

The Cosmopolitan Subaltern

Marginalized Literature and Culture in a Globalizing World, June 4-7, 2008

CALL FOR PAPERS

*The cosmopolitan ideal—take your roots with you—
is one in which people are free to choose the local
forms of human life within which they will live.*

Kwame Anthony Appiah. "Cosmopolitan Patriots"

The conference will analyze the possibilities of overcoming the subaltern dilemma of restricted agency by interrogating issues of subalternity and cosmopolitanism.

Subalternity denotes a position of relative dependence towards another, hegemonic position, describing a difference in power, income, education and/or health. This can be found on the national and global level, as not just individuals but also whole countries can be seen as being in a subaltern position with respect to a hegemon. Formal independence and sovereignty do not guarantee equality in a global discourse.

As noted by Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large*, today's world can be understood as a confluence of several "scapes" (ideascapes, finance-scapes, ethno-scapes, etc.), areas in which individuals transnationally define and create communities beyond nation-state borders. Such new visions of community and identity compel us to question subalternity in the context of post-national and post-ethnic realities and the various regimes of structural violence that restrict, confine and define the transnational public sphere. These interactions with each other influence how we are able to perceive and alter the world — and offer the challenge to interrogate and redefine the various categories and conditions that define the subaltern.

Frequently, the direct origin of the subaltern condition, if localizable at all as a solitary cause, has been alleviated. Slavery in the United States has been abolished, Native Americans have been granted citizenship and (limited) self-governance on Indian reservations, former colonies have become independent — still, problems remain that can be attributed to structural violence and racism.

Gender oppression can be found in both hegemonic and subaltern cultures. However, the sexism of the majority culture can be said to be different from sexism within marginalized groups, as the latter oftentimes seems to be an answer to discrimination according to race or social status. In response to oppression, men from marginalized social or ethnic groups may project a certain "hypermasculinity", which — as in rap or religious fundamentalism — arises as a lingua franca of the oppressed. This, however, appears to infringe on women's and gay rights, and also limits males to a specific role. Furthermore, issues relating to gender discrimination also affect transnational or cosmopolitan mobility.

Please tell us about your intended participation and the topic as soon as possible, and submit your abstract and a short biography for a 20-minute presentation till the end of April 2008.

Further information can be found on the conference web site:

www2.hu-berlin.de/amerika/asc/cosmopolitan

Organizers: Prof. Eva Boesenberg, Allison Davis-White Eyes, Philipp Kneis, Manuela Mangold, Daniela Simon

Contact: Philipp Kneis: phil@philjohn.com (for submissions & inquiries)

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Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, Montana

Disability, similarly, immediately relegates the individual to subaltern status. This curtailment of agency raises issues of access for disabled individuals concerning employment, health care, productivity, economic mobility, and both perceived and imagined regimes of dependency within society and the State.

Subalternity is not just limiting in a financial or power-related sense. Freedom of expression and freedom of thought are as limited as more concrete freedoms of movement, work choice and political participation. It has also been postulated that it is connected with a specific colonized mindset, a condition similar to the psychological phenomenon of codependency. We will discuss whether a cosmopolitan perspective offers a means of overcoming subaltern structures.

Yet the idea of cosmopolitan culture, of true world culture, may in itself be hegemonic. It may not be an accident that one of the most globalized cultural icons, the James Bond films, set and produced in various "corners" of the world, function largely as a reflection on the state of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The hegemonic text sees the world as its playground — and the subaltern text is apparently restricted to its modest local surroundings. Cosmopolitanism, being at home in the world, appears as something restricted to the elite. Whether labor migration, as a trans-national phenomenon on a working-class level, will be able to create a cosmopolitan, and not just a subaltern, identity remains to be seen.

These and other issues such as tourism, communication technology, post-national identity development, structural violence, diasporas, and the development of various "scapes" will be examined at the conference.

Academic professionals and students of all faculties are invited to present their papers or just listen.

The Conference will be opened by a keynote lecture by **Prof. Timothy Brennan**, University of Minnesota.



American Studies