

OCEANS OF CRITIQUE.

The Black Atlantic, the Black Pacific, and the Black Mediterranean as Critical Epistemologies

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Course Description:

With the concept of the Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy introduced a new paradigm to understand the transatlantic connections and movements between Europe, Africa, and the Americas that gave birth to modernity. While the Black Atlantic captures the entanglements of the European Enlightenment, liberalism, democracy, and revolution with the terrors of colonialism, enslavement, and racism, it also theorizes the conditions, practices, and imaginations of Black and African diasporic agency and resistance beyond the limitations of a North Atlantic epistemology.

This course aims to broaden the perspective of the Black Atlantic both conceptually and geographically: First, it will introduce feminist, queer, and trans* perspectives to Black Atlantic Studies. Second, it will broaden the scope beyond the Anglophone and Afro-American world to encompass the Haitian Revolution as a politics of radical antislavery in the Francophone Atlantic. Wilhelm Anton Amo will be introduced here as the first Black philosopher in the Germanophone early Enlightenment. Third, it will trace the transoceanic, transcolonial, and transracial connections between the Black Atlantic, the Black Pacific and the Black Mediterranean. Against colonialist and imperialist tropes of Oceania, the Black Pacific brings to the fore the global relationalities and repercussions of a politics of anti-colonial and decolonial resistance, solidarity, and cosmopolitanism before and after Bandung. In light of Europe’s so-called refugee crisis, the Black Mediterranean offers a novel take on Europe’s disavowed colonial past and postcolonial present by centering African diasporic archives and articulations of freedom, democracy, and belonging.

The Black Atlantic, the Black Pacific, and the Black Mediterranean can thus be understood as subversive counter-narratives, as resistant imaginations, and as critical epistemologies that do not only pluralize, complement, and enlarge the field of critical theory. They rather enable us to interrogate, decenter, and deconstruct critical theory epistemologies that stay within and are even complicit with the workings of the colonality of knowledge and white normativity. As oceans of critique, they allow to rewrite, transcend, and radicalize the imagination of emancipation beyond colonial cartographies of knowledge. In so doing, they cultivate alternative ways of being and belonging in a postcolonial world.

I. THE BLACK ATLANTIC

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