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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITLE: Figuring It Out: Crises and Resistance in Graphic Novels, Comics, and Cartoons

PROPONENTS: VALENTINA MARCELLA AND PIERRE HECKER

ABSTRACT:

In the new millennium visual and graphic arts have acquired an increasingly prominent role as sites of political expression and participation. That this is true also in the Middle East and North Africa has become all the more clear in the past decade, especially since the waves of massive protests commonly known as the 'Arab Spring', the Iranian 'Green Movement' and the Turkish 'Gezi Park Protests'. In the protests that sparked from Sidi Bouzid to the entire region visual and graphic arts have been a key means of political engagement. Yet, this trend is not limited to the protests themselves and artistic practices are employed to create new spaces for political struggle more broadly.

Among the graphic arts, comic books, graphic novels, and cartoons have been prominent vehicles for popularizing alternative views and narratives. They have contributed to forming popular counter-publics that consciously (or unconsciously) resist and challenge right-wing populism and the anti-democratic encroachments of the authoritarian state. Especially through these genres not only artists but a wide array of social actors – including activists, students, journalists – have been responding to different dimensions of social and political crises, challenging hegemonic discourses, established norms, censorship, and taboos.

This panel aims to bring together scholars working on MENA countries from different disciplines and perspectives (historical, sociological, anthropological, political, religious, literary, cultural studies, and area studies) to discuss how the graphic arts produced in the MENA region and its diaspora are changing in response to these crises. In particular, the panel focuses on comics, cartoons, and graphic novels - artistic expressions which boast a well-established tradition -, without neglecting phenomena which are relatively new in the region, such as graphic journalism. Through specific case studies, the panel seeks to investigate how these graphic art forms are asserting themselves as valuable sites for critical thinking, contestation, and resistance, therefore how they contribute to the spread of a dynamic subversive culture.

The language of the panel is English.

SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS:

Valentina MARCELLA is a Research Fellow and Lecturer at L’Orientale University of Naples. She obtained her Ph.D. from the European University Institute of Florence, where her dissertation on the political role of satire in the aftermath of Turkey’s 1980 coup was awarded the James Kaye Memorial Prize for Best Thesis in History and Visuality. Her research interests cover satire, authoritarian regimes, counterculture, urban development, and Italo-Turkish relations. Her recent publications include ‘Between Resistance and Surrender: Counter-Hegemonic Discourses in Turkish Satirical Magazines’ (Hecker et al., “The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Turkey”, Edinburgh University Press 2021) and ‘«A Satirical Magazine in Its Own Way»: Politicisation and Dissent in *Gırgır* (1972-1983)’ (*Diyâr* 2/2021). She is co-founder of the online magazine *Kaleydoskop - Turchia, cultura e società*.

Pierre HECKER is a Senior Researcher and Lecturer at the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS) at Philipps-University Marburg, Germany. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Leipzig and is the author of the book "Turkish Metal. Music, Meaning, and Morality in a Muslim Society" (Ashgate 2012; Routledge 2016). His recent publications include the co-edited volume "The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Turkey" (Edinburgh University Press 2021) as well as the book chapters 'Tired of Religion: Atheism and Non-belief in "New Turkey" (2021), 'Reading the Signs. Toward a Semiotic Approach in Islamic Studies' (2021), and 'Islam. The Meaning of Style' (2018). He has been the head of the research group 'Ne mutlu ateistim diyene. Atheism and the Politics of Culture in Contemporary Turkey' funded by Stiftung Mercator (2017-2020).

EMAIL ADDRESSES:

Valentina MARCELLA: vmarcella@unior.it

Pierre HECKER: pierre.hecker@staff.uni-marburg.de