

*Gender, Governance and Islam*, edited by Deniz Kandiyoti, Nadjé Al-Ali and Kathryn Spellman Poots

**Review by Sevgi Adak, AKU-ISMC**

Anyone who has ever studied gender in Muslim contexts will have engaged with Deniz Kandiyoti's work. Her landmark edited volume *Women, Islam and the State* published in 1991 changed the terms of the debate on 'women and Islam' for generations of students, scholars and activists. Kandiyoti's most recent volume, *Gender, Governance and Islam*, co-edited with Nadjé Al-Ali and Kathryn Spellman Poots, was published in AKU-ISMC's book series *Exploring Muslim Contexts*. It is a follow-up to the influential *Women, Islam and the State*, revisiting its main arguments and tracing the ways gender politics has changed over the last three decades. It searches for the dynamics of gender politics in concrete material conditions and power relations.

In this, it mirrors *Women, Islam and the State* which puts the state and the sociological dynamics in Muslim societies in focus rather than Islam and its progressive interpretations. However, *Gender, Governance and Islam* diverges from its predecessor in terms of its conceptual framework. Its title reflects the shift in the field from an almost exclusive focus on women to gender. It also employs the concept of governance to understand the new techniques and institutions of control that emerged in the age of neoliberalism. These not only transformed state structures but also increased the impact of international agents, transnational networks and non-state actors in the politics of gender.

The key contribution of *Gender, Governance and Islam* is its balancing of the analysis of local, national, international and transnational dynamics with outlining the interplay between different governance structures and apparatuses at these levels in the framing of gender politics. Although not every chapter addresses all of these levels, the overall picture drawn by the various case studies shows that while inevitably influenced by global entanglements, it is mainly the local and national levels where the battles for control, legitimacy and rights are fought. In other words, the techniques and strategies of governance vis-à-vis women as well as the contours of women's responses to them are ultimately determined by local conditions, by what Kandiyoti calls in her epilogue to the volume "endogenous dynamics and idioms" that are embedded in national gender regimes.

*Gender, Governance, and Islam* also illustrates the enormous variation in the ways gender politics is shaped by different governance systems, ideological currents and international power dynamics across various Muslim contexts. At the same time, it highlights the broad similarities and general trends visible across the cases surveyed. While its chapters document increasing gender-based violence, the tenacity of a form of patriarchal social contract and new authoritarianisms that utilise this contract in novel ways, they also show the unprecedented mobilisation against dominant gender orders and the new alliances built around gender activism. As such, *Gender, Governance and Islam* meticulously outlines the link between gender and governance in the major political transformations that Muslim-majority countries and their diasporas have undergone in recent decades. It situates Muslim contexts within the global contestations around gender in this time of rising neo-conservatism, right-wing populism and masculinist authoritarianism.

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*Gender, Governance and Islam* was published in association with Edinburgh University Press in 2019, with a paperback edition scheduled for release in May 2021, please see [here](#) for further information.