

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: Anti-Westernism and Intellectual Resistance to Imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa**

**CONVENOR(S):** - Dr. Oguzhan Goksel  
- Prof. Michelangelo Guida

**ABSTRACT:** Western colonialism has non-violent dimensions (i.e. cultural imperialism), therefore anti-Western sentiment in our age does not remain limited to societies with a history of Western occupation such as India and Egypt. Though never directly colonised, traumatic encounters with Western colonialism have also shaped the political and socio-economic trajectories of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries such as Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Perhaps due to its geographical proximity to Europe, the MENA region has long been at the centre of debates over anti-Westernism – attracting the attention of scholars such as Bernard Lewis, Ian Buruma and Pankaj Mishra. While some observers have associated anti-Westernism with religious fundamentalism, others have evaluated it as a reaction to the political and economic subjugation of the region by Western powers such as the US.

One relatively under-studied discussion is the way in which intellectuals of the MENA region innovatively formulate anti-Westernism as a form of *resistance* to – and *mental emancipation* from – the pervasive and omnipresent discursive influence of the Western world. This panel is inspired by the perspective of Cemil Aydin who argues that anti-Westernism has been developed by educated elites in the non-Western world as a response to a self-contradictory aspect of Western civilisation, namely its “double standards”. Aydin believes that Western powers often violate their own proclaimed standards of civilization (e.g. human rights) as a result of their imperialist ambitions. As such, the double standards of Western global hegemony lead to disillusionment among the intelligentsia and push them towards putting forward anti-Western visions for the salvation of their societies. Within the conceptual context summarised so far, we invite contributions that examine the political thought and anti-Western visions of MENA intellectuals subscribing to various different ideologies (e.g. Islamism, conservatism, Turkish/Iranian/Arab nationalism, Marxism etc.). Papers could focus on the thought of a single intellectual, cultural circle, and school of thought from one MENA country or comparatively study several of these from various countries.

## CONVENOR'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

**Prof. Michelangelo Guida** is Head of the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, Turkey. He obtained his Ph.D. from Istituto Universitario Orientale in 2005 and since then he has worked in several Turkish universities.

**Dr. Oguzhan Goksel** is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, Turkey. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of *New Middle Eastern Studies* journal, based in the UK. He obtained his Ph.D. degree from Durham University, UK in 2015.

## PAPERS:

### 1. Epistemological Resistance: Political Realism, Liberal Constitutionalism and Arab Spring.

Acar Kutay

#### ABSTRACT:

This paper critically examines and evaluates the constitutional and political processes in the MENA region conducted through the vision of achieving of social and political transformation by means of a neutral liberal constitution. I do this neither to reject liberal values of liberty and equality, nor to promote a research agenda that is apologetic for illiberal/anti-liberal regimes or for orientalism. The point is to argue that constitutional and political transformation in the region has been largely shaped and evaluated by a hegemonic interpretation of liberal constitutionalism, which is ahistorical, moralist and de-politicizing. Some commentators define such a vision as 'structural-liberalism', while others view it as 'procedural liberalism'. This literature—which includes work by political, constitutional, and social theorists—shares the belief that structural and procedural accounts of liberalism intend to present liberal constitutionalism as a universal project and a telos for the non-Western world. In contrast, political realism proposes an alternative theoretical perspective to liberalism in at least two grounds. First, following Raymond Geuss, its research agenda primarily submits to Ideologiekritik, that is, the task of political theory must be to unmask the origins, epistemic nature, and implications of liberal theory. Second, constitutionalism in liberal theory means resisting arbitrary power, but constitutions also generate legitimate political authority and create a political community that would organize and regulate its political institutions by the constitution.

## ACADEMIC PROFILE:

**Acar Kutay** is Associate Professor & Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Acar Kutay worked previously as a research fellow at the University of Bergen and as a faculty member at Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus. Currently, he is an associate professor and a Marie Skłodowska Curie fellow at University of Copenhagen. Kutay is the author of the book *Governance and European civil society: Discourse, governmentality and NGOs*, Routledge, 2014, and *NGOs, Civil Society, and Structural Change* (forthcoming, Palgrave). He has also published, among others, in *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *European Law Journal*, *Globalizations*, and *Critical Policy Studies*. His current research focuses on realist political theory and its implications on constitutional change.

