



RELATIONAL DIS/LOCATIONS: MEDITERRANEAN CULTURES IN TRANSLOCAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXTS

Date: Friday 28 November 2008

Time: 9.00am-6.00pm

Venue: Whiteley Room, U@Macquarie building, Macquarie University

The Department of Critical and Cultural Studies, the Innovative Universities European Union Centre and the Centre of Middle East and North African Studies present a one-day symposium concerned with work that conceptualises the Mediterranean not as a fixed geographical locus mapped and regulated by a series of longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates but, rather, in terms of a dispersed spatio-temporal and geopolitical phenomenon that is not identical to itself. This is not the Mediterranean of the imperial *mare nostrum*; rather, it is a transmediterranean marked by lines of contestation, dissemination and reconfiguration. This symposium brings together scholars working on Mediterranean cultures, their multiple dispersions and embodiments. The symposium examines how Mediterranean cultures are engaged in flows of transnational cultural exchange that are reconstituting local cultures and identities and translocating these things in the context of national/ist cultures. The symposium will also focus on the phenomenon of diaspora, both transmediterranean and transnational (with a particular focus on Australian diasporic cultures and their Middle Eastern, North African and European affiliations and connections), refugees and the undocumented, the “war on terror,” media representations, colonial and imperial histories, tourism, and aesthetic visions.

ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS

Petro Alexiou: “*A Dis-Located Life in the Shifting Terrain of the Eastern Mediterranean*”

The exploration of the complexities of a Greek emigrant writer in Australia from the late 1920s to the early 1960s has required a background study of a number of Greek social formations and discourses in the Eastern Mediterranean in the early 20th century. Locating a subject in this period, it is important to mark differentiations that operated between communities in traditional diaspora zones, the Ottoman Empire and the Greek nation state. The globalising tendencies of this period produced a series of intersecting

histories and discourses (imperialist rivalries and wars, Orientalism and colonialism) that impacted transnationally on large bodies of refugees and immigrants. I present some examples of an approach that explores these intersections to dispel the notion of a unitary and undifferentiated historical experience.

Independent Scholar

Noah Bassil: “*Exploring the Legacy of Colonial Racism in the Conflict in Darfur*”

The international discourse on the conflict in Darfur has focused on the Arab-African dimension in a reductionist and essentialist manner despite efforts by scholars to complicate the ethnic/racial dimension. However, even the scholarship on the whole has neglected that the racism and tribalism that afflicts Darfur today is part of a wider colonial legacy that has infected the entire region and emanates from the Sudanese centre in Khartoum and radiates throughout the country. The most apparent case of the legacy of colonial racism in Sudan has manifested in the north-south conflict, a conflict that has plagued Sudan since independence. While racism alone cannot explain the complex causes of the conflict in Darfur, it is argued in this paper that the contours of conflict in Sudan were impressed onto the country by the power relations created during the colonial period. It is these power relations which were based on colonial racial classifications which is manifest in the current conflict in Darfur.

Macquarie University

Farid Farid: “*Between The Vagabond and The Fortune Teller: Haunting Memories and Landscapes of Egypt*”

Through the lyrical expositions of Abdel Halim Hafez, one of Egypt’s foremost cultural icons of musical history, this paper aims to dissect competing racial imaginaries of Egypt that are structured by geo- and bio-political forces of the overlapping territories of the Mediterranean and Africa. Such forces have manifested themselves contradictorily over spatial and temporal divides in Egypt as a unique centre of a cultural and political milieu in terms of cultural contacts, exchanges, diffusions but also colonial conflicts, religious upheavals and sovereign domination. Hafez’s two most famous songs “The Vagabond (*Sawah*)” and “The Fortune Teller (*Qari’at al Fingan*)” provide an epistemological starting point to discern the materiality of physical and representational violence on the heterogeneous historiographies and fragmented memories of Egyptians who are rendered mute within academic and political debates about Egypt’s racial identity.

