

Center for South Asian Studies Spring Symposium 2024 Full Program (Text Only)

South Asian Futures

April 10-12, 2024

Hamilton Library, Room 301

Symposium Website: <https://southasiasymposium2024.wordpress.com/>

With aloha, the Center for South Asian Studies acknowledges its occupation of ancestral, traditional and contemporary lands of the Indigenous Hawaiian people, the Kānaka Maoli. With gratitude, we honor the 'āina and the generations who steward it.

Wednesday, April 10

4:00 Keynote Presentation: Vijay Prashad

South Asia and the New Cold War

Welcome: Anna Stirr (Asian Studies, CSAS Director, UHM)

Introductions: Pallavi Gupta (Geography, UHM)

Moderator: Jairus Grove (Political Science, UHM)

Abstract: For the past decade, the United States has imposed a set of policies to ensure the continuation of its leading role in the Asian region. These policies are largely - but not exclusively - directed toward China. One feature of these policies is the Indo-Pacific Strategy, which has drawn South Asia into the New Cold War. The countries of South Asia, which have been unable to forge any serious integration for historical reasons, are now less likely to advance a South Asian regional project in the midst of this New Cold War.

Bio: Vijay is an Indian historian and journalist. He is the author of forty books, including *Washington Bullets*, *Red Star Over the Third World*, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South*, and *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power* (2022), written with Noam Chomsky. Vijay is the executive director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, the chief correspondent for Globetrotter, and the chief editor of LeftWord Books (New Delhi). He also appeared in the films *Shadow World* (2016) and *Two Meetings* (2017).

Thursday, April 11

8:45 Continental Breakfast

8:45 Welcome

9:00-10:00 Panel 1: Futures in Literature

Moderator: Monica Ghosh (Department Chair and South Asia Librarian, Hamilton Library, UHM)

***Utopian Histories: The Places and Times of Rahul Sankrityayan's Baisvin Sadi* – Anju Parvathy Biju, University of Pennsylvania**

“This paper focuses on the Hindi writer and polymath Rahul Sankrityayan’s utopian text *Baisvin Sadi* (The Twenty-Second Century). Published in 1924 and conceived earlier while he was imprisoned for anti-colonial activities, the work imagines the experiences of a teacher who wakes up in 2124 to an Indian subcontinent that is not only free from British rule, but also of the social divisions of caste, ethnicity, and religion. Deeply influenced by the Russian Revolution and the promise of a world without property and hierarchy, the work can be interpreted as a triumphant expression of technological progress and an uncomplicated nationalism, if read superficially. However, my paper will push against this by exploring the notion of the historicity of the utopian future in Sankrityayan’s text: embedded within the locations in the novel such as Nalanda is a sense of deeper time and a geography that violates the bounded nature of the nation-state, extending outwards and drawing other places and times into its world. *Baisvin Sadi* and Sankrityayan’s later works revisiting its themes make us pay attention to the residue of the past in imagined futures. It is this historicity that animates the critical impulse of a seemingly uncomplicated utopianism and informs the localized nature of Sankrityayan’s cosmopolitan socialist concerns. I will draw from both the existing scholarship on late colonial India’s connections with the wider world and literary theorizations of utopia to make this argument.”

***Dreaming Futures: Speculative Fiction's Imaginings of Pakistan's Future(s)* – Nudrat Kamal, University of Pennsylvania**

“The subsection of South Asian speculative fiction that has been involved in articulating visions of the future has its roots in the distinctly political and anti-colonial discourse of 19th century. In contrast to visions of the future that came from the minds of writers from Western Europe and North America, South Asian visions of the future have a more complicated relationship to modernity, because the subcontinent’s own relationship to modernity has been shaped by its colonial past and continues to be mediated by neocolonialism and global capitalism. This paper will argue that it is worth investigating the specificities of such futuristic texts to see whether they can be gathered into visions of a collective and transnational future for South Asia which we might call “South Asian futurisms.” Within this larger body of South Asian futurisms, this paper will trace the futuristic visions articulated by various Pakistani writers and artists, to explore the kind of futures that are being envisaged by writers who are located in specific local sociopolitical contexts of Pakistan and who are drawing on various Pakistani histories and cultures. Exploring Urdu satirist writer Muhammad Khalid Akhtar’s dystopian novella *Bees Sau Gyara* (Twenty-Eleven) published in 1954, the animated Urdu short film “*Shehr-e-Tabassum*” (The Smiling City) created by Arafat Mazhar in 2020, and the English-language short story “*Nearly Human*” by Kehkashan Khalid published in 2021, this paper will argue that the narrative possibilities afforded by the genre of science fiction offers a vibrant poetics and vocabulary to explore questions of the impacts of (neo)colonialism, global capitalism, religious nationalism, and climate change on the subcontinent.”

