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Intellectual Exchanges in Muslim Asia
Intersections of History and Geography

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Introduction

'The Alan question' shaped intellectually the year I spent writing up my PhD thesis in Cambridge under the supervision of Susan Bayly and the following period during which I converted it into a book. Susan Bayly and I used 'the Alan question' to refer to a simple yet powerful question posed to me by Alan MacFarlane during a seminar held in Cambridge in February 2002. Addressing the emphasis I placed in the talk on the significance of critical debate to the living of a Muslim life in Chitral, northern Pakistan, he asked, 'Is what you are describing particular to Chitral or generalizable to other parts of the Muslim World?'[1] The question was a variation on a theme for anthropology – a discipline in which the relationship between 'the general' and 'the particular' has long been a central concern. Never having been especially confident in Cambridge's seminar culture, I gave an incomplete answer. My lacklustre performance on the day, nevertheless, resulted in years of animated discussion between Susan Bayly and myself: what wider implications, we discussed, did my work on Muslim life in Chitral have for the anthropology of Islam?

My thesis concerned what I had come to see as being the distinctive way in which Chitral Muslims set to the task of leading a Muslim life (Marsden 2005). At the time, I regarded Chitral as being a 'relatively remote' district in northern Pakistan. Chitral's population largely comprised Khowar-speaking Sunni and Shii Ismaili Muslims who collectively distinguished their society from that of the Pashto or Pakhtu-speaking majority of what was known at the time as Pakistan's North West Frontier Province.[2] I documented the strenuous lengths to which Muslims in Chitral's villages and small towns went in order to cultivate emotionally rich and intellectually vibrant lives. I focused

ethnographically on the important role played by the arts of debate and discussion in villagers' understandings of 'the life of the mind' – a term that captured the importance that my friends in Chitral placed upon the active and ongoing cultivation of their mental faculties, the vocal exercise of critical thought and the sensitive deployment of emotional intelligence. I also emphasized the extent to which my informants in Chitral led culturally rich existences that revolved around music, dance and poetry. The medium of these cultural forms and genres was Khowar (an Indo-Persian language spoken by approximately 250,000 ethnic Chitrali or Kho people). Chitrali poetry also drew, however, upon a vast repertoire of Persian Sufic poetry. Building on anthropological discussions of the relationship between 'the intellect' (*'aql*) and the 'carnal soul' (*nafs*) in the leading of Muslim lives, my research addressed the ways in which local practices of debate and critical discussion rendered Chitral's villages not simply the passive recipients of forms of Islamic reformism emerging from urban centres but sites of intellectual exchange and significance. I was also interested in the role village intellectuals in Chitral – from musicians to poets and religious scholars – played in ongoing interactions between the region's local culture and that of the wider 'Persianate world' – most broadly defined as the great parts of the Eurasian continent over which Persian has had a linguistic and cultural influence (Green 2019).

I emphasized these facets of Muslim village life in Chitral at a time during which Islamizing processes that were national and transnational in shape and scope were influencing the region. Many of the Sunni and Shii Ismaili Muslim villagers with whom I lived in Chitral were critical of reform-minded Muslims, especially those who advocated strict and rigid understandings of Islam's legal code, the sharia. Villagers of both 'doctrinal clusters' told me that they regarded reform-minded Muslims in Chitral and in 'down Pakistan' (the term used by Chitralis to refer to Pakistan's southern regions) as advocating narrow-minded (*tang nazar*) forms of religiosity. The Taliban – an Islamic movement comprising a heady mix of madrassa students and militants that came to power in Afghanistan in 1995 in the wake of the country's protracted conflict following the collapse in 1992 of the Soviet-backed government – maintained an office in Chitral. Indeed, some of the region's most influential religious figures (known in Khowar as the *dashmanan*) vocally supported the Taliban's aims and goals. The world of village and small-town Islam that I sought to describe and analyse was not secular. Nor were its people poorly informed about Islamic knowledge and ethical principles. Indeed, the 'ordinary Muslims' (Peletz 1997) with whom I spent much time did not seek to 'resist' reformist Islam in any simple sense. I documented, rather, a more multi-layered range of responses to the forms of faith and religiosity emerging from urban centres in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some of Chitral's mullahs and 'men of piety' were themselves renowned in the region for displaying their own creative and independent thought. Individual *dashman* openly contested the sharia-centred forms of religiosity associated in the minds of many Chitrali Muslims with

'down country' reformists and gained respect locally for doing so. Likewise, individuals active in Islamist political parties – including the Jama'at-i Islami – achieved fame and repute in Chitral by writing love poems (*ghazal*s) and attending musical gatherings (*mahfil*; *ishtok*) that were scorned in Friday sermons given by hardline *dashmanan* in Chitral's mosques.[3] The region's people were critically responsive to a wide range of ways of thinking about Muslim faith and experience with which they were familiar. These included various iterations of Islamic reformism that historians and anthropologists had tended to regard as exerting a homogenizing influence on 'local' modes of being Muslim.

In this chapter, I reflect on both my fieldwork in Chitral and my subsequent experiences in connected regions of Afghanistan, Tajikistan and beyond; I do so with the aim of making two specific contributions to the anthropology of intellectual exchange. At one level, the chapter addresses the varying forms of intellectual exchange that have shaped and transformed my understanding of Muslim life in Asia. These include my discussions with Susan Bayly, engagement with historical scholarship on Islam, and intensive interactions with a diverse range of interlocutors in the various fieldsites in which I have worked. At another level, I seek to theorize the character and direction of intellectual exchange in Muslim Asia. My central argument is that a great deal is revealed about Muslim intellectual exchanges in Asia if these are investigated in contexts at which multiple geographical and temporal scales intersect.[4] Research conducted at contexts characterized as intersecting points of space and time illuminates the way in which Muslim intellectual exchanges are shaped by overlapping yet distinct 'knowledge ecumenes', multiple 'critical' geopolitical events (Das 1996), and deeper historical processes 'sedimented' in society and culture (Koselleck 2018). In the connected parts of Central and South Asia in which I have worked, intellectual exchanges involving Muslims are best considered not only in relationship to 'the Islamic tradition' (Asad 1986) and the 'Turko-Persian ecumene' (e.g. Canfield 2002), but also to the 'global Cold War' and its ongoing social, political and geopolitical legacies (Kwon 2010). Much recent scholarship has argued that Muslim thought and identity is rarely helpfully understood in relationship to static categories such as 'local' and 'global' or 'traditional' and 'reformist'. At the same time, however, it is also unhelpful to think of the intellectual life of Muslims as being shaped either by specific knowledge ecumenes or distinct ethical traditions. The context in which the people with whom I have worked set to the task of being Muslim is an expansive arena that transgresses the boundaries of regional studies, 'culture areas' and nation states. It is an arena both affected by and influential within multiple geopolitical processes, from European imperialism to the Cold War and, most recently, competing projects of regional 'connectivity'. Each of these processes, I show, has ongoing implications for shaping the forms of intellectual exchange in which Muslims in the arena participate and the range of normative and political stances they adopt in relation to these.

