

14th 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: “Resistance is Life”. Paths of resistance in Kurdish arts and literature.

CONVENOR(S): - Farangis Ghaderi
- Francesco Marilungo

ABSTRACT:

The catastrophic consequences of the creation of the Middle East with no country for Kurds continue to present. As a minority divided among four nation-states (Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria) Kurds have been subjected to various degrees of political and cultural suppression, at times amounting to genocide. “Berxwedan jîyan e” goes a widespread saying in Kurdish: “resistance is life”. Indeed, for the Kurds throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, existence has been oftentimes ensured only by an act of resistance. Kurdish language and culture have been at the core of Kurdish resistance movements and the very site of struggle. At times the very act of writing in Kurdish has been in itself an act of resistance. As well as subverting and challenging the dominant discourses, Kurdish cultural production has been the site of creating and communicating alternative discourses. Artistic production has been, and continues to be, an effective means of constructing a national identity as well as a powerful source of mobilisation.

In this panel we welcome papers studying the close relation of Kurdish political and cultural resistance and Kurdish cultural production as an arena of resistance against the hegemonic powers. We welcome papers on Kurdish literature, theatre, cinema, and visual arts from all parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora, in order to give a broad overview of how cultural practices are mobilised today in Kurdistan as a means of resistance.

CONVENOR’S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Dr **Farangis Ghaderi** completed her PhD in Kurdish Studies from the University of Exeter in 2016. She has since worked as a research fellow and tutor in the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter. Her doctoral research examined the development of modern Kurdish poetry and the relation of poetics and politics.

Dr **Francesco Marilungo** completed his PhD in Kurdish Studies at the University of Exeter. His doctoral research focused on the literary urban space of Diyarbakır, the Kurdish largest city in Turkey, through a comparative analysis of Kurdish and Turkish literary sources. While completing his PhD, he was appointed by an Italian NGO to coordinate and monitor cooperation and development projects in the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Syria.

PAPERS:

1. Govend: steps of Kurdish politics in Turkey since 2013.

Raffaella Bianchi

ABSTRACT:

At the 2014 general elections, the electoral success of HDP (People's Democratic Party), the advertisement for the Kurdish Democratic Party HDP, portrayed an extremely diverse dancing community; along them, the co-leaders of the party Selhattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ Şenoğlu.

This paper explores political developments of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey through the analysis of significant performances of what in Turkish is named as Halay dance. This millenary dance is traditionally performed at weddings and it is popular within Turkic tribes in the Anatolian region, and in general in the Middle East. The peculiarity of the Kurdish performance (Govend) is that it can be danced mixing genders; this gender mix can also be seen in the very structure of HDP.

Mixing ethno-musicology and International Relations tools of analysis, this paper aims to deconstruct the significance of this performance for contemporary Kurdish political culture. By looking at most significant performances after 2013 since Gezi Park protest; the analysis re-constructs some relevant recent political history which is central for an understanding of the current situation of Kurds in Turkey.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA PROPONENTE:

Raffaella Bianchi is Research Fellow in International Relations and History at REDESM (Centre of Research in Economic and Cultures of the Mediterranean Region). She taught International Relations and European History in Turkey for six years. Her research interest is in music and politics. She recently published an article on the Gezi Park movement and music on the prominent journal *Popular Music*. She also draw parallels between Italian and Turkish nationalism in the field of opera studies, after writing a PhD at Loughborough University on Italian Nationalism and La Scala opera house.

2. Poetics of Resistance: Modern Kurdish Poetry as Aesthetic Resistance

Farangis Ghaderi

ABSTRACT:

Nationalism has been depending on the apparatus of literature for the creation of “imagined community”. In Europe the rise of nationalism was coincided with the rise of the novel as a literary form, but in Kurdish literature it was modern poetry which accompanied the phenomenon and novel, as a noticeable genre, did not appear until 1950s.

Accompanying the rise of nationalism changed the course of poetry from its classical forms and styles to what is known as “modern” forms. With the rise of arm struggle in the mid-20th century Kurdish poetry became more systematically a platform for the nationalist resistance movement and was employed as an effective tool in the official propaganda of the Kurdish political parties. In this paper I explore the role Kurdish poetry has been played in Kurdish politics and the ways it has been implemented in different stages of the Kurdish national struggle in the twentieth century.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Farangis Ghaderi completed her PhD in Kurdish Studies from the University of Exeter in 2016. She has since worked as a research fellow and tutor in the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter. Her doctoral research examined the development of modern Kurdish poetry and the relation of poetics and politics.

3. “I carved my name on Diyarbakir’s walls”. Literary representations of Diyarbakir as a castle of Kurdish resistance.