10:15-11:45 Keynote Presentation: Sadaf Padder

Introduction and Moderator: Sai Bhatawadekar (Hindi/Urdu/Theatre & Dance, UHM)

Coasting the Topography of South Asian Futurisms in Contemporary Art

Abstract: Artists, thinkers, and activists around the world are creatively adapting existing terminologies to describe their visions of futurism, pivoting away from the homogenizing term “Indo-futurism.”

Independent curator Sadaf Padder aims to map a topography of South Asian futurisms, and render visible the multiple strategies used by artists to adapt and develop new futurisms, including Dalit futurism, subaltern futurism, Queer Muslim futurism, eco-futurism and Sufi Sci-Fi futurism. She presents convergences and divergences with the mother of futurisms - Afro-Futurism - by highlighting artists using various modes of technology as a tool to mine archival and oral histories, the artists highlighted craft hybridized and mutated beings, new mythologies, rituals, and concepts of time toward speculative, expansive, and posthuman futures.

Bio: Sadaf Padder is a Brooklyn-based independent curator, writer and community organizer focused on excavating under-recognized contemporary art movements and histories related to the Global South. She has curated across the country, from Philadelphia to Los Angeles to Martha’s Vineyard, focusing on themes of social justice, futurism, radical liberation movements, caste abolition, climate change and neo-mythology to weave connections between various communities. Padder is uniquely informed by her background as a public school educator and administrator of eight years. She maintains a dedicated community-based practice where she develops youth arts programs and internships. Her curations have earned mentions in LA Weekly, Hyperallergic and Art News and resulted in acquisitions of BIPOC women artists by the Baltimore Museum of Art, Northwestern University and the Nion McEvoy Foundation. Padder has contributed writing to Visual Aids, ARTSY, Up Mag and Hyperallergic. She also serves as a board member for the Chickweed Alliance and ArtBridge; is lead fundraiser for Grown in Haiti, where she is building a community center and artist retreat in Jacmel, Haiti; and is a member of Phoenix Community Garden, where she runs community events and youth programs. She is a Create Change alumna with the Laundromat Project as well as a 2022–23 Emily J. Hall Tremaine Fellow via Hyperallergic.

11:45-12:45 LUNCH

12:45-1:45 Panel 2: Recognition, Rights, Sovereignty

Tourism Futures and Afterlives on Nepal’s Tamang Heritage Trail – Ian Bellows, Cornell University

“Between 2003 and 2006, the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP) created the Tamang Heritage Trail (THT) trekking circuit in Nepal’s Rasuwa District. Guided by a pro-poor, community-based approach, the TRPAP sought to promote poverty alleviation and socioeconomic development through ethnic heritage tourism. While the new circuit was initially successful, tourism

declined following the 2015 Gorkha earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, the THT attracts a few hundred trekkers per year, no longer enough to support the dozens of households in rural mountain villages that once depended on tourism-related livelihoods. Drawing on participatory mixed-methods research conducted in the THT-area villages of Briddhim and Gatlang, this presentation examines the futures and afterlives of tourism in contemporary Rasuwa. Like other mountain regions in the Nepal-China borderlands, Rasuwa has experienced accelerating climate change impacts, rapid sociocultural change, and the emergence of new cross-border economies driven by broader processes of development and state formation. The TRPAP's investment in people and communities made substantial improvements to infrastructure, sanitation and health, and education access. Tourism has also fostered new forms of cross-cultural exchange and spatial mobility. For local people, most of whom belong to historically-marginalized Tamang and Tibetan Indigenous minorities, these transformations have created new life possibilities and new avenues to advocate for recognition and rights. Regardless of whether tourism fully recovers or how it may continue to evolve, it has already given some community members new agency to decide what they want their communities to be like and work toward their imagined futures.”

Sardar aur Sarkar: The Climate Justice Implications of Balochistan's Sovereignty Movement – Aqsa Mengal, Yale University

“This study delves into the history of Balochistan's ongoing sovereignty movement as expressed through its calls for equitable resource allocation, reparational royalties, and politico-economic autonomy. Given that the Pakistani province is rich in highly coveted resources, minerals, and a strategically located deep seaport, economic imperialism and hyper-militarization have been utilized by the state of Pakistan since its establishment in 1947. Overlaid with growing climate disasters, the environmental challenges facing indigenous communities are compounded by historical disinvestment and state-sanctioned violence. By utilizing a theoretical framework that traces the ongoing sovereignty movement to the historical processes of colonialism and its manifestations in the post-colonial Pakistani-state, this paper conceptualizes Balochistan's sovereignty movement as a corollary to the contemporary climate justice movement in the Global South and its reparational approach to justice. This study will engage with the works of Olufemi Taiwo, Carmen Gonzalez, and Laura Pulido to problematize the role of the Pakistani state and situate it as a functionary of racial capitalism. The methodology employed includes an analysis of primary and secondary sources in the form of books, journal articles, newspaper editorials, and publications and social media posts by grassroots environmental advocacy organizations operating in Balochistan. The study finds that the sovereignty movement's calls for procedural and distributive justice as constitutive of its broader aim towards reparational justice are in line with grassroots climate justice activism in the province, which is tied to the global climate justice movement working to dismantle racial capitalism and structural systems of oppression.”

