Special Issue Call for Papers

Transnational Plant Studies

Guest Editors: Sushmita Chatterjee (Ethnic Studies & Women’s and Gender Studies, Colorado State University) & Banu Subramaniam (Women’s & Gender Studies, Wellesley College)

The recent resurgence and renewed attention to plants, framed under Critical Plant Studies, or The Vegetal Turn or Plant Turn, brings new attention towards species, genus, kin, and related categories. Given the histories of disciplines, plants have been studied in disciplinary and transdisciplinary contexts: Plant Studies is often grounded in the humanities and social sciences, and the Plant Sciences in the natural sciences. Climate change and the ecological decimation of the planet follow a colonial and neoliberal political economy and privileged vocabulary of certain sciences and cultures. In an endeavor to meet the challenges of climate change, the prolific contemporary turns in Plant Studies stresses cooperation, relatedness, and interconnectedness. Who or what is left out of symbiotic interactions and entanglements? Are we inadvertently establishing another imagined communion in visions of cooperation and relatedness? Haunted by how national frames creep into new (re)turns, we urge attention towards how colonial frames saturate contemporary conversations.

Despite attempts to decolonize plant studies and acknowledge its genealogies to colonial legacies of nomenclature and accounting, a national imagination haunts the frames of the plant turn. Even while the plant sciences chronicle how plant roots morph and merge with fungi and microbial lives thereby denying a stringent territorialization, a botanical, literary, and political imagination still insists on categories: species, genera, varieties, and individual categories of plant/animal/fungi/bacteria/virus. Colonialism and capitalism cement a willful play with borders, keeping some open and strenuously guarding the contours of others. Maps and cartographical imaginations reflect the putting in place of people, animals, plants, and inanimate matter as separate categories. Attempts at decolonial framings often inadvertently cement alternate categories and borders. What might a transnational plant studies look like? What would be its methods and politics? And how do we transgress the nation and its colonial presences in contemporary plant studies? Our call for papers invites work on transnational plant studies in theories and advocacies that frame the nation in plant studies and suggest possible transnational re-routings.
A transnational plant studies that theorizes against genealogies of the colonial west and east, opens myri-
iad themes within plant sciences and cultural studies. We note all the while that transnationalisms also
follow the routes of economic globalizations and colonialisms. We invite (inter)disciplinary and (trans)
national theorization on topics including:

- Histories of plant sciences within genealogies of colonialisms, noting that nomenclature from the
  “west” is privileged. What is excluded in contemporary plant studies or plant sciences? How might we
  excavate alternate genealogies of plant sciences/plant studies?
- What kinds of questions emerge from the plant sciences across different regions of the world? What
  kinds of transnational politics shape research questions of scientists from wealthy and poor nations.
- How are race, sex, gender, disability, caste, and class framed through national and/or transnational
  plant studies.
- Recognizing and challenging the interdisciplinary and multi-species valences of categories such as
  nomenclature, classification, species, genus, native/alien plants, plant labor, plant reproduction, plant
  reproduction.
- Articulating alternate modes of plant life beyond the plant sciences (including queer, indigenous,
  anti-colonial, non-western and multi-species visions).
- Drawing on alternate epistemologies outside the sciences to develop knowledge about plants.
- We encourage proposals which engage with lost or forgotten archives within the sciences and human-
  ities as well as archives outside (literature, fiction, poetry, film, theater, oral histories, activist move-
  ments) disciplined knowledge-making.
- New vocabularies and terms for plant life. What words do languages and cultures from across the
  world offer us in describing plant life? What kinds of alternate epistemologies, nomenclature, theo-
  ries, collections, histories, and geographies can we offer?
- What is lost in transnational framings of plant studies? Does an attention to the sub-national or su-
  pra-national overdetermine the “nation” as a colonial project by itself? How does settler colonialism
  continue plant studies’ nationalisms?

We invite abstracts, under 500 words, by March 15. Please email abstracts to sushch@colostate.edu and
bs108@wellesley.edu. After an initial review of abstracts by the issue and journal co-editors, authors in-
vited to submit full length papers will be notified by April. Full length papers will be due by August 15, to
be submitted for external peer review. The expected word limit for final submissions will be between
7000 to 10000 words. For details on format consult the instructions for authors:
https://www.dukeupress.edu/cultural-politics