Why Afghan Cultural Heritage Matters: In conversation with Jolyon Leslie

JB: Let us, first of all let's go right back to the beginning. And I would be really interested to know what first took you to Afghanistan?

JL: in very simply terms it was a phone call out of the blue. I'd just left working in Yemen with Oxfam, and through a mutual contact someone rang up and asked if I'd like to work with Afghan refugees, and I didn't hesitate I didn't know the nature of the UN, it was a consultancy. And that got me initially to Peshawar in Afghanistan, which it was then, which was the kind of centre of the operations, and less than a month or so, through fortuitous circumstances, I managed to get to Kabul and I realised that that was where I could, and should be based.

We were looking basically on resettling returnees in those days, hopefully returnees would come back, in their villages, the kind of work I was doing in Yemen, village development. From then on I was based in Kabul and slowly built up an agency called UN Habitat which was a tiny project at the time and we built it up and up over the years and in 2010 I handed it over to a colleague.

JB: And during all those decades now that you have been in Afghanistan, what have you learnt about how society feels about their cultural heritage?

JL: I kind of backed into it, because I spent the first ten years working on urban development, so my involvement with culture was quite tangental. I was lucky enough to be in Kabul when the museum was being looted and that was when I first came across capital C for culture, and together with Afghan friends we would go down to the museum and rescue what we could, and that is another story. But.. So I was always intrigued and was quite surprised at what riches there were.
I'm not a specialist, either in Islamic art or pre-Islamic art or anything, but I started to learn from others, particularly from archaeologists and curators, abroad and in Afghanistan, and got to know a whole bunch of archaeologists who were very committed. Most of them are now outside the country….

In 2002, I was back doing some research, after the fall of the Taliban, and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, whom I'd had quite a lot to do with, I'd previously spent some time with in Hunza in northern areas of Pakistan and they said could we start on a project and what would you think would be an important project? And we put our heads together with a bunch of very close Afghan friends, better qualified than I, because my main colleague then has a PhD in conservation from Denmark, a friend from Wardak and we came up with Bagh-i-Babur. The Aga Khan gave us the green light, and slightly the rest was history. For the next six years we worked on Babur's garden. And I think, I make no bones about it, I usually say I'm a common or garden architect, I'm not a conservation architect, I've not trained in conservation, so I'm always very aware of that. So I have to do a lot of reading and a lot of homework, um… when I have to make technical decisions. But like anything I think, over time I see it more as a craft, or trade, um… so I assimilated from others, we had visiting experts we had archeologists, Afghan masons, and whatever, and one learns and learns and learns. It's a process of accretion really. And then I got more interested and handed over in 2010-11 to my deputy and then decided to set up a small organisation which we laughingly called the daughter of the Aga Khan Trust, um … which was tiny and took a while to get off on our feet, because we didn't necessarily have a track record.

JB: And so what you are saying is that Afghans themselves were better trained, and more experienced than you were perhaps, and also, what about their artisan traditions since hundreds of years.

JL: it's not an easy subject to be clear about because depending where you are, what skill, what trade, what particular craft, and some of them are very niche crafts, whether they are at risk or whether they are, what people call them 'dying' which I find deeply patronising, you really have to know your stuff to work out whether.. For example at the moment we are working on waterproof plasters in a Hammam in Herat, in a bathhouse, you have to get your right mix of — to give you an idea of how complicated, volcanic ash, coal dust, brick dust, bullrush fibres, lime, and sand, and water. And you have to mix it in a certain way, and then you have to apply it and then you have to spend at least a week hammering it with stones to get the right….
so something like that is called Simgil and its used in houses, in bathrooms in houses, traditional houses, but we would not have known that unless we actually sat down with masons, and they said, "Yeh, yeh, my grandfather used to do Simgil and I'll have a word with my father and try to find out", and one thing leads to another and now it's pretty standard…. So it's a matter of…. we didn't necessarily wring our hands and say oh dear woe is us, woe is us, the Afghans have lost their culture or their memory. You need time, you need respect, you need a little bit of money, and you need the right tools, and the space to do it. And you need to be patient. You know, in the old city from 2005/6 onwards we did a lot of work in the old city, and the extraordinary carpentry skills. This young man who said, "Yeh, my dad was a carpenter but we haven't had work for ages". And we'd give them the best quality wood, make the best tools for them, nice bright workshops, nice warm place to work, no pressure to do, do, do, you've got to turn out a product, let's just experiment, let's have fun, let's work things through. There's an example, can we copy it, yes or no. And sometimes we did, and sometimes we couldn't or they couldn't. But generally I think it's a matter of mutual respect, curiosity, which isn't to say that all is well, because that kind of money, and it's not a lot of money if you're talking about simple carpentry or plaster work or whatever, it can be very expensive, but it doesn't have to be. You can revive it with a small 'r' but it's a very mutual process.

