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Islamic feminism and Arab family laws: Perspectives from Morocco, Egypt and Lebanon

The following papers included in this issue of *Al-Raida*—written by Connie Carøe Christiansen, Fatima Outaleb and Fatima Sadiqi, Azza Soliman and Sara Abdel Ghany, and Youmna Makhoul and Reem Maghribi—were originally published in March 2020 as part of a Carnegie Corporation-funded project that was led by the Arab Institute for Women (The AiW). The excerpt below offers insight into the goals and aims of the project, and is republished with permission from The AiW's website. For more information, please go to the following page: <https://aiw.lau.edu.lb/projects/carnegie-project.php>.

About the Project

Despite more than a century of critique of women's legal status in the Arab region, changing family patterns, and a booming young female adult population aspiring to professional lives, family laws in Arab countries still endorse inequality between the spouses and discrimination against women. This is not only unjust, but is also an obstacle to development, preventing women's self-determination and contribution to their societies. Inequality in the family laws of the Arab region is increasingly confronted by Muslim women in transnational activism and conversations. Recent initiatives to review family laws and interpretations of their core concepts within circles of scholars and activists have fostered a transnational social movement with a tremendous momentum for revising these laws by addressing their gender inequalities from an Islamic perspective. Participants include individual researchers, research centers, and organizations involving researchers from Arab countries, as well as from other parts of the world.

This project on transnational advocacy networks for gender equality in Islamic family laws is offered as a lens through which to investigate the relationship between these transnational actors and the current configurations of state.

Author Bios

Dr. Connie Carøe Christiansen is a visiting associate professor in Gender Studies. She was an associate professor at Roskilde University in Denmark and a senior advisor at KVINFO, the Danish Centre for Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity, where she managed academic programs in the Arab region, including a program which established an M.A. program on International Development and Gender at Sanaa University in Yemen. She has published research on gender, migration and Islam in Denmark, Turkey, Morocco and Yemen. She has her M.A. in Cultural Sociology and Ph.D. in Anthropology from Copenhagen University, Denmark.

Dr. Fatima Sadiqi is Professor of Linguistics and Gender Studies. Her work focuses on women's issues in modern North Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean world. She is author and editor of numerous volumes and journal issues. Sadiqi is President of the Association of Middle East Women's Studies - AMEWS- the first non-American to be elected to this office. She is a member of many national and international scholarly and policy-making boards. Her work has been supported by numerous prestigious awards and fellowships from around the world. She currently serves on the Editorial Board of the Oxford Encyclopedia of African Women's History. Fatima led the research on Morocco for this project.

Fatima Outaleb has over 27 years of experience in national and regional women's issues with a special focus on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. She is a Union de Action Feminist Board of Directors member, and Director and cofounder of the first women's shelter in Morocco. She is the MENA representative in the Global network of women shelters, North-South expert group member of The Council of Europe, focal person and gender technical advisor of many national and international human right organizations (DANNER, FAR, ABAAD WILPF, UNFPA, UNDP

ICAN), and part of many regional networks. She has publications on gender-based violence and contributed to the elaboration and editing of shelter training toolkits and briefs on women's rights in MENA region.

Sara Abdel Ghany has been working on gender issues with local, regional, and global organizations for over a decade. She has a Masters in Law from SOAS in London, as well as a BA in Political Science from the American University of Cairo. She is currently a PhD candidate at the Department of Politics and International Studies. Her PhD research project is focused on the socio-political movement of change in Egypt. She has collaborated on several research projects around Women in the Arab world and co-authored a report on online human rights activism across the Arab world. Sarah led the research on Egypt for this project.

Azza Soliman is an Egyptian lawyer and women's human rights defender. She is the board president of the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA Foundation) that is a women's rights organization established in 1995. Azza Soliman has been working in the field of Human Rights and development for more than 25 years and has expertise as a trainer in the field of human rights concepts, women's human rights, and gender equality. She is also a co-founder of the Musawah movement (a global movement of women and men who believe in enhancing and protecting equality and justice within the family and the community in addition to finding alternatives through developing new concepts for Islamic jurisprudence). Azza Soliman has won several international awards, including 'Pedro de Lemonauria award for the ethical commitment', 2018, Spain, and 'Martine Anstett Prize Association', 2018, Switzerland.

Reem Maghribi has designed and managed projects on the documentation and development of culture and society for several years. As the Managing Director of Sharq CIC, she has worked on promoting citizen voices across the Arab world. She regularly speaks at conferences on the achievements and challenges of Arab populations, and has run several workshops and trainings. Reem led the research on Lebanon for this project.

Younna Makhoul is a PhD candidate in law at the Université Paris II Panthéon-Assas. Her dissertation examines the question of the “identity of the individual in the Lebanese private law”. She is a Teaching Assistant and researcher at the Faculty of Law at Saint Joseph-University of Beirut. She is also a member of the NGO Legal Agenda and an attorney at the Beirut Bar Association.