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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

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Panel 30

Post-2011 socio-political upheavals in the Arab world through the prism of gender

Much research highlights the role of women in the mobilizations that preceded and followed the «Arab Springs» (Benzenine 2016; Bonnet 2013; Gillot and Martinez, 2016). Other works argue that the post-2011 electoral processes, and in particular the arrival of Islamists in power, have in several countries allowed women greater access to political space (Latte Abdallah, 2013, Pepicelli 2011; Munteanu 2020). However, several studies point out that the post-2011 political processes have resulted in a questioning of women's rights (individual freedom, right to abortion, right to work), combined with increased control over their behavior and their bodies (Debuysere 2016; Gana and Sigillo 2019).

In the context of the societal, political and economic crises generated by the post-Arab upheavals, the evolution of women's status and the situation seems to be marked by a paradox, linked on the one hand to the reactivation of patriarchal social norms and religious references, and on the other hand to the resistance and mobilization of women to preserve their achievements, advance their rights and conquer new positions in the public space.

This panel proposes to explore gender dynamics in North Africa as a revealing indicator of the paradoxes of post-2011 socio-political change. We invite papers based on empirical material and critically addressing the themes of women's participation in the political space, their economic integration, Islamist women's mobilizations, women's place in the social movement and struggles for civil and political rights, etc.

Person in charge and discussant : Gana Alia (CNRS, UMR LADYSS)

Program

Benzenine Belkacem (Centre de recherche en Anthropologie sociale et culturelle, CRASC)

Algerian women and the «Hirak»: the challenges of gender equality in a context of political contestation
Although many Algerian women were mobilized as early as 22 February to demonstrate in favor of a new Algeria, the issue of gender equality did not seem to receive unanimous support either in public opinion or in the various platforms for demands emanating from the main actors (political parties and civil society). This paper draws on interviews with Algerian women activists to discuss the forms and objectives of women's engagement during the « Hirak ». Its objective is to understand why the women's cause did not occupy a « large » place in the public debate. It will highlight the discourse and conceptions of political actors on the issue of gender equality and the status of women in the context of political contestation.

Bouras Naïma (Université Lumière Lyon 2, CEDEJ)

Salafist Women in the Revolutionary Process in Egypt: Reconfiguring Roles in the Implementation of the Islamic Project

In 2011, the first post-revolutionary elections were marked by a new quota system that obligates political parties to nominate one female member from each party list. This system, which was intended to give women a better chance of being elected to parliament, has in practice given Islamist women higher visibility in the political arena. Their first demands were aimed at challenging the rights acquired by the feminist movements. In particular, the rights gained thanks to the struggles led by the members of the National Council of Women, because this body was headed by the wife of the deposed president, Suzanne Mubarak. In public spaces, altercations were visible during the revolutionary period. These confrontations were materialized, on the Salafist side, by the strong dynamism of the women of the al-Nûr party, who were active in public and media spaces. Our presentation proposes to analyze the conservative rhetoric of Salafist women holding a discourse on the liberation of Muslim women «oppressed» by the Western model. New rhetoric is emerging among Islamist women that are in continuity with the type of discourse on modern Muslim women developed in the 1970s and 1980s, at the time of the Islamic awakening.

Hajri Selma (Association de recherche-action Tawhida Ben Cheikh)

The right to contraception and abortion in Tunisia: gains mishandled by the revolution?

While human rights organisations had hoped to see progress in the status of women after 2011, the rise to power of conservative (Islamist) political formations has slowed down, if not blocked, the processes allowing real advancements, apart from increased participation in political life. Moreover, in several countries, the progress achieved seems to be called into question, such as the right to contraception and abortion, the key right enabling women to control their fertility and to control their bodies. Indeed, it appears that the dynamics generated by the «Arab Springs» are far from having contributed to its consolidation. This presentation proposes to analyze the rare failed attempts to broaden the indications for abortion in countries where it is almost forbidden, as in Morocco and Algeria, or barely mentioned as in Lebanon, and to explore the unique experience of Tunisia where the right to abortion has been anchored in the memory and lives of Tunisian women for 50 years. However, even in Tunisia, the political coalitions in power since 2011, dominated by the Islamist party, have not stopped making attempts to nibble away at this right. Based on research observations, we find that abortion is becoming increasingly inaccessible to Tunisian women, even though the law has not yet been amended.

Munteanu Anca (CNRS, UMR LADYSS)

Critical feedback on the participation of Islamist women in the political space: functions, position(s) and demands

Quotas and electoral lists dedicated to women reveal difficulties shared by Tunisian and Moroccan parties regarding the insertion of women in the political field (Vairel 2018; Desrues & Lopes Garcia 2008; Desrues & Kirhlani 2010). In this context, the coming to power of Ennahdha in Tunisia and the Party for Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco has led to the integration of their female activists into politics (Du Chauffaut 2011; El Haitami 2016). But according to what criteria? This paper analyses the paths of militant engagement of Ennahdha and PJD women and their modalities of access to the political arena. It questions the role of these activists within the two parties and on the (inter)national political scene. In addition, we shall document how these Islamist women have positioned themselves in the recent debates on women's rights reform in Tunisia and Morocco. Comparative Tunisia - Morocco perspective aims to shed light on the circulation of models (discourses and demands, etc.) between Islamist women activists in these two countries. To do so, this paper draws on the testimonies of women activists collected between 2016 and 2020 in several cities in Tunisia and Morocco.