Banjaxed Sovereignty: Reimagining the Needful - Non Sovereign Democratization – Mangalika de Silva, New York University

"How did the 2022 janatha aragalaya (struggle or people's struggle), a populist mobilization in Sri Lanka, occupy and politicize the commons of Galle Face Green, Colombo, where they instituted a terra nullius of democracy ex nihilo? Through what novel modes did they reimagine a civil society and successfully

contest a kleptocracy that brutally (mis)governed through essentialist and Manichean ethnocentric patronage, discrimination and inequity? Aragalaya was galvanized by the economic implosion precipitated by massive state debt causing severe shortages of consumer goods due to currency collapse. Through clandestine, transactional patron-client networks, state kleptocracy had sabotaged governmental proceduralism by means of repression or cooptation of existing civil society agencies. Aragalaya effectively challenged the unilaterality of executive fiat and dissimulation by scandalizing the political establishment and electrifying mass support with parodic, profaning and scatological imagery and critique. I contend that aragalaya was politically effective as it envisioned and enacted, in microcosm, institutional protocols and distributive services neglected or abandoned by the state's token safety net sectors. In opposing state corruption, aragalaya allegorically jettisoned the existing public sphere in order to inaugurate an imaginal post-ethnic political topography. They resurrected long disused and reviled ideals of liberty, emancipation, and equality that the multitude had yet to experience under a postcolonial nation state founded on inequitable and violent racialization. Aragalaya nonviolent movement was only demobilized by state violence authorized by the Prevention of Terrorism Act. This paper examines aragalaya's occupation and imagined community through ethnographic analysis of its manifestos, public service culture, utopian cartography, visual culture and soundscapes."

2:00-3:00 Panel 3: Futures Past

Moderator: Ned Bertz (History, UHM)

Low carbon futures or futures past? : Examining complexities of energy transitions in rural Eastern India – Nikita Das, University at Buffalo

"This paper analyzes the haphazard nature of energy transitions exemplary of the challenges decarbonization poses for rural Indian communities, as low-carbon futures contradict post-colonial development dreams. The study builds on energy-related anthropological studies and adds to the literature on just transitions. Historically, India's development dream encompassed nation-building through largescale industrial projects which became beacons of modern India that promised surfeit employment opportunities. Although this dream continues to feed aspirations of the rural Indian, it must also dovetail with allaying climate crises concerns. Hence, the government has begun implementing decarbonization strategies like gradual phase-out of thermal power projects and promotion of Electric Vehicles (EVs). However, such processes have complex effects on the rural populace whose aspirations are rooted in development. This study elucidates these effects through ethnographic fieldwork (comprising of interviews and oral histories), conducted over twelve months in Srikhanda, an Eastern Indian village. The community was to host a thermal power project which they hoped would bring in secure job opportunities. But the project never came to fruition, leaving the community in a state of uncertainty. Instead, driving the toto, a popular three-wheeler EV became a common form of livelihood albeit precarious. Hence, Srikhanda underscores the arrival of energy transitions but with the non-arrival of secure jobs while becoming a hub for a precarious form of work. The paper concludes that acknowledging the temporal and dialogic nature of energy transition in the South Asian context is imperative to construct just energy futures that are cognizant of development and environmental goals."

Anomalous Pathans in a Cosmopolitan City: The 1929 Hindu-Muslim Riots and New Political Reasoning in Colonial Bombay – Ninad Pandit, The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art

“The Pathan is an anomaly in Bombay,” wrote Shripad Dange, a founding member of the Communist Party of India and the leading communist from Bombay, in a 1929 letter to the Bombay Riots Inquiry Commission. The Commission was investigating a major Hindu-Muslim riot in the city that started with Hindu workers attacking Pathans—Muslims from Afghanistan. In his letter, Dange generalized “the Pathan” as an alien in Bombay, someone that refused to integrate socially, did not live by the rules of social contract, and instead “grabbed whatever he wished to have.” Dange argued that as money lenders and strike breakers, Pathans had alienated themselves from Bombay’s workers, and that the attacks on Pathans were merely an instance of class conflict, where radical workers imposed mob justice on their class oppressors. Ignoring the long history of religious conflict and segregation in the city and the fact that the riot had targeted all Muslims, Dange contrived the working class as devoid of religion or caste, bound together by unswerving class solidarity. Drawing on Marathi-language archival material from the 1920s-30s including interviews, letters, police records, and speeches, this paper argues that this enterprising employment of the language of class to reframe an ethic-religious conflict as a class conflict reveals a larger pattern of public political reasoning in the region that would be employed repeatedly, including in the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, and ultimately contribute to the decline of the Left in western India. At the same time, it represents a “path not taken” for the Left in colonial India, and a point of departure for a speculative alternative history of the Indian Left where differences of faith, ethnicity, and caste were overcome politically, rather than “theorized” away.”

