

Abbas Jaffer
AIPS Narrative Report

Between September 2014 and February 2015, I was awarded a Short-Term Fellowship with the American Institute of Pakistan Studies in Lahore. I have used this opportunity in a comprehensive manner, both in conducting my own research as well as building academic bridges between the U.S. and Pakistan by giving talks and interfacing with scholarly communities.

My fieldwork concerns the circulation of Pakistani rock and pop music online, and I came to Lahore to better understand the workings of this emerging digital public. In order to investigate the social and technological dimensions of this more fully I spoke to a number of relevant stakeholders and engaged in participant-observation at studios and music events in the city. I have learned much about how class identity informs Internet usage and music consumption, as well as the role of corporate sponsors in funding rock and pop bands in Pakistan.

In order to gain insights I regularly met with several Lahore-based bands, individual musicians, producers, music marketing personnel at multinational companies (Coca Cola, Nestlé, etc.), technologists running music websites and at the Punjab IT Board, and journalists at leading publications (Dawn Group, Express Tribune) who cover contemporary music. Each category of ethnographic interviewee was pivotal for my project in their respective priorities, biases and goals around contemporary music. And by meeting with several relevant groups I have a more well-rounded view of the music scene, online platforms and their constraints.

I also attended and documented the Rafi Peer Youth Arts Festival, as well as music events at colleges and studios (e.g. LUMS, True Brew Records). As a result, I have recorded considerable written field notes as well as audio and video field data thus far that will form the backbone of my dissertation.

In addition to my fieldwork, I pursued academic exchange with faculty at LUMS, the National College of Arts Lahore and Forman Christian College. At FC College I gave public presentations on my research on two occasions, and gave a public talk at LUMS in February. I am grateful for the comprehensive support AIPS has offered towards my research and I look forward to giving back to the institute through my research, speaking, and publishing activities.