

## XV Convegno SeSaMO

Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale

22-24 giugno 2022



SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

**TITOLO/TITLE: Filling the Gap: Understanding the complex ways of Arab women fighting for liberation from interlocking systems of oppression.**

**PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S:** MAY TELMISSANY, Lina Isma'il, Radamis Zaky

**CHAIR:** Dina Salha

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

### **Panel Description:**

This panel aims to provide a multidimensional and multidisciplinary analysis to the different ways Arab women express their agency and fight for liberation from daily interlocking systems of oppression. The panel is adopting an intersectional feminist approach to fill gaps both on the theoretical and praxis level. Panellists are both scholars and social justice activists who are concern with producing knowledge and tools that can be used in empowering Arab Women. The panel consist of three presentations. Each presentation will focus on a specific aspect in relation to the empowerment of Arab women. However, the presentations compliment each other.

### **Rethinking Feminism in Egypt: A decade after the Arab Spring a A New Feminist Theoretical Model is needed.- Radamis Zaky (University of Ottawa-Canada.)**

Egyptian women played an integral and important role in the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Egypt witnessed different forms of struggles and fight over power since January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The last decade can be understood as episodes of contention. Women played integral roles in each of these episodes. Both the complexity and dynamics of the different roles played by women problematized the various conceptual frameworks that are usually used in analyzing Egyptian women's various forms of activism. Resultantly, this paper suggests a new analytical framework that can be applied to understand Egyptian women struggles and ways of expressing their agency. The proposed framework is inspired by the work on intersectionality by Collins and. Billge (2016). The Triple C model (context, contractions and commonalities) analytical framework could fill the analytical gap in understanding the various complex discourses around Egyptian women's oppression and activism.

### **Ana Horra: Gendering the History of Arab Cinema -May Telmissany (University of Ottawa- Canada)**

Although cinema was introduced in the Arab World in 1896, and films were produced in Egypt and Tunisia as early as the 1910s, no comprehensive history of the Arab cinemas has yet been published in Arabic. The few dominant histories of Arab cinemas are mainly written in English and in French and they mostly deal with this history from the national perspective (Roy Armes, Yves Thoraval, Mouny Berah, Viola Shafik, etc.). Very few books are specifically dedicated to national productions, e.g., the Egyptian cinema (Magda Wassef), the Lebanese cinema (Lina

Khatib), the Palestinian cinema (Hamid Dabashi), or address topics, genres, and filmmakers within the context of national cinemas (Joel Gordon, Kay Dickinson, Malek Khouri). Hardly any of these publications are available in Arabic, and only some confronted issues of colonial-postcolonial representations, Arab transnational diasporic cinemas, and the question of power dynamics from a gender lens. In terms of gender-based scholarship, one exception stands out as Rebecca Hillauer publishes in 2005 the informative *Encyclopedia of Arab Women Filmmakers* which begs critical contextualization and updating.

While this presentation does not claim to fill the gap in history, it addresses the disparities in the field from an interdisciplinary standpoint and expands the existing scholarship by focusing on women contributions and representations as the main entry points. By extending and correcting common views and assumptions about women's roles in cinema, this presentation uses the Egyptian film title *Ana Horra* (*I Am Free*, dir. Salah Abou Seif, 1959) to highlight and celebrate the lived realities of female directors and producers in four different directions. Firstly, from the historical perspective, the author claims that the history of women contributions to filmmaking in the Arab World flows from the pioneering era of the 1920s and 1930s Egyptian cinema to the contemporary film productions in Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia, Morocco, and the Gulf where one witnesses the emergence, and the growing recognition of prominent women filmmakers on the local, regional, and international levels. Secondly, from the feminist perspective, using gender as a category of analysis, the author addresses issues of political paternalism, social patriarchy and forms of resistance developed by women through film practice, representation, and scholarship. Thirdly, from the social and cultural perspectives, the author addresses the role played by marginalized groups such as the Syrian Lebanese in Egypt, the Berber Amazigh in Algeria, the French Maghrebi in France, and the Arab American/Arab Canadian in North America, in subverting the taboos associated with women's bodies and sexualities, as well as gendered social-economic roles. Finally, from the esthetic perspective, the author seeks to identify cinematic ways through which women filmmakers challenged and contributed to rewriting the artistic histories of the Arab imaginary through mainstream cinema and cinema d'auteur.

This interdisciplinary approach to the history of Arab cinema sheds a new light on the relationship between film and gender, changes how scholars, film practitioners and film audiences view the role of women in the film industry, and reshapes larger frameworks of understanding, and resisting against, national, social, and cultural inequalities from a pan-Arab transnational standpoint.