The Future as Critique – Tabinda Mahfooz Khan, El Colegio de Mexico

“This paper compares the conception of time found in the narrative of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (2018-) with conceptions found in the poetry of Hali and Iqbal, which influenced Indian Muslim nationalism, and those offered by communist poets such as Faiz. The speeches of PTM leaders, such as Manzoor Pashteen, Ali Wazir, and Wrranga Luni, as well as the movement’s Pashto song *Da Sang Azadi Da* (“What kind of freedom is this?”), contain a critique of the present, with a future that is indeterminate and grows from the people’s criticism, resistance, and solidarity. While Hali’s *Musaddas* and Iqbal’s *Shikva* and *Javab-e-Shikva* saw Muslim empires as a golden age and Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s *Hum DekhaiN Ge* constructed a future utopia where people would rule in lieu of kings, PTM leaders idealize neither the future nor the past. They draw on the legacy of Bacha Khan’s non-violent resistance, but after more than 60 years of post-colonial “independence”, they are radically skeptical of the state as an agent of emancipation or of state-centered nationalism. Their narrative is centered on the idea of “*Lar o Bar Yau Afghani*” (“whether in the lowlands or highlands, Afghans are one”), a conception of community that transcends borders and nation-states. In this sense, their narrative is closer to Fehmida Riaz’s vision in the poem *Tum Bilkul Hum Jaise Nikle*, which sees Hindutva and Islamism as two sides of the same coin. PTM’s future is a critique of state power and of narratives used to justify imperialism and authoritarianism. “

3:15-4:15 The Road Beyond *Ningwasum*: A Roundtable on Himalayan Indigenous Futures

Moderator: Pasang Yangjee Sherpa (Anthropology, UBC)

Roundtable Participants:

Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa, Charisma Lepcha, Elspeth Iralu, Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia, Mabel Gergan, Pasang Yangjee Sherpa, and Sara Smith.

This roundtable makes reference to the first film, *Ningwasum*, by our next keynote speaker Subash Thebe Limbu (4:30 pm). We will be showing his second film *Ladhamba Tayem: Future Continuous* directly following this roundtable; Viewing *Ningwasum* will help all participants understand the references in this roundtable and also participate more deeply in conversation with Subash following his keynote address. Subash Thebe Limbu has kindly provided links for symposium attendees to watch his films, which will be available from now until two weeks after the symposium:

Ningwasum

<https://vimeo.com/722133964?share=copy>
password- yunchhoppa

Ladhamba Tayem: Future Continuous

<https://vimeo.com/subashthebe/ladhambatayem?share=copy>
password- philinge

Roundtable Abstract

At a time when glaciers are melting, rivers are flooding, and crops are suffering from erratic rainfall and drought cycles, Himalayan Indigenous communities are envisioning new futures that push back on discourses of crisis and urgency, and instead uplift abundance and return in the mountains, valleys, and across the universe. In this roundtable, Himalayan scholars engage in discussions to delve into important creative interventions that have emerged as iridescent pathways forward. Limbu filmmaker and artist Subash Thebe Limbu's science fiction documentary *Ningwasum* (2022) and Naga scholar of religion Arkotong Longkumer and artist Meren Imchen's graphic novel *The Road Home* (2022) both draw deeply on traditional narrative forms while making use of contemporary technologies and media. This roundtable will examine three themes of time, land, and relatedness in these two works and our field sites in the Himalayan region. Roundtable participants will draw on historical, ethnographic, literary, geographical, and religious studies methods to demonstrate how these works and their Himalayan interlocutors intervene in historical, colonial forms of misrepresentation of the region by providing rich, layered cosmologies that move through the injustices of the past, rejecting visions of the mountains as ripe for resource extraction, and instead celebrates Himalayan sovereignties across space and time.

Individual Abstracts (not necessarily in order of presentation, which is TBA by the roundtable participants)

***Speculative Futures without the Heating Colony: Ningwasum in Genealogies of Himalayan and Global Indigenous Science Climate Fiction Cosmologies* - Amy Holmes-Tachungdarpa, Occidental College**

Ningwasum is a multilayered work. It is at once an expression of a specific vision of future, tied intimately to Himalayan cosmologies and mountains and a bold vision for Yakthungba futurities. At the same time, it is an expression of global Indigenous coalitions that aspire towards futures for local communities to flourish, within and beyond the nation state, thereby rejecting colonial pasts and histories

of discrimination and genocide and the nation's inaction of climate-induced harm. This chapter will position *Ningwasum* within both genealogies, demonstrating how the film is part of longer creative histories in the Himalayas that connect local cultures to the universe. These longer histories both reject and build on colonial histories of representation of the Himalayas in science fiction and speculative fiction writing and film; and is also part of global movements in speculative and science fiction that are part of "cli-fi" trends, but are also distinctive due to their expression of local cultures and histories. I will position this discussion by drawing on scholarly works from anthropology, critical Indigenous studies, environmental humanities, histories of Orientalism, studies of Indigenous science and speculative fiction, and religious studies.

