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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

**TITOLO/TITLE:** Borders and unauthorized migratory routes as spaces of critical imaginations and creative resistance across the MENA region

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**ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):**

Prompted mainly by feminist and decolonial studies, a creative wave of social science has recently been crashing onto the shores of methodological tradition within migration, borders and MENA studies, casting free a flotilla of methods described as mobile, participatory, interactive, live, relational, and suggesting new methodological crossovers at the intersection of social research and creative practices (Vannini 2015).

Moving from these premises, this panel aims to gather theoretical and empirical experiences and analysis of social practices, artistic interventions and performances experienced about and within unauthorized migration routes and borderscapes (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007) across the MENA region, examining how artworks can interrupt, transform and contaminate the spaces that they represent.

Much of the hegemonic public discourse on migration confines people on the move in the role of passive victims or aggressive criminals, refusing to take on the manifold perspective of those who experience in the everyday an unauthorized migratory route. Creative and participatory methods, with their potential to reconfigure, question and break down the distance between researcher and study subject, increasingly focus on the political empowerment of people through participation in the construction of knowledge, as in the case of the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal & McBride, 2020) and the Fifth Cinema (Kaur & Grassilli, 2019). Here, the researcher is no longer supposed to be the one who extracts knowledge and shares it with the audience, but is intrinsically used in the creation of knowledge, with the participants as colleagues in equal control (Merriam et al. 2001). In order to imagine new ways of research restitution, this approach calls also for a public reflexive approach involving the explicit positioning and siding of the researcher, and their involvement in and with the situations and people they investigate with the goal of generating and bringing together reflexive knowledge. Giorgi, Pizzolati and Vacchelli (2021) define 'methodological reflexivity' as attention to the methods and approaches used in research. We believe that creative methods emerge and develop in relation to a set of constructivist epistemological approaches that interrogate the conditions of scientific knowledge production and the role of researchers. These creative practices aim to integrate as much as possible the values, beliefs and imaginaries that are indigenous to the people concerned, creating dialogic counter-narratives and making them key aspects of the intervention. One instance might be the construction of a counter-visibility of migration, what Foucault has termed a 'reverse discourse' (1978), or Judah Schept's 'counter-visual ethnography', which he describes as a methodological "commitment to see with historical acuity the relations of production and processes of representation that have structured the present empirical moment...and [which] mobilizes the unseen for the purposes of a right to see" (2014, pp. 216–17). The proliferation of digital tools, further, has offered platforms to create and circulate counter-discourses and amplify subaltern groups voices, narratives and representations; videos, audios and photographs produced by during border crossings, for example, have the potential to challenge Eurocentric visualizations of borders (Bayramoğlu, 2022).

By working on the imagination and creating alternative spaces, artists, researchers, and people on the move are able to challenge dominant representations and hegemonic discourses, making the border an active site of

resistance. Social, legal, corporal and imaginative borders along unauthorized routes are the result of a composite articulation of material aspects related to their external realization and structures of imagination, symbolic constructs and conceptual formations that incorporate and make sense of them. In this dynamically mutable field, artistic practices and interventions can interrupt and alter the logic of the border, opening up a space of resistance and critical imagination where the transparent, unchanging and essentialist representation of the border is constantly challenged (Giudice & Giubilaro, 2015).

On these basis, we welcome interdisciplinary submissions that dialogue with the following topics and more:

- Methodological reflections (limitations, resources, opportunities, risks) on the use of creative and participatory research methods, tools and techniques about unauthorized migrations and borders in the MENA region;
- Empirical researches actively tackling with unauthorized migration in the whole MENA region through creative, artistic and participatory research methods;
- The role of art and creative practices in liberating and resisting movements and processes across borders in the region;
- Practices of decolonization, counter-visibility and reappropriation implemented by or with people on the move and/or belonging to the Global South through creative artifacts.

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

Rassa Ghaffari is a sociologist working mainly on migration, gender and Middle Eastern studies. She has a Master degree in African and Asian Studies from the University of Pavia and a PhD in Sociology at the University of Milano-Bicocca. She is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Genoa, where she conducts research on unauthorized migratory routes through Turkey and the so-called Balkan route, with a special attention to Iranian, Syrian and Afghan fluxes, the smuggling networks, and the use of digital infrastructures.

Filippo Torre is a PhD researcher in Sociology at the Department of Education Studies at the University of Genoa. He is a member of the Laboratory of Visual Sociology, with which he produced two ethnographic and participatory films entitled 'The Ritual of Passage' and 'Hogra'. Between 2021 and 2024 he conducted research in Morocco and along the Alpine migratory route between Italy and France on Moroccan migrations,

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