Conceptualizing 'the Islamic': Between Anthropology and History

The ways in which Chitralis identified with Persian and Persianate heritage, literary genres and knowledge illustrated the problems of using one-dimensional temporal frames such as those of 'local' and 'global' Islam to understand contemporary iterations of Muslim identity. At the time, anthropological studies focusing on connections between Muslims living across complex spaces tended to be framed in relationship to transnationalism or globalization and – in the Muslim world – mostly studied by way of explorations of particular Islamic organizations. As Engseng Ho has noted, such work tended to be 'historically thin' (Ho 2006). The decade following the 2001 attacks was, indeed, one of especially critical significance for the anthropology of Islam.[5] A series of studies emerged that were concerned with the 'piety movement'. Largely based on research conducted in the Middle East, especially in Cairo (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2004), these studies built upon Michel Foucault's later work on the significance of disciplinary practices of self-fashioning for the leading of ethical lives. Ethnographically, they demonstrated the way in which Muslim men and women involved in 'piety movements' actively and consciously cultivated their selves in a manner that reflected ethical principles historically sedimented within 'the Islamic tradition'. Another body of scholarship emerged that identified its focus as being on 'everyday Islam' rather than piety-minded forms of Islam deriving from Islam's textual tradition. Work on 'everyday Islam' brought attention to the inconsistencies and ambiguities of Muslim moral universes in the context of everyday life and questioned the ethnographic depth of studies of the piety movement that emphasized ethical coherence (for example, Schielke 2009; Soares and Osella 2009).

Both the piety-minded and everyday Islam approaches to the anthropology of Islam shared a focus on 'Muslim selves' (individual or collective) and the ways in which these related to 'the Islamic tradition'. The most fascinating aspect of my experiences in Chitral, however, had been the degree to which the thinking and identities of Chitrali Sunni and Shii Ismaili Muslims needed to be considered in relationship to a range of cultural genres and practices of importance at multiple geographical and historical scales. Irfan Ahmed (2017) has noted that literature on 'the Islamic tradition' tends to focus almost exclusively on the significance of the Qur'an and the Hadith as textual cornerstones. My informants regularly interspersed their daily conversations, however, with quotations from Rumi's Mathnawi, a text that some referred to as 'the Qur'an in Persian'. The range of modes of identification open to my informants were not limited to a choice between 'local' and 'global Islam' or a form of 'the Islamic tradition' that was unmediated by a specific cultural context. Likewise, the distinction between pious and everyday Islam did not do justice to the complex interactions between different forms of Muslim thought and identity in the settings in which they lived. Deploying either of these categories to analyse the vast range of modes of behaviour and religiosity I observed in my fieldsites

would have erased a great deal of what was important to my informants' experiences. Of more significance, rather, was their awareness of their place within a transregional setting informed by Persianate culture.

Exploring Chitrali Muslim thought and identity in terms of its relationship to the wider 'Persianate' world revealed dense webs of historical connectivity between northern Pakistan and neighbouring regions of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Hitherto anthropologists had largely viewed these connections from the prism of the flight of refugees and the activities of 'jihadi' organizations in Afghanistan and Pakistan (for an important exception, see Kreutzmann 1998). Addressing such longue durée connections from a broader perspective that incorporated actors including traders, development workers and musicians presented an opportunity to historicize both the anthropology of local Islam and of globalization (Marsden 2008). Connections between Muslims in adjacent settings illuminated 'the Islamic' as a lived realm of thought, agency and relationality forged through movement and the exchange of knowledge, people and experience in multiple, overlapping and expansive arenas.

While anthropologists debated the merits and demerits of understanding Muslim thought and identity through the lens of 'piety' or 'the everyday', historians developed a more expansive approach that conceptualized 'the Islamic' as an inherently flexible field that is the outcome of ongoing human agentive assertion. This approach made possible a closer consideration of the relationships and intellectual interactions between diverse forms of Muslim thought and identity. A rich body of work by historians that challenges reified understandings of both Islamic chronology and geography has played an especially important role in the development of the study of thought and agency in Muslim Asia. Several scholars have recently argued that Islamic history has traditionally been 'presented as pegged to a straight timeline that begins with the life of Muhammad and continues to the present in (post)modern transformations' (Bashir 2014: 520). According to Shahzad Bashir, this reified understanding of Islamic history has had a range of negative consequences for the historical and sociological study of Islam. Most evidently, it has resulted in an 'overemphasis on the Arab Middle East', the tendency to interpret the 'evolution of ideas and practices as part of a predetermined or natural cycle … without reference to material circumstances', and the 'undervaluation of the role of human agency in creating "time" within Islamic social, cultural and religious contexts' (Bashir 2014: 521). In place of reified understandings of Islamic chronology, Bashir and other historians writing in a similar vein have advocated that in the study of Muslim societies time should be considered as 'an ideological and narrative product that is forever being made and remade within Islamic perspectives' (Bashir 2014: 521). In this regard, recent historical scholarship builds on early work in anthropology that was critical of the reification of Islam and advocated, instead, for an approach that identified multiple 'islams' (el-Zein 1977; cf. Gilsenan 1982). It goes beyond such approaches, however, by arguing for the ongoing relevance of 'the Islamic' as a category of analysis when

it is conceptualized as an 'aspect of human agentive assertion' that can 'accommodate internal diversity' and is 'characterized by fluidity rather than stasis' (Bashir 2014: 512; cf. Ahmed 2015; Henig 2016, 2020).

Understanding 'the Islamic' as a field produced by Muslim agency in time and space has important implications for conceptualizing the geographic contexts in which Islam is studied. For Bashir, conceptualizing 'the Islamic' in this way requires scholars to appreciate not only 'the internal projection of universalism' but also 'the incessant traffic of ideas and people' within particular and often expansive arenas (Bashir 2014: 522). In terms of geography, Shahab Ahmed's work has been especially influential in challenging the overemphasis of 'the Middle East' in the study of Islam (Ahmed 2015).[6] Ahmed deploys the transregional category of 'Balkans-to-Bengal complex' to refer to the lands of Islam that stretch between present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina, Turkey, Iran and Central Asia, down and across Afghanistan and North India to the Bay of Bengal. For Ahmed, between 1350 and 1850 CE, this expansive arena shared a powerful commonality in terms of the influential and overarching role played by Sufi ideas and values, often expressed in poetry written in both Persian and Turkish. From the 1850s onwards, modern nationalism and the rise of reformist Islam with the emphasis it placed on texts and codified versions of Islamic law weakened these interconnections and the forms of self-understandings with which they were implicated.[7] Focusing on an intermediary, transregional scale of identity and experience in Muslim Asia offers multiple insights into these cross-cutting intellectual debates involving anthropologists and historians. The points at which geographical and temporal scales interact help to reveal the ways in which Muslims mediate between interacting geographies and histories by way of actively participating in various forms of exchange, ranging from the intellectual to the political and the economic.

