

Seminar Series Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul 2016-2017

Rethinking Global Histories for the Present: The Land and Maritime Silk Road in Central Eurasia and the Indian Ocean

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Organisers: Birgit Schlyter (SRI and Asian Studies Centre, Bogaziçi University) and Fernando Rosa (Asian Studies Centre, Bogaziçi University)

The first seminar will take place on December 2, at 15:30, at the Auditorium of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul (<http://www.srii.org/Home/Contact>) and will be presented by Fernando Rosa, on the theme 'Revisiting Connected and Global Histories in Eurasia and the Indian Ocean.'

Even without aiming to be exhaustive, we could venture that the framework of connected and global histories was partly first intimated by Joseph Fletcher, a scholar working on the Central Asian borderlands of China, and Marshall Hodgson, who created the notion of 'Islamicate' to indicate an institutional framework encompassing the territories from the Nile to the Oxus in Central Asia. As connected histories, this notion was further highlighted in the work of, among others, Sanjay Subrahmanyam in more recent times, both in what concerns regions in Central Eurasia and the Indian Ocean. This concept also largely dovetails with Huri Islamoglu's work on economic and legal world and global histories, as well as her notion of shared histories of modernity, as in the title of her edited collection with Peter Perdue (*Shared Histories of Modernity in China, India and the Ottoman Empire* (2009)).

When the Mongols created the first truly Eurasian empire back in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with the rise of Pax Mongolica for the first time trade could be carried out over a very large Eurasian territory without many problems. Therefore, the Mongols are the first example of connections over Eurasia enabled by a government that allows for the beginnings of a global economy. The Chinese empire's historical land and sea routes over Eurasia and the Indian Ocean also come to mind here, even though China did not necessarily control those routes. India's age-old participation in overland and maritime trade is another case in point. Two Eurasian empires are also relevant for this workshop, namely the Russian and the Ottoman empires, even though their routes may not have been as extensive as China's or India's. Though the term 'empire' currently brings up unappealing associations with oppression and autocracy (as well as, in some quarters, 'Oriental

despotism'), besides colonialism or neo-colonialism, we would like to emphasise here another sense of the word.

This sense for us cuts across periods and geographical areas, and is related to forms of government of the economy over large territories. It is also a form of pulling together a global economy, that is, of managing economic ties and various relations that are not necessarily encompassed only within a given formal imperial territory or formation. In this sense, empire does not necessarily require a past imperial history as such, as the case of the United States, for instance, indicates.

Empire here is therefore a historically reproduced style, if you will, of managing territories, relations, and connections in various domains. Though the economy is the encompassing and enabling framework, empire is of course much more than merely economic. In the past centuries, particularly since the Peace of Westphalia in Europe, the rise of the nation-state and its offshoot, namely, modern colonialism in Africa and Asia Pacific, has made various imperial formations, particularly those related to land-based empires, appear in much traditional historiography as either anachronistic or at best barely capable of modernisation. Empire has also come to associated with (neo) colonialism only. Also, some experiences of twentieth-century modernisation – for instance, Turkey's – have been cemented on a large degree of historical erasure, particularly of imperial legacies. With the rise of connected and global histories as a research domain, however, imperial legacies can be revisited anew, this time not only as a historical phenomenon or part of heritage and other studies, but also as a continuing, living source for enabling action in the present world.

The notion of empire should thus be thought of in terms of connections and histories of mobility. The global economy is our starting point but is in no way restrictive in terms of theory or research domains. This seminar therefore aims to scrutinise continuities with the past – without prejudice to differences and discrepancies – that may enable the present.

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