

AIPS Fellowship Abstract- Onaiza Arshad

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This project goes beyond the idealized past-ness and heritage value of the ancient Andaroon-shehr in Lahore, and instead interrogates the processes, discourses, and practices that wittingly and unwittingly produce its nostalgic time-space. Through an archival and ethnographic study, it tracks the work of spatial, discursive, and imagistic mediums in constituting the space and claims about the national past, community, and history. It argues that in stressing a singular past, these mediations silence the heterogenous, more troubling pasts of the space, obscure contemporary urban tensions, and contribute to religious and ethnically inflected violence. The research tracks the production, and appropriations of the city's iconic images, as they appear on postcards and in the media, and traces how built forms, such as monuments and streets, are configured and reconfigured via heritage management, architectural practices, and the everyday life and labor of the locals. Throughout, it emphasizes moments in which images and built forms exceed their intended purposes, disrupting prevalent ways of seeing and experiencing the space, and enabling us to access otherwise concealed political imaginaries and histories. The research asks what discourses and histories come into view when we foreground such disruptions, and the emergent nature of Andaroon-shehr, instead of portraying the city as an embodiment of the past. What can the space divulge beyond heritage and tradition? What does it reveal about Lahore's urban development, social hierarchies, and history of communal violence? What are the political stakes of such revelations in an increasingly divisive Pakistani national project?