| **202** | **Subaltern Studies, space and the geographical imagination (1): planetary geographies and urban imaginations** |
| --- | --- |
| **Research Group(s)** | Historical Geography Research Group History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group |
| **Convenor(s)** | Tariq Jazeel (University College London) Stephen Legg (University of Nottingham) |
| **Chair(s)** | Stephen Legg (University of Nottingham) |
| **Timetable** | Thursday 28 August 2014, Session 2 |
| **Room** | Skempton Building, Lecture Theatre 164 |
| **Session abstract** | In this session we will broadly explore the relationships between Subaltern Studies and critical geography. Our aim is to contribute to the dialogue between theorizations of subalternity and attempts to think critically about space and spatial categorizations. As such, these sessions aim to enact a thoroughgoing conversation between the historiographical innovations of Subaltern Studies and critical practice in cultural, historical and urban geography. If the Subaltern Studies collective attempted to, first, reveal how peasant agency has been effaced from the colonial archive, and second, read those archives against the grain to recover subaltern agency, then what are the implications of this for critical geographical theorizations and explorations of what we might call ‘subaltern spaces, spatialities, and geographical imaginations’? What methodo-philosophical potential does a rigorously geographical engagement with the concept of subalternity pose for geographical thought, whether in historical or contemporary contexts? And what types of craft are necessary for us to seek out subaltern spatialities from both the past and in the present? |
| **Linked Sessions** | [Subaltern Studies, space and the geographical imagination (2): archive, theory, practice](http://conference.rgs.org/Conference/sessions/view.aspx?session=1d765c01-76d5-4945-81d3-a0ce9a0b3d16&programme=202) |

**Geography, ideology, and the difference of space: disciplinary conversations with subaltern studies**

*Tariq Jazeel (University College London)*

This paper makes an argument for rigorous geographical conversations with the Subaltern Studies' historiographical project and its theoretical critiques. Drawing from my own field research and methodological problematics in South Asia, the paper sets out the importance of disciplinary engagements with subaltern studies in order to grasp the radical alterities of spatial difference in global south contexts. In broad terms, the paper argues that disciplinary geographical thought and ‘theory culture’ is ideologically constituted in ways that often fail to bring into representation the contours and politics of radically different spatialities in field contexts far-removed from the EuroAmerican well-springs of disciplinary knowledge production. Interdisciplinary conversations with Subaltern Studies as well as with some of its theoretical critiques, I argue, offer methodological strategies for critical geographers to engage the difference of such spatialities, and moreover to reveal the political workings of such quite other geographies.

**Beyond Southern Theory: New spatialities of urban theorising**

*Jennifer Robinson (University College London)*

The traditions of subaltern studies and a broader postcolonial critique have inspired a growing commitment in urban studies to engaging with urban experiences across the globe. While in principle this makes any city a starting point for theorising the urban, the grounds for bringing different cities into analytical conversation are not well formulated. Thus challenges remain in developing a more global urban studies practice. On what grounds can different urban experiences be brought into conversation? How can dominant knowledges be challenged without their being recentred? Is the post-colonial critique of Euro-American hegemony rendered obsolete with the rise of new centres of dynamic urbanism? Perhaps most significantly, the potential of new theoretical speaking positions grounded in concepts such as the “global South” or specific regions is appealing to some as it promises to establish an ex-centric and critical position from which to offer an alternative theoretical starting point. This paper will argue that while the project to dis/locate dominant theorisations is essential to generate a more global urban studies, undertaking this under the sign of the “South” poses significant risks of (re-)asserting the incommensurability of different cities. Drawing on a reformatted comparative urbanism, this paper will propose a different spatiality for theorising across urban experiences, and reflect on the need to transform the cultures of theorising to build practices of conceptualisation open to their radical revisability.

**Subalternity, everyday life, and urban politicisation**

*Colin McFarlane (Durham University)*

This paper examines what critical engagement with the work of ‘subaltern studies’ might mean for urban geography. By examining the experience and politics of everyday urban life in informal settlements, especially in India, the paper examines what an engagement with subalternity provides, and perhaps does not provide, for how urban researchers think about contestation and political change. In doing so, it examines the wider relation between political change and the status of the ‘everyday’ in critical urban research.

**The actuality of subaltern geographies: reflections from “migrant” worker politics in Gurgaon, India**

*Thomas Cowan (King's College London)*

This paper forms part of my research on garment worker politics and productions of space in Gurgaon, India’s so-called ‘millennial’ city. Both the “Gurgaon model” of private sector-led urban development and governance, and the ongoing protests of factory workers in the city’s periphery have received a wealth of coverage in public discourse in recent years. Such coverage tends to represent the city through the lens of global capital trends, “post-politics”, “modernity”, liberty, or else as a third world peculiarity embedded in the Indian psyche. Against such representations, which tend to rely on abstracted, Eurocentric essentialisms, this paper utilises debates and developments within and against the Subaltern Studies Collective, to explore the tension between the radically heterogeneous, irrecoverable form of subaltern spatialities and their integral relation to historically and geographically specific hegemonic practices. In doing so the paper seeks to both critically engage with discourses which efface such a tension and take to task the challenges of bringing subaltern spatialities toward representation.

