and business history, can usefully benefit from it. Last but not least, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan* is written in a highly conceptual and detailed language in a total of 270 pages. In addition to a long introduction, a short conclusion, and six core analysis chapters, a good number of new satellite-taken and historical maps, images, and examples of colonial primary source documents as well as a valuable appendix in English, Pashto, and Persian commercial vocabulary in nineteenth-century Afghanistan plus a rich index, appear in the current edition.

Jawan Shir Rasikh
University of Toronto

https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2020.1792611

Afghan Modern: The History of a Global Nation, Robert D. Crews, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, ISBN 978-0-6742-8609-2 (hbk), 400 pp.

"Bigger than Dubai" (p. 1). So begins Robert Crews' expansive and extensively researched work, *Afghan Modern*. As Crews relates, these were the words uttered by an Afghan co-passenger on a flight from Kabul to the United Arab Emirates, used to describe a vision for the future of Afghanistan that surpassed that of the Gulf's glittering metropolis. For those most acquainted with the images of Afghanistan circulated by American journalists and news outlets, this might come across as a statement of deeply misplaced confidence. How could a country variously described as the "graveyard of empires" (p. 3) and a place "without history" (p.3) emerge from its historical isolation to take a place on the world stage?

As Crews' book demonstrates, assertions of Afghan centrality reflect a centuries-long history of Afghan mobility and engagement with the processes that shaped the modern world. The extent of Afghans' role in this picture is vast, making it a difficult one to capture within a single monograph. Nonetheless, drawing upon an array of historical sources in multiple languages, Crews' account of the global Afghan experience is a compelling testimony of the ways in which Afghan history is at once British, Russian, Turkish, Indian, Pakistani, Iranian, Soviet, and American (to name a few).

The often-repeated maxim of Afghanistan as a "graveyard of empires" has its roots in the British colonial period, yet it long outlasted British rule. Tropes of Afghan insularity and difference had a remarkable staying power with the many foreign occupations that followed, in part because they functioned both as a justification for colonial intervention and a preemptive excuse for its failure. Since the beginning of the American occupation, for example, imperial assertions of Afghan backwardness have served to galvanize support for the war effort and build confidence that Afghans would benefit from the US-imposed development projects. Unrealized political goals after nearly twenty years of war, however, have only deepened this belief

in Afghan difference, recasting it as irredeemable: the failure of US-led democratic state-building resulted not from American hubris or ineptitude, but from Afghans' inability to change.

To begin, it is important to point out that the Afghans of Crews' story *do* express a sense of Afghan difference, yet of a decidedly different nature than that espoused in colonial and imperial narratives. This is encapsulated at the very beginning of *Afghan Modern*'s first chapter, which delves into the contents of one of the first Afghan histories: the *Makhzan-i Afghani* of Khwaja Nimatullah Harvi. Completed in the early seventeenth century for an Afghan nobleman of the Mughal court, the *Makhzan-i Afghani* traces the origins of the Afghans back to a figure named Afghana, the grandson of the Biblical King Saul. In this narrative, Afghans have an important role to play during the life of the Prophet Muhammad (according to Nimatullah, an Afghan named Qais Abdur Rashid met the Prophet and was instructed to bring the faith back to Afghanistan), as well as in bringing Islam to the Indian subcontinent. This foundational vision of Afghan identity was neither the product of historical isolation nor parochial in its outlook. Rather, it was produced and projected in a universal, cosmopolitan framework: that of the historical unfolding of Islam.

Crews' choice to open his book with Nimatullah is significant not only in drawing attention to a longer history of Afghan mobility and reflecting on their place in the world; it also disrupts teleological narratives predicated on a timeless and geographically confined Afghan identity. As the opening chapter, "Imperial Cosmopolitans," argues, the emergence of an Afghan nation-state was not a historical inevitability. Rather, it was the result of a number of contingent forces that continually pulled Afghans beyond the boundaries of their homeland. First and foremost, these were the forces that made Afghans imperial subjects, particularly of the competing Mughal (r. 1526–1858) and Safavid (r. 1501–1736) empires of India and Iran, respectively. These empires—whose networks crisscrossed modern-day Afghanistan—not only encouraged Afghan physical mobility, but drew many into the cosmopolitan social milieu often described as the "Persianate world." This was precisely the background in which the Afghan founder of the Durrani Empire, Ahmad Shah Durrani (d. 1772), was steeped prior to his rise to power, and whose symbols and instruments of authority he drew upon in crafting his imperial identity.

