

Al-Bī‘a – Saying, Describing, and Translating Ecology into Arabic

International Conference organized by
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IETT – Institute for Transtextual and Transcultural Studies

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The term *bī‘a* (“environment” or “nature”) today occupies a central place in contemporary Arabic discourse, whether in political, legal, media, or literary contexts. Yet this centrality results from a late and problematic emergence. For a long time, nature as an autonomous concept remained largely absent from classical Arab-Islamic thought, where it was mainly approached through lexies such as *ṭabī‘a*, *kawn*, or *mawjūdāt*, within a metaphysical and theological framework. Nature was understood less as an object in itself than as a sign (*āya*) pointing toward divine transcendence, according to a theological reading widely shared by philosophical and exegetical traditions.

As Averroes illustrates in his *Faṣl al-maqāl* (1997, pp. 86–87), knowledge of beings is valuable only insofar as it leads to knowledge of their Creator. He writes: “Beings refer to the Creator through the knowledge of their creation; the more perfect the knowledge of creation, the more complete the knowledge of the Creator.”

This teleological conception, deeply rooted in *tafsīr* literature, long prevented nature from becoming an autonomous field of scientific, legal, or aesthetic inquiry.

The advent of modernity marked a decisive epistemological rupture: nature gradually became “disenchanted” (M. Gauchet, 1985), stripped of its metaphysical function and transformed into an objectifiable, exploitable, and vulnerable environment. This shift profoundly reconfigured discourses: nature is no longer merely contemplated, but measured, administered, exploited, and eventually protected through ecological discourse. From this awareness emerged ecology as ideology, science, and a normative field.

In the Arab world, these transformations were accompanied by an intense process of conceptual and linguistic adaptation. Modern Arabic mobilized its neological resources (translation, derivation, Arabization, borrowing) in order to produce a precise

environmental lexicon: *bī'a*, *manākh*, *iḥtibās ḥarārī*, *tanmiyya mustadāma*, and many other terms now constituting the semantic fields of ecology. However, this process has not been free from hesitation, terminological conflict, or ideological tension, revealing the cultural, political, and symbolic stakes involved in appropriating the ecological paradigm.

On the literary level, this conceptual delay is reflected in a dual transformation: on the one hand, the evolution of representations of nature in narrative and poetic production since the *Nahḍa*, where nature was mainly ornamental and metaphorical, toward contemporary writings that turn it into a problematic space or even a full narrative agent; on the other hand, the delayed development of a critical apparatus capable of analyzing these transformations. Ecocritical studies of Arabic literature, understood as the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996), therefore remain a relatively recent field. While ecocriticism has developed since the 1990s in Anglophone countries before progressively spreading to other linguistic and cultural areas, studies devoted to Arabic literature remain relatively scarce and insufficiently developed in light of the cultural, linguistic, and historical specificities of the Arab context.

The conference therefore seeks to examine:

- the historical, philosophical, and epistemological reasons behind the delayed conceptualization of ecology in Arabic;
- the discursive modalities of its emergence and development (terminological, literary, and legal);
- the forms and figures of its symbolic representation in literature;
- and finally, its inscription within contemporary normative, societal, and political systems.

Ultimately, the conference aims to reflect on ecology not only as a scientific or political object, but also as a linguistic, discursive, and cultural phenomenon, revealing profound transformations in our ways of inhabiting the world and expressing these relationships.

Conference Themes

Axis 1 - Ecological Terminology and Neology in Arabic

This axis proposes an analysis of the processes involved in the formation of ecological vocabulary in modern Arabic (translation, derivation, Arabization, borrowing, blending, etc.), the terminological debates resulting from them, as well as the conceptual successes and shortcomings characterizing this process of linguistic acclimatization. Particular attention will be paid to the ways Arabic negotiates the appropriation of environmental concepts often forged in other cultural and epistemological contexts.

Axis 2 – Literature, Fiction, and Ecological Imaginaries

This axis examines the transformations of the imaginary of “nature” in modern Arabic literature: the departure from the romantic paradigm, the emergence of nature as narrative space, symbolic actor, and critical agency in novels, poetry, and contemporary dystopian narratives. Ecocritical and ecofeminist approaches are especially welcome.

Axis 3 – Ecology, Law, and Political-Normative Discourses

This axis proposes a jurilinguistic approach to environmental normative texts (international treaties, conventions, national legislations, implementation decrees) and an analysis of political discourses on the environment in the Arab world. Contributions may address the translation of international environmental norms into Arabic, semantic and conceptual shifts, and the tensions between environmental rhetoric and political practices.

Selected Bibliography

- Descola, Philippe, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 2005.
Garrard, Greg, *Ecocriticism*, Routledge, 2012.
Gauchet, Marcel, *The Disenchantment of the World*, 1985.
Glotfelty, Cheryl & Fromm, Harold (eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 1996.
Holes, Clive, *Modern Arabic: Structures, Functions, and Varieties*, 2004.
Huggan, Graham & Tiffin, Helen, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, 2015.
Latour, Bruno, *Facing Gaia*, 2015.
Plumwood, Val, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 1993.
Shiva, Vandana, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, 1988.
Warren, Karen J., *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 2000.

Submission Guidelines

Proposals should include a title, an abstract of 300 to 400 words, 5 keywords, and a short biobibliographical note (maximum 100 words) indicating the author’s institutional affiliation and email address.

Proposals may be submitted in French, Arabic, or English and should be sent in Word format (.docx) to the following addresses:

hilda.mokh@univ-lyon3.fr

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A selection of the papers presented at the conference will be considered for publication in a collective volume following peer review.

For any questions, please contact:

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Important Dates:

Call for papers: February 15, 2026

Deadline for submissions: September 15, 2026

Notification to authors: September 30, 2026

Conference dates: March 25–26, 2027

Organizing Committee:

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