There is a point in the work that I do, and my colleagues do, when sometime specialist expertise is required you know for scientific tests. For example. working on the mausoleum in Herat, we actually sent, with the agreement of the British Museum, and the Afghan government at the time, we sent samples of the tiles, I brought microscopic samples of the tiles back with me and they very kindly did the analysis for us, so we had a high science analysis, but it didn't get in the way of cleaning and restoring making the tiles beautiful and stable. So sometime science gets in the way, and one needs to respect it, but on the other hand I think, and I've said this before in different contexts that conservation is 90% comment sense.

JB: Can you bring that up to date with the work you are doing in Herat now?

JL: Very intriguing actually that the synagogue we are working on has very very fine painted plaster work, and none of us have worked on painted plaster before. It's not very old, early 20th century, but it's exquisite. And we were standing on the scaffolding the other day and we were trying to work out, what do we do? We know how to paint this back we know how to fill in the gaps, we can analyse the patterns, but strictly speaking under conservation law you shouldn't put back what you don't find. But we want to be able to, at least where there are cracks where there is white plaster in the cracks we want to make it fairly seamless. So again, it will be trial and error, we will, you know, it's a much less sensitive building because of its relatively young age. It's a case in point of how we just improvise and then work things out, and I come back to the whole common sense idea.

JB: One of the important things you are talking about is respect for the artisans and people you are working with, and you involve the communities themselves in the rural areas, in the villages. I'm thinking of some of the wonderful stupas that you've been restoring, Buddhist stupas from centuries back and in really remote places. How do the communities themselves feel about the restoration of these wonderful places, and how does that affect the actual village life as well?

JL: We started on our first Stupa in 2016, we think it's the biggest standing stupa in Afghanistan, but we will probably know it if there is a bigger one, and no scholar has challenged us yet on that one. Um knowing very little. So I had to do a lot of homework, translating English and French text, the best stuff was in French, and some Japanese, which is beyond my world of thought. So we did our homework., Um, so there was one aspect, which was the kind of formal, outward- looking conservation process, but actually spending lots of time on site with 100-150 men from the local village largely, day in day out, listening to them, answering their questions, asking *them* questions. And they worked both as masons and labourers, but also with archaeologists we had a team that were helping us, Afghan archaeologists on site as well. One picked up stories about, you know, what the stupa meant for them. And, I mean, it's difficult to kind of encapsulate it, but I think the way to describe it was that the stupa is part of the landscape, the mental landscape, which for them doesn't have the connotations that perhaps the political analysis of Afghan culture has, which you know is Buddhism equals threatened and endangered and all that kind of stuff -- there are threats but the threats probably come from elsewhere -- and threats partly because there aren't any resources to do enough work. What I began to understand was that they actually valued this, it was essentially a badge of office because the village that we were working on in that case, Topdara, a Top is a stupa, so it was the valley with the stupa, and they were very proud of the fact that this was their stupa, and they would tell stories about how people would come here for picnics, and I can remember in the 1990s going up there for picnics, and looking at it and thinking, I wonder,.. I knew what it was, but little did I know that we would have the wherewithal and the privilege to work on it decades later. The point I'm trying to make is that Afghans actually have a much more innate understanding than is often portrayed, particularly by outsiders, but to some extent also by the Afghan elite. I'm not criticising anybody because I'm privileged enough to have had inordinate amounts of contact, and Um, it wasn't just to emphasise it, it isn't the kind of, I mean I was in charge of the project and I was the only expat on site, but it wasn't deferential contact. I mean they used to tease me remorselessly about.. I couldn't spot a coin, or an object in the earth and they were just so much better at it. So there was a kind of bonhomia, a camaraderie that was built up. Obviously very unequal in some ways because they were relatively uneducated but they knew, they had jobs, they knew that we respected their work.

