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CONGRESS

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Panel 58

Gender and family policies in Egypt during the Nasser period

At the crossroads of social history, anthropology, and gender history, the history of family policies in Egypt tests the construction of gendered roles, conditioned by «popular» practices as much as measures aimed at reforming the Egyptian family, the place par excellence for the socialization of future citizens. Linking moral reform to social reform, socialists and Egyptian elites more generally intend to develop the country through an overhaul of morals and traditions affecting representations related to marital relations, procreation, and child-rearing. From professionals responsible for the implementation of new programs concerning women's reproductive rights and sexual health to intellectuals debating the means of reform and its possible consequences on the country's economic and social development, the workshop will question the links between public policies and gender representations through various textual and iconographic sources.

Person in charge: Pesquet Laure (Sorbonne University, Centre for 19th Century History)

Program

Ferrand Antoinette (Sorbonne University, Centre for 19th Century History)

Egyptian Socialists and Family Reforms: Challenges for Social and Economic Development

In the light of the great reforms launched by the regime, the Egyptian Socialists view it as a means to link national development and moral solidity of the young Egyptian Republic: the model of scientific socialism of the National Charter (1961-62) deployed by the magazine *Al-Kātib* (The Writer) - a reference for the entire Arab intelligentsia since its launch in 1961 and animated exclusively by men - intended to mix human sciences and political issues, thus reproducing the paradoxes of Nasser socialism in the field of family mores.

Labib Malak (Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, EUME/Freie Universität Berlin)

Industrial Work and Gender Construction in the Nasser period

The 1950s and 1960s, marked in Egypt by the birth and rapid expansion of a public industrial sector, also witness the issue of female labor becoming a key issue in political and social debate. Work and surveys - undertaken by state agencies or within the university - addressed issues such as women's productivity in factories, the consequences of women's work on family life, and the psychology of women at work. This presentation will aim to analyze the terms of the debate on women's industrial work over the past two decades.

Mayeur-Jaouen Catherine (Sorbonne University, Centre for 19th Century History)

Faten Hamama, Rushdy Abaza and all The Others: The Evolution of Gender Roles in Egyptian Cinema of the Nasser period.

The Nasser period is known to be the golden age of Egyptian cinema. At a time when most of the Egyptian population, especially women, were illiterate, cinema played a key role (especially among men) in disseminating the Egyptian government's messages about family matters. This role is even more profound and lasting as it continues for several decades after Nasser's death, with the constant broadcast of films from that era on television. This dissemination extends to the entire Arab world.

A handful of great actors will have recurrently played the main roles in these comedies or dramas where gender roles, the education of young girls, couple relationships, sexual relations, and the struggle against a patriarchal society - within the limits of good morals and a well-understood shari'a - are constantly at the center of the scenarios. In stereotypical roles, but often more ambiguous than it appears at first glance, and in a moralizing register (the virgin girl at the wedding falls in love with the right young man, and everything must end in marriage), Egyptian cinema consciously took the place of sex education as well as moral education. It deals with forced marriage, fear of the wedding night, «fault» (sex outside marriage), rape, the threat of prostitution, and even pregnancy outside marriage. Without questioning patriarchal codes, the films stigmatize the fickle husband or the one who, repudiating his wife or marrying another, would not take marriage - necessarily monogamous in the Nasser era - seriously. Women's social action is also emphasized in new roles: nurse, teacher, journalist, possibly singer or actress, and even social worker (*Zawja min Baris*, 1966).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the tone shifted more towards a bolder promotion of women (*The Woman's Enemy*, 1966), and even towards films that caused scandal (*Abî foq al-shagara*, 1969). Women's professional investment is promoted more without allowing them to step out of the traditional role of sacrificing themselves for children (*Imperatoria Mîm*, 1972). The brutal change in themes at the beginning of Anwar al-Sadat's presidency (divorce, child custody, adultery...) shows the profound evolution of debates, now more oriented around the married woman, whereas the cinema of the Nasser period focused on the situation of the young girl. At a time when the Egyptian public differentiates little between actors and the roles they play, the actress Faten Hamama (1931-2015) will have played at different ages of her life and against great actors such as Rushdy Abaza (1927-1980) the Egyptian woman par excellence (*Muslim*), pious and moral, who must fight against a patriarchal society.

From *The Nightingale's Prayer* (1959), the best-known film of the Nasser period that fights against honor killings and sexual harassment to *I want a solution* (1975) that led President Sadat's Egyptian government to change the divorce laws, Faten Hamama played successively the shy young girl, the increasingly determined young woman, and then the mature woman fighting for her rights. From the political point of view, she embodied both resolute support for the Nasser revolution (*No Time for Love*, 1963) and opposition to the dictatorship during her 'exile' from 1966 to 1971.

Pesquet Laure (Sorbonne University, Centre for 19th Century History)

Midwives, Procreation, and the State during the Nasser period

Concerned with the health of mothers and children, Egyptian midwives, who have been government graduates since 1832 or trained by missionary networks, are working to meet the population targets set by the Nasser regime, which hopes to reduce the number of births and reform reproductive practices. At a time when development theories are spreading in Egypt, midwives are witnessing on the ground the implementation of family reforms that aim to transform women's place in society while paradoxically constraining them in their role as mothers.