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Women, Gender, and Language in Morocco (review)

Deborah A. Kapchan

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Movements and Discourses and Religious Associations,” which consists of a single regionalized entry on Canada, also seems unnecessary. Readers should be prepared to skim the contents for multiple related entries and to pay attention to topical overlaps.

Careful readers will doubtless find far more gaps and overlaps than I have identified here, but I think they will also find that the EWIC editors and contributors have crafted a timely and critical guide for researchers and information seekers that manages to de-essentialize categories like women, Islam, and Islamic cultures in its simultaneous breadth and specificity. Furthermore, the EWIC challenges fields that have been slower to respond to the interventions made by gender and women's studies, like economics, political history, Middle East studies, as well as those that haven't yet adequately addressed Islamic cultures in their midst such as Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe and to rethink their methodologies by pursuing the many gaps in what we know about women and Islamic cultures.

Women, Gender, and Language in Morocco

Fatima Sadiqi. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003. ISBN 90-04-12853-0. 336 pages.

Reviewed by Deborah Kapchan, New York University

Fatima Sadiqi's newest book is an oeuvre unto itself. The title—*Women, Gender, and Language in Morocco*—is completely apt to the comprehensiveness of the volume. It covers not just the intersection of these topics but their separate intellectual histories, providing the reader with a deep understanding of context in order to fully gauge the meaning of gendered expression in Morocco. A theoretical syntactician, Sadiqi notes in the very beginning of the book that “finding out about...‘established’ and ‘taken for granted’ ideas [about gender and culture] is as necessary a step to take as actually carrying [out] academic research on women, gender, and language.” She thus sets herself the ambitious task of exploring the agency of women within Morocco's cultural and linguistic “structures of power” (xvi) from both a theoretical and ethnographic standpoint.

Chapter one provides the scholarly background for her discussions.

Sadiqi reviews the extant theories of language and gender, summarizing the history of English scholarship on the topic for both specialists and nonspecialists. She asserts the necessity of a constructivist and anti-essentialist approach to gender that situates actors in specific cultural contexts. She then proceeds to delineate those contexts for Moroccan women, recounting the history of feminisms in Morocco (including liberal feminism and religious feminism), the importance of ritual in the construction of feminine subjectivity, the rich oral culture of women, the issue of illiteracy, and the political economy of multilingualism wherein varying fluencies in Berber, Moroccan Arabic, standard Arabic, French, and English may determine social status. This chapter ends with a discussion of how women face resistance when entering politics and the public sphere even while their role as activists in civil society takes on a growing importance.

Chapter two examines the formal properties of androcentricity (male bias) in standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, and Berber. Sadiqi analyzes the role of pitch in women's and men's speech, noting the cultural stereotypes that equate low pitch with seriousness and high pitch with weakness. She then discusses stereotyping in language at length, drawing upon proverbs, lexical sexism, and other forms of public discourse that define women and women's language as unworthy of consideration. In the course of these examples, the reader understands the many tacit cultural and ideological biases that work to disempower women while upholding male dominance. As Sadiqi demonstrates, these insidious and largely unconscious attitudes are transmitted in modes of education and linguistic socialization. To their credit, women combat these forces with discourse strategies of their own, including indirection, euphemisms, diminutives, polite forms, and oaths. Although Sadiqi describes with care the difference between men's and women's language use in Morocco, as well as the power encoded in such forms, she argues that description of difference is not sufficient. Only equity in language use, she asserts, will "gradually uproot the pervasive androcentricity in Moroccan languages" (161).

Chapter three, "Social Differences," identifies the variables that create power differentials among Moroccan women, including geography, class, education, job opportunities, language skills, and marital status. Sadiqi analyzes rural speech patterns in both Moroccan Arabic and

Berber, demonstrating how certain pronunciations index class and status, and she delineates the linguistic strategies used by upwardly mobile women (increased code-switching between Moroccan Arabic and French, for example). She discusses the symbolic import of rural and urban spaces and women's place in them, as well as the institution of marriage, which continues to define social status for many—but not for all. In recent years, she notes, high unemployment has discouraged men from marrying until they reach the ages of thirty-five or forty, which leaves many women unmarried (as men eventually opt for younger women). Thus, “a new category of ‘aging’ educated urban single women is emerging” (202). Although representing a sign of autonomy, these women nonetheless are often marginalized by society, feared as “husband-snatchers,” sorceresses, or prostitutes. Sadiqi shows that among themselves women are involved in power struggles and competition for status, yet the notions of “status” and “authority” are quite particular to the Moroccan cultural context. For Moroccan women, tradition and modernity are not oppositional, for example, but complementary—a fact that differentiates Moroccan feminisms from Euro-American models.

“Contextual Differences” are addressed in chapter four, in which Sadiqi discusses linguistic style and how women empower themselves by using a repertoire of linguistic and expressive codes. Sadiqi advances the thesis that in terms of use “Standard Arabic is a ‘male’ language, Berber is a ‘female’ language, Moroccan Arabic is both a male and female language, but is more a male language in rural areas, and French is both a female and a male language, but more a female language in urban areas” (218). She goes on to analyze the expressive genres that women employ in Berber and Moroccan Arabic. This chapter is delightful for the poems, stories, and other narratives (gossip, oaths) that Sadiqi includes and analyzes. Through women's creative use of speech genres, she asserts, their resistance to oppression emerges, as does their ability to create status among their peers and family members. This chapter recalls the work of Abu-Lughod (1986) on women's poetry as well as Kapchan's analyses of Moroccan women's bawdy oratory in the marketplace (1996). Women are seen to be agents in the oral world of creative discourse.

Finally, in chapter five, “Differences within the Self,” Sadiqi grapples with the ubiquitous topic of identity. As she has demonstrated throughout the book, gender identity is a sociocultural phenomenon that is none-

theless performed by the individual. All people have multiple identities, she asserts, and call strategically upon one or another to accrue value. In order to elucidate this, Sadiqi focuses on the genre of introductions. She taped and videotaped fifty people to see which identities were most salient and why, finding that “class, education, language skills or work status” had more importance in women’s speech than did their gender identity but that their gender identity was inseparable from these factors (312). In other words, her data demonstrated that gender alone does not hold a powerful place in identity construction but is always attached to other identity markers.

Sadiqi’s book is rich in detail. It provides a cultural map for the study of gender and linguistic practice in Morocco. Sadiqi rightly asserts that work on gender must take into account “the dynamics of multi-lingualism, reading of religion, illiteracy, and orality” in order to avoid Western ethnocentric paradigms of feminism (314). Sadiqi’s work provides an excellent and highly readable example of scholarship that tilts the balance a bit more equitably toward non-Western communities. It is a powerhouse of a book that will appeal not only to linguists but to cultural anthropologists, folklorists, feminists, and anyone interested in the history of gender studies in Morocco, North Africa, and the Islamic world in general.

The Tree and Other Stories

Abdallah Al-Nasser, translated by Dina Bosio and Christopher Tingley. Interlink, 2004. 124 pp.

Reviewed by Moneera al-Ghadeer, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The stories in *The Tree* are selections from Abdallah Al-Nasser’s previously published story collections, especially *The Mirage* and *The Snow Siege*, which both appeared in 2002. Dina Bosio and Christopher Tingley translated *The Tree* from Arabic, and their translation reads very well; Salma Khadra Joyyusi contributes a helpful introduction to the collection.

Al-Nasser has worked in journalism for a few decades and contributed to many Arabic newspapers in Saudi Arabia and abroad. *The Tree*