Transregional Muslim Identities

Chitral shares a long border with Afghanistan and in places is only a few miles from Tajikistan, a formerly Soviet Muslim-majority Republic in Central Asia. During my research in Chitral, I had spent much time with small-scale traders from northern Afghanistan. These men had lived in Chitral since the early 1980s when they fled regions of the country (especially Panjshir and Badakhshan) that had been subject to Soviet bombing campaigns; they mostly ran businesses in villages and towns, largely making a living as butchers and bakers. Several men from Tajikistan also lived in the Chitrali village in which I stayed having fled the civil war in their home country (1992–97). After the 2001 defeat by US and allied forces of the Taliban, several of the Afghan families I knew returned to Afghanistan. Others stayed in Chitral while sending a family member to open a business in the country, mostly in Kabul and Kunduz (Marsden and Hopkins 2012). Spending time with such actors, I explored the ways in which mobile people mediated Chitral's position in a transregional context.

Working with mobile Muslims in a transregional arena raised two intellectual concerns. First, there had been a tendency for social scientists interested in 'transnational' and 'global' Islam to focus attention on participants in worldwide movements of Islamic reform and purification (e.g. Mandaville 2001). Fewer studies engaged conceptually, however, with the dynamics of transregional Muslim identities and the types of cultural influences and knowledge ecumenes that shape these.[8] In a recent book, Nile Green has distinguished between 'global' and 'world' Islam. For Green, global Islam 'refers to the versions of Islam propagated across geographical, political and ethnolinguistic boundaries by Muslim religious activists, organizations, and states that emerged in the era of globalization'. By contrast, 'world Islam refers to the older versions of Islam that developed and adapted to different local and regional environments during the millennium before the onset of globalization' (Green 2020: 8). In the transregional arena in which I work, a great deal of attention has been paid to the actors involved in the propagation of 'global Islam', but alongside these it is also important to recognize the significance of identify formations formed as a result of a historically durable process of exchange across transregional arenas. Such forms of 'world Islam' constitute a growing field of exploration for historians of Islam, yet most anthropological and sociological work on Islam remains focused on modern expressions of global Islam.

Second, my fieldwork in Chitral had made me aware of the rigid boundaries that anthropologists and historians tended to erect between scholarship on different 'areas'. Working on the connections between northern Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan afforded the opportunity of nuancing rigid approaches to area studies, and, in particular, bringing greater recognition to the vital nature of connections between South and Central Asia. The emerging anthropology of Central Asia focused almost exclusively on life in the five former Muslim majority states of the Soviet Union.[9] I found the boundaries between different areas problematic because the Chitrali Muslims with whom I had lived were intimately aware of their historic connections to Central Asia. Not only did many speak Persian, they also imagined the forms of Islam they practised in relation to a broader Central Asian geography, often telling me, for example, of how in past generations their family members had studied in centres of Islamic learning in the great Islamic city of Bukhara (cf. Pickett 2020).

As I embarked upon a connective historical ethnography of Muslim life in a transregional arena in inland Asia, scholarly interest in Persianate cultural forms largely remained the preserve of historians of the pre-modern Muslim world. Marshall Hodgson (1963) had developed the term 'Islamicate' to refer to cultural forms visible across 'the Eurasian Islamicate oecumene' – a space he identified as being one of 'Muslim dominion' but in which non-Muslims also played critical and vital roles. In regional terms, historians of pre-modern India, Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam's (2007) study of the traditions of Persian-language travel writing that had been popular in India during the highpoint of the Mughal Empire was a source of inspiration. Anthropological

approaches deployed the term 'Turko-Persian' in order to emphasize the inter-actions between Turkish and Persian literary traditions and knowledge systems in Central Asia (Canfield 2002). Yet ethnographic accounts of Persianate dynamics were limited largely to accounts of the role played by historic Persian texts in the teaching of Islam and ethics in Afghanistan (Shahrani 1984, 2001). My fieldwork experiences questioned the inevitable salience of the boundary between pre-modern and modern history (Shryock and Smail 2011) and high-light parallels between ethnographic and historical work on the region.

Historical scholarship on the category of Persianate has become increas-ingly sophisticated, especially in terms of understanding the relationship between Islam and geography. Early work in the field associated Persian with the territories of modern-day Iran and India (e.g. Cole 2002). Newer scholar-ship explored Persian's role as a trans-cultural and trans-religious language of significance in a vast Eurasian terrain stretching from the Balkans to the Bay of Bengal (e.g. Ahmed 2015; Green 2019; Sood 2015). Mana Kia, indeed, high-lights the importance of relationality to live in Persianate settings, arguing that 'to be a Persian was to be embedded in a set of connections with people we today consider members of different groups' (Kia 2020: 12).

Persian's relationship to Islamic history is now also the focus of considerable scholarly scrutiny. The religious dynamics of the Persianate world have been poorly understood when considered in relationship to the traditional field of Islamic history. As Ahmed noted, this work focused on law and gave little sig-nificance to the importance of cultural genres, such as poetry and related forms of cultural expression (Ahmed 2015). For other scholars, the relationship between Persian and Islam is itself not straightforward. If 'Islam permeated the beings of Persian-speakers in multiple settings', then it did not do so in any 'totalising fashion': 'Persians', rather, 'could profess other faiths, or even be hostile to Islam, without necessarily being outside of it' (Kia 2020: 214). Historical debates about Islamic and Persianate geographies more than anthro-pological work on either pious or everyday Islam illuminated my fieldwork on border-crossing forms of mobility that involved people crossing a transregional Muslim geography.

In order to generate insights into lived experiences of life in a Persianate arena, I worked with a range of actors who regularly crossed the borders between Pakistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. While the mobile people with whom I spent time exerted great energy into crossing the national borders of the countries across which they lived, they adapted to life in the settings to which they moved with relative ease. I also discovered how during their travels they were able to re-activate older connections of kinship. Such ties of kinship pre-existed the boundaries of the nation state. In particular, notable families of religious authority had close ties of kin that had been regularly reaffirmed over decades through marriage. While connections remained in the aftermath of the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the increasingly rigid nature of the boundaries during the Cold War period until the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 reduced connections between the three regions (cf. Kreutzmann

2015). After 1979, refugees who came to Chitral from neighbouring Badakhshan were able to trace their distant relatives in the region's small villages.

