

14th SeSaMO Conference

PATHS OF RESISTANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITLE: Resisting through art: aesthetic forms of defiance in the Middle East and North Africa

CONVENOR(S): - Francesca Romana Russo
- Carlotta Mingardi

ABSTRACT:

The so-called Arab Uprisings have witnessed an explosion of artistic forms of defiance during the demonstrations that have agitated the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. Their spectacular visibility has generated studies and investigations on the various artistic forms of disobedience displayed in many various countries in the region. However, the powerful impact that art may have in shaping power relations goes beyond times of revolution. Indeed, the relevance of artistic forms of protest preceding the Arab Uprisings have often been overshadowed by the presence of authoritarian systems of power. Also, the contribution of art to the perpetuation of resistance in post-revolutionary in the region times remains understudied.

This panel focuses on aesthetic practices of resistance in the Middle East and North Africa. On a theoretical level, it seeks to address the relation between artistic productions, power and resistance and to explore how art may represent a form of defiance and an effective tool to challenge systems of power. On an empirical level, papers should focus on selected case studies from the Middle East and North Africa and think about how these cases may contribute to conceptualize the ways in which art can intervene in and have an impact on relations of dominance and subordination, inclusion and exclusion.

We welcome papers that take into consideration various forms of artistic productions (dance, music, visual art poetry, theatre, street art) and investigate how these have intervened in the relations between power and resistance in the Middle East and North Africa.

CONVENOR'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Francesca Romana Russo is a graduate from the School of Oriental and African Studies with an MSc in Middle East Politics. Currently based in Tunis, her main research interests are relations between art, power and resistance, sectarianism and neoliberalism in Lebanon and the evolution of Islamist movements.

Carlotta Mingardi is a graduate from the School of Oriental and African Studies with an MSC in Middle East Politics and a MA in International Relations from Ca' Foscari University. Her research interests cover artistic resistance in women's movements of the MENA region and gender-based violence in migration contexts.

PAPERS:

FIRST SESSION

1. Resisting invisibility in post-revolutionary Tunisia: the case of the Mawjoudin Queer Film Festival

Francesca Romana Russo, Carlotta Mingardi

ABSTRACT:

Aesthetics practices are powerful components of cultural hegemonic projects (Gramsci, 1988) through which power shapes people's imagination and regulate norms of behaviours. Artistic productions contribute to build a hierarchy among subjects, remarking what and who should be visible/invisible in the public sphere and drawing lines of inclusion/exclusion (Foucault, 1980, 1990; Rancière, 2004). Theoretically this paper seeks to analyse how art can represent a viable form of resistance for those identities ordinarily made invisible and excluded from the public sphere. The paper focuses on the use of art as a tool of resistance by the LGBTQ+ community in Tunisia and on the creation of the Mawjoudin Queer Film Festival in aftermath of the revolution.

In the first part this paper analyses the relation between art and the public space during the protests of 2011. Through the performance of aesthetic forms of disobedience, people have reclaimed their visibility and their inclusion in the public space. This has been re-appropriated not only as a space to express common interests (opposition to the regime), but also re-imagined and re-configured as a site in which particular identities were able to visually express their own claims and political demands. This has in part contributed to open a space for the discussion and visibility for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community in the country. Going beyond the revolutionary momentum, the second part of this paper analyses how art contributes to perpetuate and maintain this space of debate open and visible in the public sphere.

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Francesca Romana Russo is a graduate from the School of Oriental and African Studies with an MSc in Middle East Politics. Currently based in Tunis, her main research interests are relations between art, power and resistance, sectarianism and neoliberalism in Lebanon and the evolution of Islamist movements.