***Ritual as Time Travel and Renewing Intergalactic Relations in Ningwasum* - Kalzang Dorje Bhutia, ACLS**

A vivid scene towards the end of *Ningwasum* sees the film's two main characters begin to perform the Chyabrung to transport themselves through time and space. This movement demonstrates vividly the transformative potential of ritual in the Indigenous Himalayas. In this paper, I will examine the idea of ritual as a form of time travel by examining ethnographic and textual materials related to ritual traditions from three communities that are considered Indigenous in Sikkim: the Chyabrung as it is performed by the Yakhungba (Subba) community; Muk Zek Ding Rum Faat, from the traditions of the first people of Sikkim, the Rong (Lepcha); and the Nesol, the Buddhist ritual tradition performed across different ethnic communities that participate in Buddhism. In these ritual traditions, the performers invoke and reaffirm inter dimensional relationships between humans and more-than-humans in the mountains, and especially connectedness between the people and their land. *Ningwasum* raises a generative way to think beyond just the mountains, though, as Subash Thebe's theorization, such rituals can be a way to connect rituals of the past with Indigenous futurities.

***Ningwasum: The Futures We Are Creating* - Pasang Yangjee Sherpa, University of British Columbia**

In this paper, I explore two documentaries that tell the story of the Sherpa people and the place that continues to nurture us to understand how our past and present have been expressed. This understanding is necessary to create the futures we want, guided by our individual and collective imagination. The first documentary was part of the *Disappearing World* series that showed the socio-economic changes Sherpa families experienced in the 1970s with the advent of the tourism industry in Khumbu. The second is Subash Thebe Limbu's *Ningwasum*. The remarkable visuals in this film that tell the story of the interplanetary and interstellar civilization of the future were shot in Khumbu. The film refers to it as the Sherwa Nation. I assess the visual material in these documentaries through my lived Indigenous experience: as a Sherpa woman born and raised in Kathmandu, currently living and working on Musqueam land as an uninvited settler; a climate change researcher invested in the questions of sustainability; and as a Sherpa mother motivated to create a liveable future for all. I conclude the paper with remarks about how these documentaries lead us to weave our own memories of the place that make us who we are. If the future is located at the merging of temporality and spatiality as with Miksam's dream in *Ningwasum*, I ask what might solidarities of Adivasis, Dalits, Madhesis, Indigenous, Blacks and all currently marginalized people look like in the future? I offer an invitation to further query Limbu's 'Adivasi Futurism' to re-view and re-define progress that de-link itself from the idea of nation states and the colonialist narrative of Indigenous Peoples as 'primitive.'

Indigenous Superheroes as Role Models and Game Changers to Indigenous Futures - Charisma Lepcha, University of Sikkim

Taking cue from Miksam and Mingsoma, from Subash Thebe Limbu's Ningwasum, this paper makes an attempt to imagine and establish the importance of Indigenous superheroes. Hollywood superheroes have long dominated even the imagination of Indigenous children and the influence of these characters leave lasting impressions in their over all development, although majority of the adventures and explorations may not be familiar to their realities.

In recent years, there has been a rise of Indigenous filmmakers from the Himalayas who weaves the stories of our land and our ancestors into twenty-first century story-telling methods and techniques that bring them at par with filmmakers from across the world. They introduce us to Indigenous characters that are cool, confident, courageous and compassionate. These characters take center stage as they encounter various challenges and trials of our precarious times. While we usually see tokenism at play with the exploitation of Indigenous stories adapted for box office hits that are often racist and discriminatory. The entry of an indigenous filmmaker brings Indigenous stories alive and make us hopeful of futures of solidarity and reclamation.

The key to these films are characters like Miksam and Mingsoma from Ningwasum. Likewise, this paper will also talk about Dhokbu –a character from a Lepcha film made by Dawa Lepcha, another Indigenous filmmaker from the Himalayas. It will engage with these characters of Miksam, Mingsoma and Dhokbu as are our heroes –our Indigenous superheroes from the Himalayas who are here to guide and strengthen our existence as we tackle the uncertain futures in the Anthropocene.

Narrating Indigenous Himalayan Landscapes in Dhokbu and Ningwasum - Mabel Denzin Gergan, Vanderbilt University

In India's Eastern Himalayan region, a profound landscape transformation is underway. Massive hydropower projects have stilled river waters while tunneling for railway lines and dams have left behind scarred, crumbling hillsides. In places like Sikkim, state officials have welcomed these projects for their potential to generate revenue and aid private capital flow. But it has also led to anxieties over land dispossession, environmental hazards, and the desecration of sacred sites especially among Indigenous communities. Across the border in the Nepali Himalaya, a similar dynamic is unfolding with hydropower and other infrastructural development being aggressively promoted by national and international actors.

