



The American Corner Innsbruck and the  
Department of American Studies at the University of Innsbruck  
cordially invite you to a talk by

**Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan BRANDT**

Department of American Studies, University of Graz

**The American in Chains: Enslavement and the Specter of  
North Africa in Early U.S. Barbary Narratives**

Monday, November 25, 2013, 10.15 a.m.

Room 40130, Humanities Building

In 1785, an incident occurred that was bound to shape the self-image of the not yet existent U.S. republic for centuries to come. Near the Straits of Gibraltar, two American trading ships came under the control of Algerian corsairs. Twenty-one crew members were taken as hostages, some of them dying of illnesses in the ensuing months, some being privately ransomed, and ten languishing in captivity for more than ten years. The 'American in chains' became a chief symbol in this common rhetoric of fear, with the so-called Barbary states (i.e., the Ottoman colonies of Tunis, Tripoli, and Algiers) functioning as vital opposites of the American democracy. Between 1785 and 1810 about a hundred seemingly autobiographical accounts of imprisonment by Barbary pirates were published in the United States. I will argue that these texts became so popular because they cleverly managed to evoke a field of 'negative productivity' (Bercovitch) in their portrayals of North Africa as a dark mirror image of the blooming American republic. In texts such as Peter Markoe's epistolary work *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787), Susanna Rowson's comedy drama *Slaves in Algiers, or A Struggle for Freedom* (1794), and Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (1797), the city of Algiers is constructed as a 'topographic counter model' to America, symbolically accompanying the emergence of the young U.S. republic and its 'struggle for freedom' in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Stefan Brandt** is Professor of American Studies at the University of Graz. After receiving his PhD and Venia Legendi at Freie Universität Berlin, he taught and conducted research at the University of Siegen, the University of Bochum, Harvard University, and University of Vienna. He has published three monographs – *Männerblicke* (1999), *Inszenierte Männlichkeit* (2007), *The Culture of Corporeality* (2007) – and four anthologies - *Douglas Sirk's IMITATION OF LIFE* (1999), *Transnational American Studies* (with Winfried Fluck and Ingrid Thaler) (2007), *Making National Bodies* (with Astrid M. Fellner) (2010), and *Transcultural Spaces* (with Winfried Fluck and Frank Mehring) (2010). His publications include essays on U.S. American television culture, ethnic alterity in American silent film, and cinematic aesthetics in *The Catcher in the Rye*. At the moment he is working on three projects, early American *bildungsliteratur*, liminal spaces in Anglo-Canadian literature, and transcultural urban spaces in North America.

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