In the second and third chapters, "Forging an Afghan Empire" and "Bodies in Motion," Crews situates Afghans at the center of the imperial competition between the Russian and British empires. To an extent, these chapters are a reminder of how European powers determined important outcomes for Afghanistan that would long outlast the existence of their colonial enterprises (such as the drawing of the contested Durand Line as Afghanistan's eastern boundary). At the same time, however, Afghan leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries challenged imperial authorities by adapting contemporary arguments for self-determination to assert their autonomy as a nation. In some cases, this took the form of pleas based upon declarations of a common humanity—an argument intensely familiar to the British, who used the same universalist claims as justification for the "benevolence" of their colonial projects.

Afghanistan entered the twentieth century in the shadow of European colonial authority. Nonetheless, the architects of the Afghan nation-state cast their net wide for inspiration as they imagined an Afghanistan that could stand on a par with the great powers of the world. Indeed, in "The Star of Asia" and "Seduced by Capital" (chapters 4 and 5), cosmopolitan visionaries such as Mahmud Tarzi (1865–1933) spoke of national development in the language of "progress" and "renewal." Modernization efforts entailed the building of infrastructure such as roadways and the adoption of new forms of media like the newspaper. At the same time, a rising pan-Islamic movement looked to Afghan leadership with the imminent fall of the Ottoman Empire, whose sultan was widely regarded as the caliph, or leader of the Muslim community. When Afghanistan declared its independence in 1919, the world watched as it positioned itself both as a leader of the greater Islamic world and a powerful example of anti-colonialism at a time when European powers remained in control of much of the globe.

During and after World War II, Afghanistan's place in the world became increasingly defined by its economic dependence on the United States. However, in "The Atomic Age" (chapter 6), Crews demonstrates how Afghans engaged on their own terms with post-war international social movements, intellectual currents, and flows of commodities. For example, through popular forms of media such as the radio, Afghans followed the Vietnam War and African-American activists such as Malcolm X, often finding congruence between their own experiences and anti-colonial struggles taking place across the world. Concurrently, Afghans utilized their position in contemporary politics to challenge the authority of regional powers. One of the most powerful demonstrations of this was the call for "Pashtunistan," or an independent Pashtun homeland to be carved in part from the nascent nation-state of Pakistan. For some, this was an anti-colonial gesture directed at Pakistan, which, as an ally of the United States, sought to curtail what many Pashtun Afghans saw as their right to self-determination. Afghans of the post-war period also became increasingly interested in global socialist movements. As neighboring Iran contemplated the merits of socialism, Afghans, too, read Iranian and Soviet publications and questioned how its principles could be applied to the Afghan context.

One of the richest chapters in terms of detail and diversity of source material, "The Atomic Age" also brings out one of *Afghan Modern*'s most noteworthy features: its attention to the role of minority and marginalized communities in the story of Afghan globalism. Crews' effort to this end is not unique to this chapter; he devotes consideration throughout the book to how the processes of modern state formation impacted Afghanistan's agricultural, nomadic, and border communities, in particular. Yet it is during his discussion of the international drug trade that the political significance and agency of non-elite groups emerges most clearly. For instance, in addition to highlighting the many networks on the ground that made the global circulation of drugs possible, "The Atomic Age" shows how Afghan farmers adapted American development programs to accommodate poppy cultivation—an important source of livelihood threatened by worldwide crackdowns on narcotics.

The penultimate chapter, "Revolutionary Dreams," begins with a watershed moment in Afghan history: the Saur Revolution of 1978. Here, while acknowledging the tragic violence that often characterized the revolutionary period, Crews foregrounds the sense of anticipation that persisted beyond the revolution's first turbulent years. Indeed, while party divisiveness and political violence marked the brief leadership of Presidents Nur Muhammad Taraki (1917–79) and Hafizullah Amin (1929–79), other People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) luminaries like Anahita Ratebzad (1931–2014) maintained a genuine commitment to the revolutionary project as the best means to secure such social objectives as the emancipation of Afghanistan's women. Similarly, the *mujahidin*—and those who watched them with expectation from abroad—interpreted their struggle as revolutionary. To be sure, the cause of the Afghan "freedom fighters," so named by the Reagan White House, prompted juridical questions about the meaning of *jihad*. Muslim communities across the world invested in the movement, whose leaders positioned themselves as inaugurating a new period in Islamic history. In 1989, when the Soviet bloc in eastern Europe collapsed, belief in the global significance of the *mujahidin*'s mission bolstered the claims of the leading Hizb-i Islami that it was the Afghan fighters, not the West, that had freed the world from the "godless tyranny" (p. 266) of communism.

