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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

**TITOLO/TITLE:** Gender and multiple crises in Tunisia. Exploring the consequences of crises on women and men relations, gender roles and representations through a historical approach

**PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S:** RENATA PEPICELLI E GUENDALINA SIMONCINI

**ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):**

Tunisia is currently in the international spotlight due to the political and institutional crisis that began with the events of July 2021 when President Kais Saied decided to block parliamentary activities and rewrite the 2014 Constitution. This is not the first nor the only crisis that affects the country. Multiple crises (Brand, 2016) - at the economic, social, political, juridical and cultural levels - have marked the recent history of Tunisia.

By adopting a long-term perspective, it is possible to observe that the multiple crises experienced by Tunisia had important repercussions on different levels, including the dynamics between genders. Indeed, crises have a differentiated impact for men and women (Antonopoulos, 2014; Gálvez and López, 2010). For example, the measures adopted by state authorities to address crises have brought gender into play by influencing the relationships between men and women, the models of masculinity and femininity, roles and identities. But even from below, grass-roots reactions to crisis need to be studied through gender lenses.

While the research has extensively investigated the emergence of political fractions, the new reconfigurations of Islamism, the contradictory transitional trajectories, the recession and unemployment with their respective repercussions, little has been written about the repercussions of these changes on gender in Tunisia. The impact of the measures taken to deal with crises on gender tends to be overlooked or be treated partially in the literature dedicated to crisis management. For example, many studies that emerged over the last few years tended to focus on the gendered impacts of the economic crisis accompanying the pandemic (Kabeer, Razavi e van der Meulen, 2021) while overlooking the importance of deepening the impact of that crisis on gender relations, models and identities. The study of differential material impacts of crises on women and girls at the economic and social level (United Nations Women, 2020), although of fundamental importance, need to be accompanied by an in-depth understanding of the symbolic, discursive and identitarian impacts of crises on gender, taking into account the narratives of crisis governance and the renegotiations of power relations between genders.

This panel, therefore, aims to investigate in a broader perspective the effects that the crises and responses given by governments, international organizations, political movements, society in Tunisia, have had at the level of gender reconfigurations, roles, relationships and representations.

Crises, understood as "transformative moments in history", can offer the possibility of change (Seguino, 2010) both at the level of the labour market and the opportunities for equality, as well as at the level of status, identity, performance, representations and power relations between genders. But at the same time crises can represent an opportunity to reinforce unequal power structures (Griffin, 2015) and gender representations of a patriarchal and conservative nature.

Tunisia asserts itself as a very pertinent case study of the gender consequences of both national and global crises since it represents a country in which gender redefinitions have been at the centre of the national construction process itself (Charrad, 2001), strongly altering perception, performance and gender roles. The genre has been continuously mobilised in the contemporary history of Tunisia for political interests by the various political protagonists in times of crisis (Pepicelli, 2015; Yacoubi, 2016; Moghaddam, 2018).

More concretely this panel aims to study gender models that have been redefined or confirmed in response to the various crises experienced by the country, with particular attention to the dynamics between the base and the institution. In particular, the panel will explore the impact of crises on gender in different contexts and from

different perspectives. From one side the panel wants to investigate how the emergence of women's movements and their access to the labour market and into politics has undermined the mainstream interpretation of gender roles and relations within society, breaking with traditional patriarchal positions and renegotiating conservative stances. From the other side, the panel wants to underline in which way the crises have also served the institutions and some political movements to revive conservative gender narratives in the context of security, recession and the health crisis.

With a starting point in the human and social sciences and based on field research, on the analysis of the literature produced on the subject and archival research, this panel is open to contributions that:

- Explore from an inter- and trans-disciplinary approach the conceptual and theoretical tools to address the impact of crises on gender
- Study material and symbolic impact of crises on gender relations, roles and representation in the Tunisian context
- Analyse historical or actual contestations of public meanings of femininity / masculinity in the context of multiple crises
- Discuss reconfigurations or consolidation of traditional gender roles, identities and relations emerging from crises.

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#### **PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS**

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