And it started to intrigue me a little bit that can we unpick and unpack somehow this notion that a: all heritage is threatened because people are ignorant. Wrong... Secondly, Buddhist heritage is particularly threatened because Muslims don't like it. Wrong.....and the only way I can kind of explain it, is that while people may not pray at these buildings, they hold them in huge esteem. And they are neutral. They are neutral in the sense that they are not nothing, they are not a space, but they are part of the mental landscape. And its also a social landscape, because people do go up and sit on the ruins and have picnics, and the kids. It was terrifying when we started at Top Dara, and the kids were using the stupa as a kind of climbing frame and they would show off to us and say "Engineer Sahib, I can go up faster than my brother " Oh my goodness you're demolishing, you're dislodging all those stones. But it was their space. And a lot of the motivation for the restoration was physical, because we wanted to protect, as an architect I felt you know, while we wanted to protect the fabric that was there, but as important, although you can't necessarily set proportions on it, but as important was the fact that when we handed the site over, there were almost tears in the eyes of the village elders who were basically saying "you have given us back something to be even more proud of, and by the way, we built it." So they benefited both materially, financially through the wages that they fully deserved as they worked jolly hard, they protected it before we'd arrived. And I think that is another point, is the fact that right across the country there are people quietly looking out, whether it's Buddhist, pre- Islamic, Islamic objects or sites. Afghans are not rapacious when it comes to that. If it's on their doorstep it's theirs. If it's on their land, even more so, it's theirs.

And we need to respect that. And we need to acknowledge it because I've watched projects, I'm not criticising the way other people work but I've watched projects where people parachute in and become fixated on a particular site or a particular process, and then its sort of mine, mine, mine, mine, and then they vanish. And it may well be

fixed, and it may well be better and people may well be trained, but I think we need to spend time with people, sufficient time with people and not necessarily trivialise their complicated emotions, their complicated relationship with something that they don't see Buddhism as a threat to Islam. They see Buddhism as part of their history and particularly in Shewaki when we got to know people better, and I understood a bit more about early Buddhism, through reading, they would be curious about how do people pray, how do they approach, how many people would have been on the site at any time. Is it a bit like a mosque? And visitors were asking the same questions, which is why we publish bilingual publications and we try to answer those questions. There's quite a lot of technical stuff in the publications because they are mainly for literate Afghans and particularly thinking of university students, high school students, so that they are accessible. But that sense of ownership, we really need to acknowledge and use that as a basis for engaging rather than 'me clever foreigner who is lucky enough to be able to raise funds and as I say, parachute in and lead the way and enlighten the Afghans as to the future. I feel much more diffident about it than that. I mean, that's perhaps the consequence of spending maybe far too long in the country, but on the other hand, unless we listen, and unless we sit down with people, have a cup of tea. I mean I was, not long ago I was sitting with the chaps who were washing the pottery to try and identify marks on the pottery that had come out of the archaeology and it was absolutely fascinating how they were talking about "I've got that mark that looks a bit like an ibex, what have you got?" "I've got that coin shape"... And I was looking at them and thinking, I wonder if they know what they will do with them, and they were all in these lovely little piles, anything that had an inscription, even a fragment of a word was in one pile, and this pile and that pile... They knew what they were doing. the archeologists were keeping a beady eye out, but it's that kind of thing where you have to be both a fly on the wall but you have to be quite an absorbent one.

JB: Did the authorities come and visit you when you were working on the stupas?

JL: Yeh, I mean it was a slightly double edged sword... The first stupa we did, we had quite a lot of difficulty to get the local authorities to give us permission to work on it because they said it was not safe and it was a somewhat protracted process but anyway, we got through it and started work. I don't blame whatever kind of suspicions the authorities had, but they would regularly visit us and it was on some level excruciating because it was all about grandstanding,. It was about linking what we were doing on a Buddhist site with the Bamiyan Buddhas. I kept on saying to them, "Let's not politicise this, let's not make this an issue of them and us, this belongs to all of you. It wasn't only me saying that, it was my Afghan colleagues, saying it, so we slightly bridled sometimes, and there was a lot of nonsense about when we handed the site over, you know they had huge great loud speakers and the national anthem and great big flags and it was all very, very, very partial, and I was sitting at the back and just writhing with discomfort, but it's not my country, it's not my heritage, it's up to them, they have a sovereign right. Fast forward to the second stupa, and the present administration have been much lower key. And dare I say it much more curious about, you know, "tell us about how people use these sites, and can we do more Buddhist sites because this is fascinating, it's part of our history, and even senior Emirate politicians, who know what they are saying, have gone out of their way publicly, to their own people, to say we need to be cognisant of the richness of our culture, we are stronger for it, and what has happened in the past we should neither deny nor defend, and I think that is quite admirable. I mean they have a very nuanced understanding, and touch wood at the moment they are very supportive.

