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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

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Panel 43

Rethinking traveling in the light of political experience. Spaces of activism around the Mediterranean

The panel aims to investigate the category of “political journey” through some case studies around the Mediterranean space. Mobility is an element structuring the political experience. To begin with, the latter features symbolically as a quest, an exploration, and a disclosure of horizons. Reading and other forms of learning represent a “journey of the spirit”. Then, there is the actual journey that may be a formative consciousness-raising experience for newcomers. Travelling may also strengthen ideological beliefs or the sense of belonging to a community through its rituals and symbols such as pilgrimages to sites of memory. Political mobility may bring also to fact-finding tours or support to an armed group abroad. The internationalization of political causes encourages mobility in search of solidarity and support, as well as the internationalist practice of the Left is based on worldwide meetings and visits of delegations. Finally, forced or voluntary exile is usually linked to political circumstances. Travelling, in whatever form, is an all-embracing experience affecting the formation of ideas and networks. Traveling molds spaces redefining the notions of center and periphery, community and strangeness. Mental and collective geographies bear the marks of lived and effective places.

Person in charge : Melfa Daniela (Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania)
Discussant : Messaoudi Alain (University of Nantes, Center for International and Atlantic Research - CRHIA)

Program

Cresti Federico (Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania)

The journeys of Sulayman al-Baruni, Berber, Tripolitanian, Pan-Islamist

Sulayman al-Baruni (c. 1870-1940), who belonged to an important family from the Adrar n Infusen (or Jabal Nafusa, in Western Libya), made since his youth several “training” journeys to surrounding countries. He was in Tunisia, in Egypt and in the Algerian M’zab valley between the late-nineteenth and the early-twentieth centuries. Before the Committee of Union and Progress seized power in Istanbul by 1908, he was persecuted by the Ottoman authorities in Tripoli, who saw him as a dangerous leader linked both to a Berber-Ibadi tradition and to ideas of political reform. Elected to the Istanbul Parliament in 1908, a few years later, from 1911, he was among the leaders of the anti-Italian resistance until the end of the First World War. Its relationship with the colonial government changed with the promulgation of the Tripolitanian Statute (June 1, 1919) and in the following two years he visited Italy several times. Through the analysis of documents from the Italian archives, my paper intends to analyze these journeys as an attempt to secure support for the achievement of autonomy for Tripolitania within the framework of an Italian protectorate.

Giuseppe Maimone Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Palermo

Traveling as an instrument of political struggle: the activism of the Mauritanian diaspora during the 2019 presidential election

Military coups and regimes limited democratic participation in postcolonial Mauritania. Along with Mauritians leaving the country in search of a job, some political exiles and Haratins – former slaves and their descendants – moved to France where they founded associations and social movements that allowed political participation denied in their homeland. In particular, the Mauritanian diaspora favored the spread of IRA Mauritanie abroad, an association that has become the greatest antislavery organization in the country, while at the same time increasing the popularity of its president, Biram Dah Abeid. Through interviews with IRA members and representatives of the Mauritanian diaspora, public statements and press releases of diverse organizations, and analysis of their propaganda on social networks, this presentation aims to define the role played by the diaspora in the Mauritanian political field, especially during the 2019 elections that saw Dah Abeid emerge as the candidate with the second largest number of votes while coming first in the Mauritanian diaspora.

Melfa Daniela (Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania)

Vanguard of the Tunisian Communist Party in exile: the crossed itineraries of Mohamed Harmel (1963-1972) and Noureddine Bouarrouj (1971-1992)

The paper aims to outline the divergent intellectual itineraries of two leading figures of the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT) who had been politically active abroad. Mohamed Harmel, member of the Central Committee since 1951 and of the party Secretary since 1956, left Tunis in 1963 after his arrest to settle in Prague and came back home in 1972. During his exile, he played a major role in the Socialist internationalist network by contributing regularly to *La nouvelle revue internationale. Problèmes de la paix et du socialisme* and participating in several international meetings. Noureddine Bouarrouj, elected member of the Central Committee in 1957 and the Political Bureau in 1962, was the leader of the Groupe Kléber, close to the Socialist government in the 1960s. He moved to Paris in 1971 where he passed away in 1992. If Harmel's departure strengthened his leadership within the party, the trajectory of Bouarrouj was that of a "dissident" who had to face exclusion. Anyway, for both men, the exile offered an opportunity for intellectual growth that made them perceptive observers of their motherland and Communism in a Muslim country.

Scalia Antonino (University of Catania)

A journey from Leftist internationalism to humanitarianism? Political travel and Italian-Palestine solidarity (1969-1988)

This paper studies how political travels influenced Italian-Palestinian solidarity between the late 1960s and late 1980s. The research contends that individual and collective journeys to Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank by members of the Italian Communist Party, the Italian extra-parliamentary Left and Italian feminist groups shaped the framing of and the type of support to the Palestinian National Liberation cause. In particular, this study argues on the one hand that the Leftist travel narratives of the long 1970s represented the Palestinians as the "Arab Vietcong" and fostered material support to the guerrillas. On the other hand, the Leftist and feminist travel narratives of the 1980s framed Palestinians as refugees and encouraged humanitarian solidarity. Firstly the paper considers the genesis of individual political travels and the transcultural brokers involved in them (i.e. Palestinian representatives). Secondly, the paper includes an analysis of the travel narratives through their dissemination by different media (books, periodicals, documentaries). Finally, the paper tests the impact of such travels on Italian solidarity practices.