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2. Influence of Tehran Activism at the Public Domain: A discourse analysis of graffiti

Narciss M.Sohrabi

ABSTRACT:

Iranian graffitists consider every opportunity and carve their words and opinions on the walls. In this situation, the wall is a factor in stimulating the emotional excitements, the emotions that can tarnish collective conscience by their appearances. The wall, in recent times, is an intermediary that is located alongside the social activists and situations. Graffiti has a long history in Iran, but in its modern sense, it has been formed for about 10 years, with young graffitists aged 18 to 32. The audience is important in Iranian graffiti art, and the Iranian graffitists respect the current norms of society, so there is a good relationship between the people and the graffiti. Iran is one of the countries that have many limitations in urban art. These limitations have been raised not only on the part of urban management, but also on property ownership rules. Nevertheless, graffitists have found their own solutions to resistance and survive. "Being on the street for graffiti" is a resistance that brings enthusiasm, excitement and understanding of identity to anything that makes everyday life empty of any activity and motivation. This study tries to investigate the process of graffiti developments over the past decade by the green movement and in addition to looking at the social aspects of this phenomenon, examines the ideas of the works, their forms and places of execution.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Narciss M.Sohrabi received a Ph.D. degree at Management of space and society from the Paris Nanterre University. She is a visiting research fellow, in LADYSS. She has published papers the different journals and conferences. Narciss's works focuses on abstraction of public space, socio-political movement, review and analysis of art capacity for place making urban justice and cultural impacts. Her last research is on the role of the public art in the socio-political movement in the public space and social networks.

3. Netfannou - Art is not a choice, it's who we are. *Un progetto esplorativo dell'arte non formale fra i giovani di Sousse*

Giulia Sergiampietri, Giulia Sostero

ABSTRACT:

Questa ricerca ha lo scopo di delineare il panorama dell'arte non formale dei giovani di Sousse, Tunisia.

"Netfannou" è un termine dispregiativo per definire l'arte come una perdita di tempo, ma identifica una collettività, un "noi" in cui si ritrovano molti giovani artisti tunisini che cercano di rivoluzionare l'arte o di compiere una rivoluzione attraverso l'arte.

Partendo dagli studi esistenti sul ruolo dell'arte e la sua portata di cambiamento nella cultura tunisina, si è scelta la città di Sousse come alternativa alla centralizzazione culturale in Tunisia.

Dopo una mappatura dei luoghi culturali esistenti e di alcune iniziative nascenti, l'approccio è stato quello di riportare le voci di 19 individui o gruppi di giovani impegnati in forme artistiche non formali nell'area di Sousse. Lo strumento scelto è stato quello del sito web (<https://netfannou.wordpress.com/>), con la pubblicazione di 19 video interviste (quando possibile con spezzoni di performance) in cui gli artisti si raccontano e riportano le loro opinioni sulla centralizzazione culturale e l'impatto politico dell'arte non formale in Tunisia.

La finalità di un formato multimediale e online della ricerca è quella di renderla una piattaforma di lancio per giovani artisti che raramente hanno occasione di raccontarsi e di incontrarsi. Parallelamente alla ricerca, sono stati organizzati incontri di networking per favorire lo scambio di progetti artistici e di persone.

Proponiamo quindi questo formato di ricerca come un modello che facilmente si presta alla ricerca sul tema dell'arte non formale nella regione MENA e che potrebbe essere efficacemente riprodotto altrove.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DELLE PROPONENTI:

Giulia Sergiampietri, laurea triennale in Antropologia Culturale, laurea magistrale EMJMD "Master MIM: Inter-Mediterranean Mediation" (Ca' Foscari, UPV Montpellier III, UAB). Ha ampliato la sua ricerca sull'arte dei giovani in Tunisia con una tesi di laurea magistrale basata sull'osservazione partecipante all'interno della Federazione Tunisina dei Cineasti Amatoriali (FTCA).

Giulia Sostero, laurea triennale in Lingue, Culture e Società dell'Asia e dell'Africa Mediterranea (Arabo) a Ca' Foscari, laurea magistrale EMJMD "Master MIM: Inter-Mediterranean Mediation" (Ca' Foscari, UPV Montpellier III, UAB), presentando la tesi "Radicalisation: Users' Guide. A Case Study on Swedish practices of prevention" alla XIX ISA International Conference of Sociology e alla RN34 ESA Conference of Sociology of Religion.

