eCRT Workshop Materials

Bio:

Hareem Khan is a PhD candidate in sociocultural anthropology at UC Santa Barbara. She is currently carrying out her dissertation field research this year within the South Asian beauty industry in Los Angeles County exploring themes of race and the nation as they intersect with the consumption of aesthetic services. Her research has been funded partially by the UC Center for New Racial Studies, UCSB Humanities and Social Sciences Research Grant, and the anthropology department’s Sociocultural Graduate Research Grant.

Paper title and Abstract:

Transnational Skin: South Asian Racialized Subjectivities in Los Angeles County

This project examines women’s efforts to negotiate subjectivities that are simultaneously racialized and transnational. Particularly, I am interested in how this negotiation process of South Asian women in Los Angeles County is enacted in the marketing, circulation, and consumption of skin-lightening products and aesthetic services in the diaspora. While the desire for light skin is deeply entrenched in the history of South Asia and other global contexts, presently, these desires are satisfied in commodities and services that travel transnationally to reach the diasporic consumer base that has broadened, spanning generational, ethnic, religious, and class lines. I am interested in how the affinity for light skin translates into new, complex meanings of race and the nation(s) in the American landscape. Through a structured ethnographic and textual investigation taking place in several sites situated within the loosely defined South Asian beauty industry in LA, this study argues that the consumption and marketing of various aesthetic services intersect with the processes by which South Asian women’s layered identities are co-constituted in the American diaspora. This project explores the significance of skin as the complex site of the intimate, embodied dimensions of racialized subject-formation within a transnational context.