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TITOLO/TITLE: Pandora's Box as a metaphor for the crisis of the Arab revolutions in post-2011 artistic expressions

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ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

On October 18, 2021, the European Union condemned the epilogue of the Tunisian revolution, which is currently resolved with the freezing of parliament and the concentration of power in the hands of the president. However, at home, as with Egyptian President al-Sisi, Qais Said has been hailed in numerous squares as the right person to carry out the necessary reforms without the participation of parliament. Both mainstream narratives in both countries support the president by associating corruption to the revolution and the post-revolutionary period dominated by Muslim Brotherhood parties. Shortly, both Tunisia and Egypt are experiencing post-revolutionary trauma with representational issues, divergent visions of modernism, and a democratic transition at the cost of illegal migration, terrorism, and a severe financial crisis.

Due to their aims and outcomes, the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions of the last decade can be compared to the myth of Pandora's box, whereby the desire for a radical re-discussion of identity and modernity freed the evils kept under control by the previous regime, resulting in a crisis. In fact, with censorship that in Tunisia has ceased while in Egypt it is increasingly arbitrary, during the post-revolutionary period, cultural and artistic production has been able to show an acute interest in political and social issues that often denounce the evils of society.

For example, the novel by Šukrī Mabḥūt *al-Ṭaliyānī* (The Italian, 2014), which the author claims to have conceived and written in the midst of the revolution, was received as a denunciation of the Islamic problem, repressed under the governments of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Ḥawla Ḥamdī dealt with economic problems and social disparities in the post-revolutionary period in her *Ayna al-mafarr* (Where is the Escape Route?, 2018). Similarly, many dystopian Egyptian novels, such as *Bāb al-ḥurūġ* (The Exit Door, 2012, 'Izz al-Dīn Šikrī Fišīr), *al-Ṭābūr* (The Queue, 2013, Basma 'Abd al-'Azīz) and *Uṭārid* (Mercury, 2014, Muḥammad Rabī), focus on imaginary worlds with problems that do not seem so distant from reality.

The revolutionary libertarian ethos is also symbolically expressed in a liberation of the word that takes shape in a literary and paraliterary movement where the spoken language is increasingly present and, in the process, is almost legitimised as a literary language. The use of dialect is confirmed in Egyptian cultural and artistic production, with the proliferation of comics, graphic novels, blogs, theatrical production, satirical literature and the past dialect poetry back in vogue. Similarly in Tunisia, where, in public television, the dialect was widely used only during the nineties, Taoufik ben Brik in 2015 scandalised Tunisian public opinion with his irreverent satirical novel *Kalb bin kalb* (Dog, son of a dog) endeavouring to provide a coherent model of writing the Arabic characters of the Tunisian dialect.

Referring to the myth of Pandora, this panel intends to analyse how literature, cinema, theatre, comics, figurative arts and, more generally, artistic and cultural production, have interpreted the crisis of the post-revolutionary period as the consequence of a rupture that has freed pre-existing evils, until then contained by governments.

Specifically, it aims to investigate how artistic expressions are situated in post-revolutionary polyphony, and how art interacts with the revolution, or how it contributes to its discourse not only in Egypt and Tunisia, but in other Arab countries as well. It may therefore be essential not to limit oneself to reading art as a narration of the past, but as a tool that allows us to see and understand the present and examine its tension towards the future (Castiglia 2016). Art can also be understood as a site of intellectual reflection oriented towards the creation of the image of a common identity and destiny (El-Desouky 2014) and can also serve to investigate the role of ordinary people in the construction and negotiation of national identity in a state of exception (Fahmy 2011). In return, one can question the role of art and cultural production within the revolutionary and post-revolutionary process (Rakha 2012). The panel also encourages a discussion of the specificity of different artistic genres and their local but also global impact (Calvente, Garcia, 2016).

The languages accepted for contributions to the panel are Italian, French and English.

Participants are welcome to draw on one or more of the following broad intervention areas; however, the list should not be viewed as exhaustive or restricting:

- Narratives/representations of the revolution
- Narratives/representations of the post-revolutionary crisis
- Narratives/representations of the narrative about the revolution
- Post-revolution narratives/representations with a focus on the language used
- Dystopian narratives/representations of the revolution and post-revolution
- Narratives/representations around freedom of speech
- Narratives/representations of the revolution in relation to illegal migration
- Narratives/representations of the revolution and social issues
- Narratives/representations of post-Arab revolution political representation

Quoted works

Castiglia, C. (2016). Revolution Is a Fiction: The Way We Read (Early American Literature) Now. *Early American Literature*, 51(2), 397–418.

Calvente, L., Garcia, C. (2016). *Imprints of Revolution: Visual Representations of Resistance*, Rowman & Littlefield International.

El-Desouky, A. (2014). *The Intellectual and the People in Egyptian Literature and Culture. Amāra and the 2011 Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Fahmy, Z. (2011). *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture*, Stanford University Press.

Rakha, Y. (2012). In Extremis: Literature and Revolution in Contemporary Cairo (An Oriental Essay in Seven Parts). *The Kenyon Review*, 34(3), 151–166.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

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Daniela Potenza is a researcher (RtdA) in Arabic language and literature at the University of Messina, where she also has a teaching assignment, and is affiliated to CERMOM (INALCO, Paris). Her fields of research are Arabic theatre, modern Egyptian literature and Arabic folk literature. Her book, *The Kaleidoscope Effect. Rewriting in Alfred Farag's Plays as a Multifunctional Strategy for a Multi-layered Creation*, the result of the PhD carried out at INALCO and "L'Orientale", was published by IPOCAN in 2020.

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