

I was very fortunate, this academic year, to receive the support of the Chowdhury Center through my role as the 2019-20 Malini Chowdhury Fellow on Bangladesh Studies.

In this role, one of my primary goals was to further the Chowdhury Center's mission and make Bangladesh a more visible and central site for academic research. For historical reasons, Bangladesh is very often studied in public health, economics, and some other fields, while being almost completely neglected in others. This neglect largely characterized American anthropology's attitude toward Bangladesh, at least until comparatively recently. This despite the obviously rich and complex language and culture of Bengal, and the way that Bangladesh has been situated in the creation of global processes and social structures.

Another goal has been to foster interdisciplinary engagement among scholars and graduate students interested in Bangladesh. Toward this end, I led a graduate student working group on Bangladesh studies. Students from across all campus departments were invited to come together and share their research interests with the group. Each month, one member was invited to give a short presentation about their recent or ongoing work – usually a qualifying exam topic or a dissertation chapter – in order to receive feedback from the rest of the group. Because we come from a number of diverse fields but are all invested in gathering and producing information in Bangladesh, the most valuable aspect of these meetings was the opportunity to discuss the challenges of conducting research in Bangladesh. Those farther along in the process could share valuable tips for planning and arranging research in Bangladesh. This information is invaluable to graduate students, who often learn the ins and outs of conducting research within their home departments. When study in and of Bangladesh is rare in many departments, lack of access to practical field knowledge makes dissertations far more likely to come to failure. Our hope is that successful dissertation projects in Bangladesh will encourage others to try, while also strengthening institutional and personal linkages among American and Bangladeshi academics.

So far, the graduate student working group has been confined to students on the Berkeley campus, and Berkeley students abroad. However, because of the centrality of the Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh studies in the United States, we received a number of inquiries from students at other universities seeking to join. I am hopeful that in the future, we will find a way to constructively include other students in the working group. If the past six months have taught us anything, it is that virtual engagement pales in comparison to in-person engagement. However, for as long as we are forced into meeting via webcam, we may as well work creatively to get the most out of physically-distanced learning. This may then be an opportunity for our group to reach out to non-Berkeley students. These efforts will reaffirm Berkeley and the Chowdhury Center's place as the most important American hub for Bangladesh studies.

My own research focuses on climate change discourse, and the way that climate change engineering projects straddle a line between natural science experiments and humanitarian assistance. This convergence is most apparent at Bhasan Char, the small island off the coast of Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal, where the government has constructed a refugee camp, ostensibly capable of housing more than one hundred thousand Rohingya refugees. At the Chowdhury Center's spring symposium, "Beyond the Crisis Narrative: Rohingya Statelessness and its Implications for Bangladesh," I presented my preliminary research into this issue (presentation available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1T8cZLNf1kA>).

Finally, the Malini Chowdhury Fellowship enabled me to travel to Bangladesh in order to conduct preliminary ethnographic research and to begin to arrange for longer-term research in the country. This winter, I spent six weeks in Dhaka and surrounding areas connecting with journalists, academics, and friends. Although my return trip this summer was cancelled due to travel restrictions, the Chowdhury Center's support, along with a FLAS scholarship through Berkeley's Institute for South Asia Studies, permitted me to spend this summer improving my Bangla language skills virtually via the American Institute of Indian Studies intensive summer program.

I am thankful for the support and engagement of the Chowdhury Center, and hope to have contributed to its important mission over the past year. I am looking forward to much further involvement with the Center in order to build on the progress that I think we achieved this year.