Foreword

The articles in this Special Issue, *Minority Migration from Muslim Asia*, are all concerned with the migratory experiences of different non-Muslim groups—Afghanistan's Sikhs and Hindus, Syrian Jews and Bukharan Jews—who left at the end of the twentieth century the cities in which they had lived in Muslim Asia. In the sizeable scholarly literature on these groups, there is a tendency to focus on the forms of community and identity established by migrants in the diasporic settings to which they have relocated. Many studies have noted how migrants from these backgrounds have sought to preserve their identity in relation to their regions of origin rather than to simply assimilate into the host societies or embrace more abstract and global forms of religious identity. The articles in this Special Issue seek to build on the existing literature but also take it in a different direction, both analytically and empirically. We are interested less in the forms of identity created by migrant communities in the diaspora and the relationship of these to the homeland. Instead, we are more interested in asking to what extent the forms of life and coexistence important to such groups in Muslim Asia have remained important to their livelihoods, activities and self-understandings elsewhere today. We focus on forms of life and coexistence rather than more specific notions of identity or heritage because we are interested in the extent to which these groups have or have not maintained the skills and sensibilities of importance to their lives in Muslim Asia. As we shall see, such skills and sensibilities revolve less around rigid attempts to preserve identity and heritage in the diaspora, than the ability to adjust to changing situations, new scenarios and economic opportunities; these skills also entail building networks and relations with people outside their distinct communities.

The communities we have studied all played an important role in the commercial dynamics of Muslim Asia and did so by way of establishing and maintaining networks that connected the settings in which they lived to wider regional economies. In order to work across multiple regions, the traders making up networks were mobile and able to create attachments to multiple contexts and places. Two of the articles

in the Special Issue explore how this history of participation in mobility and commerce and skills in the art of forging networks played an important role in the ways in which groups re-established themselves outside of Muslim Asia. Magnus Marsden's article focuses on Sikhs and Hindus from Afghanistan—collectively designated as 'Hindkis'—who left the country and especially its capital city of Kabul in large numbers in the early 1990s following the collapse of the pro-Soviet government and the rise to power of Islamists. Afghanistan's Hindkis are often treated in the literature as a small minority that in the context of their migration out of Afghanistan have continued to emphasise their belonging as being 'Afghan' instead of blending within Hindu and Sikh communities they encounter in diaspora. Marsden's contribution emphasises, however, the extent to which the notion of 'community' is unhelpful in analysing the experiences of Hindkis after the 1990s. He discusses the manner in which having left Afghanistan they re-established the networks of trade and commerce they had orchestrated that had focused around Kabul. In particular, Afghanistan's Hindkis sought commercial opportunities in the countries of the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, establishing businesses in thriving commercial nodes located in cities such as Tashkent, Moscow, Kyiv and Odesa, as well as Yiwu in China. During the 2000s, these traders expanded such networks in changing political circumstances—racism and mafia-like structures in Russia led an increasing number of traders to move to Europe where they also quickly established themselves in the import of commodities made in China. In all these locations, while emphasising their religious identities as Hindus and Sikhs from Afghanistan, they continued to develop and maintain commercial connections with Muslims from the country—providing them with goods on credit as well as various financial services. In the light of this ethnographic material, Marsden argues that conceptualising Afghanistan's Hindkis in relation to narrow ideas of ethnicity, community and identity fails to appreciate the flexibility of the networks they formed and their ability to work with traders of different religious backgrounds.

Paul Anderson's article, similarly, analyses the growth and durability of Syrian Jewish commercial networks by following the trajectories of merchants who emigrated from Aleppo following the Ottoman collapse and later the partition of Palestine. Scholarly literature on Syrian Jewish dispersal often focuses on boundary maintenance, ethnic persistence and associated dynamics of cultural production in particular locales. Similar to Marsden's article, Anderson's contribution instead

deals with the enduring translocal orientations which Syrian Jews maintained, in this case through commerce, mobility and the building of social and religious institutions. He asks: What accounts for the durability of geographically expansive networks and orientations through periods of sustained economic and political turbulence? Dispersed from Aleppo, Syrian Jews built up and moved between nodes in Beirut, Kobe, Shanghai, Milan, Buenos Aires, São Paulo and New York. In many nodes, elites built synagogues and community infrastructures, providing employment for religious specialists and reinforcing endogamous matchmaking practices. However, such institutions not only provided for ethnic persistence in each locale; they were also bound up with the maintenance and expansion of commercial networks. By reproducing values that circulated translocally—such as the prestige of certain forms of architecture, marriage, sociability and family names, which became recognisable and admissible everywhere—these institutions rendered each site as a node in a wider global network. They, and the values they circulated, maintained the coherence of that network, enabling merchants to move around, forge careers and navigate new contexts more easily. Adopting a mobile rather than sedentary perspective on 'community' institutions, Anderson highlights their role as infrastructures of circulation, sustaining translocal and commercial orientations and modes of livelihood.

A different take on migratory trajectories and navigation in the new settings is adopted in Vera Skvirskaja's article that focuses on Bukharan Jews of (post-)Soviet Central Asia—mainly what is today the independent states of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In contrast to Afghan Hindkis and Syrian Jews' pattern of mobility and networks of trade as discussed by Marsden and Anderson respectively, Bukharan Jews' transnational migration was much more tightly controlled and constrained by the Cold War migration regime. The first opportunity to leave Soviet Central Asian Republics *en masse* appeared in the late 1960s when Bukharan Jews—as part of Soviet Jewry—were allowed to emigrate from the USSR to Israel and the USA. The first wave of controlled migration that took place in the 1960s and 1970s was followed by mass emigration of Bukhran Jews in the late 1980s and early 1990s, resulting in the establishment of a new global diaspora with prominent diasporic nodes primarily in the USA and the EU. One of such diasporic nodes in Europe is the city of Vienna, Austria. It has arisen by chance, reflecting not so much the intention of Bukharan migrants to settle in the city as the constraints of 'migration infrastructure' that

enabled migration flows from the USSR. Vienna has become a site for new expansive networks of Bukharan Jews linking communities in the USA, Israel and Central Asia via kinship, matrimonial unions, circulation of religious specialists and (post-Soviet) migration of Muslim Tajiks and Uzbeks. Skvirskaja's article traces forms of coexistence in Soviet Central Asia by looking at economic and cultural-religious dispositions of the Bukharan ethno-religious minority and the ways in which these experiences of coexistence with the Muslim majority have informed social navigation and economic and labour relations in diaspora. Skvirskaja argues that the urban Jewish infrastructure that has developed as a result of the Bukharan Jewish migration to Vienna has become a part of migration infrastructure that has recently facilitated migration of Muslim Central Asians to the city. Thus, Jewish-Muslim interfaces that emerged in various Soviet contexts have been reproduced in the new diasporic settings.

In all three ethnographic cases, we study the migratory experiences and geographic mobilities of minorities from Muslim Asia with its rich history of managing cultural diversity and leading mobile lives. This Special Issue seeks to contribute to the research on ethno-religious minorities by bringing to the fore the new or changing modes of mobility and forms of coexistence that arise in the context of migration in the present day. In this way, we highlight the role of cultural imagination and cultural mobility in Muslim Asia's global interconnected diasporas.

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