JB: There is so much outcry at the moment about a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. What would be your thoughts on the complementarity between humanitarian action and heritage?

JL: I think nearly all the heritage projects and there are only two or three organisations involved in the for the moment, are quite low cost, compared to the big picture of feeding and health and to an extent education, there is not much money going into education because of the denial of girls above Grade 6. The main thing is,

I think, is employment, we have at any one time between 100 and 200 people on site, and we are a small player. I don't know what the other organisations, what the size of their sites are, I mean I know them physically, but I don't know what their workforce is. So for example, our last Buddhist project, we were on site for four years, and there were probably ten villages round about and every able-bodied man had his wages and they were very, very, very good and you could see their skills develop over time. They were a fairly fractious lot, because villagers do't always get on with each other. But the main thing is the economic input and it's quite difficult to get that across to use your word to humanitarian workers in Kabul these days, because eyes glaze over, and they think it's part of a feeding frenzy, and as somebody who's been there for perhaps rather too long, if you come the line it's about employment, it's about value, its about longevity, eyes completely glaze over as it's all about the here and now. I'm not criticising individuals, because the humanitarian intent is. I used to be there and I used to do that work, so I understand it. I think it's employment, to some extent it's skills transfer -- I don't think we should overplay that because as we said before there are very very very skilled people around, we just need to find them, and look after them, and understand them -- and provide them with succour and the right environment, But also psychological and I think social stability if people, I mean somebody said to me recently, "it's so nice to see you on the site day in and day out talking to people and doing this, doing that, it gives us confidence". It's a sad irony right now that even though security is much better. But what has happened because of the politics is that even the international NGOs, sad to say, have retreated behind or stayed behind walls and razor wire and steel bars and huge great steel gates and armoured cars, So, it's a bit of a legacy thing, but because of the politics it's quite difficult to explain to even well meaning non-UN -- and I spent ten years working for the UN so I'm not tilting at them, you know, the system is the system, but even the organisations that have flexibility or should have flexibility, they're still locked into, their operations are guided by what they call security officers which basically is a whole industry there, and I wonder I mean I'm not questioning it, but I do wonder about the level of analysis, and to some extent, if you say "Well come to the site, it's no problem at all, we'll jump in the car and go", it's very inconvenient because it doesn't fit the model. So for example, all our sites are off bounds both for most of the major NGOs and the UN. But I think it will take a while for that to change, and the Taliban are also quite rightly saying, well we are doing everything we can to make sure the country is more secure, on certain terms, but as long as you have the right paperwork, that is why tourism is growing, because people are realising that you can travel quite freely, quite safely, and that is the way Afghanistan should be and was.

JB: Jolyon what are your hopes for the future in general for cultural heritage, because there's a whole range of different aspects to cultural heritage, there's music, there's art, there's dance, some of which are perhaps in a more vulnerable state that what you have been describing, but let's look at it generally. What are your hopes for the future?

JL: Well, I think, drawing on what we were saying earlier, but this sort of innate understanding of small c for culture, I think there's a gulf between high culture

that's perceived particularly from abroad and may be also from the diaspora that's it's stifled. But I'm lucky that I'm spending time with masons, with ordinary workers, archaeologists, young and old, whatever, of all ethnicities, generally they just want to get on with stuff and get it done, and I worry about the alarmism, on the political level I worry about the alarmism that has become such a mantra now 'Afghanistan's cultural heritage is endangered with a capital E ... it isn't. You know, let sleeping sites lie, Yes, there's illegal excavation going on but that's been going on for 20 years on an industrial scale, we won't mention names, but we all know who's complicit in that... None of these people are sanctioned, or censured and the art press doesn't write about it because they were our friends. There is still, on the basis of survival, people are digging up, for whatever reason, archaeological remains, as they do in many countries, so that's a problem., so that is endangered, but the less we get hot under the collar about some of this stuff and the more accurate we become about what is actually a threat... Is this a fundamentalist or is it sheer neglect and lack of money. Or a flood. Or is it somebody who is and art dealer here who commissioned somebody to dig up a site because he or she knows exactly what's there.. The reason illegal digging is going on archaeologically is because of the art market, not because Afghans want the art, they sell it. And was it ever that. So I think we need to deconflict some of those interpretations.

