

Timelines: Secularity, Modernity, and Conscience

Kathleen Davis

This paper considers the relationship between issues of secular modernity in India and narratives of European nation-state formation and secularization. Although it is now well understood that European states, as well as the United States, claim secularity while privileging Christian forms, the narrative of the “early modern” emergence of secular states and individual freedom of conscience has hardly been challenged, nor has it been shaken by internal debates over the “secularization thesis.” Indeed, with “religion” ostensibly on the rise, and sovereign nation-states ostensibly on the wane, the linearity of this narrative has only hardened, and its intra-European focus (emphasizing the Reformation and wars of religion, but excluding, for example, world trade and colonial projects) remains dominant. In contrast, globalizing forces and geo-political factors are considered fundamental to pressures on state sovereignty and secularity today. Rethinking this history with a longer view that resists retrospectively defined period boundaries and that also, in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s terms, provincializes Europe, can bring valuable analytic tools and explanatory power to current dilemmas of secularism.

Kathleen Davis is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Rhode Island. She is the author of *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008) and *Deconstruction and Translation* (2001), and is co-editor, with Nadia Altschul, of *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: the Idea of “the Middle Ages” Outside Europe* (2009). Her current book project examines the intertwined histories of natural law and sovereignty, and the relation of these histories to the politics of human rights today.

The Subaltern: Political Subject or Protagonist of History?

Prathama Banerjee

The subaltern is a name that no one has claimed – it is neither identity nor ideality. That precisely has been the power of this invented category – giving it immense political flexibility, narrative agility and innate resistance to being reductively or instrumentally used. Is it this that makes the subaltern a purely political subject, who is socially or culturally marked but only contingently? But then the subaltern has also leaned towards ‘being’ the peasant now, the poor then, the woman and the dalit sometimes. Indeed, one asks today if she could be the refugee, the migrant, the post-humanist ‘human’, bare life. Is the subaltern then really the protagonist of history? Or is it history itself which is the subject here, setting up the subaltern as front figure? In this presentation, I try to think through these questions surrounding the subaltern as a category, caught as it is between imagining the subaltern as political subject par excellence and as historical character. In this I revisit the *Subaltern Studies* as a specific moment in our tradition of thinking the political. Questions of subaltern speech, testimony and ultimately ‘thought’ get inflected through this prior question of what it is to think the political.

Prathama Banerjee is a historian at the Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. Her earlier work is published as *The Politics of Time: ‘primitives’ and history-writing in a colonial society*. She is currently working on a history of the political in colonial and postcolonial Bengal. She is also involved in rethinking the history of social science disciplines in India.

Revolution and History: Maoism and Subaltern Studies

Sanjay Seth

Critics of postcolonial theory have provided it with a genealogy in which it appears as the poisoned fruit of a period when revolutionary energies were ebbing and in retreat. This essay seeks to provide an alternative genealogy, suggesting that the Subaltern Studies project, and postcolonial theory more generally, were enabled and in important ways shaped by the Maoist upsurge in some parts of India in the latter 1960s and early 1970s. The critiques of modernity, of nationalism and the nation-state, and of homogenizing narratives of progress which mark, and in the eyes of its critics, mar these intellectual currents, far from being reflections of their disassociation from radical politics, are here presented as the indirect outcome of a profound cultural and intellectual shift which has been the consequence of the Naxalite movement of this period. This alternative genealogy proceeds through an alternative reading of the Naxalite movement. This essay asks why this movement was so important, given that its ideology was naïve, and its political successes shortlived. The Naxalite strategy of ‘annihilating’ feudal landlords, and the urban ‘statue-smashing’ campaign of Naxalite youth in 1970- commonly regarded and condemned as juvenile and ultra-leftist- are here instead interpreted as an incipient critique of aspects of Marxist theory, a critique subsequently given more explicit and elaborate exposition in the writings of the Subaltern Studies group, and in postcolonial theory.

Sanjay Seth is Professor of Politics and co-director of the Centre for Postcolonial Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. He has published extensively in the fields of social and political theory, modern Indian history, and international relations. He is a founding co-editor of *Postcolonial Studies*, and his most recent book is "Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India" (Duke University Press 2007).