During fieldwork, I saw how people reinvigorated kinship connections in the context of the mobility that arose from Tajikistan's civil war and the conflict in Afghanistan (Marsden and Hopkins 2012). In addition, people also emphasized the shared cultural forms important to their lives, especially those they depicted as arising from their knowledge of Persian. One especially vital cultural form was the very practice of travel itself. My informants engaged in various forms of travel – from local 'tours' to more extensive boundary-crossing journeys (Marsden and Hopkins 2012). My informants thus talked about these forms of mobility as having critical implications for their self-identifications and social relationships – travel provoked reflection on 'the strange and wonderful' (*ajeeb u gharib*), and also allowed individuals to test and assess one another's trust – aspects of *safarnama*s (travel journals) that had been studied by Alam and Subrahmanyam (2007). This finding was important because it enabled me to see how the Persian cultural forms so cherished by my Chitrali friends were also an important aspect of the manner in which connections were built and ideas exchanged across national boundaries. Far from being a 'relatively remote' region of northern Pakistan, I now recognized that Chitral was part of an interconnected arena informed by shared Persianate cultural forms that shaped and directed the nature of intellectual exchanges.

It was not only in relationship to specific cultural forms that I was able to conceptualize Chitral as part of a wider arena that challenged the relevance of national and ethno-linguistic boundaries to understanding all aspects of daily life. I was conducting research in a setting in which sharia-centred and piety-minded forms of Islam occupied a critical and important place in everyday life, as well as in national and local legal and political structures. As in Chitral, so too in the contexts in Afghanistan and Tajikistan in which I worked, I discovered that debate and discussion occupied an important part of the everyday lives of my informants. This was as important among active members of movements of Islamic piety and Islamism as it was for Muslims whom my informants in Chitral would refer to as 'open-minded'. In the new settings in which I was working, such folk, however, had been active participants not only in Islamist but also in socialist movements and political organizations. I was now spending time not only with the 'religious-minded' but also with former members of Afghanistan's leftist political organizations – most notably but not exclusively the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Doing so illuminated aspects of being Muslim in the region that had not been evident in the anthropology of Islam (given its focus on everyday expressions of Muslim personhood and practices of ethical self-fashioning) or in Chitral (a context in which the influence of forms of reformist Islam left little if any space for leftist politics).[10]

In Afghanistan, daily discussions about the importance of macro-political and geopolitical processes to people's religious identities wove themselves into the fabric of daily conversation. As Osella and Soares have argued (2020), work

on piety-minded forms of Islam illuminates the micro-politics of such movements (especially in terms of their relationship to women's agency) yet rarely addresses the connections between such movements and macro-political dynamics. This tendency reflects the ways in which initial studies of piety-minded Islam challenged work (often in political science) that focused on the socio-economic causes of support for 'political Islam' while denying the ethical and religious aspects of such modes of faith and identity. In both Afghanistan and Tajikistan, however, an important aspect of my fieldwork was spending time with people who were not merely sceptical about the religious activities of reform-minded Muslims, but rather critical of the role played by Islam in their social, political and moral worlds. I had not encountered this type of Muslim voice in Chitral. The closest my Chitrali friends came to talking about religion in this way was in sharing rumours that one or another of their professors at the university was a 'communist'. Spending time with individuals with a history of participation in leftist movements, both in Afghanistan and subsequently in its diasporas, provoked me to question the assumption evident in work across the anthropology of Islam that religion was necessarily always at stake in the thinking and identities of people of Muslim background (Marsden and Retsikas 2014). I also came to see at first hand in Afghanistan that close political and social relationships existed between communist and Islamist-affiliated political figures. The forms of Muslim thought and identity I was now encountering arose in the context of a transregional Muslim arena shaped by an expansive Persianate culture. At the same time, it was impossible to understand Muslim identity and intellectual exchange in the region without taking into account the afterlife of the global Cold War. As I now explore, this wider geopolitical context also shaped the region's inhabitants' modes of intellectual exchange.

Islamism and Identity in Northern Afghanistan

I conducted fieldwork in the northern Afghan town of Kunduz between 2007 and 2009 and spent many hours participating in debates and discussions about Islam. The intellectual exchanges I participated in were informed by a Persianate heritage similar to that I had encountered in Chitral, but the context in which they took place was markedly different and this context shaped the character of such exchanges. The context in which I was now working was shot through with the afterlives of the Cold War, and this illuminated the degree to which understanding the intellectual exchanges I observed required a consideration of a wider geopolitical context and not simply one defined in relationship to a single, culturally defined knowledge ecumene.

Discussions in which I participated in Kunduz took place in a range of settings from petrol pumps (*tonk-e tel*) to bookshops (*kitab furooshi*) and in the midst of great picnics (*mela*) organized by politicians and business people. The social milieu in which I circulated in the town was highly shaped by the affiliation of my informants to the anti-Soviet mujahidin, especially the factions that

were affiliated with the Islamist Jamiat-e Islami Party. In the 1990s, the party had played a prominent role in the government of Afghanistan, and its leadership continued to engage in 'resistance' (*muqawmat*) against Taliban rule until 2001 (see Roy 1992). After 2001, these figures and those affiliated to them played a major role in the governments that were established after the military defeat by the US and its local and international allies of the Taliban.

My informants in Kunduz were mostly pious people (*mardum ha ye ba taqwa*) – including many who had fought alongside the mujahidin in the anti-Soviet war in the 1980s, others who had instructed fighters in Islamist thought, and several who identified as 'Salafi' and would eventually become active members of the Taliban.[11] Yet they discussed a range of topics. Their conversations were interspersed with the poetry of Persian poets such as Hafez. A young man I had known and taught English to in Chitral, for instance, was an avid reader of Islamic reformist literature, and active in a friendship circle that identified itself as Salafi: he would go on to become an active participant in the Taliban movement in Kunduz before being killed in a night raid by US forces. This young man followed the work of Salafi thinkers and told me that he dreamed of marrying an educated Egyptian rather than a 'traditional' (*sunnati*) and 'uneducated' (*besawaad*) Afghan woman. At the same time, however, he enjoyed spending his evenings playing a game in which men sequentially recited the verses of the fourteenth-century Persian poet, Hafez. The discussions I witnessed in this group and others were serious and often animated but they were also interjected with joking and humour. My Salafi friend enjoyed making men laugh in the midst of conducting their prayers so that they would have to repeat the ritual.[12] The pious Muslims with whom I spent time in Kunduz did not all think in a positive manner about the category of 'open-mindedness'. In a discussion with two friends of my Salafi informant, rather, I was told in no uncertain terms that being *rawshan fikr* merely meant having been influenced by the West (*gharb zadagi*).

