



SOCIOLOGY SEMINAR SERIES

WINTER SEMESTER 2015

Rumor and Democratic Politics Anthropological Notes on the 2014 Indian Elections

What was rumor to pre-modern society, TV and new media are to contemporary nation-states. The premise of rumor as a plebeian discourse of resistance flounders for mainstream modern media at the service of power-elites work like rumor machines to sanctify the (dis)order of political asymmetry. Based on coverage of 2014 Indian elections by five television channels – *India TV*, *NDTV*, *Aaj Tak*, *ANI*, and *IBN*– I argue that: the way journalists posed questions to their favorite politicians were already answers; in pursuing a storyline, journalists sacrificed “events/facts” to bolster their pre-determined narrative; and electoral polity like India is heading towards a designer democracy marked by permanent campaigning-cum-advertising. Among others, I discuss how during the 2014 elections media spread Hindutva as development to resemble rumor-mongering. To illustrate my argument I heuristically differentiate, while noting promiscuity, amongst rumor, gossip, propaganda, bullshit, humbug, advertising and public opinion to justify rumor’s centrality to my analysis.

Keywords: *Anthropology, Development, India, Media, Propaganda, Rumor*

About the Speaker:

Irfan Ahmad is Associate Professor of Political Anthropology [Australian Catholic University](http://www.aud.ac.au), Melbourne. Earlier, he taught anthropology and political science at University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands and Monash University, Australia. Irfan is the author of *Islamism and Democracy in India* (Princeton University Press, 2009) which was short-listed for the 2011 ICAS Book Prize for the best study in the field of Social Sciences. He actively contributes to debates in such media as *Al-Jazeera* (English), *The Times of India*, *OpenDemocracy*, *The Hindu*.and *Kafila*. His interviews have appeared in print, audio and televisions in Dutch, English, Hindi, Malayalam, Turkish and Urdu media such as *BBC Urdu*, *Channel News Asia* (TV, Singapore) *The Hindu*, *SBS Hindi*, *Voice of Russia*, and *People’s TV*. With Bryan Turner, he is the founding co-editor of *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* (Bloomsbury).

WEDNESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2015

2.30 P.M

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ALL ARE INVITED

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