University of Western Sydney

Gennaro Gervasio: “*Subaltern Voices and the ‘War on Terror’: Contesting Representations from British Muslim Media*”

The ‘war on terrorism’ has been, among other things, essentially representational. A growing inter-disciplinary literature investigates these representations. But most analysts examine mainstream representations produced by Western media telling stories from

socially dominant perspectives. However, representations *by*, rather than *of*, subaltern perspectives are rarely examined. This paper will focus instead on subaltern media of British Muslims. I will look at selected media produced by and for diverse British Muslim communities to examine how subaltern communities represent the ‘war on terror’. In comparing and contrasting representations within diverse subaltern discourses, and between subaltern and mainstream media, I aim to highlight silences in the mainstream discourse, as well as contributions of British (and European) communities to the ongoing intra-Islamic debate on Islam, terrorism and the ‘war on terror’.

Macquarie University

Maria Giannacopoulos: “‘Alien’ Conscriptio, Australian Sovereignty and the Vietnam War

Like many children born of migrants, the experience of growing up ‘Australian’ is marked by stories of other places, other homes and migratory voyages. I have many of my parents stories stored away in my own diasporic archive, but when my father casually mentioned at Christmas lunch last year that he had been called to serve for Australia during the Vietnam War I was completely taken aback. It was the shock that came with this discovery that triggered my desire to understand yet another, for me until that point unknown, chapter in Australia’s violent history. How could this have occurred? My father was not yet 18 and was certainly not a citizen at that time. This paper will be a work in progress, marrying oral and personal histories, histories of migrant protest with the official histories of the Australian parliament of 1966 which declared that ‘aliens’ who had ‘chosen’ Australia as their home were expendable at war as an effect of that ‘choice’.

Macquarie University

Gaia Giuliani: “Selecting Whites: The Sovereign Subject in Early Independent Australia”

Has the independent nation-state of Australia been created and based on a common sense understanding of race? Answering this question I will try to understand which ideas of race at the time of the fin de siècle (end of 19th and beginning of 20th) in the British Empire and outside of it have influenced the construction of the nation, its (racial) mythology, and the building of the Australian sovereign subject. In particular, I will try to understand how those ideas were connected to the colonial discourse legitimating expansion and occupation (that is, the *Terra Nullius* principle and the related ideas of property and proprietary subject) in a new shape confronted with the consolidated awareness of the dangers related to this ideology of expansion after the collapse of the so-called First British Empire. In particular, I will analyse the intervention of international debate on eugenics in order to understand how they affected the political and racial anthropology founding post-colonial Australia. Notwithstanding the differences in “native policies” and “migration policies,” I will try to unfold in which degree eugenics did provide an optimal understanding of Australian race-relations that worked to both systematise Aboriginality in a larger racial scale and establish a race hierarchy in migration policy. The aim of my analysis is to understand which political anthropology

developed between the 19th and 20th century (with particular reference to the White Australia Policy). How did the “myth of the frontier”, the obsession with the possible survival and proliferation of the white (anglo) race, and consequently, the idea of a healthy citizenship, articulate the institutional discourse legitimizing a striping citizenship along colour and race-line(s)? How did those ideas join the Lockean foundational understanding of individual property and the right to migrate in Australia to build the nation and how did they contribute to define the sovereign subject? How is this subject described and materially built up? In the frame of such analysis, I’ll approach the case of the influence exerted by the theories on the inferiority of select races and social groups articulated by the Italian anthropologist, criminologist and jurist Cesare Lombroso in shaping some of the fundamental ideas about Aboriginal racial inferiority and some forms of the ex/in-clusion of migrants according to Australian official politics of Australian identity-building.

University of Bologna

Sandro Mezzadra: “*A Contested Space: Border Crossing and Border Reinforcing In and Around the Mediterranean*”

This presentation will focus on the multifarious tensions arising in the Mediterranean space from the clash between movements of migration and European migration policies. Processes of externalization and “deterritorialization” of the European “external frontiers” will be described and critically discussed, as well as the “countergeographies” materially drawn by migratory movements at the level of everyday life. Among shipwrecks and military patrol crucial battles are fought in the Mediterranean nowadays. The presentation will show how the very definition of the European space and the very meaning of European citizenship are at stake in these battles.