Revolutionaries as Subalterns: A Tale of Two Conferences

Kama Maclean

Histories of the Indian nationalist movement frequently construe the revolutionary activities of the late 1920s and early 1930s in north India as operating in opposition to, or at best in isolation from, the mainstream Congress. However, the popular movement to save the condemned revolutionaries Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru was supported by elements of the Indian National Congress, and not only in the Punjab. After the formal appeals to stay their executions were exhausted in February 1931, their executions were carried out on March 23, barely a week before the annual Congress meeting, in 1931 held in Karachi. The government knew that this would put enormous pressure on Gandhi and might even lead to another Congress split between his followers and the 'younger and more radical elements' in the nationalist movement. The proceedings of the Karachi Congress are infused with this tension, particularly in the ways that debate following a qualified condolence resolution by Nehru (at Gandhi's behest) was firmly limited. In this light, a banned publication purporting to be the minutes of a Conference of India's Martyrs in Paradise can be read as the desired response to the martyrdoms of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, and a mirror opposite to the event that was the 1931 Karachi Congress. Thus, the extraordinary minutes of the Martyrs' Conference in Paradise provides a window through which to interpret the charged events surrounding the popular reception of the revolutionaries in the 1930s.

Dr Kama Maclean is Senior Lecturer of South Asian and World History at the University of New South Wales and editor of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. Her research interests range across a broad range of themes relating to history, politics and religion in nineteenth and twentieth century north India. Her book, *Pilgrimage and Power: the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad*, was published in New York by Oxford University Press in 2008.

Subaltern Sexualities and the Archives in Colonial India

Charu Gupta

This paper focuses on disparate sites and subjects to reflect on and problematize the relationship between sexuality and the archives in colonial north India. I dwell on how 'recalcitrant' and hidden histories of sexuality can be gleaned by not only expanding our arenas of archives, but also by decentering and recasting colonial archives. I do so by specifically investigating some of the 'indigenous' writings in Hindi, through texts concerning homosexuality, sex manuals, the writings of a woman ayurvedic practitioner, didactic literature and its relationship to Dalit sexuality and current popular Dalit literature and its representations of the past. The debate for me here is not about the flaws of archival uses but rather of playing one archive against another, of appropriating many parallel, alternative, official and popular archives simultaneously to shape a more nuanced and layered understanding of sexuality.

Charu Gupta is an Associate Professor of History at Delhi University. She did her PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. She has been a Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, Delhi, a Visiting Associate Professor at Yale University, a Rama Watamull Distinguished Indian Visiting Scholar at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, a Visiting Faculty at the University of Washington, a Fellow of the Social Science Research Council, New York, an Asia Fellow of the Asian Scholarship Foundation, Thailand, a Visiting Fellow at the Wellcome Institute, London, and a South Asian Visiting Fellow at the University of Oxford. She has presented papers in a large number of national and international seminars and conferences. Her publications include the book *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (co-published by Permanent Black, Delhi & Palgrave, New York, 2002) and *Contested Coastlines: Fisherfolk, Nations and Borders in South Asia* (Routledge, Delhi and London, 2008), and several articles on gender, Dalits, masculinity, sexuality, fundamentalism and nationalism in various national and international journals. She is currently working on 'Dalit Masculinities and Femininities'.

Subaltern Studies, Aboriginal History and the Pilbara Aboriginal Stockworkers' Strike

Bain Attwood

The projects of Subaltern Studies and Aboriginal History emerged at much the same period of time, and there were important similarities or convergences as well as differences or divergences between them, as many have noted. One of the areas of convergence was the debate about whether the subaltern or the Aboriginal were pre-political and could only become political as a consequence of a process of political development, as Marxist historians such as Eric Hobsbawm would have argued, or whether they were constitutionally political and so already capable of being political subjects. I am about to embark on a study of an Aboriginal pastoral or stockworkers' strike that took place shortly after World War II in the Pilbara in the north-west of Western Australia, and in this paper I wish to investigate what and/or how some of the approaches in Subaltern Studies could be useful in providing answers to questions such as what did the Aboriginal people understand by a *strike* and how was it that they came to embrace this concept in order to represent what they did and the changes they wanted to bring about; how and why did the concept of a *strike* come to have authority among the Aboriginal people involved in the strike; and what role if any did white Australians play in this?