But then thinking of less tangible things like music and dance... Um, I aware of quite a number of people who are just quietly getting on with [it] in the comfort of their own homes. Yes, it's tricky, they don't want to draw attention to themselves. They don't necessarily want to grandstand about the fact that I can still play my Rubab, because they know it will cause problems for them in their family.

I think it's a passing phase. You know, you walk around the bazaar in Kabul, and you have funky music pumping out of cars, and the moment the mullah is seen walking round the corner, it's just turned down a little bit. And people are getting on with stuff. They are confronting what is essentially intolerance and prejudice.

But the pendulum has always swung that way in Afghanistan. There have been periods, in Amanullah Khan's period there was liberalism versus dark fundamentalism, however you want to portray it, but it's the conservative side of Afghanistan. It's still a very conservative society. So some people accept those kinds of restrictions, some people are.....you know, some people actually perhaps even appreciate them because they have a world view; some people just accept it, and a lot of people are pushing back quietly, and 'come and get us', basically. And there's an element of insolence. They know, they can't, whoever is in charge in Kabul, or Kandahar, or elsewhere, they can't lose public opinion because that's the key to the country. It always has been through history. And it's a useful lens to apply to the cultural side of things that if people's respect for what's done at the end of their road, whether it's a mausoleum, or a stupa, or the remains of a temple or whatever, if that can be acknowledged and say 'yes we know it's there', we know it's yours, but at some point with your acceptance, with your approval, we can do some work on it, whether it's documentation, whether its conservation, whether it's protection, whatever, we need them to be somehow in the vanguard of that.

But we shouldn't underestimate actually how much protection and push back is actually going on, both in the intangible, whether it be poetry, or literature -- there's

fabulous writing going on at the moment in the country, -- but people don't necessarily want to put their heads above the parapet. And if anything, you know an Afghan friend was saying to me recently, if anything "we are at our best when we are facing adversity". And this is a friend who is very very literate, in Kabul, and a part-time poet. He was saying, "this gives us so much material to write about, but we'll keep it quiet for the moment". And obviously, social media is a help because the authorities are very active on social media and people can be scrutinised on social media, but you can also be quite agile on social media. So you have an audience, and then you can vanish, and so people are playing cat and mouse with that. And I think that is very, very rarely reflected in the kind of human rights perspective, that is portrayed, that tends to be quite black and white. I absolutely respect there's a need for championing people's rights, one can't contest that, and it's very admirable what some people are doing, but it needs to be based on a much more nuanced analysis I think. Not to be relativist, but just to, sorry to say, get beyond the usual suspects, I always tilt at my Afghan friends and say "Stop being victims, you guys. Your destiny is yours".

And they don't need me to tell them that. But there is a tendency, throughout the last 20 years to treat people as either slightly paternalistic, but also to portray whether its culture, whether its human rights issues or goodness knows what, whether its diversity, you know,,, 'these people need helping to be normal.....' they are normal.... They've just got different ways of being normal from you and I. And I think my approach to that is to sort of fit around that, rather than necessarily impose on it, not lean on it, and just absorb and absorb and absorb.

JB: And give them space, basically, to be themselves.