In illustrating the many ways in which Afghans have absorbed and adapted modernizing processes, Crews' book accomplishes the broader objective of highlighting the deeply interconnected nature of the modern world. I do wonder, however, about the author's choice of title. In the introduction, Crews defines his primary subject as Afghan "globalism," or "the myriad ways in which Afghans engaged and connected with a wider world, how they came to participate in our modern, globalized age" (p. 2). But did this globalism stem from or precede an engagement with the "modern"? Were there Afghan ways of being "in the world" before this, or that drew from sources not clearly related to modern politics, intellectual culture, and social formations? Nimatullah's *Makhzan-i Afghani* (see chapter 1), for example, in which Afghans are placed at the center of a universal history of Islam, reflects a cosmopolitan sensibility that cannot be reduced to an engagement with characteristically modern processes. Afghans met the advent of modernity with existing understandings of their place in the world that critically informed how they interpreted and accommodated modernizing forces.

In addition to its merits listed previously, *Afghan Modern* extends an important invitation to Area Studies scholars to consider the limits of our often arbitrary regional focuses and the worlds opened up for those who think on a wider scale. Without a doubt, images of a "timeless" Afghanistan emerged in part from anthropological studies that focused on narrow and racialized categories such as "tribe" and "village." Similarly, nation-state-centric scholarship on Afghanistan and Iran has often obscured the historical linkages between the two. In incorporating the flows of the age-old Mashhad–Herat corridor, as well as the shared intellectual milieu, literary heritage, and territorial imagination that have shaped modern Iranian and Afghan national identity, Crews' expanded geographical and historical lens captures how the histories of these two nations have been inextricably intertwined. The con-

nections between Iran and Afghanistan, of course, only continue to deepen and evolve, not least due to Shiʿa Afghans' engagements with the ideologies and institutions of the Islamic Republic (described in chapter 8, "At the Center of Humanity").

While any attempt to encompass a subject as vast as Afghan globalism might risk losing the fine grain of historical experience, Crews has produced a work that is at once richly detailed and broad in scope. An accessible book with something to offer to any curious reader, *Afghan Modern* is a thought-provoking and welcome reminder of the historical dynamism of Afghan national identity as well as its extraordinary resilience.

Nicole Ferreira
University of California, Berkeley

https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2020.1792609

The Eastern Frontier: Limits of Empire in Late Antique and Early Medieval Central Asia, Robert Haug, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2019, The Early and Medieval Islamic World, ISBN 978-1-7883-1003-1 (hbk), XII + 296 pp.

The Eastern Frontier consists of seven chapters, preceded by a list of abbreviations (p. viii), list of maps (p. ix), acknowledgements (pp. x–xi), introduction (pp. 1–15), and followed by conclusions (pp. 197–200), notes (pp. 201–58), bibliography (pp. 259–81) and an index (pp. 282–96). The book is graphically well done with a good proportion between page size, font and line spacing; the maps, all in black and white, are of good quality and of an appropriate size. The numerous and precise notes are placed at the end of the text and not at the foot of the page: this choice, I presume editorial, forces the reader to move from one end of the volume to the other, weighing down the rhythm of reading: on the other hand this allows the font size of the notes to be kept as in the body of the text, makes the consultation of notes more agile and at the same time keeps the page layout elegant.

Haug's work concerns what was once the eastern frontier of the Sasanian Empire and after the Arab conquest the eastern frontier of the Umayyads and Abbasids. Frontier is an extremely interesting concept and one can look at it from several points of view: we have linguistic, ethnic, political and religious frontiers. A frontier may also be the point of contact between two different ways of life, for example sedentary and nomadic. All these aspects of the frontier concept cannot be superimposed: a linguistic frontier hardly coincides perfectly with the political, ethnic or religious one. This is valid both in the contemporary world and in antiquity. The eastern frontier presents many of these different overlapping interpretative aspects: it was a political frontier that separated the Iranian empires from what lay beyond; it has long been a frontier that separated the nomadic world from the