



CZECH ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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Institute of Sociological Studies, Faculty of
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is happy to invite you to the

LADISLAV HOLY LECTURE 2018

by

DAVID B. EDWARDS

James N. Lambert '39 Professor of Anthropology

Williams College, Williamstown, MA

*Caravan of Martyrs: Sacrifice and the Rise of
Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan*

17 February 2017 from 16:00

Venue

FSV UK, Hollar Hall, room H212,
Smetanovo nábřeží 6, 110 01 Praha 1

Abstract

This talk examines the transformation of sacrificial ideology and ritual in Afghanistan from before the beginning of the ongoing conflict in 1978 to the present. Beginning with a discussion of sacrifice as an instrument of peacemaking in the context of tribal feud, I consider how the Islamic political parties that rose up to oppose the Soviet occupiers developed a cult of martyrdom. This enterprise was further transformed by so-called “Afghan Arabs,” most importantly al-Qaeda founders, Abdullah ‘Azzam and Osama bin Laden, who changed the focus of martyrdom from the retrospective conferral of status on the dead by the political party to the active pursuit of sacrificial death by the living, a transformation in understanding that laid the groundwork for the attacks of September 11, 2001. This leads to an analysis of the development of suicide bombing in Afghanistan following the American intervention in Afghanistan. Rather than focusing on either political strategy or the psychology of the suicide bomber, I look at suicide bombing in indigenous terms as a form of sacrificial ritual, that has been adapted to the structural and moral dilemmas created by American forms of military and political control. The talk will conclude with a discussion of the role of Facebook and other forms of social media in creating a new cult of martyrs among Afghan youth.

Biography

David Edwards has been conducting research on and writing about Afghanistan, South Asia and Islam for more than thirty years. A graduate of Princeton University (BA, 1975) and the University of Michigan (PhD, 1986), he is the author of three books on Afghanistan, all published by the University of California Press – *Caravan of Martyrs: Sacrifice and Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan* (2017), *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad* (2002), and *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (1996) - along with numerous articles on Afghan history, religion and culture. Edwards is also the co-director and producer of the film, *Kabul Transit* (2006), which has been an official selection at many film festivals, including the Los Angeles Film Festival, the International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam, and the Independents Night film series at Lincoln Center in New York City. Edwards has received research fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and the National Science Foundation. In 2002, Edwards was named a Carnegie Scholar by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and taught at Charles University in Prague as a Fulbright Fellow in 2012-13.