

*Orientalism and the Making of the Armenian Diasporic Imaginary in Early Colonial India*

Veronika Zablotsky Freie Universität Berlin

This talk will focus on the figure of Joseph Emin, a Persian Armenian reformer who was commissioned by the English East India Company to write *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Ēmīn, An Armenian, written in English by Himself*, an English-language memoir first published in London in 1792, republished in Calcutta in 1918, and finally translated into Armenian in Beirut in 1958. Building on a close reading of this peculiar text, I will discuss how colonial imaginaries and practices of extraterritorial and corporate sovereignty in South Asia interacted with Mughal authorities and capital in ways that refashioned Armenian mercantile networks into ambivalent conduits of European colonial expansion. Through a combination of coercion, cunning, and consent, Armenians were incorporated as middling agents in the legal, built, and social environments of the company towns of Madras and Calcutta where Joseph Emin came to believe in the superiority of European manners, knowledge, and styles of governance. Furthermore, I consider the formative impact of early Orientalism on the Armenian diasporic imaginary through a discussion of Sir William Jones' anonymous editorship of Emin's memoir. Overall, I will make the case that early modern encounters with British colonialism in South Asia shaped Armenian aspirations for national independence in the borderlands of the Ottoman, Russian, and Persian Empires.

**Bio:** *Veronika Zablotsky is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Philosophy at Freie Universität Berlin as a member of Transforming Solidarities, an interdisciplinary research project funded by the Berlin University Alliance until 2024. Previously, she was a Sawyer Seminar Postdoctoral Fellow in the Andrew W. Mellon Sawyer Seminar Sanctuary Spaces: Reworlding Humanism at the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy at the University of California, Los Angeles. She completed her dissertation in Feminist Studies with notations in Critical Race & Ethnic Studies, Politics and History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 2019. Through a postcolonial and transnational feminist lens, her scholarship interrogates the politics of nation-state borders, empire, migration, and diaspora. She is a founding member of the Abolition Beyond Borders Collective in Berlin, the Critical Armenian Studies Collective at the University of Pennsylvania, and serves on the advisory board of the German Academic International Network (DAAD GAIN).*