Mediterranean Fractures
Contested Pasts, Unrealised Futures

University of Malta, Valletta Campus, 5-6 November 2015

A two-day symposium organised by the Mediterranean Institute, University of Malta in collaboration with the Centre for Postcolonial Research, University of Kent and the Associazione Italiana di Studi sulle Culture e Letterature di Lingua Inglese (AISCLI)

Nothing is forgotten in the Mediterranean. Thierry Fabre has recently turned this adage on its head, pitching it as a call for more relational, generous and historically vigilant practices of recall along the Mediterranean littoral. The ‘compass for imagining the future’, Fabre has argued, lies in seeing the region’s ‘pluralistic genealogies’ as a means towards treating some of its long-standing conflicts. But such time-honoured genealogies – not least the Judeo-Christian one – have also spawned some of the main cultural, economic, political and historiographic paradigms and practices that appear today – as Wendy Brown has scathingly shown in her Politics Out of History – to have outstayed their timeframe of relevance. The labour of ‘the emancipation of history (and the present) from a progressive narrative’ is, when all is said and done, no straightforward task, and any critical approach to “the Mediterranean” today will be ‘forced to orient itself amid so much history and so many histories, [that] history itself emerges as both weightier and less deterministic than ever before’ (Brown).

After a successful Mediterranean Fractures symposium held at the University of Kent last May, this second edition of the symposium now sets out to respond, through a multidisciplinary mindset, to the challenges and difficulties presented by both newly-emergent and more persistent aspects of fractured consciousness as they emerge across the basin today: from Israel’s repression of Gaza, to confessionalist ideologies and totalitarian rule, histories of uneven development from Turkey to Italy to Morocco and Andalusia, the as yet unresolved partition and/or secessionist narratives in Cyprus, Spain, Palestine and elsewhere, to the “cemeterisation” of the Mediterranean as ill-fated migrant crossings continue to increase. Having embarked upon such a damaged periplos, however, we must not forget Franco Cassano’s emphasis that the Mediterranean ‘is not a problem but an opportunity,’ one that, as he reminds us, is both mediative, meditative and medricative. Mediterranean Fractures will seek critical and cultural responses that can mediate/mediate/medicate in between the region’s entrenched forms of historical consciousness, its many institutionalised pasts, and those emergent forms of memorial awareness and political subject-formation that will not allow anything – as per Fabre’s old adage – to remain unreckoned. This symposium acknowledges the Mediterranean as being, today, caught within an obstinate dialectic. On the one hand there is the extended presence of its many irrevocable pasts (and fictions); on the other, the uncertainty of humanitarian urgencies, the unbearable imminence of fresh and potentially disastrous political turns, cross-border fears, and powerful choices that have not yet been committed. The region’s inevitable passage today is therefore, in Pierre Nora’s phrase, ‘from a history sought in the continuity of memory to a memory cast in the discontinuity of history.’

Is it possible today to take up such notions as redistribution and exchange – which, as pointed out by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, have structured transmarine activity for centuries, and harness them anew to discuss the emergence of cultural and political subjectivities that practice this model – exchange – as their basic ontological ethos? Can a Mediterranean political topos be elicited on the basis of the region’s distinctly tangible sites of memory? How do the fraught spaces of this interconnected landscape – its cemeteries, its shores of departure and detention, its often neglected imperial ruins, Gaza’s shelled buildings, the cemeterised sea itself – how do all these ‘archives of the abject’ (Chambers) impact on postcolonial and other forms of scholarship as cues towards more relational forms of imagination and identification across the basin? Equally importantly, how may such localities help us, as scholars, to resist the role of mere observers in the processes that are fast determining the region’s future shape, and to counter the temptation towards a passive ‘self-relating negativity’ (Žižek)? Can the Mediterranean today take account of a certain revenance or haunting – at once made up of ‘unrealised dreams of the past’, ‘visions of the future that [have become] obsolete’ (S. Boyrm), as well as a consideration of the region’s future that ‘makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales’?
The organizing team is inviting abstracts that include, but are not limited to:

Contested pasts / unrealised futures in/of the Mediterranean
The Mediterranean and world literary perspectives
Modernism and modernist writing in the Mediterranean
Interfaces between the Middle East / Levant / Mashriq and the Mediterranean
Alternative histories of Mediterranean urbanity/cities
The Ottoman / post-Ottoman Mediterranean in history and in literature
Ethnomusicology and its ramifications in/of the Mediterranean
Postcolonialist critiques of the Mediterranean
Mediterranean lieux de memoire / spaces of representation
Migration and humanitarian narratives and contingencies
Partition narratives in the region
Visual storytelling in Mediterranean contexts
Macro- and micro-regional social and economic histories
Feminist perspectives on Mediterranean contexts
Critiques of empire and imperialism in the Mediterranean
Analyses of Palestinian narratives and the Occupation
Literary, cultural, political analyses of North African and Maghrebi contexts, including post-2011.
Ideological, religious and identitarian fractures
Secularism and the post-secular in the Mediterranean
Combined and uneven development in the Mediterranean
Spatial and memorial critiques of Mediterranean texts/contexts
Globalisation and post-globalism in the Mediterranean
Material histories and materialist critiques of the Mediterranean

250-word abstracts (max.) for 20-minute papers addressing aspects of the above or other concerns pertinent to ‘Mediterranean Fractures’ should be submitted by email, in the form of an attached document, to Norbert Bugeja at norbert.bugeja@um.edu.mt. (Kindly title your email Mediterranean Fractures – Abstract). The deadline for receipt of abstracts is Monday 9th February 2015. Proposals for the setting up of panels (450 words max.) will also be considered by the same date.

The Mediterranean Fractures team is actively exploring the possibility of a fully peer-reviewed publication that will bring together a selection of papers from the symposium.

Notification of acceptance of abstracts will be sent by 28th February 2015.

The symposium abstract, as well as more information on the Mediterranean Institute of the University of Malta, can be accessed through the Institute’s online portal at www.um.edu.mt/medinst

The detailed Mediterranean Fractures symposium website will be available soon and linked through the above URL.