One man I came to know especially well in Kunduz was a former ideologue in the Hezb-e Islami Party led by Gulbudin Hekmatyar.[13] By the time we met, however, he had switched his allegiance to the Jamiat-e Islami Party (besides being regarded as more moderate in terms of its approach to Islam, this party largely also represented the political interests of ethnically Tajik Persian-speaking people). In subsequent years, the man achieved a degree of fame across Afghanistan for admitting on national television to the mistakes made by the mujahidin in their period of government in Kabul between 1992 and 1995 (though he also pointed towards the lengths to which secular regimes had gone across the Muslim world to disempower Islamist parties). In his everyday social relationships, however, the man was known to all for being above all else '*ijtimaaye*' (social), meaning that he was able to 'sit with anyone, big or small'. His son once told me how his father never forced his opinions about Islam on anyone, not even Afghan communists, among whom he counted many friends and never asked them to reform their behaviour in line with Islamic principles, preferring instead to encourage them to change through his own behaviour.

Importantly, while being a committed Islamist, this man was also the descendant of a religious family in northern Afghanistan that had for a long time earned repute for its position of authority within a Sufi brotherhood (*tariqa*), the local lodge (*khanaqah*) over which family members had presided. A combination of factors – including perhaps most importantly the role his family has long played as social mediators – had drawn this man to an ethics of exchange that consciously emphasized pluralism. His embrace of this position contrasted him to others in the town (including the Salafi men discussed above) who regarded open commitment to intellectual pluralism as inherently un-Islamic and a reflection of Western influence.

The Islamists of northern Afghanistan with whom I interacted were a world away from depictions by anthropologists of Islamist ideologues and piety-minded Muslims (Bayat 2007). They were educated and well versed in both Persianate and reformist expressions of Islamic thought. In terms of knowledge, they were fluent in the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunna. They also placed high moral value on deep knowledge of the corpus of Persianate Sufi poetry. And they established relationships with people of varying backgrounds, not infrequently taking advice from individuals with very different understandings of Islam than their own. With regards to questions of personal morality, they adapted flexibly to the different situations they faced in the countries across which they moved and emphasized their ability to cultivate and maintain relationships with people regardless of their levels of religious commitment or political dispositions.

Muslim intellectual exchange in this part of Asia needed to be analysed in relation to broader political, cultural, historical and geopolitical dynamics and processes. Several visits that I made to Badakhshan between 2005 and 2011 underscored this. Until the end of the nineteenth century, Badakhshan was a khanate in Central Asia ruled by a Mir who had close relationships with neighbouring political entities, including the state of Chitral, and the court of Kabul, and the Emirate of Bukhara.[14] After that point, Badakhshan was incorporated into the structures of the Afghan state; in the first decades of the twentieth century, the region was divided along the River Pyanj between Afghanistan and the Soviet Republic of Tajikistan. Chitral and Badakhshan had hitherto been closely connected to one another through trade and the circulation of commercial, religious and official personnel, as well as sustained patterns of inter-marriage. The family with whom I had lived in Chitral claimed descent from a notable religious family in Badakhshan, and, during my stays, I was able to visit their distant relatives, many of whom had lived in Chitral during the Afghan civil war in the 1980s and 1990s.

A visit I made to Badakhshan in 2011, however, alerted me not only to the region's interactions with South Asia but also to its connections to the world beyond. Staying in the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border town of Ishkashim, I made friends with a butcher (Rasul) from the neighbouring region of Panjshir. In addition to butchery, Rasul also traded in precious stones on the weekly border market (*bazaar-e mushtaraq*) that takes place in no-man's land between

Tajikistan and Afghanistan. He invited me to visit a nearby village with him in order to meet a person he thought I would find of interest. The village was an hour's drive along the rough road from Ishkashim in the direction of Faizabad (the administrative headquarters of Afghan Badakhshan) and miles from a district (Warduj) in which the Taliban were active and that friends had told me not to visit. On arriving in the village, my friend told me that he would introduce me to a committed Talib who was also a Shii Ismaili. I assumed my friend was joking – in Chitral the very concept of an Ismaili Talib would not have made sense given the overwhelmingly Sunni composition of the Taliban and a perception of it being hostile to Shii Muslims. A few minutes later, however, a bearded man in clothing resembling that generally worn by the Taliban walked in our direction and greeted us. After the traditional exchange of greetings, I joked that I had never heard of an Ismaili being a Talib. The man responded that he had been an active member of the Taliban until the early 2000s and maintained close ties with the organization. He soon told me his path to becoming a Talib. In the final years of Afghanistan's pro-Soviet government, he had been awarded a scholarship by the Afghan government for military training in Ukraine. On his return to Afghanistan in 1992, President Najibullah had relinquished power, diverse mujahidin groups had taken control of the country, and a civil war had subsequently erupted. As a result of the change in political leadership, he was not appointed to position in the country's military. Unlike many other Soviet-trained Persian-speakers from northern Afghanistan who joined mujahidin groups largely made up of Sunni ethnic Tajiks, my new acquaintance told me that he had not wished to serve alongside mujahidin leaders because of the harsh manner in which its fighters had treated Ismailis in his home region. He chose to leave Afghanistan and live in Chitral where he met individuals belonging to the Taliban. As a result of his opposition to the mujahidin fighters and leaders in government in Afghanistan at the time, he decided to join the Taliban. Aware that he was an Ismaili, the Taliban were nevertheless keen to incorporate him into their networks and structures: the technical knowledge he had acquired in Ukraine was something they and their movement needed.

My interaction with the man offered insights into the pragmatic nature of relationships in Afghanistan's political culture and structures. In the context of Afghanistan, an attempt to address the nature of piety-minded Islam without addressing national and geopolitical dynamics is entirely unsatisfactory. Anthropological work on piety-minded Islam addressed the concerns held by many anthropologists and scholars in related disciplines about the US-led 'War on Terror' and the modes of representing 'good' and 'bad' Islam with which it was connected. In the context of Afghanistan, however, the activities of the Taliban movement are intimately connected to Cold War dynamics but also to the state of Pakistan and other actors in the region – in the 1990s the Gulf States, and today China, Russia and Iran. Ethnographically, then, my conversations with interlocutors in Badakhshan and Kunduz were a constant reminder of the need to understand all forms of collective self-identification – including

those of pious Muslims – in relation to local, national and transregional political and geopolitical dynamics. There was the scope for not only diversity but also varying normative positions about intellectual exchange and pluralism– some of which arose from ethical and others from pragmatic imperatives. Importantly, there was no simple correlation between the position an individual took about the ethical status of intellectual pluralism and their affiliation to a particular political or religious organization.

