Ethan Wilensky-Lanford's Draft Statement of Purpose – Kyrgyzstan

A new university is being built in Central Asia. There will be three campuses, the first of which will be built in remote Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. The university, called the University of Central Asia, is a project between the governments of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, and the transnational Aga Khan Development Network, led by the Aga Khan, who is the spiritual leader for at least five million Ismaili Shia Muslims. The planners and administrators of the university conceive of it as a development university, which will benefit the economy and lead to "greater well-being" of the population of the region.

Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan is a divided country. Only one road bridges the fertile south from the capital in the north. Since independence, southern and northern politicians have had different priorities and power bases. Tragically, there have also been interethnic tensions between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations, which share the southern Ferghana Valley region. The government has been supportive of different efforts to build a strong national identity and promote peace between all ethnicities in the country. One of these efforts is financed by the World Bank and the Aga Khan Development Network, and is designed to promote "social cohesion" in select communities in Kyrgyzstan. The social cohesion grant, formally called Social Cohesion through Community-Based Development, marks a new model of peacebuilding and development for the World Bank, according to preliminary research I have done among grant implementors in Kyrgyzstan.

My research project will provide qualitative data on the process of promoting social cohesion, which is a crucial process to understand for anybody interested in building peace in the world. I will conduct ethnography with individuals in communities that the Aga Khan Development Network has selected to receive grants through a process that is designed to bring together stakeholders from local and regional government, as well as mosques, businesses, and the general population. While administering this grant, the Aga Khan Development Network is also building an international university in Kyrgyzstan as well as Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Part of this forthcoming university is involved in research and implementation connected with the World Bank-supported grant.

My project is highly feasible. I first conducted anthropological research in Kyrgyzstan in 2001, when I was an undergraduate at Reed College. I decided to focus on the country for my doctoral research, because I have built up a strong base of knowledge about it over the past 13 years, and I continue to find it fascinating.

In this project, I will investigate the meaning of social cohesion, and how it relates to the Aga Khan Development Network members' concepts of development, cosmopolitanism, and pluralism. Together with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which is a partner in the implementation of the grant to promote social cohesion, the Institute for Public Policy and Administration group at the University of Central Asia will be measuring social cohesion using a metric it is currently developing. While collaborating with the grant implementation partners, I will study this measurement process, and help the partners track community-administered grants that are intended to promote social cohesion. I have already conducted preliminary fieldwork among the university administrators and planners for the past three summers, and have been invited to intern with the Aga Khan Foundation, a component of the Aga Khan Development Network which is overseeing the grant implementation. Studying the process of promoting social cohesion is key if we are to understand what may

well be the next generation of World Bank-supported development projects around the world.

I believe that anthropology incorporates the methodology that is best suited to my research questions, which are:

1.) **How do members of the Aga Khan Development Network and their partners measure social cohesion using the social cohesion index?** How does social cohesion relate to building a cosmopolitan ethic and pluralism? What impact do community-based grants have on local communities that receive them?

2.) **How do residents of the communities that receive grants for social cohesion conceive of the Aga Khan's Ismaili religion?** What do Hanafi Sunni religious leaders in the communities say and preach about the Ismaili religion, if anything?

3.) **What can the Aga Khan Development Network's emergent development-education-cosmopolitanism nexus tell us about the future of politics in Central Asia?** Does the Aga Khan Development Network seem poised to change the political discourse of the region?

I will conduct ethnographic field research to evaluate the efficacy and results of social cohesion promotion by organizing focus groups to discuss the process and outcome of the implementation of community-based grants. I speak Russian, so will easily be able to socialize and communicate with members of the communities I will study. I will select two or three multiethnic communities from the fifteen mono- and multiethnic communities where the grant program is being implemented, in collaboration with the relevant project staff at the Aga Khan Foundation, the University of Central Asia, and another partner organization, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. I will ask residents of the communities to write about what social cohesion means for them, and discuss these written responses in follow-up individual interviews.

My research will last for a full academic year, from August 2015 through June 2016. I will then use the research data I produce to inform my doctoral dissertation at Rice University. I plan to publish articles in peer-reviewed academic journals about this research, and, after I earn my doctoral degree, write an academic book related to my research. Support from the Fulbright fellowship will help me reach my career goal of becoming a tenured professor at a liberal arts college or larger research institution.