University of Bologna – University of Western Sydney

Lara Palombo: “*Transnational Sovereignities at War: Subversive (White) Diasporic Women*”

White diasporic relations have reasserted political sovereignty through the constitution of the Internment Camp. Prior and during World War Two the (auto) immunitarian ban of subversive Italian diasporic sovereign politics produced racialised heteropatriarchal violence that effected the constitution of women as Civilian Internees. In this paper I want to critically examine this transnational sovereign subversive politics that was also claimed to be operating in Italian diasporic newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s. I argue that the transnational political sovereign idioms operating in the realms of these newspapers were part of modern diasporic forms of (self) protection that did not produce politically subversive diasporic women. Transnational sovereign politics often violently disembodied Italian women from their life relations in Australia, including from the effects of the re-configuration of the North/South divide.

Macquarie University

Ihab Shalbak: “Edward Said and the Palestinians: Reappraisal”

In his most sophisticated and rarely addressed work *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Said makes the distinction between two modes of association *affiliation* and *filiations*. For Said both notions are effective tools to unearth structures, references, connections and attitudes that influence the overall rationality of a given period and the act of beginning. This paper aims to sketch the dynamic usage by Said of both notions in his journey *in and out of things* in order to reflect on the nature of his multiple associations with seemingly contradictory currents and intellectual practices that led him to Palestine or led Palestine to him.

University of New South Wales

Ilaria Vanni and Antonella Biscaro: “Imagining ‘Italians in the World’: Italian Elections Abroad, Media and Gossip”

According to the website of Partito Democratico in Australia ‘From 26 April (sic) we will vote for the election of Camera dei Deputati and Senato della Repubblica. Italian citizens living abroad and registered in the Register of Birth, Marriage and Death of Italians living abroad, will vote by mail in their country of residency. Each Italian citizen will receive the necessary documentation to vote directly at home, from the nearest Consulate.’ This is the second time that Italians living abroad or ‘Italians in the world’ as they are called in Italy, have the possibility to elect representatives, both for the Lower and Upper House, chosen in their own countries of residence. This paper is concerned with the 2008 election campaign as an example of relational, post-political and post-national, politics. Following the campaign as it unfolds in old media, such as radio and newspaper article, in electronic media, such as websites, direct email campaigns, blogs, as well as in more traditional public events, this paper examines the media discourse in the shaping of a politics of imaginary. It argues that rather than advancing abstract political programs, themes, or even ideologies, the election campaign imagines a community built as an intimate space, based on opinions, affect, gossip, relationships.

University of Technology, Sydney

Lisa Wynn: “I’ll Give You 100 Camels for Your Daughter’: Mimesis, Mockery, and Joking in a Trans-Mediterranean Arab Tourist Circuit”

Egyptian vendors in Cairo’s tourist market, the Khan el-Khalili, often joke with tourists about exchanging camels for one of the women in their group. Some tourists join in the joking, while others act appalled, revealing an underlying notion that camels might actually be a currency used by urban Egyptians in marriage transactions. (Ironically, urban Egyptians are far less likely to ever encounter camels than are tourists, who often ride them at the pyramids.) But the joke is not just an Egyptian one. Travelers report hearing this joke in Damascus and Jerusalem as well. For the vendors, the joke is a humorous way of addressing Western tourists’ stereotypes about Arabs and their primitiveness. Such jokes slyly elicit representations of neocolonial stereotypes of Arab otherness that some tourists participate in. This paper takes camel jokes as a starting point for examining mimetic exchanges, based on 3 years of ethnographic fieldwork in

Egypt. The anthropological literature on mimesis is a critical interpretation of a literature on representation that goes back to the ancient Greek philosophers. Following Erich Auerbach's analysis of mimesis in literature, I argue that the genre of mimesis in tourist encounters in Egypt entails something hidden, concealed meaning that is only partly available to readers/tourists. This hidden aspect is linked to the broader tourist economy which is shaped by strategic revelations, highly gendered and often sexualized role-play, and an economy of secrets. In contrast with those who have advanced universalizing arguments about mimesis as a characteristic of the colonial encounter, I argue that any discussion of mimesis must take into account genre.

Macquarie University

For more information on the symposium, please contact:

Associate Professor Joseph Pugliese

Department of Critical and Cultural Studies

Macquarie University

Joseph.Pugliese@scmp.mq.edu.au

(02) 9859 8863

For more information on the Innovative Universities European Union Centre, see

<http://www.iueu.org.au/index.html>