

Arbab_Abstract

Project Title: Nonviolence Embodied and Representations of Violence in The North West Frontier of British India

My research is focused on the Khudai Khidmatgars: a non-violent movement largely composed of Pashtuns that occurred in the North-West Frontier of British India during the 1930's. Unlike other Indian anti-colonial resistances, especially Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha, the history of this movement started by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, or the Frontier Gandhi as he was called, remains obscure. My project involves explaining how nonviolence was embodied by an ostensibly violent race of peoples and the self-motivations that brought about a transformed social and political framework, while also looking at the historical erasure of the movement. I compare the literatures of Pashtun self-representation with British colonial and indigenous representations of the area and people: using the methodological framework of literary, postcolonial and feminist critical theory I read the colonial archive alongside vernacular literature. By becoming the habitus of the people of that region, at least for a short historical span, I argue, that the movement not only tapped into an alternate nonviolent ethos already embedded in the local imaginary, but also, that it paradigmatically shifted violence as normative within social and political rhetoric far beyond its historical occurrence. A shift that is extremely significant for political theory in general, but which remains significantly under analyzed as well.