HIST 585-004: Special Topics in History:
(cross-listed with ANT 585-002, MESAS 570-000)

Topic: Un-archived Histories

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<th>Instructor</th>
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<td>Pandey</td>
<td>TH</td>
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Semester Description:

The title of this course does not refer to histories for which there is no archive. It refers rather to histories and social interactions that have been un-archived – or dis-qualified – in the process of archiving particular aspects of the human past and present as history. The course is intended as an investigation of the extensive domain of the unarchived – that is to say, histories, ethnographies, and more generally ‘knowledge’ that has been disenfranchised.

In Foucauldian terms, the archive authorizes what may be said, laying down the rules of the “sayable”, negating (making inaudible and illegible) much that comes to be classified as “non-sense”, gibberish, madness, and is dispatched therefore to a domain outside agential, rational history, politics and social understanding. In this process of selecting, framing and authorizing, as even the most hard-boiled of traditional historians and social scientists will acknowledge, every archive necessarily excludes a great deal that is not of direct interest to its custodians.

The archive, as a site of remembrance – doing the work of remembering – is also at the same time a project of forgetting. The very process of archiving is accompanied by a process of un-archiving, rendering many aspects of social, cultural, political relations in the past and the present as incidental, chaotic, trivial, and therefore unhistorical and inconsequential. What are the implications for our constructions of the past – and the present? And for the objects of inquiry we construct, and the methodologies we accept, in pursuance of greater social scientific and historical understanding?

The seminar will investigate these questions on the basis of texts from a variety of disciplines and from people writing on several different parts of the world, as well as through discussion of the ongoing or proposed research projects of those enrolled in the course. We will begin by reading a couple of introductory texts, which lay out the range and parameters of the debate on unarchived histories: Dipesh Chakrabarty’s Provincializing Europe, and a forthcoming anthology edited by me, entitled Unarchived Histories: the “Mad” and the “Trifling”. Following this, we shall take up a set of paired texts, in which the authors deal with the same moment of historical or political struggle in radically different ways. Eric Hobsbawm and Ranajit Guha on peasant revolts; E. P. Thompson and Carolyn Steedman on the English working class; selections from Leslie Harris, Natasha Tretheway and Gyan Pandey on the history and memory of lower-class and lower-caste struggles; Mariane Ferme and Achhille Mbembe on the politics of independent African states, are possible examples.

The list of readings will be finalized during the first two meetings of the seminar, once the composition and concerns of the class are clear. The concluding weeks of the semester will be reserved for student presentation of their own projects and research conundrums.
Required Textbooks, Articles, and Resources:

Tentatively:


