

Concepts in Postcolonial Theory: The Subaltern; and the Postcolonial Intellectual G41.2900

Instructor: Rajeswari Sunder Rajan

Description: This course will undertake a detailed examination of two theoretical concepts borrowed from the work of the Italian Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci, which have been appropriated by postcolonial theory with deliberate intent, namely, the 'subaltern' and the 'intellectual'. The study of these terms, distinct but not unrelated, will enable us to engage in a conceptual exploration of the historical formation of subjectivities specifically marked by colonialism. The 'subaltern' figures in postcolonial theory primarily in the work of the Subaltern school of South Asian history, which embarked on a project of 'recovering' the agency of subalterns —peasants, working-classes, tribals, and women-- in anti-colonial resistance movements in India. We shall examine the theoretical claims, the breakthroughs, the limits and contradictions, and the influence of subaltern studies. We shall also read Gayatri Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?,' a major text of postcolonial theory, which asks how subaltern *gendered* subjectivity was framed in the context of British imperialism's intervention into the practice of *sati* (widow immolation) in India.

In our exploration of the genealogy of the 'postcolonial intellectual,' we shall trace this figure's evolution from colonial history -- where he (invariably 'he') is variously viewed as middleman, mimic man, the *evolvee*, the native informant, or a leader of anticolonial resistance movements—into the present--when the politics of the identity and location of the postcolonial theorist herself comes under scrutiny.

The reading list will include selections from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* and 'Southern Question,' and from Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*; key essays from *Subaltern Studies* (there are useful anthologies), and reflections and commentaries on the project (O'Hanlon; Gyan Prakash; Dipesh Chakrabarty; David Ludden); essays from *Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*; James C.Scott; Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'; *I, Rigoberta Menchu*; Fanon, Bourdieu, Said, Spivak, Robbins on the 'postcolonial intellectual'; and a case-study of CLR James or V.S. Naipaul.

Course requirements and grading:

1. Weekly response papers (300 words) (10 best): 50%
2. Final essay (4000 words), due last week of term: 50%

Subaltern: weekly schedule (weeks 1-8)

September 8: Introduction and overview: please read two stories from Devi, *Imaginary Maps* ('The Hunt', 'Douloti').

September 15: Gramsci; Brennan; Green

September 22: Marx; other 'histories from below' (Hobsbawm; E. P. Thompson; C.L. R. James, *Black Jacobins*; *We Were Making History*; Carlo Ginzburg; James Scott; Ambedkar).

September 29: Guha, *Elementary Aspects*; essays from *Selected Subaltern Studies*; Guha, 'Chandra's Death'; Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory*

October 6: Critiques of Subaltern Studies (Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, O' Hanlon, O'Hanlon and Washbrook; Ludden; Sarkar; Gopal; Jalal; Prakash; Spivak, 'Deconstructing Historiography')

October 13: Columbus day. NO CLASSES

October 20: Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'; and responses (Parry, Larsen,

October 27: Latin American Subaltern Studies (Beverley, selections from Latin American SS reader).

November 3: Subaltern Studies and Ireland, Africa, United States (David Lloyd; Cooper; Cherniavsky)

November 10:

November 17: CLASS CANCELLED; Individual meetings this week

November 24:

November 26: (Legislative Monday)

December 1:

December 8:

Subaltern Studies: Reading list

- Ambedkar, B.R.
- *American Historical Review* December 1994 (v.99)—special issue on Subaltern Studies
- Amin, Shahid. *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1995.
- Biehl, Joao. 'Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment,' *Social Text* 68 (Volume 19, Number 3), Fall 2001: 131-149
- Beverley, John. *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory* Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Brennan, T. 'Antonio Gramsci and Postcolonial Theory,' *Diaspora*, 10:2 (Fall 2001): 143-87
- Brennan, T. 'The Southern Intellectual', in Martina Ghosh-Schellhorn, Vera Alexander, eds. *Peripheral Centres, Central Peripheries: India and Its Diaspora(s)*. Berlin: LIT Verlag Berlin-Hamburg-Münster, 2006.
- Brennan, Timothy. *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. Ch. 1 'A small history of Subaltern Studies,' in his *Habitations of modernity : essays in the wake of subaltern studies*. University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 'Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of *Subaltern Studies*,' in Chaturvedi.

