

School of Languages, Literatures and Learning
Autumn 2026

LiS Open Lecture Series, “Children’s and YA Literature from an Intercultural Perspective”

Sexuality in the Contemporary Arab Adolescent Novel

Sex remains a sensitive topic in the contemporary Arabic adolescent novel. A comparison with the treatment of sexuality in Arabic novels for adults suggests that these restrictions originate in constructions of childhood and adolescence and can be understood through taking account of the practices of censorship, self-censorship, marketing and buying trends that govern Arab publishing for adolescents.

While actual depictions of sexual activity are practically non-existent in Arabic adolescent fiction, there are a number of novels that touch on the subject of sex and sexuality as well as related topics, such as love and puberty. This paper presents a brief overview of these novels and finds that sex is associated with trauma, violation, motherhood, secrecy, and loss of status among other things but very rarely with pleasure or love.

In the presentation, I will look at two of the more daring novels to examine the role of language and discourse. In *Ismī al-ḥarakī farāsha* (Code Name Butterfly) by Aḥlam Bisharāt, the protagonist and her friends are fascinated by the secret that is sex while the adults around them exercise power through withholding desired information and deploying loaded words such as “‘irdh” [honour] to produce sexual compliance. In *Falāfil al-nāziḥīn* [The falafels of the displaced], Samāḥ Idrīs explores issues of sexuality, desire and fidelity through the point of view of a dog. Rather than using this device to liberate the novel from the repressive rules of the human world on sex, socio-cultural constructions of sexuality are reproduced in the dialogue between the dog focaliser and his canine object of affection.

Biography: Susanne Abou Ghaida is a researcher specialising in Arabic children’s and adolescent literature. She has a PhD from the University of Glasgow, and her doctoral research was on the contemporary Arabic adolescent novel. She was formerly a postdoctoral fellow at Aix-Marseille University, carrying out research on *al-Shayāṭīn al-13* [The 13 Devils], an Arab espionage/adventure series for adolescents. She has written on a number of subjects, including multicultural picture books, disability, Arabic adolescent literature, and the political history of Arabic children’s literature, which has been published in *The Literary Encyclopedia*. She is the Vice President of the Young Adult Studies Association and a Senior Editor of the *International Journal of Young Adult Literature*.



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Tuesday 13/10 – 2026

13.00-14.30 (CET)

Zoom: <https://du-se.zoom.us/j/67853300672>



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