

XVI Convegno SeSaMO

Università degli Studi di Cagliari
Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Sociali

3-5 ottobre 2024



SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: Existentialism and commitment in contemporary Arabic literature

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S: DR ALESSANDRO COLUMBU, UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Although it has certainly gained greater relevance in the past decades, the influence of existentialism on contemporary Arabic literature in the 1950s and 1960s remains to this day a relatively understudied subject in European academia. In particular, the relationship between existentialism and literary commitment (*iltizām*) represents a largely uncharted alley of investigation. Indeed novels, plays and short stories (such as Sonallah Ibrahim's in Egypt, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's in Iraq, Samira 'Azzam's in Palestine, Ghada al-Samman in Syria and Suhayl Idris in Lebanon) brought to the stage an experimental style that coalesced nationalist and anti-authoritarian concerns with an existentialist style of writing and argued for a form of commitment that did not renounce the concept of absolute freedom of the artist, at a time when socialist realism gained momentum and promoted the notion of the social function of literature.

This panel invites contributions that explore the intersection between existentialism as thought as well as a literary style on one hand, and commitment to the towering pan-Arab causes of nationalism, feminism and emancipation on the other. Motivating this panel is the desire to discuss and clarify the significance of this page in the development of modern Arabic literature, and the panel welcomes contributions that employ a multidisciplinary methodology to challenge/confirm the nature of the intersection between existentialism and literary

commitment in Arabic as it has crystallized so far. Papers may focus on, but are not limited to, the following themes:

1. The role of local political causes in individual countries and regions, in novels, plays and short stories in Arabic.
2. The influence of existentialism on literary commitment in the Arab World
3. Comparative analysis of literary texts exploring the causes of national liberation, feminism and class struggle
4. Critical approaches to the genealogical way of thinking about the popularisation of existentialism in the Arab World
5. The role of literary magazines

Suggested bibliography:

Allen, Roger and Kilpatrick, Hillary eds., *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, London: Saqi Books, 1994.

Ashour, Radwa; Ghazoul, Ferial J.; Mekdashi, Hasna Reda Eds., *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*. Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 2008.

Badran, Margot, and cooke, miriam. *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Boullata Issa J. ed., *Critical perspectives on Modern Arabic literature 1945-1980*, Washington: Three Continents Press, 1980.

Di-Capua, Yoav. *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Fernea Warnock, Elizabeth and Qattan Bezirgan, Basima eds., *Middle Eastern Muslim women speak*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977.

Firat Alexa, Cultural Battles on the Literary Field: From the Syrian Writers' Collective to the Last Days of Socialist Realism in Syria, *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 18:2, (2015) 153-176

Firat, Alexa and Taleghani, R Shareah eds. *Generations of Dissent – intellectuals, Cultural Production, and the State in the Middle East and North Africa*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2020.

Guth, Stephan, Priska Furrer and Johann Christoph Bürgel, eds. *Conscious Voices: Concepts of Writing in the Middle East: Proceedings of the Berne Symposium*, July 1997. Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999.

Kanafānī, Ghassān. *Adab al-muqāwama fī Filasṭīn al-muḥtalla 1948-1966*, Bayrūt: Dār al-Ādāb, 1966.

Hanna, Kifah. *Feminism and Avant-Garde Aesthetics in the Levantine Novel: Feminism, Nationalism, and the Arabic Novel*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016.

Hassan, Wail S., ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Meyer, Stefan G., *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Pannewick, Friederike; Khalil, Georges; Albers, Yvonne (eds), *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s*, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2015.

Sulaymān, Nabīl and Yāsīn, Bū ‘Alī. *al-Adab wa al-idiyūlūjīyā fī Sūriyya 1967–1973*, Bayrūt: Dār Ibn Khaldūn, 1974.

Van Stralen, Hans. *Choices and Conflicts: Essays on Literature and Existentialism*, Brussels: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2005.

Dr Alessandro Columbu

Dr Columbu completed his PhD in modern Arabic literature at Edinburgh in 2017 and is currently Senior Lecturer in Arabic at the University of Westminster, London. His research looks broadly at the intersection between cultural production and the rhetoric of nationalism in Syria and its neighbouring countries. His monograph *Zakariyya Tamir and the Politics of the Syrian short story* was published in 2023 by Bloomsbury. His translation of Zakariyya Tamir's *Sour Grapes* was awarded the 2023 Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and International Understanding.

INDIRIZZO/I EMAIL/EMAIL ADDRESSES: a.columbu@westminster.ac.uk; alessandro.columbu@gmail.com