

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: Crossing boundaries in Tunisian cultural productions: genres, languages, and audiences

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/s: ANNAMARIA BIANCO, CRISTINA DOZIO

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Tunisia has played a pivotal role in starting the popular uprisings in the Arab region in 2010-2011, in which the citizens demanded social justice, the end of corruption, and freedom of expression. Nevertheless, mainstream narratives have often presented this complex process in terms of exceptionalism: Tunisia was the only case of successful transition resulting from the Arab Spring. Overcoming this simplification, scholarship has explored political dynamics and social change over the last decades, while the contemporary scenario confirms the country's interconnectedness with regional and global issues, such as migration, economic crisis, and religious extremism (El Houssi 2019; Sadiki 2015).

In parallel, modern Tunisian cultural productions have been partly overlooked due to the country's supposed insularity. Its small size, the peripheral geographic position in the Arab world, the prestige of French as a literary language, and the divide between the intellectual elite and the public all contributed to marginalizing its literature, drama, and cinema within the broader field of Arab studies and World Literature (Mamelouk 2017). Nevertheless, the 2010-2011 revolution brought about some relevant aesthetic changes that challenged these notions of fixity and exceptionalism. As in other Arab cultural scenes over the same years, artists have experimented with creative ways of expression, enhancing the contamination of styles, languages, and genres (Carlson 2016; Lang 2014). Moreover, the impact of art on the social life has become more visible, as exemplified by the street art (Lacquaniti 2013) and multidisciplinary festivals. For instance, *Chouftouhonna Festival* and *al-Nawaat Festival*, launched in 2015 and 2021 respectively, bring together artists of different backgrounds and give new life to the cultural scene thanks to innovative communication and participation strategies that have been defined as 'artivism' (Borrillo 2020). Meanwhile, some contemporary Tunisian novels are accessing the global market through translation, which has been encouraged by international literary prizes. Tackling socio-political concerns in artistic productions is part of the agency of speaking out (Negri 2023; Pardey 2021), while the re-examination of the past has brought about some critical debates about multiculturalism and gender issues (Nicosia 2023). However, these themes are equally central to literary writings focused on the present time, investigating in particular the racial discrimination that runs through today's Tunisian society while problematizing the meanings of identity and belonging (Elsakaan 2023; Sciortino 2023).

To further explore the Tunisian modern and contemporary cultural production in all its richness, this panel invites contributions on various artistic and cultural fields (fiction, poetry, drama, cinema, visual arts, music) that develop the notions of contamination and/or transit. Which borders are crossed in the production and circulation of Tunisian art? Which regional and global issues are central in the cultural debates? Which role does hybridity play in shaping modernity and national vs post-national identities? Do the notions of 'crisis' (Gana 2023), 'renewal', 'dissent', and 'justice' acquire new meanings when examined through the lens of contaminations?

We invite contributions covering but not limited to the following issues:

- migration literature, in particular *harraga* literature;
- female voices, gender issues, and feminist writings;
- representation of minorities and multiculturalism;
- representation of natural environments, local communities, and environmental issues;
- artivism in performing arts, street art, and music;
- intertextuality and adaptation in cinema, literature, graphic novels, and music;
- literary criticism and cultural history across the Maghreb;
- linguistic hybridity in synchronic and diachronic perspectives;

- multilingual products and cultural productions in languages other than Arabic.

The focus is not only on post-revolutionary cultural productions, but we also encourage contributions about some turning points in modern and contemporary culture.

The panel's working languages are English, French, and Italian.

After the conference, we hope to collect the papers in an edited volume or a journal special issue.

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- Mamelouk, D. 2017. "Tunisia". In *The Oxford Handbook of the Novelistic Tradition*, ed. by W.S. Hassan, 455-472. Oxford UP.
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- Sciortino, M.G. 2023. "Raccontare e raccontarsi al di là dei «limiti»: Šamt al-nawāqīs di Faḥīyya Dabiš". *In Verbis*, October: 27-49.

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

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Cristina Dozio is Assistant Professor (rtd-B) in Arabic language and literature at Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy. Her research interests are contemporary Arabic literature, humor and satire, urban literary representation, and translation studies. Her first book is *Laugh like an Egyptian: Literary Humor in the Contemporary Egyptian Novel* (DeGruyter 2021). She translates Arabic fiction into Italian.

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