

Panel 28: Subalternity Reconsidered: Political and Epistemological Challenges

Convener: Nikita Dhawan, Junior Professor for Gender and Postcolonial Studies, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt

Abstract: The term 'subaltern' is one of the most important and popular 'travelling concepts' within postcolonial theory. And because concepts travel it becomes necessary to trace the trajectories of their journeys and arrivals. The migration of this Gramscian notion from its Italian location to postcolonial India through the work of the Subaltern Studies group and its reception in the Anglo-American Academy will be the subject of this panel, which will address the following questions: How has scholarship inspired by this category fared in the last twenty five years? Has the inflationary use of the term led to the loss of its critical potential? Or does subalternity remain a seminal category that helps address contemporary theoretical and political issues? In what direction should scholarship on subalternity be pursued?

Using a feminist-postcolonial perspective and approaching the social sciences from a transdisciplinary point of view, we want to discuss issues ranging from the writing of history to the politics of decolonisation. What are the challenges in adopting a view 'from below'? Does the term 'subaltern' help explain better the intersections of 'race', gender, class and caste from a transnational perspective? What projects of 'epistemic change' need to be undertaken in order to undo subalternity? By posing these questions, the panel wants to offer a forum of discussion for all those interested in the advancement of a non-Eurocentric critical theory.

Contact: Nikita Dhawan: dhawan@soz.uni-frankfurt.de