

Atelier Recherche du Cedej

Thème approfondi:

“Let down the curtains around us”

GLOBAL SEX WORK, BIOPOLITICS, AND MODERNITY IN COLONIAL CAIRO, 1882-1952

This talk explores the social construction of transgressive sexualities in modern Egypt and, more pointedly, the making of a specifically gendered subjectivity, the *prostitute's*, as a site of modern bio-political governmentality in colonial and semi-colonial Egypt (1882-1952). By tracing the transformation of gendered economic roles and mobility in a rapidly changing urban environment as fin-de-siècle Cairo, I will show how new biopolitical anxieties were inscribed in the body of the newly-emerging ‘tragic’ urban figure of the prostitute, seemingly justifying the extension of a disciplinary regime whose rational can be most interestingly studied at the intersection between imperial and Egyptian nationalist politics. Far from being only a metaphor of power and its anxieties, though, sex work was also a highly diversified kind of labour women practiced out of necessity but with varying degrees of autonomy. By exploring the way in which sex workers’ micro-histories and regulationist and reformist discourses intersected, it is possible to recover at least a glimpse of this agency under constraints, which, far from being marginal as often maintained, was integral to the making and remaking of colonial and local power structures.

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Francesca Biancani holds a PhD in Government from the London School of Economics (2012) and is Adjunct Professor of History and Institutions of the Modern Middle East at Bologna University since 2010. A social historian with a keen interest in the interplay of sex, gender, mobility and labour in the making of subaltern subjectivities in colonial and semi-colonial Egypt (1882-1952), her book on global sex work, biopolitics and modernity in colonial Cairo is forthcoming with IB Tauris. Among her publications, "The Hierarchy of Prostitution in Colonia Cairo at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century", in *The Meeting Place of British Middle Eastern Studies*, A. Phillips and R. Abu-Remaileh, eds. (Cambridge Scholar Press, 2009); "International Migration and Sex Work in Early Twentieth Century Cairo," in *Globalization and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, L. Kozma et al., eds. (IB Tauris, 2015), "Prostitution in Cairo, 1600 to Present: an Urban Overview", co-authored with Hannan Hammad in *Prostitution in Global Cities, 1600 to Present*, E. van Nee derveen Meerkerk, L. Heerma van Voss, M. Rodriguez Garcia, eds., (Brill 2017) "Globalization, Gender, and Labour in Cosmopolitan Egypt, 1860-1937," in *From Slovenia to Egypt: Aleksandrinke's Trans-Mediterranean Domestic Workers' Migration and National Imagination*, M. Hladnik, ed. (V&R Unipress, 2015).

L'atelier se tiendra au CEDEJ, le lundi 29 janvier 2018 à 18h00.