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Book Review

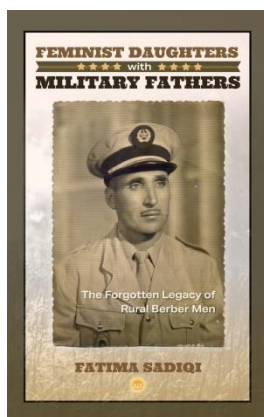
Feminist Daughters with Military Fathers: The Forgotten Legacy of Rural Berber Men



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Cover page



Book details

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Fatima Sadiqi is a prominent Moroccan Amazigh academic. Her publications focus on themes of linguistics, gender, Amazigh/Berber identity, culture and feminism movements in Morocco, North Africa. In her autobiography article (2017) Sadiqi reflects about her academic trajectory navigating her Amazigh language, identity, and feminism within a hegemonic feminist scene in Morocco. In her recent publication (2021b: 598) Sadiqi described herself as “a Berber feminist linguist: both the Berber language and feminism constitute a fundamental mix in my intellectual journey and in my life”. Therefore, identity and language are central elements of significance in the academic career of the author.

In her recent book under review (2021a) that is “both personal and scholarly” to the author where she weaves the threads of the chapters attributed to memories of her military father Mouhamd ou Lahcen.

She reflects on the role he plays to support her education among other themes, organized throughout five chapters as follows:

Chapter one opens with a biography of Mouhamd ou Lahcen (around 1919-2005) a rural, illiterate, self-made Berber man who served in the French army before joining the Moroccan army after independence in 1956. Sadiqi through her father's experience discuss the remarkable military role “in a context where many conservative urban men with more privileges did not bother to enroll their daughters in school. Yet urban men like Allal Alfassi and Mohammed Belhssan Al-Ouzzani are celebrated as feminist men, which they are, the rural Berber men's legacy is forgotten and needs to be re-emphasized in the modern history of Morocco. These men were marginalized first by French colonizers, then by the postcolonial state-builders and finally by feminists of both sexes” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 3).

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Her father being of a Berber tribe “Imshihh of Ayt Uwragh” expanded to explain the tribal structure and system as “a natural framework for rural life in Morocco and the locus of the rurales first identity” (Sadiqi, 2021a:11). The author then narrates the life of her father growing up in rural Berber tribal areas. Family and loyalty are an important social trait at the core of the Amazigh culture through which Sadiqi describes as “space-based patriarchy”. The latter manifested through identity which is acquired via masculine intermediation and belonging to the male ancestor bloodline. Women hold the public responsibility of maintaining the purity of the male bloodline by keeping up strict strategies to control female virginity with piety codes as not to bring shame to the family name and reputation within the tribe and town. Women and girls are responsible for keeping the family reputation intact (Sadiqi, 2021a: 19-20).

Chapter two is dedicated to the sociology of the military. Despite Sadiqi departing from explaining that “the relationship between military and society [...] is understudied and poorly researched” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 62), she questions factors such as social organization, family issues, motives of service, and social representation to be impacting the recruitment to the military services in Morocco. To the author, “throughout history, minorities groups consist of the social categories that have been absorbed into the military service” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 68). Thus, Berbers from rural areas form the bulk of the Moroccan military and therefore they impacted Moroccan society at large and helped develop social and family relations. Among characteristics of the Moroccan army are “allegiance to the king, ruralness, discipline, hierarchy, centralization, political, neutrality, and conservatism” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 70).

Chapter three offered an understanding of intersection between gender and the military and also highlights the important role of Moroccan women in the national struggle for independence. In addition to discussing women in today’s Moroccan military as important highlight of the book because such occupations weren’t accessible for Moroccan women until second decade of the 21st century. In today’s Morocco the number of women working in positions of authority in the military, and police departments is increasing according to the member of National Defence Administration stated in parliament there are now about 5,690 female soldiers. As stated by the author “The Moroccan public is no longer surprised to see women wearing police or military uniforms in the streets” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 109). This, according to Sadiqi, is part of a phenomena called ‘feminization of authority’ and within these occupations that have been traditionally available only to men, feminization of authority is achieved by providing access for women to public spaces. This subsequently leads to breaking cycles of patriarchy linked to space as what is public is considered male authoritative and what is private is considered female.

Chapter four examines the nature of Moroccan Military institution and its history. Sadiqi reviews several historical eras and positions the Moroccan military within its overall historical context such as precolonial, colonial (1912-1956) and pre independence transition to the independence era and other major events (Sadiqi, 2021a: 133-140). The years 1971-1972 known for two unsuccessful military coups are also touched upon. King Hassan II’s minister of Defense Oufkir mounted the second coup and was said to be involved in the first one (Sadiqi, 2021a: 140). As a result, according to the author “the king decided to have greater oversight on the military affairs and to ensure the loyalty of the military” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 140). Hassan II restructured the FAR (Les Forces Armées Royales), to him “loyalty was preferred to ability when it came to the distribution of key assignments”. A major change was “the arabophobe officers replaced Berber officers in the senior military ranks” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 140) and modernization of the military structure continued. Sadiqi stated that “Today FAR participates in peacekeeping missions in addition to the protection of Morocco’s frontiers” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 140). The chapter also talks about the representation of the military in Morocco’s society and culture. The author explains that “the Moroccan military is given a special status which resides in the fact that they represent the highest expression of patriotism, and they provide the means to serve both king and the country” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 41). Sadiqi stated that Morocco’s motto is *God, King, Country* and “appears at far badge meaning the military serves Islam, the monarchy and the country” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 141).

Last but not least chapter five contains the life stories and experiences of twenty-five Moroccan Feminists leader in various fields. Journalists, university professors, medical doctors, and writers that are of Sadiqi’s generation who have similar backgrounds being “daughter of military fathers” and “often share rural background”. These women “might have had encouraging mothers but given the nature of the overall Moroccan social structure, fathers were the ones to decide on their daughter’s education” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 3). Among these women Najat Aatabou, Meryem Demnati, Leila Abouzeid among others. Sadiqi presented profiles of these women and their achievements then moves on towards analysis of interviews and life stories surrounding the important role their fathers played in their education as well as having rural origins and navigating a modern urbanized Morocco.

Sadiqi sums up that despite the important role “these men were marginalized in both the colonial and Moroccan narratives, as well as in the Moroccan feminist discourse” (Sadiqi, 2021a: 1-7). The legacy left by these men to Sadiqi deserves recognition in the social history of modern Morocco.

The book is a resonant homage to the services of Berber men in the military. Despite their marginalization in national discourses, this book without

doubt is a valuable contribution to visibility of their legacy in rural society and their impact on girls' education documented not only through the author's personal story but also of 25 Moroccan Feminists leader she was able to interview. Sadiqi with this publication succeeds to explain the intersectional layered information on Moroccan rural society, tribal system, gender, culture and the military which enriches the canon of knowledge in the field of sociology, gender, history and the military.

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