

Research Committee on Arabic Comparative Literature

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Introduction

The Arabic cultural scene with its multifarious patterns and systems offers the realm of humanities and the inter-, cross-, and multidisciplinary horizon of comparative literature a rich body of artistic and literary works (classical, modern and contemporary) in various genres that have transformed and traveled across time and space brimming with influences and emitting their own specificity as they range outside the boundaries of culture and language. Multilayered as it is, that body is not only collectively produced in the Arabic language but also in the many national languages of different regions in the Arab world, sometimes within the same country showcasing distinct cultural nuances¹, the languages of the former colonizers, or those of the host countries wherein Arab writers migrate.

As a consequence of the aforementioned diversity, comparative literature studies manifest a variety of approaches in the Arabic cultural scene where Arabic - which comes on top of the list as the major tongue of production - is also accompanied by proliferating contributions in French, English, Spanish, German, Dutch, etc, particularly in the third millennium. The latter witnessed great efforts exerted by Arabic comparatists to consolidate the literary-cultural dialectic by adopting the cultural turn of comparative literary studies which focuses on the democratization of human culture. Therefore, the current dynamic nature of comparative literature in the Arab region emerges from capitalizing on new cultural phenomena to expand the horizon of comparative research and to reequip the comparative literary stage which was founded

¹ Tamazight in Morocco and the unique diversity of dialects and traditions in Upper and Lower Egypt are two cases in point.

in the second half of the 20th century, connecting the classical and modern heritage of Arabic culture (as in Arabic-Persian Studies, Moriscos in Arabic studies, Modern Arabic Renaissance and European Cultures) via the developments introduced by Arab comparatists in the various comparative spheres with the purpose of connecting national Arabic interests with those in the international arena, and establishing new comparative spheres that celebrate diversity and otherness while maintaining harmony and affinity.

Among the different fields of comparative literary studies that are being developed by Arab comparatists are the following:

- Translation studies, namely, repatriation and translation between two national languages and what these entail in relation to the binary of “the Self and the Other” which relies on traditional translation theory.
- Comparative studies in the field of Francophone and Anglophone literature with a focus on the act of writing as a space ripe with confrontations and encounters among multifarious languages and cultures.
- Studies in Arabic Moving Identities which provide literary productions that enrich not only Arabic cultural systems and structures but also those of non-Arabs through which Arab writers (immigrants and diasporas) produce their art either in Arabic (or their original national language) or in the language of their adopted new cultural environment.

Within the intermeshing frameworks of Comparative Literature and Moving Identities Studies in the post-colonial era, the study of Arab diaspora writers, namely expatriates and the displaced, is a promising comparative project that facilitates the negotiation and representation of Arabic comparative studies within and outside traditional academic circles. A scholarly appealing topic for comparatists worldwide, representational studies of diasporic and hybrid entities, with their interplay of othering and integration, provide a space for a viable encounter between Arabic and International practices of comparative literatures, both in the East and West.

Newly developing academic Arabic comparative literature projects subsume the dialogue of literatures within the same culture and often within a single country, and the role played by culture in sustainable development. The latter brings literature to the study of political, economic, environmental, behavioural, social and cultural phenomena through cinema, media and journalism. It also incorporates travelogue, the politics of publishing, and digital media into the study of contemporary Arab culture.

Overarching Objectives

1. The facilitation of dialogue between Arab and International researchers in the field of Comparative Literature via:

- a. The identification and introduction of Arabic contribution and achievement in the field of comparative literature in a collective critical work with both Arab and International contributors.
 - b. The translation (English/French) of appraised Arabic critical work and research in the field of comparative literature.
 - c. Holding a biennial conference in an Arabic or international university which provides a chance for exchange of ideas among Arab and international comparatists, and which deals with topics that pertain to the relation of Arabic Culture with various manifestations of human cultures.
 - d. Bolstering relations between (1) the Arabic Comparative Literature Research Committee and ICLA Member Associations working on Arabic Comparative Literature; (2) Comparative Literature Departments at universities in the Arab world and other universities and academic institutions and universities worldwide where researchers are involved in studies related to modern and classic Arabic culture.
2. Contributing to the advancement of emerging critical approaches and methods in comparative literary studies that characterize the Arabic cultural scene, namely, transculturality : the dialogue of literatures across national borders (and within the same culture), the transregional and transhistorical flow/travel of ideas, concepts, theories, movements across languages and media, and the literatures of moving identities (literature of migration and exile).
 3. Promoting research that allows the comparison of different fields of studies and disciplines such as translation studies, and in particular literary translation, within Arabic comparative literature, together with other emerging, developing, or cultivated research interests generated by recent interaction with international advances in literary, critical and digital criticism and creativity. Those research interests include but are not limited to trends related to cultural production and industry, intermediality and the visual turn, animation and comics, the tourist imaginary and literary cartography, discursivity, digital humanities, and Artificial Intelligence.

A series of coordinated workshops and lectures dealing with the aforementioned is to be publicized and held online.

4. Publications will begin with a Newsletter by December 2025, then, a Journal by April 2026 (tentative). The peer-reviewed biannual journal will be dedicated to Arabic comparative literature, theory and practice, its multifarious encounters with world literature from an interdisciplinary perspective.
5. An online one-day colloquium will be announced by mid-October 2025 to be held by the end of April 2026.

Membership

Members of ICLA and Member Associations can become regular members of the Committee and engage in many of its activities: newsletter, journal, online seminars, workshops and symposia as both participants and organizers. Membership and calls for participation will be posted on the committee's page on the ICLA website and circulated among university programs that include current or prospective ICLA members.

The Committee welcomes collaboration with ICLA Member Associations for conferences and symposia on Arabic comparative literature (partnership to organize and promote academic events, pooling expertise for networking, and discussion of critical topics).

Early Career Academics and Post-Graduate Students

The committee encourages early career academics and post-graduate students in Comparative Literature programs at universities and academic institutions to become active members in the committee's research development plan (in-progress) for researchers who are working on comparative projects either individually or collaboratively. As members of the Committee, they can engage in many of its aforementioned activities as both participants and organizers.

As an ICLA research committee, the Arabic Comparative Literature Standing Research Group is concerned with developing, enhancing, and disseminating research in Arabic comparative studies ranging from the ranks of early career academics to professional scholars in the field.

The committee will dedicate a section of its ICLA page to address prospective/already involved students/researchers in Arabic comparative literary studies. The page will provide

- short texts/videos introducing ideas, concepts, thematic concerns, new grounds, key research questions, and gaps to be filled in the field of Arabic comparative studies, etc.
- scholarly guidelines and tips for approaching and writing comparative research in the field.
- the process of contributing to the online monthly newsletter and biannual journal of Arabic Comparative Literature Standing Research Committee.