

Mira J. Mohsini

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Cultural Anthropology, May 2010

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Dissertation: “Becoming an *Asli Karigar*: The Production of Authenticity among Old Delhi’s Muslim Artisans.”

Advisor: Dr. Caroline Osella

M.A., Anthropology and Development, September 2003

London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London,
Thesis: “Rethinking Participatory Development: A Pragmatic Approach.”

Advisor: Dr. Michael W. Scott

B.A. Honors, Cultural Anthropology, June 2002

University of Western Ontario

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Visiting Assistant Professor	University of Akron, Ohio (2016-2019)
Lecturer	Eastern Michigan University, Michigan (2016)
Lecturer	Kalamazoo College, Michigan (2014-2015)
Adjunct Instructor	Western Michigan University, Michigan (2014)
Research Fellow	Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany (2012-2013)
Postdoctoral Fellow	Goldsmiths College, London, UK (2011-2012)

GRANTS AND AWARDS

Experiential Learning Award: Faculty Champion, University of Akron, 2019

Faculty-Driven Initiative Grant, University of Akron, 2018 (\$5,300)

Nomination, Outstanding Teaching Award, University of Akron, 2018

Faculty Grant, Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership, 2014 (\$600)

Student-led Initiative Grant, Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2009 (\$2,000)

Research Grant, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2009 (\$2,500)

Bursary, British Association for South Asian Studies, 2009 (\$250)

Training and Collaboration Grant, Royal Anthropological Institute, 209 (\$500)

Central Research Fund, University of London Senate House, 2006 (\$2,000)

Fürer-Haimendorf Fieldwork Grant, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2006 (\$4,000)

TEACHING INTERESTS

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology; Anthropological Theory; Ethnographic Field Methods; Anthropology of Religion; Islam and Muslim Societies; South Asia; Sex and Gender; Material Culture; Globalization; Anthropology and International Development

COURSES TAUGHT

University of Akron	Human Diversity (Classroom & Online) Human Cultures (Online) Introduction to Anthropological Data Field Methods in Cultural Anthropology (Unearthing the Paranormal: Ghosts of Akron's Past) Anthropology of Sex and Gender Anthropology of Islam and Muslim Societies Magic, Myth, and Religion Migrating Home: Material Culture and Migrant Communities
Eastern Michigan University	Introduction to Cultural Anthropology Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the United States
Kalamazoo College	Introduction to Society and Culture Anthropology of Globalization and Consumption Introduction to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Western Michigan University	Comparative Study of Islam and Muslim Societies

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Visual and material culture; Islam and Muslim societies; urban anthropology; economic anthropology; nationalism; minority identities; race and ethnicity; sex and gender

Geographic areas: South Asia; United States

RESEARCH

Principle Investigator	<i>Visual Culture and Urban Revival in Detroit.</i> Since Detroit's bankruptcy in 2013, the city has undergone significant urban redevelopment, with revival projects focusing on craft and creative industries. However, dominant visions for Detroit's future are not reflective of a city that is over eighty percent African American. Radically different visions for revival are being articulated, shaped by the art and aesthetic movement known as Afrofuturism. The purpose of this research is to
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explore how different visions for Detroit’s future are expressed through visual culture.

Principle Investigator

Veiling Practices of Working Class Muslim Women in South Asia. Research on Muslim veiling practices tend to assume that veiling is a stable practice – a woman is either veiled or unveiled – and that the veil is a symbol. However, ethnographic research with female Muslim artisans in Old Delhi demonstrates that these approaches are insufficient. The purpose of this research to explore the multiple and nuanced ways in which women veil, paying particular attention to the intersection of veiling, class, and minority identities.

Principle Investigator

Common Idioms across Borders: The Case of Indian and Uzbeki Artisans. Despite the creation of relatively recent national borders, the notion of the “Islamicate,” a territory unified by common cultural formations shaped by Islam and its expansion, connects artisan practices. This research examines how idioms, which articulate an ethics of practice, are shared between artisans in India and Central Asia, and how this common discourse intersects with local understandings of identity and history.