- Chatterjee, Partha. 'A Brief History of Subaltern Studies,' in Sebastian Conrad et al. (ed.), *Transnationale Geschichte. Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, Göttingen 2006: 94-104.
- Chaturvedi, Vinayak, ed., *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. London and New York: Verso, 2000.
- Cherniavsky, Eva. 'Subaltern Studies in a U. S. Frame,' *boundary 2*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Summer, 1996): pp. 85-110
- Cheyfitz, Eric. "The (Post)Colonial Predicament of Native American Studies." *Interventions* 4.3 (2002): 405-427.
- Cooper, Frederick. 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History,' in Ludden.
- Dangle, Arjun, ed. *Poisoned Bread: Translations From Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Delhi: Orient Longman, 1992. Read review in *Race and Class* at goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-31411/Poisoned-bread-protest-in-Dalit.html
- Ginzburg, Carlo. 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things I Know About It,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 1. (Autumn, 1993): 10-35.
- Gopal, Priyamvada . 'Reading Subaltern history,' in Neil Lazarus, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Gramsci, Antonio .*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 'Notes on Italian History,' pp. 52-55 and 'The Study of Philosophy,' pp. 323-343.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question,' in *Pre-Prison Writings*, edited Ricahrd Bellamy, trans. Virginia Cox. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994: 313-337; OR from *Selections from Political Writing: 1921-1926*. New York: International Publishers, 1978
- Green, Marcus E. "Gramsci Cannot Speak: Representations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern," *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Fall 2002), pp. 1-24.
- Guha, Ranajit, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Eds. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Essays by Spivak, Guha, Gautam Bhadra, Shahid Amin, David Arnold.
- Guha, Ranajit. "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Guha, Ranajit and Gayatri Spivak (eds.). Oxford University Press, 1989. 37-44. Also in Chaturvedi.
- Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983

- History from below, a collection of excerpts from E. P. Thompson, Christopher Hill, Linebaugh, CLR James etc; online at http://www.caughtlearning.org/files/all_knees_and_elbows_v2.pdf
- Hobsbawm, E. J. *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester UP, 1959.
- Jalal, Ayesha. "Secularists, Subalterns & the Stigma of 'Communalism': Partition Historiography Revisited." *Modern Asian Studies* (July 1996), vol.30, pp.681–9.
- Larsen, Neil. 'Marxism, Postcolonialism and *The Eighteenth Brumaire*,' in Crystal Bartolovich, Neil Lazarus ed. *Marxism, modernity and postcolonial studies*. Cambridge University Press, 2002
- Latin America Subaltern Studies Group, "Founding Statement," *boundary 2* 20 (Fall 1993): 110-121.
- Legras, Horacio. Review of *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader. The Americas* 61.1 (2004): 125-127.
- Lloyd, David. "Discussion: Outside History: Irish New Histories and the 'Subalternity Effect'," *Subaltern Studies*, Volume 9 : 261-280.
- Ludden, David, ed., *Reading Subaltern Studies. Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, London 2001. . Introduction by Ludden, Frederick Cooper.
- Mallon, Florencia E. "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 99 (December 1994) pp. 1491-1515.
- Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire Of Louis Bonaparte*, International Publishers, New York, 1963. On-line text at marxists.org
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind, and David Washbrook, "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, 1 (January 1992): 141-167. Also in Chaturvedi
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind. "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 22, 1 (1988) pp. 189-224. Also in Chaturvedi
- Omvedt, Gail. *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India*, ME Sharpe: Armonk, 1993
- Parry, Benita. "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Oxford Literary Review* Vol. 9 (1987): 27-58. Also included in Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth A. 'The Child in the Basement: States of Killing and Letting Die.' *SAQ*
- Prakash, Gyan. 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism,' *American Historical Review* 99 (December 1994): 1475-1490.

- Prakash, Gyan. 'Writing Post-Orientalist Histories in the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, 2 (April 1990): 383-408. Also in Chaturvedi
- Revel, J. and L. Hunt, eds., *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*. NY: New Press 1995.
- Rodríguez, Ileana (ed.), *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Rodríguez, Ileana. "Is there a Need for Subaltern Studies?" *Disposition* 52, 25 (2005): 43-63.
- Sarkar, Sumit. 'The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies.' In *Writing Social History*. Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1997. pp. 82-108. Also in Chaturvedi
- Scott, James C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale University Press, 1985
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and The Interpretation of Culture*. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. London: Macmillan, 1988. pp. 271-313. Also in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak. Oxford: OUP, 1988.
- Stree Shakti Sangathana, *We Were Making History: Women and the Telangana Uprising*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988; or London: Zed Books, 1989. See also review by Sheila Rowbotham, *Feminist Review*, No. 37 (Spring, 1991), pp. 108-110
- Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari. Ch. 7: 'Outlaw Woman: The Politics of Phoolan Devi's Surrender, 1983.' *The Scandal of the State: Women, Law and Citizenship in Postcolonial India*. Duke UP, 2003.
- Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Victor Gollancz (1963); 2nd edition with new postscript, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, third edition with new preface 1980
- Verdesio, Gustavo ed., *Latin American Subaltern Studies Revisited* Special issue of *Dispositio/Disposition* 25: 52 (2005).
- Williams, R. John. 'Doing History': Nuruddin Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Subaltern Studies, and the Postcolonial Trajectory of Silence,' *Research in African Literatures*, Winter 2006, Vol. 37, No. 4: Pages 161-176
- www.lib.virginia.edu/area-studies/subaltern/ssmap.htm
- www.southasianist.info/india/subone.html

Texts:

The following texts will be available at the book-store:

- Chaturvedi, Vinayak, ed., *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. London and New York: Verso, 2000.
- Gramsci, Antonio *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1973.
- Guha, Ranajit, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Eds. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Rodríguez, Ileana (ed.), *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Devi, Mahasweta. *Imaginary Maps*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. London&New York: Routledge, 1995
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1999
- Menchu, Rigoberta. *I, Rigoberta Menchu*. London & New York: Verso, 1984.