4. Juggling powers: resistance through clowning techniques

Ilaria Amadori

ABSTRACT :

Theatre is used as psychotherapist method in art therapy in **refugees and asylum seekers'** camps and shelters. It is a flexible, affordable and extensive practice that allows to create comfortable and protected spaces for narrating and discussing about the experiences people are living. With the various techniques (theatre of the oppressed, psychodrama, social theatre), it can be used to learn or to teach, to speak out and to advocate (Boal, Freire). Performing using non verbal languages collaborate in the healing process, reinforcing awareness and resilience, allowing personal and communitarian growth (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008). **Clownerie** is one of the social theatre techniques. It is frequently marginalized, considered a pueril art lacking of seriousness. On the contrary, thanks to the stress released situation that laughters creates, the performance can introduce a **satirical counter-narrative** . Moreover, this technique can be understood on multiple scales so that anyone-from children to adults- can be part of the performance. With this intervention, I would concentrate on the "Clown me in" Lebanese experience in **refugees camps and settlements in Lebanon, Jordan and along the Balkan road**. Clowning performances and laboratories **defies powers** and are one of the everyday resistance (Scott) practices for displaced people

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DELLA PROPONENTE : I am graduate from Université Paris Diderot (Paris 7) with a MA in *Sociologie et Antropologie: politique, culture, migrations* and a Master in Middle East Politics and a master from Università Ca' Foscari of Venice, *Crossing the Mediterranean: towards Investment and Integration (MIM)*. My research

focus on spatial and urban practices of migrant with a gender perspective, concentrating on women working in the care sector in the MENA region. Working with refugees and asylum seekers in different European countries, my attention is on grassroots strategies of resistance in informal context.

SECOND SESSION

5. Syrian documentaries after 2011 as a resistance: reappropriation of the narrative

Nicolas Appelt

ABSTRACT:

In the midst of a flood of images of different origins, natures and formats drawing from the revolt and, subsequently, the conflict in Syria, a documentary cinematographic creation emerged, free from control of state authorities in 2011. In this way, these documentaries constitute a form of resistance, which is resistance to the narrative emanating from the regime. These films represent a resistance to content and form. Indeed, their aesthetic depends on an ethical position marked by the desire to understand what is happening in Syria. They contain several common peculiarities that set them apart from raw testimonies on the country's extreme crisis situation. Among them, a sense of ethics related to their subject and filmed people, as well as the affirmation of an "I" takes place. These two characteristics constitute central elements of the approach, as well as of the devices implemented in certain documentaries. Based on a corpus of several films, this presentation will show that the filmmakers are creating a form of resistance by reclaiming the story of both the revolt and the conflict. This attempt is built, in particular, from a double reappropriation, that of both memory and spaces. This reappropriation of the narrative is translated into images by the appearance of "counter-spaces," the so-called by Michel Foucault heterotopias.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Nicolas Appelt is PhD Student at University of Geneva (Global Studies Institute). His research interests cover Syrian documentaries after 2011.

6. "E canta per i cuori assetati": la canzone impegnata e il lavoro culturale della sinistra tunisina negli anni 1970-1980

Alessia Carnevale

ABSTRACT:

I cicli di contestazione e di conseguente repressione che attraversano la Tunisia nel corso degli anni 1970-1980 marcano un'inesorabile frattura tra il regime bourguibista e le basi militanti dei movimenti studenteschi e sindacali. È in questo contesto di crisi egemonica che emergono i primi cantanti e gruppi musicali fautori di una canzone che si propone come "alternativa" e "impegnata". Voce della sinistra radicale e dissidente, *al- uġniya al-multazima* è chiamata ad animare manifestazioni e ricorrenze all'interno delle facoltà, dei locali sindacali e dei centri culturali di tutto il paese. Il mio intervento mette in luce, attraverso il materiale d'archivio, le testimonianze orali e le canzoni raccolte durante la

