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TITOLO/TITLE: "Who Goes Green? Patterns of Environmental Activism, Cooperation and Resistance in the SWANA region"

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/s:

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ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

From the 2013 protests in Istanbul's Gezi Park, to the demonstrations against electricity shortages in the Gaza Strip in 2017, from the 2015 garbage crisis and the "You stink" movement in Lebanon to the 2016 "We are not waste" campaign in Morocco or the long-running collective "Maneche Msabb" in Tunisia, from the 2014 anti-fracking campaign in Algeria to "Egyptians against the Coal Movement", there is a growing and increasingly vibrant activism in the South West Asian - North African (SWANA) region around environmental issues. They are just a few examples of a multitude of bottom-up processes of contestation and change that shed light on multilayered, prolonged and overlapping crises far beyond the strictly environmental dimension. As the French sociologist Razmig Keucheyan (2019) shows in "Nature is a Battlefield", the centrality of environmental issues in contemporary social conflicts depends on the fact that the relationship between power, economy, and politics revolves more and more around these issues. Moreover, when talking about environmental issues, activism, and crises, the local dimension very closely intersects with the regional and global ones.

The main goal of this panel is, therefore, to disentangle different notions of environmental and climate crisis and others intermingled, bottom-up and in their relation with state policies, by looking at how local claims, modes of action, languages, and dynamics connect to broader trends domestically, regionally and internationally. Equally important, it is to investigate how and to what extent environmentalism tell us about inequalities, precise political-economic choices, historical processes and hierarchical power relations.

The SWANA region is particularly vulnerable to environmental and climate challenges, as clearly evident in intensifying desertification, recurrent droughts, increasing soil erosion, water shortage as well as the over-exploitation of natural resources. Moreover, environmental issues can hardly be isolated from other pressing issues such as wealth redistribution, infrastructure development, access to basic resources, resource sovereignty, resource governance, and management. Lastly, as Moneer (2020) recalls, rigorous environmental institutions and ad hoc legal frameworks are largely missing.

Against this backdrop, it has long been thought that the region has a poor political ecology and awareness. This assumption, however, is increasingly being challenged on two levels: conceptually, many scholars describe this idea as if it were an orientalist legacy overstating that a scarce nature is deterministically mismanaged by societies and states overall incapable of negotiating modernity inputs (Hoffmann 2018); in practice, as environmental activism has been strongly intensifying in the region (Verhoeven 2018). In that regard, more and more citizens would take advantage of the political openings resulting from the Arab uprisings to organize at the grassroots level for their environmental rights as well (Moneer 2020). At the same time, whereas it is undeniable that the expansion of environmental contestation reflects changing opportunities for activists who learned from other types of popular campaigns how to frame concerns broadly (Sowers 2018), it is equally true that environmental activism is by no means a "new" phenomenon. Environmental problems are not only rooted in the political and economic trajectories pursued in colonial and post-colonial times, but also reflect long-term structural changes in the region's political economy, including population growth, and rapid urbanization. In this sense, a historical reconstruction of the origins of environmental crises is a key step to better contextualize what is happening today. Current environmental issues cannot, in fact, be properly understood without taking into account colonialist legacies but also specific policies for constructing the modern post-independent states,

as well as the subsequent neo-liberal economic policies and processes of privatization and commodification of spaces and resources, which reproduced a number of inequalities, based on social class, gender or even ethnic belonging, as well as regional imbalances between urban and rural areas, and among different regions within the same country. Last but not least, one should not forget the role that state environmentalism played in some regimes as a legitimizing factor, not unlike state feminism.