Postdoctoral Research

Sufism and Craft Production in India. Sufism in South Asia is typically associated with bustling shrines and syncretic practices. This research explores other aspects of Sufism, namely its everyday articulations among working class artisans. The purpose of the research is to examine how ethical practices among artisans, whether as discursive idioms or embodied dispositions towards craft production, are inflected with broader Sufi conceptions of devotion. (2012)

Dissertation Fieldwork

Becoming an Asli Karigar: The Production of Authenticity among Old Delhi’s Muslim Artisans. Dissertation research focuses on trajectories of marginalization that have led to the exclusion and stigmatization of Muslims who subsist as self-employed artisans. Nationalist discourses of belonging hinge on producing “authentic” citizens rooted in mythologies of India as originally Hindu and rural. Hence, the primary research question is how do urban Muslim artisans reimagine

authenticity in terms of their work and their sense of belonging? Supervisor: Dr. Caroline Osella (2010)

- Interviewer Administered semi-structured interviews with women and children who were at-risk of human trafficking along the India-Nepal border. Interview data supported proposal for a USAID program to implement training centers for women. (2007-2009)
- Interviewer Administered surveys and semi-structured interviews with and women candidates for public office in Pakistan. The Aga Khan Foundation funded project focused on increasing women's representation in local politics. (2003-2004)

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles

Mohsini, M. (2011). Performance and agency from the margins: Experiences of the state through awards for highly skilled artisans. *Contemporary South Asia*, 19(3), 281-296.

McKenzie, R.L., & **Mohsini, M.** (2011) Rethinking research methods: Introduction to the special edition. *Anthropology Matters*, 12(1). Retrieved from https://www.anthropologymatters.com/index.php/anth_matters/article/view/181/300.

Book Chapters

Mohsini, M. (2016). Crafting Muslim artisans: Agency and exclusion in India's urban craft communities. In Clare Wilkinson-Weber and Alicia DiNicola (Eds.), *Critical Craft: Technology, Globalization, Capitalism*. London: Bloomsbury.

Mohsini, M. (2011). Crafts, artisans and the nation-state in India. In Isabelle Clark-Deces (Ed.), *Blackwell Companion to the Anthropology of India*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Public and Community-Oriented Publications

Mohsini, M. (May 18, 2016). Who made that police badge? The shadow lives of a hidden workforce. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/91BfsK>.

Mohsini, M. (2006). Social markets, networks and craft-based livelihoods. (2006). *Craft Revival Trust*. Retrieved from <http://www.craftrevival.org/voiceDetails.asp?Code=99>.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Conferences and Workshops

Mohsini, M. Exploring Muslim Veiling through Women's Work and Mobility in India.

Rethinking Gender Series, University of Akron, November 9, 2018. (Paper)

Mohsini, M. When the Veil becomes a Parabody: Encountering Affective Geographies in South Asia. *Association of Asian Studies*, New Delhi, India, July 5 – July 8, 2018. (Paper)

Mohsini, M. Muslim Artisans, Ethics, and Skilled Work: A Case for the Professional "Underclass." *Mobile Muslim Professionals Conference: Trans-regional Connectedness and (Non-State) Cooperation in Asia and the Middle East*, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany, April 14 – April 15, 2016. (Paper)

Mohsini, M. Undoing the veil: The Lived Experience of Crossing Boundaries through 'Surprising' Bodily Movements. *17th World Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences*, University of Manchester, Manchester, England, August 5 – August 10, 2013. (Paper)

Mohsini, M. Work and Devotion: The Constitution of Subjectivities among Working Class Muslims in Urban India. *Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History Conference*, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany, July 5 – July 6, 2013. (Paper)

Mohsini, M. Sufis and Artisans: Reflections on the Role of Ethics in Constituting Spaces of Belonging. *Conference on Work, Labor and Local Belonging in Early Modern Global Contexts*, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany, June 14 – June 15, 2013. (Paper)