Bain Attwood has published extensively in the history of colonialism. His sole authored books include *The Making of the Aborigines* (1989), *Rights for Aborigines* (2003) and *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History* (2005). He has also done a jointly authored book with his colleague Andrew Markus, *The 1967 Referendum* (1997, revised edn 2007), and edited several collections of essays. He has held fellowships at the Australian National University (2001-03) and Cambridge University (2007-08), and has undertaken work for the National Museum of Australia, and has written occasionally on indigenous history for newspapers.

Settler Colonialism and Postcolonial History: Re-thinking Australian Settler Society 1820s-1860s

Angela Woollacott

Subaltern Studies and postcolonial theory revolutionised historiography, not least for British imperial history. One of the many products is the rapidly burgeoning field of settler colonial studies, which seeks to explore settler colonialism as a variant of colonialism within imperial and global histories. This paper will consider the evolution of settler society in the Australian colonies 1820s-1860s as a local case study of global settler colonialism. The employment of nonwhite labour, frontier violence against Indigenous people, and the articulation of white settler manly authority as a basis for Responsible Government were each facets of Australian settler society, as was knowledge of connections between the Australian colonies and others, including India. Postcolonial and feminist approaches to history help us to consider settler colonialism from new angles, and to see the significance of imperial connections, not least the mid-19th century global shaping of labour systems, political subjecthood, and racial and gendered hierarchies.

Angela Woollacott is the Manning Clark Professor of History, and Head of the School of History, at the Australian National University. Her teaching areas include Australian history, British Empire history, and feminist and postcolonial history. Her recent books include *Gender and Empire* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and coedited with Desley Deacon and Penny Russell, *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World* (ANU E-Press, 2008) and *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity 1700-present* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). She is currently completing *Race and the Modern Exotic: Three 'Australian' Women on Global Display* and is at work on *Settler Society in the Australian Colonies: Self-Government and Imperial Culture*.

Subaltern Historiography and South African History: Some Ideas for a New Radical History of White Folk?

Neil Roos

Deriving from my association with South African social history, this paper asks how we might develop new histories of ordinary white South Africans. It asks further whether such a histories may be 'radical' in the sense suggested by Eley (2005).

Surveying how whites have featured in South African historiographic traditions, I argue that they have generally been represented in 'large' categories, and we have not been able to understand much of their intimate worlds, what Du Bois (1999) calls their 'souls undressed'. In particular Marxist-inspired social history, adrift from the strong theoretical base necessary to enrich and renew it, has been unable to pose the appropriate questions to develop a historiography of ordinary whites. Following Posel (2010), I argue for an explicit act of (re-)theorizing that might break the taken-for-granted association of South African social history with Marxism. Literary and political observations made by black critical voices as diverse as Plaatje (1917) and Biko (2004) suggests that a more useful starting point for the history of ordinary white people might be the idea of a racial state, a concept that owes more to Foucault than Marx. As Posel notes, historiographies of below are not necessary from below. *Subaltern Studies* with its emphases on the need to separate histories of power from those of capital, as well as its use of anthropology, literary criticism and gender studies may offer useful perspectives to explore the 'souls undressed' of ordinary whites, within the bigger premises of a racial state. I argue that subalternity is a condition not a category, and conclude by asking whether ordinary whites in South Africa may be considered subalterns – albeit 'subalterns of a special sort'. Consideration of this point is important for shaping the intellectual and political project of a 'new' radical history of white folk and so imagining a set of pedagogies against whiteness.

I took a PhD in history from the University of the North West, one of South Africa's 'bantustan' universities. Since graduation I have worked at the University of Pretoria (South Africa), the University of Notre Dame (USA) and the University of the Free State (South Africa), where I am currently employed. In 2006 / 7 I enjoyed a fellowship at the University of Chicago, where I become very interested in the historiographic and political

possibilities of Subaltern Studies. I am interested in histories of ordinary white people in apartheid South Africa, and have published recently in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *Journal of Social History* and *Social History*. I am the author of *Ordinary Springboks: white servicemen and social justice in South Africa, 1939-1961* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). At the University of the Free State I am director-designate of the new Postgraduate School, and I am affiliated to the history department as a research associate.

