



Bologna University
Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures
July 17th 2017, 11:30am-1:30pm, room 1

Arts Beyond Borders.

New Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Pop Cultures and the Production of Knowledge in Asia and Africa Today



“A work of fiction lives by empathy - the extending of myself into another’s, the willingness to imagine myself in someone else’s shoes. This itself is a political act: empathy is at the heart of much revolutionary action. But the novelist, like the activist, is also a citizen of the world and bears the responsibility of this citizenship. The question is, then, can you honour your responsibility as a citizen of the world and fulfill your responsibility to your art? The question becomes critical in times of crisis” (Ahdaf Soueif, Guardian.co.uk, 17 August 2012).

Ahdaf Soueif, one of the most internationally renowned contemporary Egyptian writers, poignantly explains one of the main concerns of the committed artist and intellectual in the Twenty-first Century. Other Arab writers and intellectuals, such as Edward Said, Ghassan Khanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Nawal al-Saadawi, and Hisham Matar, to name just a few, have discussed the complex relationship between the arts and politics, which also engages literary critics and historians at many levels. What do arts tell us about the power relationships that shape politics? Are the arts inherently embedded in politics? And if so, how do they change when ordinary politics become revolutionary situations? What is the role of the artist in the society? How to approach these and other questions in the contexts of Asia and Africa today? What are the legacies of history? Middle Eastern and Asian Studies scholars discuss these and other questions, sharing their experiences of researching the production of culture and knowledge beyond the European borders.

Participants: Dr Francesca Biancani, Bologna University; Dr Paola Caridi, Palermo University; Prof Mark Levine, Irvine University and Lund University; Dr Massimiliano Trentin, Bologna University; Dr Lucia Sorbera, The University of Sydney

Chair: Dr Paola Scrolavezza, Bologna University