Francesco Marilungo

ABSTRACT: In the summer of 2015, the Turkish military besieged and, after a hundred-day long siege, conquered *Sur*, namely old-town Diyarbakir, the historical district of the largest Kurdish city in Turkey. The soldiers hanged Turkish flags on the city-walls to mark their spatial and symbolical appropriation of a space that was in those days claimed by the Kurdish autonomists. Few weeks earlier, that space was listed by the UNESCO as a World Heritage site, and for decades it was at the centre of a political and cultural struggle about visibility vs. annihilation of different cultures and ethnicities.

After presenting briefly the dynamics of political struggle as they developed in the city of Diyarbakir after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, with a specific focus on the management of heritage, I will analyse the literary representations of the city-walls as a symbolical element that conveys meanings of resistance in contemporary Kurdish literature. In the work of authors such as Ahmed Arif, Mehmed Uzun, Rojen Barnas, and others, Diyarbakir city-walls are represented as a castle of resistance of Kurdish culture and identity vis-a-vis the Turkish assimilative policies. In the last decades, in which Kurdish language publishing has seen a significant resurgence, poems, short stories and novels that celebrate the city are uncountable.

Bringing together examples from Kurdish and Turkish language literature, in this paper I will analyse the literary image of the city and the ways in which the latter inspired practices of resistance and opposition to the State.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Francesco Marilungo, PhD, Kurdish Studies. Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter.

4. Testimony in Kurdish Literature from Turkey

Clemence Scalbert Yucel

ABSTRACT:

(250 words max, font: calibri 10)

Due to the negation of Kurdish culture, the ban on the expression of any form of Kurdish identity and on the use of Kurdish language on the one hand, and the strength of a Kurdish political movement on the other, Kurdish literary production in Turkey has been intermingled with non-literary political stakes. Though Kurdish modern literature has developed relatively recently, it has grown rapidly as a dynamic and rich field of production. This paper will focus on one particular aspects of this production which is the literature of testimony or of testimony in Kurdish literature. The publication of memoirs has been growing. Yet although a genre of testimony has not necessarily developed as an autonomous genre, poetry or fiction have been used in order to testimony, to witness, and to account for the negated dominated history of the Kurdish people and Kurdistan. This presentation will examine the evolution of this literature since the 1980s. Analysing a range of works produced in Turkey and in diaspora, in both Kurdish and Turkish language, this presentation will pay a specific attention to 1/ the genres of testimony and memoirs and their relation to other literary genres such as poetry or fiction; 2/ the narrative techniques of the testimony in Kurdish literature from Turkey; 3/ the uses of paratext this literature.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

C. Scalbert Yucel gained a PhD in Geopolitics (University of Paris IV- Sorbonne) and graduated in Kurdish Language and Civilisation (INALCO). She joined the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies in 2007 where she is currently a Senior Lecturer in Ethnopolitics and Kurdish Studies.

5. Towards A Resistance Literature: The Struggle of Kurdish-Kurmanji Novel in Post 2000s

Davut Yeşilmen

ABSTRACT:

In post 2000s Kurdish-Kurmanji literature has expanded qualitatively and quantitatively thanks to the efforts and activities of both institutes and individuals; and due to certain developments within the Kurdish political movement. The rising number of Kurdish publishing houses and publications, the high number of reading groups and bookstores and *last but not least* a new generation of Kurdish authors, who have preferred to remain in their homelands are the most remarkable signs of such expansion. Within this rising Kurdish literary scene since the 2000s, the most prominent genre has been the novel. Considering that the dominant genre in Kurdish literature history had been poetry, this is a remarkable shift.

While analyzing the growing importance of the Kurdish novel, the historic perspective of exile and encounter with western literatures should not be forgotten. However, besides these social transformations and movements within the Kurdish society, the better education opportunities in several institutes and universities as well as the growing interest in alternative forms of historiography (“history from below”) has to be also considered closely. Only then it is possible to understand why the novel has become a space of resistance and a platform to deal with social traumas and catastrophes, in which an important cultural practice of remembering takes place.

This paper aims to tackle the following questions: Why the post 2000 Kurdish novel has to be considered a “new” period in Kurdish literature history; and what does the term “new” mean? What has changed linguistically, thematically and technically in the Kurdish novel? The works by Şener Özmen, Ciwanmerd Kulek, Dilawer Zeraq, Bawer Rûken, Yaqûb Tilermenî and Lokman Ayebe will be the objects of this paper.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Davut Yeşilmen was born in 1984 in Mardin/Kerboran. In 2015 he received his Master’s degree in Kurdish Literature and Culture at the Artuklu University of Mardin. He is founder and co-editor of the literary journal “Wêje û Rexne” (Literature and Critic). Currently he is working on his PhD thesis, preliminary entitled as the “Potentials and Limits of Literary Representation of Non-Muslim Minorities in Post 2000 Kurdish Literature” at the University of Duisburg-Essen, where he also works as a research assistant and teaches Kurdish literature.