JL: A very, very good friend of mine who works in the media, and chose to stay, we have a kind of salon in Kabul. Every few weeks we get together and gossip and read poetry and things like that, and I'm lucky to be included in this wonderful group of very creative people, and we were killing ourselves laughing last year when one of them came in after a meeting with, I think, a UN agency and he said: "I really let them have it, and it's so nice, you know, 'cos now we can defend our space to think for ourselves. We do not need outsiders telling us what to do," looking at me... very much sort of, "mind your Ps and Qs". And there is a real sense amongst that group, that dynamic, which it hopefully typical, you know, middle class life across all the cities in Afghanistan, it's probably a particularly urban phenomenon, which is give us the space to work things out for ourselves, because when you look at the, and I've been very much involved in this because I have worked with the previous Afghan government, and you looked at the strategies, the working papers, the consultation documents and projects, after projects, after projects, many of them were outside led, and wrapped in a language which really didn't relate to the country, and was essentially to appease the donors. I'm not trying to decry the good work that was done, some of it was very very useful, but many voices weren't heard, put it that way. And Kabul and the other cities were awash with foreign advisors, and sometimes I had to pick myself up and think I wonder what all these people are doing? because I was very much on the outside looking in. I was an advisor with the government as well, and I would sit in the ministry and discuss with the ministry and we would have people coming in from the UN agencies, from the bank, for this and that and the rest of it, and it was all very nice and cordial, but we would look at each other and think, well what are we meant to do next. It was quite a strange dynamic and difficult to generalise because there were many processes that were much more give and take than that, but generally, I think, educated Afghans are relishing the space they have to say roll up our sleeves, let's make this work, it's not going to be ideal, we are going to have to give and take, not just about who's in charge in Kabul, it's much more complicated than that. There's the whole legacy, that whole kind of morning after about 2021, where essentially so many things were changed. Trying to work to make sense of that with the institutions that are much weaker, and all the rest of it, that's also a challenge. But many many very clever Afghans are thinking this through. But they are keeping quiet about it for the time being. And it will be interesting to see how long it takes for the international community as a bloc, either

diplomats, or heads of agencies or whatever, to actually acknowledge the fact that the jigsaw has totally changed, the dynamic has totally changed. Now, you know, some of them very secular, probably some of them very devout, some of them from all walks of life, Afghans are basically saying well, thank you very much we'll work on this. And we'll find solutions. the challenge of course is that they have to find those solutions, for their own people, and to stop this sense which, in some cases its their words, not mine, the sense of all the time waiting for people to do things for them.

At the village level, it's a very different dynamic. People are more dependent on the State and rural Afghans do look to the centre, for law and order, for jobs, for education whatever, so it's a very unequal balance that. And in previous jobs when I've worked on issues of kind of social justice and whatever, your realise that if that works for villages, why should we change it. It's worked for centuries. Incrementally change will happen. If a few girls and boys from that village can get a better education, slowly, slowly, but it will take generations, things will change. Things will change. But if people are doing it, and I hope not any more, but, you know, who are we social development people to walk in and say, this has to be, everything has to be based on equity. That's not like that, you know. Not in this country it's not, if we want to be honest about it. So, it's quite interesting. I think about this as a pendulum, and I spend quite a lot of time in Kabul reading history, catching up and educating myself, and it will be interesting to see how far the pendulum swings. But it's very dynamic, and I feel that um, despite all the troubles they've had, despite all the tragedy they've had, despite all the politicising of their lives that they've had, manipulation they've had, sometimes you know for their own deserts, because again, it's the leaders who have played some of those games, as the present leaders will have as well, because it's a very very centralised State. But I think, in the finer grain, there is cause for optimism.

And, the fact that there isn't an almighty, vicious, brutal war going on, one of a succession, is the best thing, quite the best ting because people.....When I meet families flying back to Kabul from Dubai, as I do regularly, I always try to sort of engage, catch somebody's eye and have a chat, where are you going, where are you from? "Oh I'm from Australia", or "I'm from Berlin", or whatever, "I'm going back for a wedding", you know, "Why are you going back What's it going to be like?", Listening to them, you wouldn't recognise their interpretation of the country. They're not saying its all perfect, but security is better; we can now go to the village without worrying about drones or without worrying about check posts, or worrying about people bad mouthing us and then we are vilified when we come back. It's created a sort of sigh of relief that security aspect, there are many many other challenges there, but um, but I find it quite, the reason I do that and I engage with people, and it's a really useful reality check I mean that's my life on the ground in Kabul as well, but then I'm talking to resident Afghans. But to hear people from Germany or Australia talk in that way, Afghans, who've been abroad for sometime two years, sometimes decades, it's quite interesting to think that they're making their own calculations, their own compromises, ok they're relatively affluent because they can fly back, but they've kept their family contacts and generally they feel very upbeat.

JB: Jolyon, you've taken us across a whole huge cultural landscape of everything that's been going on, I can only really thank you enormously for sharing that with us. For helping us to understand more about Afghanistan, in the past, today, and hopefully for the future.

JL: Thanks Jessica it's been a great conversation.

+++