

***Subverting the State:  
The Postcolonial Predicament***

**22 May 2015**

**University of Kent, Centre for Colonial and Postcolonial Studies**

**Keynote lecture:**

**Priya Gopal (University of Cambridge)**

Since the birth of nation-states, emerging in conjunction with the first wave of globalisation and the height of European colonialism in the mid-nineteenth century, avant-gardists have problematized the role of the nation-state. However, as anti-colonial freedom movements often assumed a nationalist character, postcolonial studies has been preoccupied with understanding the historical significance and emotional force of the nation-state and devoted less attention to the movements and ideas that sought to subvert the state altogether.

More recently, at a time when a combustible mixture of ideas, groups and organisations refuses to be incorporated into the nation-state, there appears a subversive vacuum, an ambiguous territory that offers opportunities for marginal discourses and opposing forces to be expressed. This ambivalent space becomes the stage in which the nation-state can be subverted but also re-enacted or reinstated in many shapes and forms. Instances of these dynamics can be found across the postcolonial world: from the post-Soviet frozen conflicts, of which the Ukrainian war is but a last episode, to the recent disappearance of the Sykes-Picot border between Iraq and Syria. Away from the headlines, transnational criminal organisations or diffuse online subversive networks represent very different, but equally significant, challenges to the state, which blur the traditional dichotomies between oppressor and resister.

Presenting a daunting challenge to postcolonial studies, the rapid growth of neoliberalism, globalization and neo-nationalism requires renewed attention to the role of the nation-state and, more importantly, forces that seek to subvert the nation-state. In light of these challenges and framing subversion within a postcolonial context, this symposium invites scholars to 'think outside the state' from a variety of disciplinary and theoretical approaches. It seeks to discuss and develop productive ways of engaging with the opportunities and limits of theories of subversion that encompass and extend across postcolonial discourses.

We invite papers from scholars working in the disciplines of history, literature, political science, philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, human geography, religious studies and other related areas. Proposals reflecting an interdisciplinary approach are particularly welcome. Some suggested themes are:

- Violence, non-violence and civil disobedience;
- State terrorism and terrorism against the state;
- Performing subversion: the state as stage;
- Para-states as subversion, competition or mimicry;
- Organised crime, law and policing the state;
- Transnational criminality in the contemporary postcolony;
- Revolution, direct action and rioting;
- Rhizomatic networks of protest outside the state;
- Legitimation, citizenship and state formation;
- New nation-states and postcolonial disillusion.

Please send abstracts of no more than 350 words in Word format to [subvertingthestate@gmail.com](mailto:subvertingthestate@gmail.com) by 15 February 2015.

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Conference organisers: Maria Ridda (University of Kent), Enrique Galvan-Alvarez (International University of La Rioja) and Ole Birk Laursen (University of Copenhagen)

