust investments in Bangladeshi Islamic banking since the industry’s inception?

The ethnographic yield of exploratory interviews among four distinct sectors will allow me to revise my key research questions, evaluate my methodology, test the efficacy and appropriateness of interview questions, and use my contact networks to begin the critical, multiyear process of building trust with key informants, in advance of dissertation fieldwork in the fourth year of my program.

- (2) Out of my proposed 90-day research period, approximately 60 total days will be spent in Dhaka, and 30 days will be spent at a rural field site, the location of which will be determined in conjunction with my contacts at the Research and Evaluation Division of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement committee (BRAC), Nari Uddog Kendro, and Ain O Salish Kendro.
- (3) A focal point of this academic year is foundational theoretic and historic background preparation for my intended summer research. For a fall 2009 reading course on Bangladesh and Pakistan, I produced a research paper on evolutions in Islamic finance in Pakistan in the context of the global Islamic finance industry. For a reading course this semester, I am reflecting upon methodological challenges of framing my proposed interdisciplinary ethnography of religion and finance as a transnational assemblage. I also am currently preparing a chapter regarding U.S. interventions in religious extremism in Bangladesh for a book on Bangladesh’s foreign policy that I am co-editing with Dr. Jalal Alamgir of the University of Massachusetts-Boston, tentatively set for a December 2011 release by Sage Publications.