Institute for South Asia Studies
UC Berkeley

ISAS Public Lecture Series

Qandahar and New Sovereign Claims in Early Modern Iran and Hindustan

a talk by

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Talk Abstract
Safavids, Mughals, Afghans, and Nadirids attempted to conquer and control Qandahar throughout the early modern period. Qandahar, one of the oldest inhabited fortified cities in the region, was a strategic city for long-distance overland trade. It served as a port of entry to both Iran, to the west, and Hindustan, to the east. In the eighteenth century, conquering Qandahar was a requirement for claiming sovereignty. The Ghilzai Afghans managed to govern as an autonomous empire after successfully controlling Qandahar. It was only after ousting these Ghilzai Afghans that Nadir Shah was empowered enough to try his luck in Hindustan. Likewise, Ahmad Shah Abdali-Durrani’s claim as emperor was taken seriously only after he subjugated Qandahar, which became the capital of his empire. This paper examines eighteenth century primary sources in order to trace how emerging emperors legitimized their sovereign claims and its relation to Qandahar’s occupation.

Speaker Bio
Dr. Neelam Khoja is a social and political historian. Her research brings together connective history and intersectionality in early modern Iran and Hindustan (present-day Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India). In particular, she is interested in questions about 18th century Afghan identity, migration, sovereignty, and power. Khoja’s research has been supported through numerous grants, including Fulbright, American Institute of Pakistan Studies, American Institute of Iranian Studies, and Harvard University’s South Asia Institute and Asia Center.