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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

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Panel 53

Art and war in Middle-East

Art and war interact according to a dialectic where the former is both fuelled and affected by the latter. Confronted with conflicts and wars shaking their countries for several decades, Middle Eastern artists produce languages that interact with the contexts they witness. Through the analysis of works produced in, by and in link with wars in Syria and Iraq, this panel will reflect on forms and meanings of artistic works dealing with war, violence and barbarism. Thus, we will question literature, war and sectarian conflicts in Iraq through the Iraqi generation of writers from the 1990s; we will reflect on the methods that the Iraqi novelist Sinan Antoon implemented in his novels to operate an aesthetically rich interference between artistic genres; we will study the works of the Syrian playwright Wael Kadour to highlight the difficulty in establishing the roles of victims and perpetrators during the war. Then, we will explore how war has reshaped the spaces of artistic production in Syria. Finally, the panel aims at defining how artists in the Middle East deal with war and whether they share common topics, aesthetics or strategies.

Person in charge : Potenza Daniela (Università degli studi di Napoli «L'Orientale», DAAM, CERMOM)
Discussant : Ruocco Monica (Università degli studi di Napoli «L'Orientale», DAAM)

Program

Pacifico Antonio (University Jean Moulin Lyon 3, IETT)

The Iraqi literary field faced with war: a few observations on its writers' generation of the 1990s

Amongst Middle Eastern countries, Iraq stands out as one of the most seriously affected by wars, sectarian conflicts and endemic violence. Its generation of writers of the 1990s has been the latest to be marked by these traumatic events, the effects of which are mirrored not only in prose literature but also in poetry. Nevertheless, the few studies devoted to Iraq and its literature are focused almost exclusively on the "internal" dimension of this production and do not take into account the actors of its literary field. Thus, looking at the "hors-texte", we will discuss in-depth the impact of these traumatic events on the career and the artistic activity of some leading authors of this generation. To do that, we will draw on the concepts of "position" and "trajectory" developed for the study of culture by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1992). Moreover, we will also consider several theoretical elements that have been rather neglected within his works. Such a contribution, indeed, in conversation with the "internal" analyses of the literary texts, may help us to elaborate more concretely on the profound reasons for the aesthetic choices of these authors towards war and its brutality.

Rubino Marcella (University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, Department of Languages, CERMOM)

Arts facing violence: interferences of genres in Sinan Antoon's novels

Sinan Antoon's works are amongst the contemporary novels that have aroused the most interest from critics. Like many other Iraqi writers, Sinan Antoon focuses on the topics of war and violence. Indeed, he explores the role of art when faced with violence and death. His specific artistic choices involve both frequent references to different arts and extensive use of the narrative devices and the aesthetics that these arts offer. The American-Iraqi writer thus distinguishes himself for an aesthetic of the "interference between artistic genres" that plays a two-fold role: on the one hand, it re-establishes a collective memory for the Iraqi people, but it also builds a reader model whose common denominator is an "Iraqiity" that transcends religious divisions.

Potenza Daniela (Università degli studi di Napoli «L'Orientale», DAAM, CERMOM)

Victims or perpetrators? Questioning by the Syrian playwright Wael Kadour

The last two plays by the Syrian playwright Wael Kadour, *al-l'tirāf* (The confession, 2013, latest version, 2018) and *Waqā'i' madina lā na'rifuhā* (Chronicles of a city we never knew, 2011, latest version, 2019) place friendship, love and family bonds at the margins of a war context where lies, madness, injustice and violence penetrate society and disrupt it. In this context, each character has to play a role that has not always been chosen by them. Dramatic devices, such as doubles, play-within-the-play, repetition, narration, rapid succession of scenes, emphasize the impossibility of establishing the role of characters, of deciding whether they are victims or perpetrators. Through an analysis of the different versions of the two plays and their dramatic devices, this communication seeks to outline how art can reflect on topics such as culpability and morals in a war context.

Sai Fatima (Università degli studi di Bari, Departement Lettere Lingue Arti, Italianistica e culture comparate)

Changing places: how war reshapes the literary space, the case of Syrian Literature

Conflict seems always to be a pivotal factor in contemporary Middle Eastern literary and artistic production. War and its many consequences have shaped the literature and the art of the Levant, not only thematically, but also in terms of affecting the conditions in which they are being produced.

The spaces described in prose and poetry are affected by the changing experiences of their authors: places are idealized, disavowed, they serve as allegory and identity-building reference, as they go through the actual changes that the ongoing conflict imposes on them.

At the same time, the physical spaces where literature and art are produced and disseminated are changing at an increasing rate. The displacement and exile of authors, with the help of new forms of communication and representation, has led to the proliferation of blogs, dedicated websites, magazines, as well as a change in relationships with publishing houses and readerships.

Ten years after the outbreak of the war, the present paper proposal intends to analyze the transformations of Syrian literary spaces within and beyond the page.