ricerca di campo, il percorso artistico e militante di due esperienze tra le più rappresentative di questa corrente musicale: i gruppi *Al-baḥṭ al-mūsīqī* di Gabes, formatosi in ambito studentesco, e il gruppo *Awlād al-manājjim* di Gafsa, espressione dei lavoratori delle miniere di fosfato. Muovendo da un concetto di cultura come luogo di articolazione del conflitto ideologico, si intende con ciò esplorare il ruolo della canzone nell'aggregazione e coesione dei militanti, nella promozione culturale ed intellettuale, e quindi nella costruzione del discorso contro-egemonico della sinistra tunisina. Attraverso la ricostruzione di tale patrimonio artistico e memoriale dissidente, ci si propone dunque di contribuire all'indagine di quel processo ininterrotto di accumulazione di pratiche e materiali di resistenza che in Tunisia, come nel resto della regione, hanno costantemente messo in discussione i regimi autoritari e agito per il cambiamento politico e sociale.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA PROPONENTE:

Alessia Carnevale è dottoranda in Civiltà Islamica presso l'Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali, Università di Roma "La Sapienza", dove ha avviato una ricerca sulla canzone impegnata in Tunisia durante i regimi autoritari postcoloniali. Precedentemente ha conseguito la laurea magistrale in Letterature e Culture Comparete presso l'Università di Napoli "L'Orientale".

7. The feather and the sword: Hassani poetry as a form of resistance to occupation in the Western Sahara

Alejandro Martin

ABSTRACT:

The Western Sahara conflict illustrates a case of resistance of the original Sahrawi population, represented by the Frente Polisario, to the Moroccan occupation of their territory. Between 1975 and 1991, both parties engaged in an open war that ended with the signing of a UN-sponsored ceasefire. While many observers initially believed that the Polisario's resistance and capacity to fight Moroccan forces would gradually wear down, since it failed to win strong international allies, its well-motivated guerrilla fighters made the Moroccan administration of the territory very costly. In trying to understand the Polisario's ability, as a non-state actor that started with barely a few dozens of members, to fight one of the most powerful states of the region, we must consider the role that poetry played in mobilising the Sahrawi population around the idea of a common national identity. According to Deubel (2011), traditional Hassani poetry indeed served as 'a discursive strategy' to support the political rhetoric of the Sahrawi nationalist movement, which reinforced the population's commitment to resist Moroccan occupation. Morocco, on its part, appropriated traditional poetry festivals, moussems, that assert national belonging through symbols including Moroccan flags and government delegations, evoking disdain from Sahrawi youths (De Orellana 2015). Exploring the extent to which Hassani poetry was exploited, to different degrees of success, by both parties in the war will allow for a conceptualisation of how this form of art can serve to promote a political identity and, consequently, paths of resistance in the MENA region.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Alejandro Martin is a graduate of the University of Cambridge with an MPhil in International Relations and Politics. With a first-class BA from KCL, his research interests include conflict resolution and refugee issues. Currently based in Nairobi, he is expecting to start his PhD in Cambridge in October 2019.

8. Boycotting the Museum: Power relations and canon-building in Lebanon

Nadia von Maltzahn

ABSTRACT:

In the early 1960s, a number of Lebanese artists boycotted the annual group exhibition of the newly opened Sursock Museum in Beirut. Reasons for boycott included not involving the Lebanese Artists Association for Painters and Sculptors in the selection process for the exhibition, and the focus on an abstract art that they considered to be imported from Europe and “questionable” (*mashkuk bihi*). The 1960s were a high period for contemporary art in Lebanon, with new galleries opening and the city establishing itself as a regional cultural hub. As new institutions were forming, it was only natural for some to assert themselves as the leading venues for art and setting taste. Each institution (such as the Sursock Museum, the Unesco Palace, select galleries) was connected to various public and private bodies and individuals that came with their own set of politics. The 1960s were also the height about debates over abstract versus figurative art, the discussion often being connected to questions of tradition and authenticity. This paper will analyse the power relations between different institutions and artists during these formative years, which will be connected to who determines what constitutes a canon of art in Lebanon.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Nadia von Maltzahn is the Deputy Director of the Orient-Institut Beirut. She is the author of *The Syria-Iran Axis: Cultural Diplomacy and International Relations in the Middle East* (I. B. Tauris, 2013/2015), and other publications revolving around cultural practices in Lebanon and the Middle East. She holds a DPhil in Modern Middle Eastern Studies from St Antony's College, Oxford.