

14<sup>th</sup> 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: The Paradigm of Resistance: Tracking the Course of the Left in the Middle East and North Africa**

**CONVENOR(S):** - Daniela Melfa;  
- Francesco Saverio Leopardi.

**ABSTRACT:**

The theme of resistance represents an effective paradigm to study the trajectories of leftist movement in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The “need” to resist marked the conduct of forces from the whole leftist spectrum. Resistance to colonial powers was high on the Left’s agenda, prompting collaboration with ideologically different organizations. After the establishment of post-colonial regimes, leftist organizations experienced conflict with the authorities but often also collaboration and compromise with them. Resistance entailed efforts to retain ideological consistency, organizational integrity and survival to government crackdown. The MENA Left, notably Communist, struggled with problematic Soviet interventions responding to Cold War logic. Since the late 1970s, leftist movements both resisted and compromised with Islamist forces and with the neoliberal paradigm supported by the nationalist-military elites. Resistance to the demise of global socialism represented the ultimate challenge whose consequences are still felt today. This panel aims to investigate how the paradigm of resistance shaped the trajectories of the MENA Left by looking at single cases both theoretically and empirically. What conceptual tools can we use to study leftist resistance politics in the MENA? Are concepts derived from the observation of power relations in Western societies (e.g. Foucault) relevant for the MENA? How did Marxist factions elaborate their concept of resistance and how did they implement it? How did leftist movements face Marxist-inspired competitors and Islamist organizations? Ultimately, this discussion aims to analyze the reasons behind the current marginalization of leftist forces, namely one of the factors contributing to dysfunctional polities throughout the region.

**CONVENOR’S ACADEMIC PROFILE:**

**Daniela Melfa** is Associate Professor of African History at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania. Her work-in-progress concerns the trajectory of the Left in independent Tunisia. She is the incumbent president of the Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies.

**Francesco Saverio Leopardi** is Research Fellow at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna. During his PhD (University of Edinburgh), he worked on the contemporary history of the Palestinian Left. He currently participates in the research project "The Making of the Washington Consensus. Negotiating international assets, debts and power (1979-91)" (MIUR, Prin 2015) focusing on the case of Algeria.