



ZMO-Kolloquium 2011/2012

Not all about Islam: Current Political Conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Asia

Thursday, 23 February 2012, 6 pm

Kashmir: Beyond Borders, Ethnicity and Sovereignty

Lecture by Dr. Seema Kazi

Kashmir is among the modern world's longest running conflicts. Mainstream analyses represent the conflict as one rooted in territory and/or ethnicity. Contesting both narratives, this paper suggests that Kashmir is neither merely a territorial dispute between the states of India and Pakistan; nor must it be viewed as an 'Islamist' rebellion against the (secular) Indian state. Rather, the suggestion here is that the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination has been shaped and defined by its own specific history; in effect, this struggle symbolises collective, secular resistance by a people who happen to be Muslim against the contradictions produced by the establishment of the modern nation-state in India. Drawing upon historical studies, this paper maintains that Kashmir's struggle for self-determination predates partition of the sub-continent and the moment of Indian independence, yet has, nonetheless, been subsumed within the latter. Using a range of critical literature, and drawing upon the author's own research on Kashmir, the paper highlights the resilience of a Kashmiri imagination that has persistently resisted attempts to subsume and assimilate Kashmiri Muslim identity within the 'national' narrative. Kashmir's human rights tragedy, the paper goes on to suggest, is the price the Kashmiris have had to pay for nurturing dreams and longings inconsistent with the loyal 'national' citizen prototype so central to the centrist, assimilative impulse of the unitary, 'sovereign' nation-state India (and Pakistan) chose to imitate. Emphasising Kashmir's historical and cultural significance to the world in general, and to South Asia in particular, this paper suggests a discarding of the congealed 'national' ideas – that have proved to be so catastrophic for the Kashmiris in particular – in favour of a plural, non-national political imaginary consistent with, and respectful of, the sentiments and aspirations of sub-national groups and minorities and, by extension, to South Asia's plural histories and empirical realities.

Seema Kazi has been educated in India, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. She has worked with NGOs and women's groups in the area of Muslim women and human rights, and subsequently as an independent researcher and writer on gender, conflict and governance. She is the author of *In Kashmir: Gender, Militarization and the Modern Nation-state* (South End, 2011). Seema has a PhD from the Gender Institute, London School of Economics, and is presently Assistant Professor, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi.

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