

ICGC SOUTH ASIA SEMINAR SERIES



Image credit: A detail from Shannon Tamara Lewis's *Sometimes But Not Very Often* (2016). Oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm. From the series "Shapeshifters and Other Flows."

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The Hetero-temporality of Subaltern Studies

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Centre for the Study of Developing Societies

Discussant: CSR Shankar (History)

Speaker & discussant will join via Zoom.

Wednesday, September 27, 11 am to 12:30 pm CT

537 Heller Hall (ICGC) Live stream @ icgc.umn.edu

The Subaltern Studies (SS) emerged in South Asia in the 1980s as a radical intellectual movement within the discipline of history. Critiquing the then dominant schools of nationalist, Marxist, and social history - for rendering the peasant and the 'tribal' into pre-political or pre-modern subjects of history - the SS sought to fashion a new historical method and a new historiographical style that could render the subaltern present to modernity. Soon, however, the search for a new historiography led to a critique of the discipline of history itself and a deconstruction of history's complicity in colonial modern epistemologies. In this discussion, I explore the politics of time implicit in the career of the SS school, with a special emphasis on the work of Ranajit Guha, which went beyond, I suggest, its remit as simply a postcolonial mode of thought. Both in its locational politics in South Asia and in its travels across the global academy, the SS, I argue, sought to think through the question of heterogeneous times and thereby reopen the very conceptions of modernity and contemporaneity to radical contestation. The SS was one of the few schools of thought that self-consciously announced its own end in the first decade of the 21st century. Following the different paths subsequently taken by three ex-SS scholars - Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha - I show how the question of temporality came to be variously thematized 'after' the SS moment. I argue that at stake in this rethinking of temporality is a rethinking of the political itself as concept and practice.