In the transregional arena of Muslim connectivity I was investigating, it was too simplistic to assume that the ethical and ideological dynamics of movements of Islamic piety were inevitably shaped in relationship to the Islamic discursive tradition. A research trip I made to Kabul in 2017 resulted in further insights into the internal complex relationship between ethnicity, religion and geopolitics. During the course of the trip, I visited a notable figure from Badakhshan who had served in various levels of government during the mujahidin and post-Taliban regimes. Affiliated with the Jamiat-e Islami and from a family of religious notables tied by kin to Chitral, I had known his family members in Pakistan and spent time in his home village in Badakhshan in the summer of 2010. On this occasion, he was hosting a gathering of influential politicians from across Afghanistan's political spectrum. They had been invited by the figure to interact with Afghan men and women whose names had recently been submitted by the country's president to the parliament for approval for ministerial appointments. During the evening, the ministerial candidates would have the opportunity to persuade the sitting MPs that they were worthy of their support in an upcoming vote in the parliament. MPs in Kabul often used such occasions to request gifts from the candidates in return for pledging to offer them their votes.

Rather than have myself sit between senior figures in Afghanistan's government, I was beckoned next to the man who my host joked was also English (*inglis*), presumably on account of his fair skin and light hair colour. My new companion transpired to be a Shughni-speaking Ismaili from Badakhshan.[15] Having undergone training in the Soviet Union, he had served in the security services of the Afghan state in the 1980s. At the time of our meeting, he was living with his family in Tajikistan's Badakhshan border town of Khorog, while also seeking the support of the notable figure from Badakhshan in whose garden we were sitting for securing employment in the Afghan Ministry of Defence. After briefly chatting over a sumptuous meal of kebabs and rice cooked with meatballs and pulses and glasses of green tea, we shared our phone numbers and agreed to meet the next day in the historic Bagh-e Babur – the burial place of the Mughal Emperor Babur. Walking around the gardens – restored in the 2000s by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture – the man told me that during the pro-Soviet government of Dr Najibullah, he had served in the presidential bodyguard.[16] After the fall of Najibullah's government, he had maintained a position in the presidential guard during the period of mujahidin rule, during which time Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Cairo-educated Islamist from Badakhshan, had been Afghanistan's president. My newly made friend

then went on to explain how during the era of the Taliban he had continued to serve in the country's security and intelligence services. Being Ismaili, he did not pray alongside the Taliban. Yet he was able to avoid the attention of their morality police (*amr bil maruf*) by growing a beard and vocally remonstrating with people he met on the street who had not offered their prayers (*namaz*). Later in the evening, we took a taxi to the exterior gates of the house of one of Afghanistan's most influential political figures. Having whispered a code (*fish*) to a bodyguard and handed over a small bundle of cash, a bottle of locally brewed alcohol (*sharaab watani*) was handed over to my friend, which we consumed that evening with kebabs. Interacting with individuals active on the fringes of the Taliban illuminated the problems of anthropological work on both piety-minded and everyday Islam that overlooks the significance of political dynamics and pragmatism.

Self-reflexive discussions about the nature and ethics of intellectual exchange formed an important aspect of the discourses of the Muslims in northern Afghanistan with whom I worked. Informed both by ethical and pragmatic concerns depending on the backgrounds and situations of individuals and communities, the nature and character of normative positions about intellectual exchange were shaped by the Cold War and its ongoing geopolitical legacies. If a shared Persianate heritage was evident in continuities in the nature of intellectual exchange in Chitral and northern Afghanistan, the significance of the Cold War to life in the latter context had also resulted in significant ruptures and differences in the parameter, consequences and nature of such intellectual exchanges.

Khorasan and the Reconceptualization of the Nation State

Attempts by scholars to conceptualize the Persianate world and transregional forms of Muslim thought, identity and agency are mirrored in debates among intellectuals and politicians from the region about their collective history and identity. As I now explore, these debates build both on historical scholarship arising in Western universities and from the work of intellectuals from Afghanistan and the wider region, many of whom lead mobile and diasporic lives, and, critically, have participated in formal higher education programmes in diverse geopolitical contexts.

During my research visits to Afghanistan, I interacted with many different actors who identified themselves in relation to a history that they counterpoised to the boundaries of the modern nation state. Many of my Persian-speaking informants from northern and western Afghanistan routinely reject the identity category 'Afghan'. They argue that in Afghanistan's Persian-speaking communities the term *Afghan* – locally pronounced *awghan* – refers specifically to Pashto-speaking peoples. On entering the Panjshir valley – a Persian-speaking region that was the base of the anti-Soviet and anti-Taliban fighter Ahmad Shah Massoud (d. 2001) – graffiti inscribed on a large river boulder

reads '*ma afghan nistim* (we are not Afghans)', the title also of a popular song sung by a young musician from the region. Some of my interlocutors argue that the term 'Afghanistani' better identifies their identity (*huiyat*) than 'Afghan'. Afghanistani, they say, identifies citizenship as defined by the state of Afghanistan rather than membership of a particular ethno-linguistic group.

Others, however, are critical of the notion of Afghanistan itself. They reject not only the ethnonym 'Afghan', but also the geographical and cultural categories with which the term is now entwined. These actors promote the use of categories that, they argue, more closely reflect their historical and cultural backgrounds. Most regularly, for instance, the term Khorasan is deployed by Persian-speakers in Afghanistan to refer to the territories within and beyond Afghanistan with which they identify.[17] Advocates of this cultural geography include not only intellectuals but also influential political figures who refer to '*Khorasan zamin*' (the land of Khorasan) in their speeches, published books and articles, and in widely read and circulated social media communications. Such intellectual trends and debates are also materialized in the broader community and its social institutions. Restaurants owned by traders from Afghanistan named 'Khorasan', for instance, indicate the political viewpoint of their owners, as well as their active participation in political and intellectual debates about culture and identity in Afghanistan. Such discourses are enriched by debate and discussion with intellectuals – often based in the country's diasporas – who both conduct independent research on the region's history and maintain close relationships with political figures, sometimes as paid advisors (*mushawar*), but mostly from within friendship circles.

The use of the term Khorasan in Afghanistan is highly controversial and if transregional connections are an important aspect of life in the wider arena this in no sense means that the boundaries of the modern nation state are insignificant. Those who use such terminology are widely accused of treachery (*khiyaanat kardan*) by political figures who promote autochthonous forms of nationalism. According to such forms of national identity, Afghanistan's indigenous (*bhumi*) population are distinct ethno-linguistic groups (notably Uzbeks and Tajiks) that are depicted as having migrated to the country from Central Asia in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution. A former ambassador of Afghanistan to a country in the MENA region told me that critiques of dominant discourses of Afghan nationalism were largely repressed until the emergence of greater intellectual and political space in the country following the defeat of the Taliban by international forces and their local allies in 2001. The ambassador, a trained religious scholar, argued that support for the Taliban among the country's political elites arose from a desire to crush such discourses and their attempts to rethink national identity in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, an intellectual active in developing the concept of Khorasan in the 1980s told me that influential figures from northern Afghanistan who in later years had widely used the concept in their speeches had initially been critical of him because they regarded his use of the term as indicating his disloyalty to Afghanistan and his tacit promotion of ethnic separatism.

