

FEMINIST STUDIES COLLOQUIUM SERIES FALL 2017

Wednesday, October 11

2-4pm, HUM 1 room 210

Body Mike: Alternating Words on the Afghan Frontier

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This talk examines how the U.S. military's counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan relies on a fetishistic misrecognition of speaking as inspiration, and takes linguistic expression as the dissemination of terroristic violence through oral networks of exchange and emboldening. It suggests that the more obvious powers of language (particularly a language that demands its own translation (English) into one that signifies what Afghans do not know (Persian/ Pashto), doubles as a harbinger of wartime death and surveillance. It illustrates how military translators mediate the exchange of words and sense-making, and participate in the construction of a dangerous rural subjectivity as the exemplification of ineradicable danger.

Linguistic and biometric practices deployed in intercultural translation within military campaigns, newly commodified and bearing more devastating consequences, are the ideological heirs of earlier imperial discourse on nomadism and irregular frontier movement. In contexts of counterinsurgency, speech has come to signify collaboration or guilt (apostasy or terrorism) and informs fear about dialect in the Afghan countryside, where rural subjects are thought to be especially (and dangerously) itinerant, taking their dialect with them to evade military interrogation and biometric capture.

Fatima Mojaddedi, a President's Postdoctoral Fellow in Anthropology at UC Berkeley, completed her Ph.D. in Anthropology at Columbia University in 2016. Her ethnographic research, based in Kabul, Afghanistan, considers the nature of contemporary warfare, language, and questions of cultural representation and catastrophe.