The diffusion of environmental activism is mainly evident in countries like Lebanon, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Israel, and Iran but also emerged albeit to a lesser degree in the Persian Gulf. It manifests in many forms and creative modes of action: from resistance to megaprojects, land dispossession and waste dumping, to mobilization against air pollution, fracking and mining. Moreover, and remarkably, local protests in many countries have increasingly developed in an intersectional manner around multiple crises, bringing together labor claims and especially lack of job, with environmental issues, underdevelopment, misrecognition and even neocolonialism. An increasing number of scholars of SWANA/MENA politics, for example, engaged with issues of environmental exploitation, especially in “peripheral” territories (Suárez Collado 2013; De Smet and El Kahlaoui 2021, as byproducts of neoliberal, state-led and international donor driven policies, and as the manifestation of neocolonial practices.

This panel is interested in exploring five largely interwoven axes:

- First, the interconnectedness of environmental issues and other socio-economic, identity, and even cultural claims.
- Second, how practices of environmental activism and resistance go about renegotiating state-citizen relations, and social contracts.
- Third, whether and to what extent current state-led environmental projects and discourses meet environmental priorities from below, or are even in opposition and conflict with them.
- Fourth, the historical roots of environmental crises in connection to the (re)definition of hierarchical power relations, and center-periphery dynamics, with a particular attention to their entrenchment in state-led developmentalist projects first and privatization processes later on.
- Fifth, the ways in which local "crises" connect to global “crises”.

A last dimension is added to the previous ones, still largely underexplored, and that is the relationship between Islam and environmentalism. In other words, whether and to what extent social and political actors use a religion-based discourse as a theoretical framework to promote specific policies and narratives on environment.

In short, this panel aims to explore how “environmental consciousness” plays out in the SWANA countries, what the main local environmental concerns are, how they are embedded in broader processes of contesting the established political order and denounce social injustices, as well as the discursive narratives and modes of action of environmental activism(s) locally, their global connections and disconnections and their historical background.

The panel seeks original papers that elaborate on these topics, either as comparative studies or individual case studies. Contributions are invited from different disciplines including Political Science, Anthropology, Sociology, History and Area Studies.

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CONTRIBUTI ACCETTATI:

Abstracts:

1) Stephanie Daher (The Centre for Social Sciences Research & Action, Beirut)

The Lebanese "Tol'et Rihetkon". From Environmental-Triggered Claims to Socio-Economic Grievances.

The summer of 2015 in Lebanon witnessed the emergence of the "You Stink" (Tol'et Rihetkon) movement which unfolded as a result of the garbage crisis when the main landfill known as "Naameh" was closed causing piles of waste to pile up in the streets of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. In an unprecedented manner in the post-war period, the movement expanded across the country with protesters demanding a sustainable environmental solution to the crisis. However, though it was initially triggered by an environmental crisis, it soon came to embrace other demands and grievances, albeit interconnected in nature. Accordingly, the paper's aim is twofold: first, to examine in what ways does the 2015 waste and mismanagement crisis inform us about the economic policies historically adopted by the sectarian zu'ama which in their turn produced socio-economic inequalities across several regions. Second, it aims to unpack how the mobilising of Lebanese citizens along environmental demands was actually embedded in a broader process of contesting the political establishment and denouncing its entrenched corruption over decades producing systems of social injustice. To do that, the mobilisation dynamics including the advanced narratives and adopted modes of contentious action will be particularly researched and analysed.

Keywords: contentious politics, Lebanon, You Stink, sectarian system, zu'ama.

2) Costantino Paonessa (Università di Chieti-Pescara).

Al di là dalle interpretazioni storiografiche: il posto delle lotte ambientali nelle rivoluzioni della regione Mena (2011 – in corso). Qualche riflessione di storia del tempo presente.