Eckert, A., & **Mohsini, M.** Why do we need a History of Global Work? *Globality in the Space of Reflection*, Käte Hamburger Center, University of Bonn, Germany, April 25, 2013. (Paper)

Mohsini, M. The Element of Surprise: Photo Elicitation as a Tool for Documenting Knowledge of Craftsmanship. *Critical Craft Workshop*, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway, February 8, 2013. (Paper)

Mohsini, M. Highly Skilled Labor: Troubling the Categories of 'Artisan' and 'Labor.' *Taking Stock of Craft Workshop*, Washington State University, Vancouver, WA, June 14 – June 16, 2012. (Paper)

- Mohsini, M.** In and Out of Time: Skilled Memory, Narratives Performances and the Construction of Value among Artisans in Old Delhi. *Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth Annual Conference*, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India, April 3 – April 6, 2012. (Paper)
- Mohsini, M.** Defining Authenticity within Craft Production in Urban India. *Association of Asian Studies Annual Conference*, Toronto, Canada, March 15 – March 18, 2012. (Paper)
- Mohsini, M.** 'Traditional' and globalized market places: Artisan strategies in New Delhi. *Anthropology Seminar Series*, Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK, November 16, 2011. (Paper)
- Mohsini, M.** Devotion in Old Delhi: Time, Zikr and the Performance of Authenticity. *The Sensory City Workshop*, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK, May 25 – May 26, 2010. (Paper)
- Mohsini, M.** The Rise and Fall of Glitter: Old Delhi's Muslim Artisans. *Conference on Islam, Modernity and South Asia*, Princeton University, October 1, 2009. (Paper)
- Mohsini, M.** The Darbar of Bahadur Shah Zafar: Memory, Nostalgia and the Construction of Identities among Muslim Artisans in Old Delhi. *British Association of South Asian Studies Annual Conference*, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK, April 17 – April 19, 2009. (Paper)
- Mohsini, M.** Experiences of the State through Awards for Highly Skilled Artisans in India. *Experiencing the State: Marginalised People and the Politics of Development Conference*, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, March 12 – March 13, 2009. (Paper)
- Mohsini, M.** Women, Migrants and States of Liminality in Old Delhi. *Department of Anthropology Seminar Series*, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, November 14, 2008. (Paper)
- Mohsini, M.** Contemporary Work Practices of Zardozi Artisans in Old Delhi. *Anthropology Seminar Series*, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, UK, October 15, 2008. (Paper)

Community-oriented Presentations

Okoh, T., **Mohsini, M.**, Rodriguez-Soto, I., & O’Sullivan, T. What does it mean to be an Ally? A Teach-In on the Importance of Collaboration and Accountability in Social Justice Work. University of Akron, Akron, OH, February 7, 2018. (Roundtable)

Okoh, T., **Mohsini, M.**, Rodriguez-Soto, I., O’Sullivan, T., & Lyons, B. Making Sense of Charlottesville: A Civil Dialogue about Race, Citizenship and Belonging. University of Akron, Akron, OH, October 24, 2017. (Roundtable)

Okoh, T., **Mohsini, M.**, & Rodriguez-Soto, I. Critical Perspectives on Study Abroad and the Savior Complex: A Rethinking Race Face-to-Face. February 15, 2017. (Roundtable)

Mohsini, M. Developing a Graduate Program in Critical Craft Studies. 13th Annual Craft Think Tank. Center for Craft, Creativity and Design, Asheville, NC, June 16 – June 22, 2016. (Workshop)

Mohsini, M. Understanding and Transforming Institutional Racism. Anti-Racism Workshop for Faculty. Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership, Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, MI, June 4, 2015. (Workshop)

Mohsini, M. Zardozi Work in Old Delhi: Development of Urban Crafts Production in North India. Centre for Postcolonial Education, Varanasi, India, July 10, 2007. (Paper)

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Faculty Search Committee

University of Akron

Jun-Aug 2018

Akron, OH

- Led search for adjunct faculty to teach 200-level introductory course
- Wrote job description, interviewed candidates, and finalized hire with administration

Program Evaluation Committee

University of Akron

Sept 2017-Jan 2018

Akron, OH

- Served on committee in charge of a holistic review of the Bachelor’s degree in Anthropology. Reviewed quantitative data on the Anthropology Department’s program.
- Conducted detailed analysis of the Anthropology program’s strengths and areas for development, including strategies for student recruitment and retention.