Muslim Subjects, Muslim World: The Universal and the Political in the Malayan Forest

Amrita Malhi

This paper reflects on a series of subaltern political uprisings between 1890 and 1989 in the forested hinterland of the Malay Peninsula. During the first half of this period, uprisings were triggered by the colonial restructuring of complex relationships between cultivators, land and forests in specific hinterland localities. Their protagonists, however, mobilised political categories which far exceeded the politics of locality. Instead, they drew on the globalist grammar and imagery made available by Islam to mobilise hinterland Muslims against their *kafir* British colonisers. Later, from 1949, the peninsular hinterland became a site for more sustained armed insurgency. This was led by the Malayan People's Army, an armed wing of the Maoist Malayan Communist Party. The MPA's Tenth Regiment consisted of communist cadres who were specifically also Malay and Muslim, and who searched for an Islamic basis for third-world revolutionary internationalism. Located in the 'jungle', away from the agrarian and courtly sites of Malay culture and politics, these movements repeatedly exceeded the horizons of the Malayan/Malaysian geo-body in how they imagined political space and subjectivity. Rebels actively reconfigured universal categories by harnessing them to their specific struggles. They also translated their struggles into universal terms by mapping them on to an imagined Muslim World, drawing on an Islamic vocabulary which they later fused with that of Maoism. In dialogue with these movements and their visions of the political, this paper will ask why a desire for a politics of the world has emerged repeatedly in this particular location, marginal to the Malayan geo-body and the Malaysian nation-state. How have Muslim subalterns in the Malayan forest repeatedly transformed a globalist longing into a basis for a universal revolutionary subjectivity?

Amrita Malhi is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the International Centre for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding at the University of South Australia. Her research interests include the production of 'Muslim' as a political subjectivity in Malaya/Malaysia and the forest as a site for subaltern politics in Southeast Asia. Her recent PhD thesis is to be awarded the 2010 J.G. Crawford Prize for best graduate work in the humanities and social sciences at the Australian National University.

Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial Moment

Simon During

This paper will map certain of postcolonialism's wider sources and conditions of possibility. It will then focus on the academic and intellectual situation in Australia at the time when subaltern studies was first recognized as a force within and for postcolonialism. It will argue that such contextualization allows us to recognise that the Australian humanities missed opportunities for dialogue with the modes of thought that subaltern studies represent. It will further argue that the structures and institutionality of academic knowledge in the global 'endgame capitalist' moment constitute a limit to this thought's dissemination and realization.

Simon During is a New Zealander who studied for his PhD in Victorian literature at Cambridge. For many years he taught at the University of Melbourne, where, as Robert Wallace Chair and Head of Department, he helped establish the Media and Communications, Cultural Studies and Publishing programs. Between 2002 and 2010 was a professor of English at Johns Hopkins University, where he also served as Director of the Film and Media Program. He has held fellowships and visiting positions at Berkeley and Princeton and elsewhere. His books include *Foucault and Literature* (Routledge 1991), *Patrick White* (OUP 1994), *Modern Enchantments: the cultural power of secular magic* (Harvard: 2002) and *Exit Capitalism: Literary Culture, Theory and Post-Secular Modernity* (Routledge 2010). *Literature, conservatism and compulsory democracy* will appear in 2011 with Fordham University Press. He is currently working on two projects: 1) a history of the relationship between Anglicanism and literature in Britain from 1600 to 1945, and 2) a book manuscript provisionally entitled: *Fictions of the secular: the modern novel and emptiness*.

Justice Outside the Subaltern Paradigm

Kalpana Ram

Ethnography – including my own ethnographic work among fishing and agricultural laboring castes in Tamil Nadu – attests to a series of complaints that are regularly brought to shrines and mediums all over India. They range from maladies that will not succumb to ordinary cures, to the affect-laden rupture of intimate relationships – lovers, spouses and children who do not love where they should nor exercise duty of care as they ought. These concerns are understood by participants as a quest for justice that heals and restores bonds. Yet despite their orientation to justice and their ubiquity, they are very quickly passed over in the accounts written by scholars. This is particularly the case in intellectual accounts shaped by political traditions of socialism and Marxism, where attention quickly moves on to the complaints that *matter* – those dealing with the state, or with elite domination. The problems brought to the ‘courts’ of shrines and medium remain, in such accounts, ‘problems with no name’, to re-use Betty Friedan’s phrase for women’s complaints in the era before (second wave) feminism.

