



AFGHANISTAN AND SOUTH ASIA

CULTURE, COMMERCE AND POWER

SOAS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Thornhaugh Street
Russel Square
London, WC1H 0XG

Friday, 19 October 2018

Panel: 17:30 - 19:00
Reception: 19:00 - 20:30

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PANELLISTS

The territories that make-up the modern state of Afghanistan have enjoyed for centuries dense connections to the Indian subcontinent. Against the backdrop of today's geopolitical processes, such relations are predominantly viewed through the lens of inter-state rivalries.

Historically, though, Afghanistan and South Asia existed within multiple, overlapping and differently structured imperial realms. Their societies were connected through various networks that transported goods, people and ideas. Rabindranath Tagore brought one such network to popular attention in his celebrated short story of 1892, *Kabuliwala* – a story about an Afghan dry fruit seller in Kolkata.

After the partition of 1947, new national boundaries weakened such networks. Rigid boundaries led once mobile societies to be cut-off from their homelands. There are few signs today that transregional connectivity will override national borders. Yet against a backdrop of war and political instability, networks of Afghan merchants that criss-cross South, Central and West Asia bear a striking resemblance to those of the *Kabuliwala* of yore.

Panellists will put conventional perspectives on South Asian political dynamics in the context of an older and denser set of interrelationships. Once again, these dynamics are playing a decisive role in shaping the region's future on its own terms and in relation to the wider world.

Moska Najib (Photographer and Co-Curator of the *Kabuliwala* Exhibition)
Shah Mahmoud Hanifi (Professor of History, James Madison University)
Faisal Devji (Reader in Indian History, University of Oxford)
Magnus Marsden (Professor of Social Anthropology, Director, Asia Centre, University of Sussex)