| **239** | **Subaltern Studies, space and the geographical imagination (2): archive, theory, practice** |
| --- | --- |
| **Research Group(s)** | Historical Geography Research Group History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group |
| **Convenor(s)** | Tariq Jazeel (University College London) Stephen Legg (University of Nottingham) |
| **Chair(s)** | Tariq Jazeel (University College London) |
| **Timetable** | Thursday 28 August 2014, Session 3 |
| **Room** | Skempton Building, Lecture Theatre 164 |
| **Session abstract** | In this session we will broadly explore the relationships between Subaltern Studies and critical geography. Our aim is to contribute to the dialogue between theorizations of subalternity and attempts to think critically about space and spatial categorizations. As such, these sessions aim to enact a thoroughgoing conversation between the historiographical innovations of Subaltern Studies and critical practice in cultural, historical and urban geography. If the Subaltern Studies collective attempted to, first, reveal how peasant agency has been effaced from the colonial archive, and second, read those archives against the grain to recover subaltern agency, then what are the implications of this for critical geographical theorizations and explorations of what we might call ‘subaltern spaces, spatialities, and geographical imaginations’? What methodo-philosophical potential does a rigorously geographical engagement with the concept of subalternity pose for geographical thought, whether in historical or contemporary contexts? And what types of craft are necessary for us to seek out subaltern spatialities from both the past and in the present? |
| **Linked Sessions** | [Subaltern Studies, space and the geographical imagination (1): planetary geographies and urban imaginations](http://conference.rgs.org/Conference/sessions/view.aspx?session=18e7d992-798d-4855-bf3e-0ec1365dfd84&programme=239) |

**Subaltern Space: Empirical and Analytical locations in the Ashrams of Colonial Delhi**

*Stephen Legg (University of Nottingham)*

In this paper I will engage the writings of Gayatri Spivak on the figure of the subaltern, focusing on a recurrent tension in her writings and in readings of them. The tension is between two seemingly contradictory definitions of the subaltern. One, more empirical definition, has featured in Spivak’s writings for over 25 years and identifies the subaltern as the non-elite, the immobile or the figure beyond the reach of the state. Against this more empirical definition comes the famous analytical definition of the subaltern as he or she that “cannot speak”, being defined by their inaccessibility in the archive, as broadly conceived. This presentation will suggest that these two definitions have their respective forms of space, which suggest and demand different methodologies. I will suggest that an over-emphasis on the analytical definition has led to an over-cautious approach to subaltern spaces, neglecting the compulsion to attempt to find and say something about subaltern spaces which Spivak suggests. I will briefly examine a report into abuse of women in some of Delhi’s ashrams in the 1930s to suggest how we can use studies of empirically verifiable subaltern space to think about the analytically subaltern spaces which must always be beyond exploration.

**Interrogating the Relationalities of Subaltern Politics**

*David Featherstone (University of Glasgow)*

Partha Chatterjee has recently argued that ‘subaltern histories’ have not engaged adequately with the translocal formation of subaltern politics (Chatterjee 2012: 49). His argument-speaks to a set of tensions around the intersections of claims to place and debates around anthropology and history in the work of the collective. It also raises significant questions about the relationalities at work in different articulations of subaltern studies. This paper seeks to trace different ways in which the relationalities of subaltern politics has been viewed by Gramsci, in the work of Guha and Chatterjee in the 1980s and in relation to more recent debates around the heterogenous time-spaces of the nation and what Chakrabarty has termed history 1 and history 2. The paper will conclude by arguing that recovering forms of subaltern agency crafted through, or in relation to, translocal processes offers ways of contributing to accounts of subaltern politics as bearing on the ‘active determination of space and society’ (Chari, 2013).

**Postcolonial Tanzania, the Dar School and pan-African geographical imaginations**

*Jo Sharp (University of Glasgow)*

During the first two decades of Tanzanian independence, and especially the period after the announcement of its intention to follow an independent path of African socialism after the Arusha Declaration, Julius Nyerere sought to challenge the geopolitics of colonialism and the Cold War. Like many other Third World leaders at the time, he sought a voice for those previously marginalised from the imaginings of the world order, and to move towards an alternative geographical imagination of a united Africa and an alliance of the poor. Within this political context, the University of Dar es Salaam was established as a postcolonial site of learning. During this period, there were intense debates around the meaning of African knowledge, the role of the postcolonial university, and the most appropriate future for Tanzania, Africa and the Third World. While subaltern studies has, of course, been associated with the Indian subcontinent, much of what Nyerere and many of the academics at the University of Dar es Salaam were attempting to achieve could be seen to have similar concerns with recovering the voice of those marginalised from history. Drawing on this period, this paper will explore the challenge of bringing subaltern spatialities and imaginations into academic and political practice.

**Subalternity’s Space?**

*Vinay Gidwani (University of Minnesota, USA)*

In framing the matter so, I want to pose two questions both pertinent to our present conjuncture: First, what if any is the continued analytical and political salience of the term “subalternity,” which is now the object of a capacious, inter-disciplinary scholarship? Second, given the relative paucity of geographical scholarship on “subalternity” (there are notable exceptions, of course) how might a spatial imagination enliven our thinking about the itineraries of subordination and insubordination? Indeed, is there a case to be made that the confrontation of subalternity and space could recharge what at times appears a tired engagement between left political economy and postcolonial studies?