

**Review of Zakia Salime, *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco*, MN: The University of Minnesota Press 2012, xxx + 195 pp., ISBN 978-0-8166-5334-4**

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Zakia Salime's *Between Feminism and Islam: human rights and sharia law in Morocco* is a ground breaking study in the field of Islamic feminism inasmuch as it provides a perspective on Islam and gender which is currently under-studied in academic literature: namely Islamic feminism as embedded in global networks of capital, information and human rights. She defines 'feminism' as an advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality to men. Islamic feminism, according to Salime, should be comprehended only in tentative historical terms and against the complex interplay of international events and discourses (on feminism, Islam and the war on terror) and socio-cultural factors deeply rooted in the political habitat of Morocco. Salime suggests that classical binaries in the study of feminism – such as feminist versus anti-feminist activism – are particularly insufficient when it comes to addressing the nature of women's movements in the Middle East. Categories such as 'feminism' versus 'fundamentalism' have become the stereotypical way of classifying divisions and solidarities among women (see, for example, the Mahmood – Gourgouris debate in *Public Culture* around Mahmood's depiction of Islamist feminism in Egypt in *Politics of Piety*). Instead, Salime explores how seemingly oppositional activist communities engage with one another and even dynamically interchange positions and public roles, in the period between 1980 and 2007. In doing so, they simultaneously impact local Moroccan state policy and define global perceptions of Islam's involvement with the 'Western' gender debate. Thus Salime is capable to trace carefully 'the tensions, contradictions, and negotiations' (p. xvii) that ultimately turn formative for both Moroccan feminists and Islamists when becoming complex, both rule-challenging and rule-defining, political actors.

Thematically the book is organised around what Salime identifies as 'three key moments': 1) the One Million Signature Campaign organised by feminist groups in 1992 that aimed to collect enough public support for a reform of the Islamic Code of Personal Status (Family Law); 2) the Islamic rally that took place in 2000, 8 years after the feminist-led campaign, and which happened

in response to the government's proposal for reforms in the familial code; 3) and the Casablanca terrorist attack of 2003 where feminists and Islamist groups joined forces and became government partners in fighting terrorism in the region. In the four principal chapters of the book, Salime entangles the historical circumstances of those 'three key moments' with an ethnographic mapping of the discursive, physical and political strategies employed by the feminist and the Islamist movements. She shows that their power struggles and bureaucratic ambitions are often articulated through the all-embracing discourses of modernity, democracy, human rights, and freedom against the equally dismissive and over-arching discourses of political domination and cultural hegemony.

The opening chapter provides an introduction to the Moroccan landscape of discourse on gender ideologies and the main actors in it: the religious scholars (Arab. '*Ulama*'), the Moroccan monarchy, the feminist and the Islamist movements. All these groups are actively involved in the debates around the Code of Personal Status, or *mudawanna*, which in 2003 is re-issued as the Code of the Family. *Mudawanna* is defined by Salime as the law 'regulating men's and women's relationship within the family, giving men the upper hand in marriage, divorce and child custody, among other matters, and justifying these inequalities through highly patriarchal interpretations of the Islamic sharia, or legal code' (p. xv). The *mudawanna* is additionally loaded with ideologies related to the self-defining processes of national identity in the post-colonial post-independence period in Morocco. It is also the contestation site of identity formation for groups that define themselves as feminists versus those that settle for conservative Islamic readings of gender. Neither of the two communities, however, is monolithic but they are rather full of contradictions which became evident in 1992 during the One Million Signature Campaign.

This feminist led campaign for reforms in the *mudawanna*, organised by a secular feminist group called *Union de l'action feminine*, is the subject of the second chapter. The campaign aimed at revising the misogynist paragraphs in the Code of Personal Status with amendments for women's access to education and parity between the genders in marriage, divorce, guardianship and inheritance rights. Secondly, it also had a clearly defined desire to 'import' international agreements such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The campaign was significant also in another way: for the first time an attempt of reinterpretation of the sharia law in Morocco suggested that it was not a divine law but a legal system, historically controlled by men, and profoundly rooted in socio-cultural circumstances. Unexpected and most interesting consequences of this campaign, from Salime's perspective, are that it 'feminised' Islamist movements in Morocco by urging them to 'invent' Islamic ways of representing Moroccan women that resonate with international values and norms (and in that respect, it also influenced male perceptions of gender). Secondly, the campaign's mass character connected secular feminists with rural religious communities (speaking only local Arabic and sticking to Islamic conservatism) and made them tune their language and demands to Islamic religious perceptions of gender. This process Salime defines as *Islamization* of the secular feminist movement in Morocco.

The third chapter explores the Islamist rally that took place in Casablanca in March 2000. It happened in response to the socialist government's proposal of a major revision of the *mudawanna* in the form of a National Plan of Action for Integrating Women into Development (NPD). The contestation of this reform to the Code of the Family coming from Islamist women is a particularly important

historical moment for Islamic feminism because it brought urgently and unequivocally to the public sphere the need for 'reconciliation' between Islam and feminism. While taking leadership roles in mosques and schools, Islamist women also appealed to their (perceived) natural roles as mothers and caregivers as well as to Islam's inherent respect of both genders in order to create a feminist framework inspired by Islam. Such delicate issues as polygamy, marital guardianship (*wilaya*) and men's duty to provide (*qiwama*) were reframed by Islamist women as men's responsibilities rather than practices of oppression. Simultaneously, the secular feminists realised the need of developing a 'feminist politics of the street' (p.104) that would make messages of gender equality legitimate in a society that was suspicious of them and, moreover, perceived them as an undesired Western form of cultural intrusion.

The 2003 terrorist bombings in Casablanca changed again the dynamics of the gender debate in Morocco. The feminist movement, capitalising on the 'war-on-terror' with its concomitant discourse on the clash of civilisations, represented itself as a vehicle of democratisation and modernisation of Morocco. The Islamist women, on the other hand, using 'motherhood' as a political platform of moderation, fought to achieve public recognition as the stronger player in the Moroccan public sphere. In both cases, the gender lens was inscribed in larger political struggles that involved disputes over leadership and legitimacy that ultimately transcended the immediate differences in the interpretations of gender equality. As a result, Salime depicts the internal fragmentation of the Islamist and feminist movements as well as their sometimes convergent trajectories against the backdrop of 'national' and 'international' war.

Zakia Salime's meticulous ethnography (rooted in complex understandings of the shifting historical terrain) of the two principal movements engaged in the gender debate constitutes an important theoretical and methodological intervention in the study of gender and religion through the perspective of social activism. More importantly, Salime's book is particularly relevant today when, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (characterised by massive involvement of women in Morocco and Egypt) and in view of the mediatised gender atrocities (among others) of ISIS in the Middle East, Morocco is usually portrayed as the model for Arab women's liberation. Salime's skepticism is instructive in that respect and worth exploring further: she seems to suggest that gender reforms and gender struggles in Morocco happen against the background of global pressures for modernisation of Moroccan citizenry and leadership while the divisions among women are of benefit only to the disciplinary power of the monarchy, and to the over-arching economic forces of the neoliberal, neo-orientalist, profit-driven 'war on terror'.