### **Women and Agro-resistance in Palestine- Lina Isma'il (Palestinian Agro-ecological forum- West Bank Occupied Palestine)**

The session will be introducing the beginning of the journey of the agricultural movement towards food sovereignty in Palestine, from an emancipatory feminist ideological standpoint that seeks to break away from the dependence on the Israeli occupier and the global monopolistic companies. The movement advocates for the adoption of food production systems that are based on natural resources, local production inputs, values of cooperation, and agricultural practices that are culturally, environmentally, socially, economically, and nationally appropriate for the Palestinian context.

I will be discussing the role of Agro-ecology in achieving food sovereignty, through presenting case studies adopting agro-ecological farming methods in Palestine, urging us to explore the impact of such practices on the political, social, cultural, economic, health, and environmental settings of the Palestinian society.

**Political and Poetic Ideology in the Translation of Occidental: Modernist Literature During Arab Cultural Awakening. The Case of May Ziadeh - Norah Alkharashi (University of Ottawa)**

According to André Lefevere, translations are rewriting of an original text. Whatever the intentions, rewritings (also translations) manipulate literature in each society to function in a certain way, reflecting that societies' ideology and poetics. Borrowing this concept of "literary manipulation", this paper examines the translations of occidental modernist literature by May Ziadeh - a female Arab author and a translator who rose to fame during Al-nahda period.

Between the 1850s and 1950s, various Arab provinces (later, countries) went through an era of cultural awakening. This period witnessed a pioneering literary activity, a rising influence of foreign literature in Arabic language, writing and letter, and the use of various forms of literature to spread modernism and secular thoughts and ideologies. This revival has opened a space for women who arouse interest in their emancipation, literary commitment and participatory with universal values of that time. As their geographical spaces went through a decolonizing process, Arab female authors of that period showed alliances with liberal attitudes towards love, marriage, women, government, and religion while at the same time maintaining an antagonism against the Western capitalist camp.

By taking a temporal and textual analysis approach, this paper aims to examine the cultural behaviours of May Ziadeh as a translator in that given cultural climate and her agency under the manipulation of ideology. The analysis will move from macro to micro, focusing on her translation/adaptation of *Memories: A Story of German Love* by Max Müller. In doing so, this paper will highlight the relationship between poetics and ideology in the literary *polysystem* of the modern Arab culture, the interaction among professional actors and patronage (such as reviewers, critics, teachers, and translators). While framing the case study in a specific historical period, the concepts of rewriting, ideology and agency of Arab translators will be examined as well for further research.

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

**May Telmissany, Ph.D.**

May Telmissany is an associate professor of Arabic studies at University of Ottawa, an internationally acclaimed Egyptian-Canadian novelist, and an intellectual dedicated to the cause of secularism and civil rights. Born in Cairo in 1965, May moved to Canada in 1998 and earned her PhD in Comparative Literature and Cinema from Université de Montréal; her doctoral dissertation dealt with the depiction of working-class neighbourhoods in Egyptian cinema and the associated criticism of nationalism. Her academic publications include a book of photographs and cultural studies, May Telmissany contributed from Canada to the events surrounding the Egyptian revolution by creating [www.dawlamadaneya.com](http://www.dawlamadaneya.com) a website dedicated to defending civil rights and raising awareness of the principles of secularism. Her

travels back and forth between Canada and Egypt were the focus of her book *Ceci n'est pas un paradis. Chroniques nomades*, published in Arabic in 2009 and in French in 2017. In this book, May analyzes the grievous effects of religious fundamentalism on Egyptian society and the premises underlying a latent revolt that would come to a head a few months later. In the past years, Canadian, Egyptian, and European media have regularly invited Telmissany to comment on the political situation in Egypt; she has given over 40 interviews and public lectures on such complex issues as the utopianism of revolutionary movements, the flaws of Egyptian militarism, the need for a new secular constitution that respects human rights, and the dangers of political Islam and the rise of religious fascism in the region. In addition to her academic publications and activist engagement in social movements in Egypt, May Telmissany is an acclaimed novelist. Her three novels and three short stories collections published in Arabic and translated into several European languages include *Duniazad* (Saqi Books, 2000) *Héliopolis* (Actes Sud, 2002), and *A Cappella* (Actes Sud, 2014).

### **Lina Isma'il**

Lina Isma'il is an environmental activist working in the fields of community development and food sovereignty.

She is a member of the Palestinian Agro-ecological forum that aims to provide an open platform for practitioners and activists in the field of Agro-ecology, in the effort of creating a movement towards achieving food sovereignty in Palestine.

### **Radamis Zaky**

Radamis Zaky is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies at University of Ottawa, Canada. His research focuses on Egyptian women in post 2011 Egyptian revolution.

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