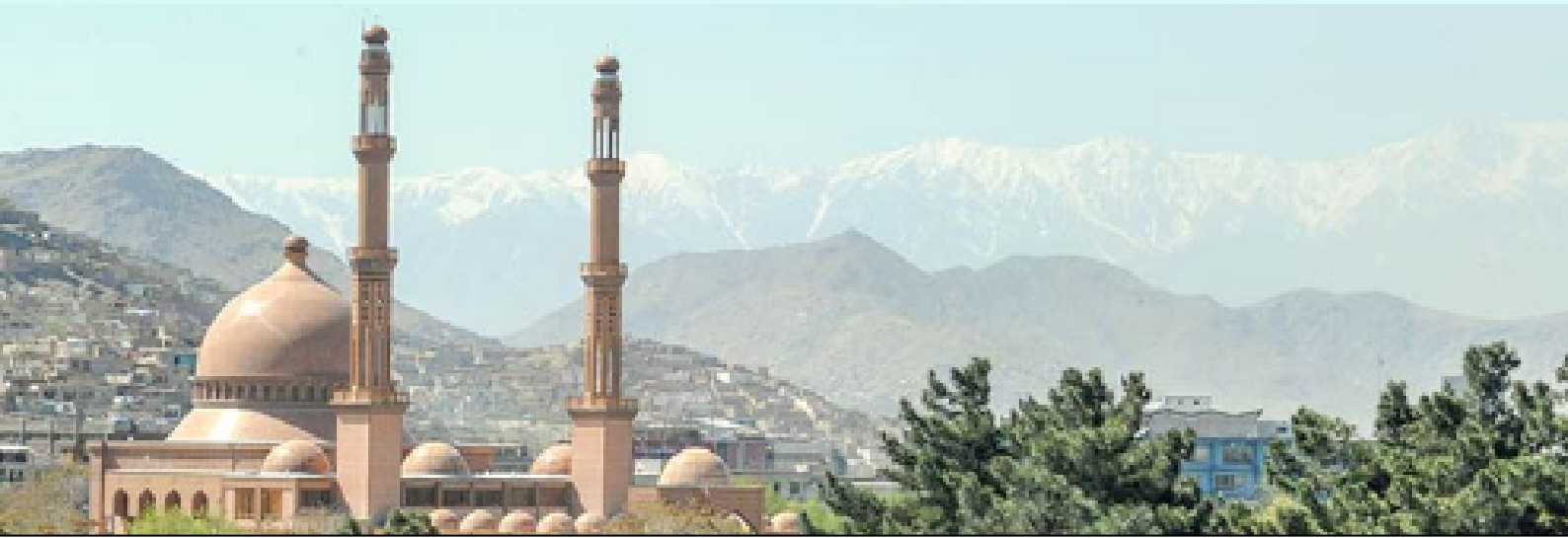


THE AFTERLIVES OF URBAN MUSLIM ASIA: ALTERNATIVE IMAGINARIES OF SOCIETY AND POLITY



Introduction

Welcome to the third edition of the Afterlives of Muslim Asia Newsletter. The project began in January 2022 and the research team are in the final stages of their fieldwork and pulling together the results of the past 2 and a half years. In this edition we feature the outputs and activities the team have been involved with and spotlight the communities that have contributed so enormously to the project.

The 'Afterlives' project is led by Prof. Magnus Marsden of the University of Sussex, the co-Investigators are Dr. Paul Anderson of the University of Cambridge and Dr. Vera Skvirskaja of the University of Copenhagen. Our project photographer is Moska Najib.



Public & Academic Engagement

On the 20th February, Magnus gave an online talk on Afghan mobility and refugees at a conference entitled "*The Contemporary Developments in Afghanistan: Implications on Central Asia.*" The conference was organised by the Institute of Advanced International Studies, at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent



Above: Vera Skvirskaja, Shahla Muram and Paul Anderson presenting a paper on '*Mobile Societies, Coexistence and the Unbounding of Central Asia*' in Tartu, Estonia

4th March, Magnus presented a seminar at the Cambridge Central Asian Forum seminar series. His talk was entitled "*Beyond the Jewish Triangle: A Comparative and Connective Analysis of Muslim and Jewish Central Asian Emigres in the Twentieth Century.*"

On the 27th March, Magnus and Vera joined Paul in Cambridge for the Cambridge Festival of Ideas, where they partook in a panel event at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies - <https://www.festival.cam.ac.uk/events/afterlives-urban-muslim-asia>



Above: Dr. Paul Anderson giving a talk at the Cambridge Festival in March 2024

On 5th May, Magnus gave a talk in London on the contributions of Ustad Asif Mahmood to music in Afghanistan and the diaspora. The talk was given on the occasion of a concert by Asif Mahmood's son, Yousuf.

