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## Gendering Political Agency in the Maghreb

FATIMA SADIQI

- Women, Gender, and the Palace Households in Ottoman Tunisia.*** Amy Aisen Kallander. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013. 287 pages. ISBN 9781477302132
- The Moroccan Women's Rights Movement.*** Amy Young Evrard. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014. 300 pages. ISBN 9780815633501
- Gender and Divorce Law in North Africa: Sharia, Custom, and the Personal Status Code in Tunisia.*** Maaïke Voorhoeve. London: Tauris, 2014. 338 pages. ISBN 9781780765297
- The Ideal Refugees: Gender, Islam, and the Sahrawi Politics of Survival.*** Elena Fiddian-Qasimiyeh. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014. 329 pages. ISBN 9780815633266

If North Africa is understudied by academics of the Middle East, the Maghreb is more so and Maghrebian women even more (Ennaji, Sadiqi, and Vintges 2016; Moghadam 1993; Sadiqi 2016). The four books under review direct attention to this region and link the multifaceted and gendered histories of the Maghreb to its present. Their local, regional, and transregional approaches make a valuable contribution to North African, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean studies. Employing novel approaches and methodologies, new theories, and new sources in the post-Arab Spring moment, the books highlight the role of gender in the making of the historical and contemporary political Maghreb.

Unlike most works on women in Ottoman households that focus on the Middle East, especially Turkey, Amy Aisen Kallander's *Women, Gender, and the Palace Households in Ottoman Tunisia* spans the period from the sixteenth-century Ottoman conquest of Tunisia to the early nineteenth century. Starting from the premise that palaces are complex domestic spaces where economic and political



and economic life for twenty-three years through corruption and clientalism. The author sees this as a perpetuation of the worst attributes of a royal family (palace building, flaunting of wealth, immunity from legal sanction, use of family connections, and preparation of a hereditary dynasty). Kallander's dynamic approach to the role of the family and women's political power in the Maghreb from the sixteenth century to the present analyzes colonial modernity not as rupture but as reorientation of a continuous global process.

Amy Young Evrard's *Moroccan Women's Rights Movement* focuses on the Moroccan secular feminist movement. She shows how this movement weaves together the local and the transnational to produce something unique to Morocco and yet resonates with women's concerns in the region and beyond—the promotion of women's legal rights and the reform and implementation of the *mudawwana* (family law). The women's movement in Morocco is political (Ennaji 2005), allowing it to compromise with Islamic feminist organizations. Secular Moroccan women play a positive role in the struggle for social change (Guessous 2011) and in safeguarding women's rights. Secularity was crucial to the development of feminist thought in Morocco and North Africa. The post-Arab Spring Islamist government in Tunisia did not remove women from the political scene, and feminists brought back a secular government in the 2014 post-Islamist elections. Evrard convincingly argues that the Moroccan secular feminist movement owes its strength to the political dexterity it acquired through decades of strategizing with the monarchy, political parties, and other social movements. She emphasizes the “urban” nature of the movement and its inscription in the larger Moroccan political framework. Her analysis shows how diverse secular nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Morocco not only feminized the political space but democratized it and opened further decision-making spaces for women. She demonstrates the strength and elasticity of these NGOs as they improved women's legal rights. Building on these findings, the author broaches issues such as the necessity to problematize the “secular” and go beyond the binary secular-religious as sources for women's rights. She questions the meanings of *secular* and *elite*. Strikingly, Evrard's book relocates the secular not only as part of women's lives but also in the larger sociopolitical makeup of the region. In search of a “harmonious family,” the book speaks to Kallander's by highlighting the flexibility of the women's secular movement in Morocco, which offers family development programs. Evrard underlines the dual conception of the harmonious family, however defined by women related by blood or marriage. The idiom of family is growing salient in the discourse of associations (including slogans and brochures) as a way of legitimizing women's rights and discussing issues like the veil.

Taking the legal aspect of family law to a more concrete but complex level, that of judicial practices of 2008–9, Maaïke Voorhoeve's *Gender and Divorce Law in North Africa* highlights the emancipatory reading of judicial law by Tunisian female



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