In the 2000s, a group of Persian-speaking 'Afghanistanis' from a range of settings across northern Afghanistan who were based in London established an organization that held talks and produced publications about Khorasan's history. Speakers at events included both students from Afghanistan studying in UK universities and scholars in Europe and North America with an interest in the study of the history of Afghanistan. The general aim of the group's activities was to illuminate the effect of the modern Afghan nation state on the historic identities of the regions of Afghanistan with which they identified. This group of scholars also emphasized the historic significance of the Hanafi School (*maslak*) of Islamic jurisprudence to the identity of Muslims in Southwest and Central Asia.[18] In this respect, while emphasizing the broad historical and cultural geography of which modern-day Afghanistan is a part, some of these actors depict non-Hanafi forms of Sunni Islam (e.g. Salafism) and Shii Islam (including the Twelver and Ismaili clusters) as being external to the region's culture and therefore a source of disunity (*fitna*). Some members active in the organization had been officials in former Afghan governments – being aligned both to communist and left-wing movements (several having also studied for degrees in the Soviet Union) and to the mujahidin-led administration of the 1990s (of whom some had studied for degrees in Islamic studies in universities run by Afghan Islamist organizations in Pakistan). Still more were the sons of influential Afghan political and intellectual figures from a variety of backgrounds and had recently studied various aspects of Afghan history at British universities. Over the course of the following decade and more, several members of the organization and participants at the events it had held travelled to Afghanistan in order to take up positions in the government, mostly working as senior advisors for politicians from the north of the country. In turn, on their visits to the UK, influential politicians from northern Afghanistan gave speeches focusing on the idea of Khorasan to large audiences assembled by diaspora organizations.

There is diversity in terms of the ideas that the members of different organizations hold about the cultural content of the idea of Khorasan. A range of different cultural organizations have been established in the UK. One of these, for example, does not merely emphasize the transregional aspects of northern Afghanistan's history, they also emphasize in their activities the region's pre-Islamic history, arguing that Islam was imposed upon the region forcibly by Arabs. Proponents of this approach to Khorasani geography and history and of its relevance to modern identity took active steps to distance particular aspects of their self-identifications from Islam, most usually by changing their given Arabic names for pre-Islamic Persian names, at least informally.

A form of diaspora politics and identity that focuses on ethnic boundaries informs the notion of Khorasan. At the same time, however, the geographical category of Khorasan enables the articulation of an imagined geography rooted in an alternative history to that of the modern nation state of Afghanistan. This is because the key historic urban centres of contemporary Afghanistan (especially Herat and Balkh) were of great significance in the

eastern Islamic lands in the mediaeval period. Cultural organizations in Afghanistan are active in promoting and articulating scales of identity, culture and geography alternative to those of the modern nation state. One Afghan think tank, for instance, active in the country until its takeover by the Taliban in August 2021, organized its flagship conferences in the historic city of Herat (rather than the country's capital of Kabul) in order to celebrate the city's mediaeval position in a wider geography. Rather than subsuming this to the logic of modern Afghanistan, the think tank addressed wider transregional aspects and dimensions of the issues facing Afghanistan and used its events as a platform to promote regional dialogues with neighbouring countries including Iran, Uzbikistan and Tajikistan. As with the UK-based organizations, the think tank also hosts speakers and conducts research that challenges the singular role of Islam in the political culture of Afghanistan. It organized events and publications focusing on religious diversity in historic Khorasan, initiating discussion in Herat and beyond, for example, about the role played by Jews in the urban dynamics of the city and the wider Khorasan region. Leading figures within the think tank regard Khorasan not as a template for a new nation state but rather as facilitating the presentation of a different image of Afghanistan to the wider world. In addition, according to their interpretations, the culture of Khorasan is crystallized in terms of connections between multiple traditions and geographies, meaning that it carries the possibility of promoting cultural and historic relations between Afghanistan and countries in West and Central Asia. As with many other politicians and intellectuals active in debates about Khorasan, he argues that such relations have been marginalized by the focus of both Afghan nationalists and Western policy-makers on the country's close relationship to Pakistan. In this context, the idea of Khorasan being a historically inclusive cultural realm is part of a project of the imagination produced and sustained by intellectuals, cultural elites, diaspora figures, international finance organizations and regional governments.[19]

Politically, however, Khorasan is not simply a way of referring to the geographic location and cultural composition of Afghanistan in relationship to the notion of the transregional. It also reflects the significance of language and ethnicity to Afghanistan's political dynamics. Identifying with the notion of Khorasan often indexes a distinction between Persian-speakers (referred to in Afghanistan as Persian-speakers or *farsiwan*), as well as those identifying as Turkic-speakers (*turk tabaar*), and Pashto-speaking Pashtuns – the latter being widely, if problematically, represented in those advocating for Khorasan as dominating the country's political structures.[20] In terms of ethnicity, the vast majority of people who identify themselves as 'Khorasani' regard themselves as being ethnic 'Tajiks', though Uzbeks are also active in attempts to define the concept.

Afghanistan's position in the Cold War is also imprinted in powerful ways on the genealogy of the idea of Khorasan in modern Afghanistan. Leftist movements and organizations in northern Afghanistan played a critical role in influencing discussions about the relationship of ethnicity to the state in the

country and also in shaping the imagination of alternatives to it. Building on the theories of national identity important in the Soviet Union, leftist thinkers, notably the Badakhshan-born Tahir Badakhshi (1933–79), interpreted their revolutionary struggles in relation to ethnic and regional political struggle. Badakhshi's 'Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Afghanistan' argued that a socialist revolution would only be possible in the country after the end of the 'national oppression' of minority ethno-linguistic groups by the Pashtun political elite (see Nunan 2016).

Within the geopolitically divided Persianate realm, the notion of Khorasan also enables types of expansive geographical imaginations that are not subordinate to the regional political ambitions of powerful nation states in the region, notably Iran. This is especially important in the context of Afghanistan given the hierarchical relationship of the country to Iran and the degree to which Afghan nationalism has historically sought to distinguish the form of Persian spoken in the country (officially referred to as Dari since 1958) from that spoken in Iran.[21] Indeed, autochthonous nationalist movements in Afghanistan depict communities that have ties to adjacent regions of Iran and Central Asia through marriage and kinship as inauthentic Afghans. The leaders of such movements regularly depict individuals, movements and organizations that emphasize the importance of transregional connections and histories to their identities as pursuing the geopolitical agendas of neighbouring states, especially Iran but also Tajikistan, and therefore as being disloyal to Afghanistan.