To counter capitalist and Hindu nationalist notions of Himalayan landscapes as national property and resource, in this paper I foreground Indigenous conceptions of landscape through the lens of two filmmakers Dawa Lepcha and Subhash Thebe Limbu. Belonging to the Rong (Lepcha) and Yakthung (Limbu) communities, both Dawa and Subhash center Indigenous language and storytelling in their films, exploring themes of memory, temporality, and the power of sacred landscapes. *Dhokbu – the Keeper* is set in Dzongu, a place revered as sacred by Lepchas and follows a young researcher who encounters Dhokbu, a mythical superhero, who offers her protection while regaling her with stories of the land. Ningwasum, follows time-travelers Miksam and Mingsoma, who tell us they come from a future timeline where

Yakthung people have sovereignty, agency and mastery over time-travel technology. I analyze how both film invite us to attend to Indigenous encounters with extractive economies, nation-states, and time itself.

Our Land is Ours: Experiences of Naga Sovereignty - Elspeth Iralu, University of New Mexico

Articulations of Naga sovereignty have historically been narrated by nationalist political groups seeking regional and international recognition of Nagas as a nation-state. This paper considers shifting articulations of Naga sovereignty that take into account Naga assertions of Indigeneity and offer visions of Indigenous nationhood beyond the model of the Westphalian nation-state. While not rejecting the political visions of the early Naga movement, emerging conversations about Naga nationhood envision a sovereignty enacted in the here and now and felt through lived experience. This vision of Naga sovereignty is a response to the “not yet” of “when we get our sovereignty.” I consider this embodied sovereignty through the graphic novel “A Path Home,” written by Arkotong Longkumer, illustrated by Meren Imchen, and published by the Recover, Restore, and Decolonize Collective. The work of the collective, and the graphic novel itself, trace connections between Nagas’ multiple experiences of colonialism, and between the Naga experience and those of Indigenous peoples globally. In this paper, I place this graphic novel in the context of emerging Naga political thought and contemporary scholarly conversations in Indigenous studies on Indigenous futures and futurity. Naga sovereignty, then, is not something to be awarded at a future date, but a futurity we enact through our relations, connecting past, present, and future.

Desire time: law and education as temporal infrastructure in Ladakh - Sara Smith, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

In 2023, on a summer walk with my daughter in Leh, Ladakh, I saw fresh graffiti calling for Ladakh to be considered a tribal territory. The rocks along the stream read “6th schedule for Ladakh” in bold letters. The almost dry streambed, littered with rubble from a prior flood event, would be full again to the point of fear a few days later; everyone commenting on the immediate and distant future of this stream as well. Sometimes it feels like both the past and present are with us in every conversation, no matter the topic. Earlier at Spindle Art Café, Chemat Dorjey explained to us why he used the spindle and understood it as deeply connected to Ladakhi history and future – in the most central part of the café a rainbow of threads hang down a few stories connected to the graceful wooden pins. On the one hand, to fight the 6th schedule draws on tropes created through the global movement of the ideas of race and Indigeneity created to foster colonial projects as Gergan has also argued. These require Ladakhis to be pinned backward in time. On the other hand, the goals of ST affirmative action is to move ST people forward or onto the national timeline. These backwards and forwards movements unfold alongside the interpretations of artists like Chemat and others, who play with time and space in their representations of Ladakh, sometimes embracing and sometimes refusing the political tropes. In this paper I move between these questions of temporality as they unfold in Ladakh and my new work on infrastructures of the future in education and university settings at my workplace in North Carolina.

4:30 Keynote Presentation: Film *Ladhamba Tayem: Future Continuous*, and Zoom Q&A with Director Subash Thebe Limbu

Introduction: Anna Stirr

Moderator:

Friday, April 12

8:45 Continental Breakfast

9:00 Panel 4: Imagination and Action

***War of Narratives: Christianity, Iconoclasm and Decoloniality of Race and Religion* – Shalini Kakar, Independent Scholar**

