

14<sup>th</sup> SeSaMO Conference

**PATHS OF RESISTANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

University of Turin (Italy)

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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

**TITLE: Challenging Narratives of Oppression: Middle Eastern Studies and the Politics of Research**

**CONVENOR(S):** Lorenzo Casini

**ABSTRACT:**

The counter-revolutionary wave that has recently swept through the Middle East has found legitimation in Europe and the US in a “discursive order” (Fairclough 1989, 1995) in which the claims of the Arab revolutions have been disqualified as naïve utopias, while systematic human rights violations by Arab regimes have been minimized or justified. Within this emerging discursive order, old orientalist ideas long discarded by the academic community (e.g. the incompatibility between Islam and democracy; Arab exceptionalism and so on) have turned into incontestable assumptions on which narratives of imminent threats coming from the region (e.g. “terrorism”, “migration”) have been articulated. Besides legitimizing the Arab counter-revolutions, mainstream discourses on the Middle East have served also to ground dominant discursive and social orders in the West where a new nationalist rhetoric is rapidly catching on in several countries.

Drawing on ongoing debates within the Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO) on the role of scholars of the Middle East in the present political scenario, this panel explores the potential of research as a means of resistance and transformation. **Within this wide framework, the panel invites contributions that address the following themes:**

- **The political implications of epistemological paradigms employed in Middle Eastern Studies**
- **Critical analyses of hegemonic discourses on the Middle East**
- **Research freedom in Middle Eastern Studies in the Middle East and abroad**

**CONVENOR'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

**Lorenzo Casini** is Assistant Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Messina. Most of his research concerns the study of the Arabic novel through theoretical approaches drawn from debates in “cultural studies” and the “sociology of literature”. Currently he is preparing a monograph in English language on the poetical and political deployments of the European theme in the Egyptian novel and working on a new project on recent developments in Gulf literature.