Conclusion

'The Alan question' contrasted the particular with the general, and the local with the global, in a manner that narrowed the scope for considering the ways in which the Muslims with whom I worked mediated between different yet interacting scales of history and geography. Using this framework made it difficult to conceptualize the ways in which life at the intersections of these scales had important implications for understanding the thinking, agency and identity formations of a wider and inherently transregional context. Far from being exceptional, the forms of Muslim thought and identity I encountered in Chitral were nestled in an expansive arena that transgressed the conventional boundaries of culture areas and nation states (cf. van Schendell 2002).

This chapter has sought to make a contribution to this volume's focus on intellectual exchange in two major ways. First, I have sought to reflect on the ways in which my ethnographic work on Muslim thought and identity has been shaped by multiple forms of intellectual exchange over the past two decades and more. Of particular importance have been my attempts to engage with historical scholarship on Islam, and with my diverse and varied interlocutors in the field. Both of these axes of intellectual exchange build on the key

themes of Susan Bayly's work (see the Introduction). Second, the chapter has also contributed to the anthropology of intellectual exchange in Muslim societies by arguing that in addition to recognizing the significance of the Persianate ecumene and the Islamic ethical tradition, geopolitical processes also play a powerful role in shaping the character and direction of intellectual exchange in complex transregional arenas in Muslim Asia.

Across the specific arena in which I have worked, 'the Islamic' articulates in a complex manner with linguist, ethnic, national and sectarian identity markers. Various manifestations of modern and global Islam, notably those labelled as reformist and Salafi, also compete for space and influence. The people with whom I work are also fluent in a range of practices from travel to poetry and music that reflect and sustain a shared Persianate history. On reflection, my initial work on Chitral was insufficiently bold in challenging conceptualizations of Islam as a religion that revolves around legal and ethical prescriptions. Chitrali Muslims did not, as I had argued, merely cherish a form of Islam shaped by Persianate culture and criticize reformist Islam. Rather, in the wider region in which they lived, 'the Islamic' was best defined in terms of its capaciousness and ability to incorporate multiple and often contradictory aspects (Ahmed 2015). As I have shown in this chapter, such contradictions are enfolded in the lives of pious Muslims as much as they are evident in the field of 'everyday Islam'. Historians have tended to equate the rise of the modern era with the demise of 'world Islam'. My fieldwork points, however, towards the ongoing relevance of historic expressions of world Islam, even in a context that has been shaped powerfully by reformism, the modern nation state and multiple geopolitical projects. The expressions of the Islamic that I have studied have been formed in the context of intense and ongoing intellectual interactions and exchanges in multiple and overlapping domains of life. They are evident in the activities of villagers, small-town people, urban intellectuals, religious scholars, political leaders and movements, as well as merchants and long-distance traders. The modes of Islam with which they are attached continue to occupy an important yet dynamic aspect of the thought, identities and experience of Muslims in this arena.

The chapter has also explored the ways in which the intellectual exchanges that permeate everyday life in connected regions of South and Central Asia are shaped in relationship to transregional forms of Muslim thought and agency. In order to understand the direction and nature of intellectual exchanges involving the region's diverse Muslim population, these need to be analysed in relation to geopolitical events and processes of significance to the region's people, notably those emerging in the context of the global Cold War. Approaching intellectual exchange in relation to these overlapping contexts enables an understanding of their significance in the production of a diverse range of imaginations and identity formations that hold political, cultural and religious significance in the region.

Data Statement

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Alan MacFarlane was a longstanding member of the Department of Social Anthropology at Cambridge who also acted as Susan Bayly's 'mentor' after her appointment to Lecturer in Social Anthropology in 2000.
2. The North West Frontier Province was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010.
3. The Jama'at-i Islami is Pakistan's most established Islamist party founded by the politician-ideologue Mawlana Mawdudi (d. 1979). See Nasr 1994.
4. I follow Nile Green and deploy the broad concept of 'Muslim Asia' as a 'collective shorthand for Asia's Muslim-majority population zones' (Green 2016: 275).
5. It was hard as a young anthropologist writing about Islam at the time not to be affected by an environment in which depictions of Islam in general and Pakistan in particular focused almost inevitably upon brainwashed madrassa students, violent insurgents and

the ultra-orthodox forms of sharia embraced by the Taliban. To challenge such stereotypes by depicting another side of Muslim life in Pakistan, however, came with its own pitfalls. Such work ran the risk of reproducing the simplistic discourses of many public intellectuals and policy-makers at the time who categorized Muslims in terms of their being either 'good' or 'bad' (Mamdani 2004).

6. For one especially critical discussion on the concept of 'the Middle East', see Green 2014.
7. For a detailed discussion, see Marsden and Henig 2019.
8. For a notable exception, see Henig 2016.
9. For an overview, see Marsden 2012.
10. On the experience by the region's people of the Cold War, see Nunan 2016 and Kirasirova 2011.
11. The term 'Salafi' referred to Muslims who advocate a return to Islamic 'first principles' as laid out in the Qur'an and the Sunna. See Farquhar 2016.
12. On the historical significance of humour to debate in the region, see Subtelny 1984.
13. On the Hezb-e Islami, see Edwards 1993.
14. On the history of northern Afghanistan, see Lee 1996 and Noelle-Karimi 1997.
15. Shughni is an Indo-Iranian language spoken in the Shughnan districts of both Afghanistan and Tajikistan.
16. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture is an organization working within the broader remit of the Aga Khan Development Foundation – a development organization founded by the leader of the world's Shii Ismaili Muslims, the Aga Khan.
17. Khorasan is generally used to refer to a region that today comprises the eastern part of Iran, the west and north of Afghanistan, and those parts of formerly Soviet Central Asia that lie on the southern banks of the Amu Darya (Oxus River). Most of the people with whom I interact deploy a broader usage that incorporates Persian-speaking regions of modern-day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The term dates back to sixth-century Sassanian Iran, but it was also used by a variety of political entities and empires in the region after the arrival of Islam in the seventh century. On the shifting geography of Khorasan in the early modern period, see, for example, Noelle-Karimi 2014.
18. The Hanafi School of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is named after Abū Ḥanīfa an-Nuʿman ibn Thābit, an eighth-century CE Muslim jurist of Persian ancestry whose family is regarded by many in northern Afghanistan as originally hailing from present-day Charikar, a town to the north of Kabul.
19. See also Anderson's (forthcoming) discussions of the ways in which his informants from Aleppo argue that people from the city are the heirs of a unique 'Eastern Spirit'.
20. On the problematic narrative of 'Pashtun domination' in the history of Afghanistan, see Hanifi 2011.
21. On such attempts to bind according to nationality different forms of Persian, see Green 2019.

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