

# Writing Difference

Dissertation Workshop| 5-6<sup>th</sup> June 2011|New York

University of Copenhagen and New York University

In an increasingly globalized world said to be marked by similarities and fluid circulations, difference appears both as an object of desire and contempt. Globality suggests a system of signs that can be read, recognized and translated across national boundaries and cultural divides, and it is precisely in this universe of familiarity that the specter of difference haunts and seduces us. How to negotiate universality without losing the specific difference that constitutes identity? This classic question has gained a particular urgency in a context where global standards and scales are frequently deployed to enumerate, measure and rank nations; political formations of democracy, freedom and diversity are deemed as universal ideals even though the same are seen as weak imitations of the 'original' in the global south; mass marketed cultural symbols of consumption colonize the remotest of locations; and even the 'exotic' is displayed within a global frame of aesthetics. The old debates of homogeneity/heterogeneity, universality/particularity and self/other have resurfaced in the current moment in new forms and configurations.

In this dissertation workshop, we explore the notion of 'difference' – as identity, opposition and even resemblance – in its multiple meanings and settings, and the ways in which it plays out in the social-political landscapes. Moving away from the idea of difference as natural or essential, we explore how difference is constructed, manifested and obscured. We will not only focus on the theoretical and conceptual debates on difference, we will pay attention to the modes of writing and representation of difference in the production of historical, anthropological, literary works as well as that of popular culture. How are traces of similarity and difference woven in the transactions between the self and the other? And how to make sense of cultural difference that is often offered as a simple explanation of the Other? In other words, how is difference *written about* and how does difference *write*? These questions will lead the two day workshop where we aim to discuss the modes of writing difference – identity, inequity, inequality and unevenness within Asian societies (class, race, gender, caste, geography to name a few) across temporalities and disciplines.

We invite ongoing projects at doctoral level engaged with any or more of these themes. It will be composed of eight students in all – four each from New York and Copenhagen. The ongoing work will be subjected to comments and discussions led by peers as well as the participating faculty members and invited observers.

## How to apply:

The prospective candidates should send a letter describing their motivation for participation in the workshop together with CV and a short description of their project. Deadline 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011. The applications should be sent to

Prof. David Ludden [ludden.david@gmail.com](mailto:ludden.david@gmail.com) at NYU

Dr. Ravinder Kaur [rkaur@hum.ku.dk](mailto:rkaur@hum.ku.dk) at UC

The dissertation workshop is collaboration between Asian Dynamics Initiative, University of Copenhagen and Institute of Public Knowledge, New York University. The selected participants will be offered accommodation at NYU as well travel funds through the graduate school at the University of Copenhagen.