A poco più di dieci anni dalle rivoluzioni del 2010 – 2011, una seconda ondata rivoluzionaria ha attraversato il Sud e Est del Mediterraneo. Mentre in alcuni casi le proteste sembrano essersi affievolite anche a causa della pandemia di Covid-19 e della repressione governativa (Algeria, Libano, Iraq), in Sudan si continua a resistere e a portare avanti le istanze emancipatorie. Il punto di partenza delle nuove proteste popolari sembra riproporre i temi delle mobilitazioni che si sono succedute in questi anni nella regione MENA e più in generale a livello globale. È in questo quadro, anche come conseguenza delle mobilitazioni mondiali contro il cambiamento climatico, che l'aspetto per così dire "ambientale" ha generato una rinnovata attenzione da parte di media e analisti afferenti a diverse discipline. Ricerche accademiche e reportage giornalistici hanno voluto accertare da una parte l'impatto della crisi climatica nello scoppio dei moti rivoluzionari, dall'altra il grado di consapevolezza di chi protesta sui temi legati all'ambiente e all'ecologia. In questo intervento mi soffermerò sull'analisi della matrice ambientale delle proteste (2011 – in corso) al fine di comprendere quanto questo fattore abbia influito – in maniera diretta o meno – sullo sviluppo dei movimenti rivoluzionari. Prendendo spunto da un articolo da me pubblicato sulla rivista *Diacronia* nel 2020 vorrei affrontare alcune questioni teoriche e concettuali concernenti il rapporto tra storia, subalternità e crisi ecologica, attraverso il caso dei movimenti rivoluzionari a Sud e Est del Mediterraneo. Lo scopo è quello di riflettere sulla metodologia della storia immediata o del tempo presente, riproponendo alcuni degli interrogativi post-coloniali sulle relazioni esistenti tra la prova storica e l'interpretazione della stessa.

3) Giulia Cimini (Università di Bologna)

Framing environmental activism and security in the Maghreb: a preliminary analysis of issues, perceptions and research avenues from the localized example of Morocco.

Following the Arab uprisings, environmental activism has been intensifying in the region (Verhoeven 2018). Some argues that citizens took advantage of the political openings resulting from the Arab Spring to organize at the grassroots level for their environmental rights as well (Moneer 2020). At a smaller scale, local protests in many countries have increasingly developed in an intersectional manner, bringing together labor claims and especially lack of job, with environmental issues, underdevelopment, misrecognition and even neocolonialism. An increasing number of scholars of SWANA/MENA politics, for example, engaged with issues of environmental exploitation, especially in “peripheral” territories (Suárez Collado 2013; De Smet and El Kahlaoui 2021), as byproducts of neoliberal, state-led and international donor driven policies, and as the manifestation of neocolonial practices. This is particularly evident and striking in a country like Morocco which has become a regional benchmark in the domain of political ecology and green transition for its ambitious energy policy and expansion of renewables, a process strongly driven by outside demand, and very much centralized with the clear backing of the monarchy. The peculiar case of Morocco is indicative of multiple aspects: the persistence of a gap between a political ecology from above and needs from below, a marginalization that is reproduced at multiple levels, and the intersectionality of issues in protests that look similar yet fail to evolve into national movements or widespread contentious collective actions. How does “environmental consciousness” play out in the country? What role does environmental activism and resistance play in the context of a broader process of social contestation? How does it relate to broader and transnational movements seeking to change the region’s political and economic order? This work in progress aims to illustrate some potential avenues of research and directions of Morocco’s environmental movement(s) in its(their) national outreach and external projections, paying particular attention to discursive narratives of disenfranchisement, the structural dimension of inequality and environmental security notions. It does so by taking the cue from localized examples of environmental activism such as the 2016 ‘We are not waste campaign’ in reaction to the decision of importing Italy’s waste, the 2017 ‘thirst revolts’ over water shortages in Zagora, or the Hirak of Jerada against the ‘mines of death’.

4) Ersilia Francesca (Università L’Orientale di Napoli).

Islam and environment: theoretical approaches and bottom-up politics between eco-friendly products and environmentally ethical business practices and “green washing”

The Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development (IDSD) 2002 maintains that Islam’s vision of economic development is entrenched in the ethical norms of Islam, stressing mankind’s responsibility in the utilization, allocation and preservation of natural resources, considered as gifts from God to the whole of humanity. The moral economy of Islam advocates social justice, poverty eradication and protection of the planet’s inhabitants and ecosystems. From its fusion of economic and moral principles, Islamic economics has proposed new strategies of growth, often involving an integration of Islamic values and the market economy which advocates a sustainable model of development.

