Paper proposal for conference:

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Transitional Regimes and the Contingencies of Multiple Modernities in the Balkans, 1910-1923

Proposed by Isa Blumi, Associate Professor of History, Georgia State University

This project focuses on the western Balkans during the tumultuous 1910-1923 period when policies aimed to subjugate and/or co-opt the peoples increasingly identified as Albanians in Kosovo/Macedonia may help address methodological failures regarding the study of post-Ottoman transitional regimes. I claim that the intersections of Serbian (and then Yugoslav) state language politics, claims of religious orthodoxy, the politicization (and criminalization) of heterodox cultural practices, and finally the mobilization of nationalist discourses actually reflect contingent, frequently modifying indigenous responses to violent change rather than the normative reference to “state-building” processes we find in conventional Balkan historiography. Indeed, local resistance to still precarious state-building projects requires that we identify a multiplicity of trajectories of modernity heretofore subsumed in modern Balkan state mythologies.

Drawing from my earlier book, Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912 (Palgrave, 2011), I wish to continue to explore the means by which local constituencies emerging out of socio-economic upheaval informed new expressions of local and regional collective agency that only at critical junctures, take on the exclusivist “Albanian” versus “Serbian” binary so prominent today. These variable expressions/reactions to violent transitional events actually left imprints on the western Balkans well into the 1920s, especially in respect to the trajectory of Yugoslavia’s state-building agenda. These scars of contentious politics, so to speak, reflected that there existed a variety of associational expressions whose dynamic contradictions confounded any claim to uniform extension of modern state power. As such, this paper provides a revisionist exploration of the staggered establishment of a modern state in the post-Ottoman Balkans claims that certain forms of administrative practices fully in line with Modernity necessarily reflect an adaptive process by which identity (racialist) politics, for example, actually had to accommodate diverse claims not framed in narrow sectarian and ethno-national terms. In other words, local mobilization ended up creating still culturally opaque and ideologically fluid “transitional regimes” that must inform how we theorize “modernity” in postcolonial settings. Ultimately, I argue that this process of exchange that
subsequent nationalist historiographies strategically ignore, may be useful to our shared project of reconsidering the utility of narrowing Modernity as a way to impose a single, universal human trajectory.

Biography

Isa Blumi, PhD (NYU 2005), and Associate Professor of Global History, has authored six monographs, including *Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World* (2013); *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities* (2011); and *Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State* (2012). His inter-disciplinary, trans-national work primarily focuses on comparing transitional societies in regions as diverse as the Balkans, South Arabia, East Africa and the Persian Gulf in order to challenge Eurocentric paradigms still entrenched in regional historiographies. He has recently completed a three year term as Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Area Studies at Leipzig University.