19-21st June, project team members Magnus, Vera and Paul, alongside researcher Shahla Muram, presented papers at a panel at the Eighth Annual Tartu (Estonia) Conference on East European and Eurasian Studies, titled "*Mobile Societies, Coexistence and the Unbounding of Central Asia.*"

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23rd June, Magnus attended the 6th International Conference organised by the Nehkaame Sewa Trust, Guru Hargobind Singh Trust, along with all Afghan related organisations and Sadh Sangat at the Guru Nanak Sikh Academy, Hayes, London. Magnus was presented with an award for his research on the Afghan Sikh and Hindu community by the conference organisers.



Above: Participants of the 6th International Conference, Hayes, London

20th July, Magnus attended the 25th anniversary of the Great Bala Pritam Gurmat Samagam in Hayes, London. During the event he gave a speech on the distinctive contributions of Afghan Sikhs, received an award from the community and presented Dr Khurana with a certificate of recognition for his scholarly activities on behalf of the School of Global Studies, University of Sussex. Other invited guests included Seema Malhotra MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Home Office.



Above: Magnus with Ravshan Usmanov



Above: 25th anniversary of the Great Bala Pritam Gurmat Samagam in Hayes, London

On Sunday 28th July, Magnus organised and attended an event at the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara in Surrey, Vancouver, to share the findings of the project with the Afghan Sikh community in Canada. Magnus gave a talk about the project and presented members of the community with a booklet of Moska Najib's exhibition displayed at SOAS, University of London.

On 8th August 2024, Magnus discussed the project's findings with Uzbekistan's Ambassador to the UK, Ravshan Usmanov.

During the course of visiting New York in August 2024, Magnus shared project results with the following associations: Hekmat Foushanji (Afghan American Trading Company), Jack Abrahams (Afghan Jewish community), Abdullah Khwajah

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Above: Magnus with the Committee of the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara (Afghan Sikhs, Long Island), August 2024



(Turkestanian American Association, New Jersey), and the Committee of the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara (Afghan Sikhs, Long Island).

In addition to discussing the project's research, opportunities for further collaborations were also explored.

Left: Magnus and Jack Abrahams (Afghan Jewish community) in New York

'Belonging Flexibly: Non-Muslim migrants from Muslim Asia'

Thursday 11th July marked a special occasion in the 'Afterlives' project when principal photographer, Moska Najib, joined the research team in London for the launch of our exhibition, which showcased the work of Moska along with pictures taken by the researchers during their fieldwork trips.

The 'Belonging Flexibly' exhibition tells the story of non-Muslim communities from historically Muslim-majority cities in Asia, including (post) Soviet Central Asia, that migrated out of the region due to political instability, international intervention, and civil conflict. The exhibition emphasises the ongoing importance of their cities of origin to these communities' sense of belonging, their cosmopolitan skills and their nuanced ways of dealing with diversity in the context of life in the diaspora.



Above: Vienna, courtesy of Moska Najib

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Above: Opening address at the 'Belonging Flexibly' exhibition launch, SOAS

Moska has produced vivid images that explore the diverse diasporic experiences of multiple communities, including Sikhs and Hindus from Afghanistan and Bukharan Jews from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These photographs were informed by the wider research activities of the project's team that has also explored the migratory trajectories of Afghan Jews, Syrian Jews, Christians and Central Asian and Afghan Muslims.

The photographs provide a lens into the new settings in which these communities now live as well as into their geographically expansive orientations and flexible rootedness.

The exhibition focuses its attention on three communities that feature in the project's research. These are:

Afghanistan's Sikh and Hindu communities

These photographs document the vibrant communities of Sikhs and Hindus from Afghanistan who have been living in London since the 1990s. The photos illustrate the ongoing importance of the ties of Sikhs and Hindus to Muslims from Afghanistan, and significance of these ties for the forms of trade and commerce that sustain their livelihoods and collective identities.

Bukharan Jews

These photographs explore the Bukharan Jewish community in Vienna that emerged in the 1970s and have reinvigorated Jewish life in the historic Jewish neighbourhood of Leopoldstadt. Alongside Bukharan religious infrastructure catering for observant Jews, the photographs illustrate the persistence of traditional Bukharan occupations and professions.

Syrian Armenians

The photographs shed light on the interfaces between Syrian Armenian Christians living in Armenia and Muslim tourists from Iran, the Gulf and the Arabic-speaking Middle East. The images reflect the claims of many Syrian Armenians in Armenia that they maintain closer cultural and commercial bonds with Muslims from Syria than with Arab Christians in Syria.

Guests to the exhibition's launch included members of the local Afghan Sikh and Hindu communities that supported Magnus' research in London.



Above: Guest at the exhibition. First Floor Gallery, Brunei Gallery, SOAS



View the exhibition's website at:
[https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=abdullahs-family-blog-afterlives-\(1\).pdf&site=11](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=abdullahs-family-blog-afterlives-(1).pdf&site=11)

In addition to the launch of the exhibition in SOAS' Brunei Gallery, there was a Roundtable conference. The aim of the conference was to share and debate the project's findings with participating communities, relevant government officials and heritage experts, the general public and relevant scholars. The first panel was chaired by Qaisra Khan (Curator at The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art). The speakers were Magnus, Vera, Paul and Sudaba Zahidi (AISS).