Greater importance is now being directed to the considerations related to environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives and for the need of their integration into finance. Cumulatively, the overarching goal to be achieved is sustainability. The emerging trends offer Islamic finance a new frontier for growth, with its focus on value-driven finance and the ability to provide financial solutions that can bridge sustainable development gaps and address financial inclusion issues. The so-called “green sukuk” (green Islamic bond) – aimed at financing environmental-friendly projects, such as solar parks, bio-gas plants, and wind farm – count as an example of the financial solutions the Islamic finance offer to support sustainable development. At mean time many Muslim countries – in particular the Gulf countries – have included the UN SDGs in their 2030 Visions (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Abu Dhabi) and have started to support pharaonic infrastructural projects of “smart cities”, such as Masdar city (Abu Dhabi) and Neom (Saudi Arabia), which are supposed to have “zero” environmental impact.

Moving from the theoretical framework of the relationship between Islam and environmental sustainability, this paper will explore the case studies of green sukuk and smart cities in the SWANA region in order to disentangle their nature as eco-friendly products or “green washing” strategies.

5) Teresa Pepe (University of Oslo).

“That Future is Now and it Stinks”. Climate Change in Contemporary Arabic Dystopian Fiction.

This working paper analyses the representation of climate change and environmental issues in contemporary Arabic fiction. It focuses, in particular, on post-2011 dystopian literature, that is novels and short stories that project a pessimistic view of the future, a type of fiction that has become particularly prominent in Arabic in the last two decades. Dystopic and futuristic literature are privileged genres to study societal perceptions of environmental disasters and climate change because they might imply a wish of changing current realities by projecting possible future scenarios. Environmental degradation is in fact a major problem in the Arab region affecting the lives of millions, and climate change looms at the horizon as an even bigger threat to life conditions everywhere through desertification and sea level rise.

The study is based on a range of fictional works written in the last decade and it is informed by previous studies in the field of literature, social sciences and environmental humanities. It shows that a number of recent Arabic dystopian works explicitly deals in a fictional way with the issue of climate change, such as *Using Life* (Istikhdam al-Haya) by the Egyptian author Ahmed Naji (2014), *The Solar Grid* by Ganzeer (2020) and the short story "The Worker" by the Iraqi writer Diya Jubaili (2016); other dystopian novels, such as the critically acclaimed *Otared* [‘Utarid] (2015) by the Egyptian Mohamed Rabie, indirectly deals with environmental questions. I have identified a range of ecological issues that seem to occur in most of the works taken in consideration, namely: the representation of air and water pollution, waste disposal, traffic congestion, built environment and how they affect the daily lives of the Egyptians; the imminent coming of the apocalypse as a result of resource exploitation and climatic changes; the building of smart futuristic cities and the use of technology and renewable energies as means of recovering from the ashes of the catastrophe.

In conclusion, the study shows that Arab future fictions offer several solutions to the urgent threat of climate change, from dystopian environmental catastrophes to future green utopias achieved with genetic engineering and renewable energy. Besides, it argues that environmental challenge is becoming a growing concern for Arab authors, as part of a long-standing tradition of political commitment (iltizām).

Keywords: Dystopia; Climate Change; Literature; Arabic; post-2011.

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

Giulia CIMINI is a Junior Assistant Professor at the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Bologna, Gerda Henkel Research Fellow, and Visiting Fellow at the International University of Rabat (UIR). Previously, she was a Teaching Assistant of Politics at the University of Naples L’Orientale, and Visiting Fellow at the Middle East, Central Asia and Caucasus Studies Institute at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Her research interests include Maghrebi political parties, dynamics of contention and security assistance. She has published in the *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, *Contemporary Politics*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, and *The Journal of North African Studies*, among others. Giulia is the Book Reviews Editor of *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, a peer-reviewed, Open Access, online journal publishing in the fields of Comparative Politics and International Relations.