"This paper examines Christian icons in Punjab, in northern India, and their relationship to the larger discourse on race, iconoclasm and decentering whiteness in the United States. I analyze the appropriation of Punjabi idioms woven into Christian icons to interrogate the alleged case of forced conversions of lower-caste Sikhs, and the subsequent atmosphere of violence. Focusing on the recent beheading of Christ and Mary's pieta statue in a church in 2022, I investigate the iconic materiality and vexed histories of the religious symbol. Do Christian icons reside in the collective subconscious as political monuments of oppression that commemorate colonial power? On one side, do desecrated "white icons" (such as the church, cross, Jesus and Mary's images) become monuments of counter-memory, projecting alternate narratives of an "inverted iconoclasm" in a postcolonial landscape? On the other, how does the beheaded pieta make visible the fissures of a deeply segregated caste-ridden society destabilized by what Spivak calls the "epistemic violence" of the Crypto Christian Sikh? I argue that entangled in the politics of memory, Christian icons are an impregnated space of intersecting colonial histories of oppression and conversion entrenched in hierarchies of race, class and caste. The study contributes to understanding the growing impact of Christianity in northern India, the war of narratives being enacted upon its icons, and its relationship to transnational iconoclasm in context to Confederate statues and defacement of Catholic icons in the United States since 2020 to posit a bigger question: Is there a way to navigate through the dense matrix of colonialism, religion and race to reclaim agency through Walter Mignolo's idea of "praxis of decolonial healing"?"

***Dalit Futurism - Degenerate Desires to Deface Dalit Iconography* – Aatika Singh, Stanford University**

"In 2018, the statue of the Hindu lawmaker Manu in the Rajasthan High Court was defaced by two Dalit women; Kantabai Ahire and Sheela Pawar as an act against caste oppression. The duo along with another Muslim man were immediately incarcerated under stringent non-bailable criminal offenses. On a comparative note, more than a majority of all community designed Ambedkar's statues today stand defaced or caged due to the fear of repeated defacement of the icons of the modern Indian intellectual and statesman. The miscreants are rarely penalized under the appropriate statutory laws. Thus, the persistent phenomenon of cultural conflict leading to iconoclasm deserves a broader inquiry into not just the act of defacement but also the body, form, materiality and significance of the art work being attacked. The paper attempts to analyze the visual futurism surrounding Dalit iconography that consists of Ambedkar, Buddha and other statues and symbols of the anti-caste movement. The politics of sculptures as propelling ideological concerns through visibility has steadily grown problematising the arrival of an art historical modernity. Therefore, the research firstly looks into the study of inequality, identity politics and cultural studies. The second strand focuses on the politics of visibility, materiality and representation generated by

the sculptures and material culture of Dalit community. The paper draws a common thread between iconoclasm and iconophobia in the cultural politics of modern India tracing the trajectory from colonial modernity to the post-colonial turn. The analysis attempts to lay bare the degenerate desires instrumental in attacking and defacing the anti-caste aesthetic thought and dignity. The analysis of the field and its historical struggle revolves around a socially engaged art history as it currently unfolds with its ephemerality and ideology.

***Sufi Futures in Sri Lanka: Saint's Shrines and Ruptures of Space and Time* – M. Shobhana Xavier, Queen's University**

The research for this presentation is based on fieldwork in Sri Lanka spanning over a decade. The project's broader goal is to map Sufi shrines in Sri Lanka against the backdrop of a post-civil war and growing Buddhist-Sinhala majoritarianism that have impacted numerous minority communities, including Tamils and Muslims. Specifically, Sufi Muslims' pieties presents a generative prism through which to understand this political, social, and religious context. Their devotion at the graves of holy figures (saints), which are venerated by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, results in acts of visitation, rituals, and community building. For instance, tombs to 40 feet long Sufi saints (or giants) dot the island and are believed to be descendants from prophetic times while shrines to women saints draw women from across religious and ethnic communities, such as the Nachia saint who disappeared into a cave while being chased by assaulters. Sufi saint's stories sustained at shrines then rupture notions of linear time and space on an island where Muslim communities have not been marked in meaningful ways, especially in the colonial or state archives, and have been receipts of consistent state and communal violence. Stories of saints embed the islands' geography within cosmological and metaphysical roots, routes, and spheres, and the pious acts that unfold at saint's shrines evade and resist the political oppression of Muslims, in effect summoning religious pasts to survive in troubled presents in the hopes of thriving in Sufi futures.

***Looking for Queer Cohabitations* – Prateek Paul, Columbia University**

"The "then and there" of queer futurities (José Muñoz 2009) look different when the conditions of their possibility reside in the living room of a Bengali bhadralok family's home in Calcutta. Shayok Misha Chowdhury's cutting-edge play, "Public Obscenities", centers queer desire between the Indian-American protagonist Choton and his Black boyfriend Raheem while living in Choton's ancestral home. In the living room, the sofa pulls out into a bed, and the mosquito net suspended from the edges of the room forms the permeable enclosure that shrouds—and makes possible—queer intimacies on stage. Un/comfortably perched upon the "precariously private" (David Bell 2001) space of the living room, my paper seeks to engage with queer phenomenology (Sara Ahmed 2006) via the imaginative—and material—possibilities conjured at home, as depicted in a play that lays bare "the things we see, the things we miss, and the things that turn us on" (Soho Rep). At the same time, I situate my analyses in another discursive terrain, that of Grindr and its attendant terminologies, to make sense of the search for and the staging of desire—or "obscurities"—across the public and private realm (Berlant and Warner 2002). In doing so, I ponder over my own queer habits and habitus across Delhi (my family home) and New York (my own home), to query those intersections along the straight path of inhabiting the world that render bodies out of place, odd, strange, queer. In my paper, I shall turn towards queer moments of disorientation in the home and see them as turning points for queer bodies that make liveable the sensorium of straightness that is the family home. At every turn, the body becomes reorientated, acquires a new shape,

makes new impressions, and throws open queer possibilities of inhabiting space. What kind of disorienting affects emerge as queer bodies find a "place" to "host" (Grindr speak) our bodies, our desires, and the bodies we desire? Thus follows my tracing of the ephemeral, yet lasting, conditions of emergence of a queer habitus: What kind of spatial practices are necessary for queer bodies to envision and make possible queer/er futures at home?"