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Above: Panel 2 at Roundtable event, SOAS
Below: Guests at the exhibition launch party



The second panel was chaired by Dawood Azami (Multi-Media Editor, BBC World Service). The speakers were Moska Najib (Afterlives project photographer), Thomas Loy (Oriental Institute, Czech Academy of Sciences and Afterlives Advisory Board member), Faisal Devji (University of Oxford) and Shah Mahmoud Hanifi (James Madison University and Afterlives Advisory Board Member).

The event was attended by representatives of various community associations in the UK, past and present government officials of the UK and Afghanistan, leading experts in the field of Islamic heritage presentation, members of the public, postgraduate students, and leading academics.

The 'Belonging Flexibly' exhibition ran from the 11th July to the 21st September 2024 at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University of London.

You can find out more about it on the gallery's website:

<https://www.soas.ac.uk/about/event/belonging-flexibly-non-muslim-migrants-muslim-asia-0>

'Belonging Flexibly' is curated by Moska, an award-winning photographer based in Delhi, with the input of Magnus, Vera and Paul.



Above: Paul Anderson discussing the project's research alongside (left) Shahla Muram and (right) Vera Skvirskaja

Publications

In March 2024, an article by Magnus on London's 20th-century fur and carpet trade was featured in *The Conversation* -

<https://theconversation.com/how-central-asian-jews-and-muslims-worked-together-in-londons-20th-century-fur-and-carpet-trade-226283>

An article titled '*The Demolition of Jeddah and the Relocation of a Neighbourhood in Turkey*,' exploring the connection between built neighbourhoods and heritage, written by Magnus, was published by Edinburgh University Press in April.

April/May, the *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* published a special 'Afterlives' edition, featuring contributions from the researchers - Magnus, Vera and Paul.





Publications

In June, a short article by Magnus was featured in *The Conversation*, titled '*Khorasan: Why many Afghanistan citizens are pushing back against the term's association with terrorism*'

<https://theconversation.com/khorasan-why-many-afghanistan-citizens-are-pushing-back-against-the-terms-association-with-terrorism-231985>

The HROMADA network published a blog article in June by Magnus and Vera. The blog article, titled '*"Non-traditional" migrants in the political economy of the Ukraine: Ukrainian Afghans*' can be viewed at

<https://hromada.network/non-traditional-immigrants-political-economy-ukrainian-afghans/>

Fieldwork

Paul has conducted life history interviews with Armenians from Aleppo focusing on relations with Muslims and economic activities before, during and since the civil war. These have been conducted in Yerevan (January, May, August 2024) and in Kuwait (May 2024). He has also administered questionnaires and conducted remote interviews with Muslim Aleppines in Aleppo, Gaziantep and Istanbul on their experiences and perceptions of neighbourhoods which were home to Jews and Armenians.

Finally, he has been consulting Arabic chronicles and memoirs of Jewish-majority areas in Aleppo to better understand their historical development and the ways in which they have been rendered as heritage subjects.

Magnus has been contextualising his ethnographic work through time in the archives. In the UK, he has consulted records relating to the activities of Jews, Sikhs and Hindus from Afghanistan at the British Library, the National Archives, and the London Archives. Most recently, he travelled to Winnipeg in Canada in order to visit the Manitoba Archives, the holding place of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. The Hudson's Bay Company was the principal agent in the sale of Afghan Karakul fur in the twentieth century, a trade in which both Jews and Muslims from Afghanistan and Central Asia played a pivotal role.

After the photo exhibition '*Belonging Flexibly*' in London, Vera conducted some brief fieldwork in Vienna, focusing on the publishing activities and plans of Bukharan Jewish activists, met members of the Bukharan Jewish community who featured in the photo exhibition and/or facilitated the shooting session, and attended a Bukharan Jewish women's study group. Vera noted that there was a desire to popularise knowledge

about the Bukharan Jewish community in Vienna (and Europe) - their historical background, migration pathways and especially, their membership in the wider, national Jewish community of Austria - to the general public. This year (in November), the Bukharans will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of their community in Austria. Looking back, they are particularly proud of becoming a presence in Austrian public and political life. Recently, the Bukharan Jewish community has taken part in providing first assistance to the Jewish refugees from the war-affected Ukraine and facilitated their smooth introduction to Austrian society. Vera has followed up on the links between the Bukharan and Ukrainian Jewish communities in Vienna to map new transnational connections of this global diaspora.

The Team

Prof. Magnus Marsden, Principal Investigator (University of Sussex)

Dr. Vera Skvirskaja, Co-Investigator (University of Copenhagen)

Dr. Paul Anderson, Co-Investigator (University of Cambridge)

Ms. Moska Najib, Principal Photographer