Should we utilise such concerns to re-think the parameters of the political, or should we concede that there are quite simply, limits to the kinds of concerns that can be handled by the traditions from which Subaltern Studies emerged?

Kalpana Ram’s doctoral field work at the Australian National University in the early 1980s was on the Mukkuvar fishing community of south India, and the presence at the ANU of key members of the subaltern studies group such as Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gyan Pandey provided important elements of this work. She was a founder member, with Professor Jolly, of the Gender Relations Centre at the Australian National University. She has published widely on the changing nature of women’s experiences of puberty and maternity in Tamil fishing and agricultural castes, as well as on the performing art, nationalism and gender in India. Her forthcoming book, *Fertile Disorder. Spirit Possession and projects of subjectivity in rural Tamil Nadu* (University of Hawai’i Press) is a wide ranging attempt to use possession to re-examine the premises of different kinds of modernizing projects. Dr. Ram teaches courses on anthropological theory, phenomenology and India in the Anthropology Department at Macquarie University, where she is the inaugural Director of the newly founded India Research Centre.

The Subject of India's Unique Identity Number

Ursula Rao

Indian governance of poor populations is entering a new era since biometric registration is becoming compulsory for a growing number of social services. State agencies' investments in these new technologies for surveillance and disciplining re-enact the modernising interventions of colonial and post-colonial governments in a new context. This contribution reflects on notions of subaltern subjectivity and how they have been discussed in subaltern studies projects. The contemporary example serves as a reference point for summarising key insights generated by the subaltern studies' discussion about processes of subjection and subjugations. The aim is to articulate the relevance of subaltern studies for current social analysis as well as to ask new provocative questions about subject formation in contemporary India.

Ursula Rao is Associate Professor of Sociology & Anthropology at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Her research focus is urban life and cultural transformations. She has worked in India for over 15 years and has written on urban space, Hindi- and English journalism and ritual theory. Some of her recent English language publications are *News as Cultures. Journalistic Practices and the Remaking of Indian Leadership Traditions* (2010, Oxford: Berghahn) *The Cultural Politics of Disadvantage in South Asia* (Asian Studies Review, Volume 33, Number 4, 2009, edited together with Assa Doron).

Subalterns on Call: Repair Economies and Global Commodities in Contemporary North India
Assa Doron

This paper examines the mobile phone service industry by exploring the experiences of both the people who go to fix their mobile phones and those who service them. Places such as Nokia Care Centres play a vital role in mediating the reshaping of a burgeoning consumer economy, by stressing customer satisfaction and loyalty as directly tied to a corporate identity as expressed through slogans such as 'Nokia: a brand you can trust'. For the customer, these are spaces where one becomes familiar with and socialized into the technical and social protocols of a consumer-driven world, with its attendant modes of organising knowledge and practice. Further, this paper will explore the 'un-sanitized' (informal) aspect of this service economy, by focusing on the pavement 'fixers' (mysterys) who repair mobiles at street-side stalls. It argues that this largely hidden world, bustling with inventive and entrepreneurial activity, is populated almost exclusively by the subaltern classes and reflects how India is engaging with and communication technology and subverting global capitalism. This is an economy that taps into a reservoir of skills, cultural traditions and social capital that enables a substantial section of India's consumers to evade the full impact of a commodity economy. The paper concludes with a reflection on subaltern modes of consumption, whereby the Western 'consume and dispose' model is displaced by a reconfiguration involving repair, recycling and subversion of global capitalism.

Assa Doron is a fellow in anthropology at the School of Culture, History and Language, ANU. He is the author of *Caste, Occupation and Politics on the Ganges* (Ashgate, 2008), and co-editor of the *Cultural Politics of Disadvantage in South Asia* (Asian Studies Review, special issue 2009); *Health, Culture and Religion in South Asia* (Routledge, 2010). He has published on urban modernity, new media, health, and identity politics in north India, in journals such as *Modern Asian Studies*, *South Asia: Social Science and Medicine*, and the *Austrian Journal of Anthropology*. He is currently working on a co-authored book on cell phones in India.