Renata Pepicelli is professor of Islamic Studies and History of Islamic Countries at the Department of Civilizations and Forms of Knowledge of the University of Pisa, Italy. Her research focuses on social movements and gender issues in North African societies and Islamic diaspora.

RELATRICI E RELATORI:

Dr. Stephanie DAHER is a research fellow in contentious politics - MENA at the Centre for Social Sciences Research & Action. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in Lebanon and Tunisia, in addition to visiting research periods at the Institute of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Durham University (UK) and Centre D’Etudes Maghrébines in Tunisia. She is also a researcher at the European Foundation for Democracy. She holds a PhD in Political Science and International Relations from the Sant’Anna Advanced School of Studies in Italy, where she specialised in contentious politics and protest movements in the Middle East and North Africa. She also has an MA in World Politics and International Relations from the University of Pavia (Italy) and a Masters Degree in Law from the Lebanese University. Her main research interests include contentious politics in the MENA region, social movements, and security studies.

Costantino PAONESSA ha un Dottorato in islamologia, post-doc in storia contemporanea, attualmente docente a contratto di Cultura e istituzioni – lingua araba presso l’Università di Chieti – Pescara. I miei interessi scientifici riguardano diverse discipline che vanno dalla storia dell’Islam e del sufismo (XIX secolo – tempo presente), alla storia contemporanea dei paesi arabi. Recentemente mi sono interessato alla storia dell’Emigrazione italiana a

Sud e Est del Mediterraneo (1861 – 1914) attraverso il caso dei gruppi anarchici italiani. Per la lista delle pubblicazioni si consulti :
[https://dial.uclouvain.be/pr/boreal/search/site/?f\[0\]=sm_creator:%22Paonessa,%20Costantino%2](https://dial.uclouvain.be/pr/boreal/search/site/?f[0]=sm_creator:%22Paonessa,%20Costantino%2)

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In 2015 she was visiting scholar at SOAS (London), and in 2018 she was Directrice d'Études at École Pratique des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses (Paris).

She is member of the Scientific Committee of the International Association on Ibadism and chief editor with A. al-Salimi of the series Studies on Ibadism and Oman, Olms (Germany).

Her scholarly activity focuses on Islamic law, gender studies in the MENA region, and history of Islamic economics. She published 5 books and 3 edited books; and wrote over 20 articles in PR journals and contributions in edited books in the last 10 years. Her 2002 book titled Teoria e pratica del commercio nell'islam medievale is considered a milestone in the field of studies on Ibadism and early Islam (s. review in JSAI 2004/29). Her book Economia, religione e morale nell'islam (Carocci 2013) is the first attempt of a comprehensive reconstruction of the Islamic economic thinking in Italian.

In the last five years she has supervised over 50 Master thesis, 6 PhD projects, 1 joint-supervision (cotutelle) with EPHE, Paris, and one Postdoctoral fellow.

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In 2021, she received a MECAM Fellowship (Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb) to join the Research Project "Imagining the Future: Dealing with Disparities" (IFG: Aesthetics and Politics) with a research project on "Environmental Imaginaries in Egyptian and Tunisian Dystopian Fiction". She is the author of the book Blogging From Egypt: Digital Literature (2005-2016) (Edinburgh University Press, 2019) and the co-editor of the volume Arabic Literature in a Posthuman World (with S. Guth, Harassowitz Verlag 2019), that examines the use of dystopia, necropolitics, monsters and satire in Arabic literature today. She has published several articles in Oriente Moderno, The Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication, Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies and LEA- Lingue e Letterature d'Oriente e d'Occidente. She occasionally writes for Jadaliyya, the Egyptian online newspaper Mada Masr, and the magazine Strange Horizon.

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