Narrative Report

I carried out the first three months of my dissertation fieldwork under the auspices of AIPS in Lahore. It was a largely exploratory period looking at a crucial juncture in a young man's life: the transition between education and employment. I sought to understand the process of the job search and factors that shape it such as educational backgrounds, family, and social networks. I began with informal interviewing and observations at FC College, and continued at Punjab University, Sargodha University - Lahore campus, Government College, and the University of Management and Technology. I eventually shifted my focus from students, faculty, and administrators to those recent university graduates who were working or looking for work. To locate job seekers and recently hired workers, I interviewed employers and job placement agents, part-time workers at a 'network marketing' office, and at a call center. This segment of fieldwork helped me understand the context in which young men find themselves in. In order to continue to enrich my understanding of the urban and socio-economic context, and to also obtain a diversity of viewpoints, I conducted informal interviews with youth (studying, working, and unemployed) that took place at student hostels, cafes, and at a snooker club.

Such preliminary research demonstrated that the research on the transition period from education to employment was 1) not well served on a university campus, 2) my research questions were in need of further definition and clarity, 3) many educated youth were either working or studying rather than exclusively job searching, and 4) the definition of 'unemployed' is polysemous. I further realized I was encountering a range of young men, many from other parts of Pakistan, who came to Lahore to study, work, and start a career. As I did so, I listened to stories of social mobility that contained threads of anxiety about their careers and families that seemed to index the sociological factors and conditions involved in navigating the urban economy.

In meeting a range of students and recent graduates at different phases of the job search and career development process, I began to document the role of family, the significance of social status, and the persistence of peers or kinship networks in mediating the transition. I began to learn about strategies, experiences, choices, and aspirations; I became sensitive to how young men talked about their goals which involved a mixture of cynicism, political optimism, and ambivalence about merit.

As some authors have pointed out, the growth of education has produced high expectations for young people and their families (Mains 2011). The attitudes of college-educated youth in Lahore seem to confirm that. But the question this initial data raises is how to understand the consequences of what happens after acquiring a university degree. In the transition to work,

social capital helps explain some of the outcomes of recent graduates (Bourdieu and Passeron 1984). Initial data show that paternal networks in particular can be helpful in finding information and securing positions in the world of work.

But class advantage belies the activity and maneuvers of a stratum of young people who look to the city as part of a larger educational and career strategy. How do we understand the emerging category of professionals who maintain rural social and kinship relations but see themselves as urban? As seats in university become available, it is becoming apparent that this is not a category of educated youth passing time or waiting as Jeffrey finds in rural India (2010). It is an emerging group that seems to challenge the structure of opportunities in urban Pakistan. Preliminary data also offers an insight into urban Pakistan which has been presented as dominated by politics and violence in recent social research. Lahore provides a different context which young people take advantage of as they cobble together an employable profile by accumulating educational credentials and taking part-time jobs. Data suggest an important social phenomenon in the consequences of the booming education sector but bottlenecked job market for youth who are trying to forge a career in the face of uncertainty. Thus, in Lahore, urban youth culture is influenced by career choices and by desires for social mobility through merit rather than oppositional styles found in other recent studies.

In summary, my initial expectations of a linear education-to-work transition was problematic. An opportunity for preliminary a research period allowed me to carefully approach a much more complex situation than what I anticipated. I thus saw the situation in a very different way thanks to my being able to access any part of the city at any time of the day or week. The flexibility and support of AIPS and staff allowed me to explore a range of issues in Lahore. AIPS also allowed me to travel to Islamabad to attend conferences and events that helped think about and redefine my research questions.

References
Bourdieu, Pierre and Passeron, Jean Claude
        1990 Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture. London: Sage.
Jeffrey, Craig
        2010 Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India. Stanford: Stanford
                University Press.
Mains, Daniel
        2011 Hope is Cut: Youth, Unemployment and the Future of Urban Ethiopia.
                Philadelphia: Temple University Press.