

Proposal/Research Statement

Fleeing Violence: Gender, Human Rights, and Trafficking in Women in Pakistan

According to the estimates of the United Nations, human trafficking has become the second largest criminal industry in the world after drugs, victimizing millions of people annually. Drawing upon gender and human rights literatures, this study aims at analyzing women's trafficking in Pakistan. In this study, I examine the issue of trafficking at two levels: micro (victims' experiences) and macro (institutional/policy). More specifically, at the micro level, I intend to analyze processes that make women vulnerable to trafficking as well as their attempts to negotiate their conditions. Drawing upon the experiences of trafficked women, I argue that trafficking should be considered not simply in terms of patriarchal cultures and power of men over women, but in terms of women's vulnerable positions within a larger political economy. Within this structure, certain women are more vulnerable to trafficking, and, more importantly, trafficking occurs within the context of interlocking cycles of exploitation. Trafficking occurs within a multidimensional continuum of violence—ranging from wars, intrastate conflict, to home based gendered violence—which intersects with entrenched structural inequalities and make some segments of society vulnerable to exploitation, often repeatedly, by traffickers. Thus, trafficking might occur repeatedly within a person's life course, though not for the same purpose, and not in the same way. A person could be trafficked for sexual exploitation and then end up as bonded labor. At the institutional/policy level, I intend to examine how the understanding and social construction of "victims of trafficking," which are based on specific (often narrow) diagnoses of the causes of such violence, channel policy efforts to address trafficking in limited ways. Thus, policies remain inadequate to address the root causes of trafficking.

This study is driven by the following research questions:

- a. Micro level: What are the life experiences of trafficked women? What do these experiences tell us about the structures and processes of trafficking as well as women's agency in this exploitative process?
- b. Institutional/Policy level: What are the structural conditions that enable trafficking to occur? How are violations of human rights both a cause and a consequence of trafficking in women? How well do the policies and institutions designed to address trafficking reflect an accurate understanding of the problem?

Focusing on the province of Punjab in Pakistan,¹ I will use three different approaches to collect data. With the support of the government of Punjab, Pakistan, I plan to conduct 15-25 life story interviews with the women victims of trafficking in various shelters established by the government. I will conduct semi-structured interviews (15-25) with the stakeholders, including representatives of concerned government departments, international organizations and NGOs working on the issue of human trafficking, to examine how they understand trafficking, and challenges they confront while implementing anti-trafficking interventions. Moreover, using a feminist policy analysis framework, I will also analyze trafficking related legislation and policies to understand who—under what circumstances—qualifies as a "deserving" victim of trafficking, and how the policies address the needs of trafficked women.

With the support of AIPS Summer Research Grant, I intend to travel to Pakistan between August-December 2014 to collect the data. It is important to mention that my Fulbright Fellowship does not support any fieldwork or research activity outside the USA. Therefore, the AIPS Summer Research Grant will really help me to complete my fieldwork/data collection in Pakistan.

¹ Punjab is the most populous province of Pakistan with approximately 55.6% of the total population of the country (<http://pwd.punjab.gov.pk/>). As a province of Pakistan, this region encapsulates the legal and policy context of Pakistan.