

Call for papers

Global Afghanistan: how non-European networks shaped the modern world

International Conference, University of Bern, Switzerland, 10-12 September 2020

Today, the dominant image of Afghanistan continues to be one framed in ideas of primitiveness, isolation, backwardness, violence and divisive tribalism. However, ever since Robert Crews' 2015 book *Afghan Modern: The history of a global nation* the idea of a country cut-off from global dynamics and modernity has started to be fundamentally challenged. The author has made the case that throughout history Afghans were far from inward-looking but instead 'engaged and connected with a wider world' and 'came to participate in our modern, globalised age'. They have been, in other words, global actors: highly mobile entrepreneurs, traders, scholars, pilgrims, refugees, students or soldiers and as such have had an important role in the global flows of knowledge and commodities. Other scholars have equally started to describe Afghanistan under a different light and investigated how it was linked to wider regional, trans-regional and global dynamics. In these histories Afghanistan and Afghans have been portrayed as integral part – often to their great disadvantage – of the economy shaped by the British empire (Hanifi 2008). Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier have been encompassed into political dynamics happening beyond their borders, showing how imperialism, decolonisation, the Cold War shaped this region in crucial ways. Indeed, Afghanistan itself has been identified as the testing ground for forms of governance or legislation then exported across the British empire (Hopkins 2008 and 2020, Leake 2017, Fuoli 2018). Contributing to integrating non-Western networks into the writing of global history, this region has been studied as part of the wider Persianate world and the trans-regional networks of Muslim pilgrims and scholars that crossed Afghanistan and spanned between the Middle East, Central and South Asia (Haroon 2007, Green 2012, Ziad 2017). Inter-Asia connections have been at the centre of studies showing the primacy of Islamic law and influences coming from Indian Muslims and Ottomans, rather than necessarily Western countries, in shaping Afghanistan's state institutions and modernisation at the turn of the twentieth century (Ahmed 2017). The importance of these networks continues to be visible today in the global trading connections built by Afghan merchants across Eurasia and beyond, which seem to defy and yet are central to global capitalism (Marsden 2016).

This conference seeks to connect cross-disciplinary scholarship addressing the question of how the modern world has been and continues to be shaped by non-European actors and forces. It does so from the vantage point of the many ways in which Afghanistan and Afghans have been integral part of regional, trans-regional and global dynamics. The contributions will engage with the wider connections and entanglements that influenced Afghanistan and its inhabitants but also with the ways in which Afghans have been part of and contributed to shaping these dynamics. This workshop's aims are two-fold. On the one hand, it refocuses the way global histories have been written and turns the attention toward local, indigenous networks and their agency on a global scale. In this way, the contributions will critically look at how non-European networks and entanglements interacted with and played a crucial role in processes of globalisation. On the other hand, it aims to expand our understanding of Afghanistan as an active player - not only a passive bystander - in these global dynamics. In this way, this conference also aims to further deconstruct the image of Afghanistan as a war-ridden and isolated backwater.

We invite submissions from researchers across disciplines who work on the broader Afghan region, Afghan networks and diasporas in the early modern, modern and contemporary periods. We also encourage contributions addressing the theoretical and analytical implications of thinking global history through peripheral regions and their actors more broadly. Contributions may address, among other questions, the following areas of enquiry:

- How can we better integrate the histories of local and regional networks in Asia, Africa or the Americas within global history?
- Is there an alternative history of globalisation and global integration?
- What were the non-European networks, forces and actors through which globalisation passed?
- How did European and non-European networks interact, cooperate or hinder each other?
- How can we account for non-elite and subaltern actors in global dynamics?
- What was the role of local, peripheral regions and actors in shaping modern empires?

Please submit your abstract of no more than 400 words to francesca.fuoli@hist.unibe.ch by **April 10, 2020**. Decision of acceptance will be communicated no later than mid-May.

Confirmed keynote speaker: Prof. Robert Crews (Stanford University)

For all enquiries please contact Dr. Francesca Fuoli. Travel and accommodation funding will be available.