Subaltern Forces: On the Efficacy of the Inhuman in Cultural and Historical Life

Anand Pandian

This paper proposes a critical return to the concept of "forces" at work in subaltern studies, with an eye to questions concerning the activity, agency, or efficacy of inhuman forces, elements, and assemblages in cultural and historical life. I begin with a re-reading of classical passages in the annals of Subaltern Studies that betray the traces of such inhuman activity or efficacy, with respect to vectors such as contamination, rumor, influence, or fate. These passages are confronted with ethnographic materials arising from my own fieldwork with contemporary Tamil popular filmmakers in south India, in which the merciless efficacy of elemental forces such as light, wind, heat, and weight is registered not only in the process of making cinema but also in the form and content of the films that thereby arise. Shifting attention from the creative intentions of elite filmmakers to the immanent potential of the material situations and circumstances in and with which they work, I seek to suggest that subaltern studies continues to offer us vital resources with which to think beyond the human.

Anand Pandian is assistant professor of anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of *Crooked Stalks: Cultivating Virtue in South India* (Duke University Press, 2009), and co-editor of *Ethical Life in South Asia* (Indiana University Press, 2010) and *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference* (Duke University Press, 2003). He has published widely on the cultural politics of modernity, media, space, and nature in south India, in journals such as *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *Cultural Anthropology*, *JRAI*, the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, and *Screen*. He is currently working on an ethnographic investigation of film production practices in Tamil popular cinema.

“Yeh Haath Mujhe De De Gabbar!”: The Dacoit as Subaltern

Mridula Nath Chakraborty

This paper is an enquiry into the figure of the dacoit as a subaltern device. I take, as a productive provocation, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's assertion, in her "Introduction" to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, that the group overlooks the crucial importance of the "concept-metaphor woman" to the functioning of their discourse. I wish to interrogate such a reading of gendered subjectivity by focusing on caste as the other integer that informs social movements in the subcontinent. I take up, for discussion, the figures of the fictional Gabbar Singh, the iconic dacoit from Ramesh Sippy's 1975 Bombay film, *Sholay*, and the real life Phoolon Devi, who defies any representation as *Bandit Queen* or *Devi*, while still occupying the cult-status of gendered caste subversion. Working across Eric Hobsbawm's formulation of "primitive rebels" and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan's postcolonial interpretation of "outlaw women," this paper will look at how these figures are interpellated by the long arm of the law in the secular, democratic nation-state whose judicial structures are derived from the colonial order. While substituting 'caste' for 'gender' does not do away with the foundational fallacy of apprehending subalternity, it does allow us to reconsider how the category of the subaltern itself is a critical agent of the discourse of history-making. This discussion of subalternity thus returns to Spivak's original question of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and reminds us that subalternity is indeed a provisional speaking position and functions as a methodology even as the conditions of its possibilities are shaped and determined by questions of identity formation in relation to modernity.

Mridula Nath Chakraborty is a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Writing and Society Research Group at the University of Western Sydney. She completed her dissertation on postcolonial feminist politics at the University of Alberta, Canada. She has published on diasporic Indian writing and diasporic cinema and on third wave feminism. Her current work involves editing a collection on 'Being Bengali' and also following the lentil trail: a cultural biography of red lentils.

Asylum: Notes Towards Global Subalternities

Ranjana Khanna

Abstract: In “Asylum” Khanna analyzes conceptual links among different sites designated by the term “asylum.” Extending insights concerning one institutional setting (the mental asylum) to asylum’s most expansive version (the nation), she will highlight the manner in which asylums are bound not only by borders but also by strict rules. The space of asylum suggests the rights of institutions over living bodies, rather than the rights of citizens emerging into different spaces. Through figures of sovereignty and subjectivity, asylum highlights the ways in which the sovereign intervenes in lives to formulate concepts of the human and the valuable. This feminist analysis of asylum—related to philosophy, literature, film, art, and architecture—reconceptualizes the boundaries of modernism and its notions of interiors and interiority. She also considers how asylum is a quasi-concept.

Ranjana Khanna works on Anglo- and Francophone Postcolonial theory and literature, Psychoanalysis, and Feminist theory. She has published articles on transnational feminism and psychoanalysis in journals such as "Diacritics," "Art History," "positions: east asia critique," "Screen," "Signs," "Third Text," "differences," "The Duke Journal of Law and Gender." She is the author of two books: "Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism" (Duke University Press, 2003) and "Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation 1830 to the present" (Stanford University Press, 2008). Her current book projects in progress is entitled "Asylum: The Concept and the Practice" and "Technologies of Unbelonging."