

The Intercultural World: Theoretical Approaches, Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Two day Workshop, November 29-30th, 2007, Monash University (Caulfield Campus)

Confirmed Keynote Speaker:

Ass. Professor Armando Salvatore, Naples/Berlin/Essen

Armando Salvatore is Associate Professor of Political Sociology of Modern and Contemporary Islam, University il Orientale, Naples, Reader in Comparative Historical Sociology and Social Theory, Dept. of Social Sciences, Humboldt University, Berlin, and Senior Fellow, Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, Essen. His research embraces the sociological, political and practical significance of modern concepts of religion and secularity as developed within the Euro-Mediterranean civilizational area, with a particular focus on Islam. Among his most recent books (authored, edited, and co-edited), *The Public Sphere: Liberal Modernity, Catholicism, Islam* (2007), *Islam in Process: Historical and Civilizational Perspectives* (2006), *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies* (2005) and *Public Islam and the Common Good*, (2004). He is editor of the *Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam*

Keynote Paper:

'Secular formations and public spheres in intercultural, comparative and transnational perspective'

Abstract:

There is a wide consensus on the secular character of Western societies, in spite of the divergent variety of arrangements concerning relations between states and religious groups. The kernel of secularity and its formations, according to Talal Asad, is situated beyond such specific arrangements, and lies in a distinctive relation between state forms and life forms. On the other hand, this critique has also highlighted the Eurocentric character of notions of 'religion' as applied to the measurement of secularity. This is particularly evident in the articulation of the private and public spheres, in the assumption that secular norms require that religious groups stay away from the latter. The Habermasian public sphere appears then as a prototypical secular arena. The paper looks at how Habermasian articulation can be made more complex in an intercultural perspective. It comparatively analyzes the ways in which the configuration of public spheres in the institutional constellation of Muslim societies has generated types of spatial tension different from the polarization of secular and religious, public and private found in the West. This paper will thus attempt to de-essentialize the view of a distinctive, secular formation pivoting on the "public sphere" and to unveil its constitution as a field of tensions rather than order;

both in its theoretical presuppositions, as well as in its empirical and historical institutionalization. It will show the multiple entanglements of the genealogy of the public sphere with a variety of traditions, in both the Western and the Muslim majority world.

The current struggles surrounding both transnational Islam and the role of Muslims in Europe are strategically situated at the confluence of several historical and contemporary streams and will provide the main case in point. It will be suggested that Muslims are largely contributors - and not opponents - to the renewal of the European secular process. This is the case notwithstanding their different understanding of the public sphere and of its normative fundamentals, generating an approach that overlaps, to a large extent, with those of "alternative" or "subaltern" public spheres in colonial or post-colonial contexts. Transnational public Islam is even more interesting in its capacity to articulate an alternative, yet quite Habermasian view of connectiveness and 'communicative action.' As a final step, the paper attempts to assess what is common to this internally diverse development of late modern public spheres in the conflicted horizon of multiple modernities. The same culture of 'communicative action' can be seen at work at different levels, in spite of the diverging institutional polarizations between the historic, European, state oriented political arenas and the more fluid transnational processes, and in spite of different symbolic repertoires providing ideological cohesion to conflicting articulations of the public sphere.

Link to conference Website:

<http://www.arts.monash.edu/psi/news-and-events/intercultural-world/index.php>

(Conference programme will be posted soon).

All Welcome!

For catering purposes, please RSVP by November 15th.
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Co-sponsored by the School of Political and Social Inquiry, the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics and the Sociology Program
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