Course Coordinator, Human Diversity (Gen Ed course)

University of Akron

Sept 2017-present

Akron, OH

- Oversaw part-time instructors who teach this course to ensure learning outcomes were stream-lined and assessments were in line with Learning Outcomes.
- In charge of curricular development for this course, including designing it as 100% online.

High School Outreach

Jan 2017-May 2017

University of Akron

Akron, OH

- Visited local high schools to promote the Anthropology Department's undergraduate degree.
- Presented information about Cultural Anthropology and job opportunities after graduation.

Student Supervision

Jan 2017-present

University of Akron

Akron, OH

Hannah Cuckler, Department of Anthropology

Independent Study (3 credits, Fall 2018)

- Worked with student to focus project on local interpretations of the Cry Baby Bridge folklore
- Developed reading plan, written assignments, data collection plan, and final public presentation

Anna Avery, Department of Anthropology

Honors Project (2 credits, Spring 2018)

- Worked closely with student on the topic of LGBTQ women's experiences of gender.
- Developed assignments to help student with research design and plan for data collection.

Chandler Shoaf, Department of Anthropology

Honors Project (1 credit, Spring 2017)

- Worked with student on the topic of gaming cultures and identity formation.
- Developed study guide focusing on theory and methods for data collection and analysis.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Anthropological Association (AAA)

British Association for South Asian Studies (BASAS)

South Asian Anthropologists Group (SAAG)

Association of Asian Studies (AAS)

Dissertation Abstract

Becoming an *Asli Karigar*: The Production of Authenticity among Old Delhi's Muslim Artisans

Fieldwork for this dissertation was undertaken with Muslim artisans who live and work in Old Delhi, India, between July 2006 and October 2007. These artisans are skilled in a form of embroidery, done with gold and silver metallic wires, known as zardozi. This craft emerged in India in conjunction with the rise of so-called Islamicate states beginning in the 13th century and zardozi was essential to the production of luxury goods of exquisite quality. Today, the high quality and intricate form of the craft is rarely patronized, while sub-standard work is being produced in the name of zardozi. With the liberalization of India's economy beginning in the 1980s, competition from abroad and new opportunities afforded by the growing export market for handicrafts have accelerated the decline in high quality craftsmanship. These recent trends have meant that many highly skilled artisans are losing their sources of livelihood or are forced to produce low quality goods for a mass market. In my dissertation, I argue that the marginal position of urban Muslim artisans runs much deeper than recent shifts in the global marketplace. This marginalization can be located in their exclusion from the broader narratives of the Indian nation-state, whereby the rhetoric embedded in colonial and post-colonial discourses locates the authentic artisan and authentic crafts production in primarily rural and "Hindu" communitarian settings. In this context of marginalization, I pose the following research question: How do urban Muslim artisans constitute themselves as real, authentic craft producers or, in their own words, as "*asli karigar*"? The theoretical objective of the thesis is to recover the possibility of becoming subjects in the spaces whereby normativity is aspired to and not necessarily where it is subverted or resisted. In the dissertation, I locate various sites of performance where the real, authentic artisan is constituted, including the construction of the "Other" through language that distinguishes authentic from inauthentic; the incorporation of Islam into conceptions of ideal work practices; constructions of lineage through narratives situated in both linear and non-linear temporal frameworks; and relations with the state – the largest patron of crafts in India – through encounters with government sponsored exhibitions and award competitions.

Supervisor and Advisors: Caroline Osella (Supervisor/SOAS), Magnus Marsden (Sussex), Edward Simpson (SOAS)

Committee Members: Emma Tarlo (Goldsmiths), Geert de Neve (Sussex)