(Re)contesting Rights Regimes: South Asian Women and the International Human Rights Agenda – Maha Ali, Leiden University

Prominent scholarship on the historical study of human rights at the United Nations (Moyn, "The Last Utopia") has asserted that the political project for international human rights was essentially initiated as the politics of decolonization and communism diffused during the Cold War, and the international community eventually picked up the subject of rights. However, this largely tends to overlook the history of women's movements in the Global South, particularly in South Asia. Women's movements in many parts of South Asia had, to a large extent, stemmed from nationalist movements, which often translated into their agencies being weakened and their voices diluted in the larger postcolonial project. From the political trajectories of Indian activists part of organisations such as 'Mahila Atmarakhsha Samiti' (MARS), to the Democratic Women's Association (DWA) in Pakistan, leftist parties in the post-colonial state witnessed heavy policing and suppression, when they delivered the most radical messages of human rights, specifically socio-economic rights, for the most oppressed factions of society, including women. This essentially diminished their agency as non-state actors influencing the dialogue and discourse on human rights domestically and internationally. The instability of postcolonial governments and political systems, particularly in India and Pakistan, as explored in this paper, provide for a clearer picture as to how and why the dominant state narratives were detrimental to the amplification of women's rights agenda at the national and international fronts. Archival materials accessed through the British Library, Women's Library, London, National Archives of Pakistan and Pakistan Institute of International Affairs Archives, help in exploring not just the ultimate so-called "successes" of these activisms, rather the discursive shift, which these South Asian women were able to create, through their domestic and multilateral activisms, essentially resulting in the contestation over the meaning of "human rights", while expanding the definition of human rights to include social and economic rights as well.

11:00 Keynote Presentation: Ritodhi Chakraborty

Witnessing the Himalayan (M)Anthropocene

Introduction: Jan Brunson (Anthropology, UHM)

Moderator: Pallavi Gupta (Geography, UHM)

Abstract: In 2014 economist Kate Raworth asked, "Must the Anthropocene, be a (M)Anthropocene?" She was referring to the overrepresentation of men in the Anthropocene Working Group and to a variety of other committees and gatherings examining, exploring and giving voice to our current age. A decade since this self-evident question, have things really changed? Elite (white, upper caste, university educated, wealthy, from the Global North) men still control the production and application of knowledge about the

Anthropocene, despite significant challenges to their hegemony. One such challenge presents the idea of ‘Ecological Masculinity’ . Arguing for a system of being and action which emerge from an ethic of ecological stewardship and care, eschewing both industrial and ecomodernist masculinities. My work explores the promises and pitfalls of this framing in the Indian Himalayas. Working through more than a decade of engagement with rural communities in Uttarakhand state, using feminist and radical epistemic perspectives, I draw upon interviews, oral histories, visual ethnographies, social media data, surveys and participatory mapping to ask the following questions: Is Ecological Masculinity a sustainable & inclusive response to the (M)Anthropocene? Does it support or challenge historical (ongoing) mobilizations towards environmental and social justice in the region? What are the ways in which the production of regional climate knowledge, mirror the existing intersections of caste and elite/non-elite patriarchy? Can Ecological masculinity be wielded to address the structures of the Himalayan (M)Anthropocene? If not, then what are its conceptual and material limits and can (should) they be transgressed?

Bio: “I am a political ecologist and interdisciplinary social scientist that collaborates with indigenous and agrarian communities to explore pathways of environmental and social justice. For the past decade, I have worked with various universities, think-tanks, public and civil society institutions in United States, India, Bhutan, China and Aotearoa New Zealand on issues of plural knowledges, environmental and social justice, rural transformation, youth subjectivities, climate change and agriculture.”

12:30 Closing

CSAS Director: Anna Stirr

CSAS Coordinator: Mari Martinez

CSAS Secretary: Tess Constantino

CSAS Executive Committee: Jan Brunson, Ashok Das, Monica Ghosh, Pallavi Gupta, Karen Kadohiro-Lauer.

With sincere thanks to our sponsors: The Rama Watumull Collaborative Lecture Series, GJ & Ellen Watumull Fund, Hamilton Library, Department of Asian Studies, School of Cinematic Arts.