## **2. The Emergence of Anti-Westernism and Turkish Conservatism.**

**Michelangelo Guida**

### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper aims at analyzing the emergence of anti-Westernist political ideologies among Turkish speaking intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century. After a brief introduction on the historical roots of contemporary political ideologies and their anti-Westernist approaches, this paper will focus particularly on the conservative and Islamist intellectuals, which emerged as a reaction in 1880s to the West that was perceived not only as a military threat but also as a cultural and civilizational one. Consequently, even if heavily influenced by Western ideas of modernization and admired its technological successes, these two ideologies will emerge as a reaction to and in rejection of Western Imperialism.

The understanding of these two ideologies is particularly important because they have been extremely influential in contemporary Turkish politics. However, the existing literature has failed to identify the historical and intellectual roots of their ideas. Moreover, the present literature has not been able to clearly underline the different peculiarities of Islamism and conservatism in non-Western context, and particularly in Turkey.

### **PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA PROPONENTE:**

**Michelangelo Guida** is head of the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Istanbul 29 Mayıs University. He received his BA in Politics (2001) and PhD in Turkish Studies (2005) from Università per gli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale and his MA in Turkish Studies (2002) from SOAS. Prof. Guida has published in Italian, English and Turkish mainly on Islamist intellectuals in Turkey but he also worked on intellectual behaviours.

## **3. A Ferment of Dissent: Martin Heidegger's Influence in pre-revolutionary Iran**

**Mustafa Aslan**

### **ABSTRACT:**

One of the most poignant anti-Western manifestoes of all times emerged in Iran during the twentieth century. It was Gharbzadegi (Westoxication), a monograph penned by Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969) in 1962. Specialists of pre-revolutionary Iran also reiterate the monograph's ideological contribution to the making of the Islamic revolution. Just like the content of Gharbzadegi, the personality of Al-e Ahmad is of extreme complexity. It underwent dramatic transformations as well as unsettling moments. Besides all of these, Al-e Ahmad cultivated a very cosmopolitan intellectual zeal. On this account, his exchanges with anti-modern European thought, particularly with that of Martin Heidegger, remains worthy of contemplation. Hence, with primarily appealing to Ali Mirsepassi whose writings artfully elucidate the imprints of Heidegger within the intellectual landscape of pre-revolutionary Iran, the present study traces these various exchanges and the historical contingencies surrounding them. In this study, I also do argue that this so called 'Heidegger connection' also endowed Gharbzadegi a particular flavor. At this point, Al-e Ahmad's encounter with Ahmad Fardid (1912-1994), the 'middleman' between him and

Heideggerian philosophy, remains at the focal stage of this inquiry. Eventually, this study ventures into one of the most vibrant episodes of the intellectual history of pre-revolutionary Iran. But, more than that, it also aims to challenge the unthinking assumption that anti-Western visions of MENA intellectuals are introvert and monolithic reactions to Western global hegemony. To this end, the case of Al-e Ahmad, in fact, reveals a very eclectic and heterogeneous form of anti-Westernism.

#### **ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

##### **Mustafa Aslan**

##### **PhD Candidate at GCSC (Graduate Center for the Study of Culture) of Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen, Germany**

In my bachelor's, I have studied Philosophy as a major and English Literature as a minor at Bilkent University in Turkey with a full-comprehensive scholarship. I graduated from this institution in 2014 and ranked as the second best student of that year's cohort. After my bachelor's, I went to Belgium to study Cultural Studies at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven as a master's student. My master's thesis on diaspora identity was selected as one of the best papers written by master's students in the 2015-2016 academic year and received an outstanding grade. Eventually, I have graduated from KU Leuven in September 2016 with a *Cum Laude* distinction. After finishing my studies at KU Leuven, I have started my second master's in Comparative History at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. During my studies at CEU, I also undertook an academic specialization in Religious Studies which endowed me an Advanced Certificate in this field at the end of the academic year. In my master's thesis bearing the title *A Plague from the West: Jalal Al-e Ahmad's Gharbzadegi within the Context of Anti-Westernism in the Islamic World*, I critically analyzed Jalal Al-e Ahmad's seminal monograph *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) in relation to the pre-existing anti-Western visions of various MENA thinkers. During this research, I worked with Professor Nadia Al-Bagdadi whose studies in the history of the Middle East are well-known in Europe and beyond. I have started to learn Persian in the summer of 2016 at the Saadi Foundation in Istanbul, a highly acclaimed private institution that offers Persian language courses to Turkish citizens at all levels. As a master's student in the Comparative History program at CEU, I also took an intensive language course of Persian which was specifically designed for source reading purposes. Apart from my knowledge of Persian, I do possess sound knowledge of Ottoman Turkish. This year I had been accepted to the PhD program in History at GCSC (Graduate Center for the Study of Culture) of Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen with a full scholarship.