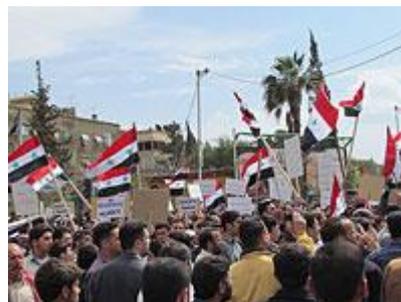


How to Theorize Actuality: Mediterranean Revolutions, Postcolonial Questions

29 February 2012

Iain Chambers' study on the postcolonial Mediterranean (2008) suggests a daringly new way to rethink European, Arab, Middle Eastern and North African identities as intertwined. It ties in with the larger project of the theory of globalization, which invites us to see and think the world differently. Postcolonial theory lay the groundwork for this new imagination, but it also reminds us that we should take into account the specific (geopolitical) power dynamics that are bound up with all imaginations of the world. What would be a productive way, for postcolonial scholars, to engage with such imaginations, and their political critique? What do these new proposals mean for our commitment to the present struggles in the Southern Mediterranean, and the ensuing efforts to build a democracy? We dwelled on these questions (and more) during the Platform Meeting on 28 October 2011!

Date 28 October 2011
Location PC Hoofthuis 5.59, Spuistraat 134, Amsterdam
Registration osl-fgw@uva.nl
Organizers Elisabeth Bekers (VUB), Sarah De Mul (KUL), Isabel Hoving (UL), Liesbeth Minnaard (UL)



How to Theorize Actuality?

Mediterranean Revolutions, Postcolonial Questions

Iain Chambers' study on the postcolonial Mediterranean (2008) suggests a daringly new way to rethink European, Arab, Middle Eastern and North African identities as intertwined. It ties in with the larger project of the theory of globalization, which invites us to see and think the world differently. The conceptualization of the world as radically, though ambivalently, interconnected, seems to have great potential. Postcolonial theory lay the groundwork for this new imagination, but it also reminds us that we should take into account the specific (geopolitical) power dynamics that are bound up with all imaginations of the world. Political accounts of the efforts to create a Mediterranean identity (European Mediterranean Project, Barcelona Process, 1995) point at the Arab distrust of such projects.

What would be a productive way, for postcolonial scholars, to engage with such imaginations, and their political critique? Should we "think global", and what exactly does that mean? What do these new proposals mean for our commitment to the present struggles in the Southern Mediterranean, and the ensuing efforts to build a democracy? How should we theorize the position of the refugees and the unwelcome reception that they are given in Europe? Which theories are more relevant to these debates – culturally inclined postcolonial theories such as Chambers', Marxist postcolonial studies such as Aijaz Ahmad, analyses in the wake of Said, or philosophical approaches such as those of Agamben, Derrida, Nancy?

In this seminar we will address these questions in different styles and formats. The day will open with a presentation on Agamben's work by legal theorist Dr. Bas Schotel (UvA). We will continue by discussing and close reading a number of influential classical texts that can help us to understand the fundamental issues involved. The afternoon is dedicated to exchange and debate. Dr. Dina Heshmat (UL) will present her own research on Egyptian literature in the light of the day's topic and debates. Other researchers will comment from their own field of research. We will conclude the day with an on-the-spot analysis of a fictional text that addresses the hot topic of the meeting in an unexpected and inventive way.

The seminar is open for both researchers and Research Master students working in the field of postcolonial studies. If you are interested in participating, please register/enroll (Res MA) with Eloe Kingma (NICA/OSL). Active participation by Research Master students (presentation, response, short paper) may be awarded with 1 EC credit. For more information, contact [Eloe Kingma](#), [Sarah De Mul](#), or [Isabel Hoving](#).

Programme "Mediterranean Revolutions"

MORNING: The Mediterranean as a Contested Space of Politics and Economics

- 10.15 Welcome, and introduction
- 10.30-11.30 The Must-Reads and the Classics: Close Reading and Debate.
- 11.30-12.30 Guest lecture by legal theorist Dr. Bas Schotel (UvA): "Immigrant as State of Exception and Bare Life. Agamben and the State's Right to Exclusion"
For this session we read and discuss:
- Chambers, Iain. "The Mediterranean. A Postcolonial Sea." *Third Text* 18.5 (2004): 423-433.
 - Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. Fragments from chapter 1 (15-21) and chapter 7 (166-80).
 - Downey, Anthony. "Zones of Indistinction. Giorgio Agamben's 'Bare Life' and the Politics of Aesthetics." *Third Text* 23.2 (2009): 109-125.
 - Ahmad, Aijaz. "Islam, Islamisms and The West." *Social Register* 2008. http://www.iran-bulletin.org/political%20islam/SR_08_Ahmad_0.pdf (a long text, but a quick read)
- 12.30-13.30 Lunch

AFTERNOON: Imaginations in/of the Mediterranean

- 13.30-15.30 Workshop
- Food for Thought and Discussion I:** "Anger, Revolution, and Literature in Egypt" by Dr. Dina Heshmat, specialist in Arabic language and literature (Leiden Institute for Area Studies, Leiden University)
- Food for Thought and Discussion II:** "Multitude, Identity, Democracy and Revolution: the Ontology of the Present in Agamben, Negri and Virno" by Dr. Sonja Lavaert, lecturer Italian, Philosophy of Culture and Politics & Political Theory (Department Applied Linguistics Erasmuscollege, VU Brussels)
- 15.30-15.45 Break
- 15.45-16.45 On-the-spot analysis of an excerpt of Rachida Lamrabet's "Vrouwland"
- 16.45-17.00 Concluding remarks

Followed by Drinks