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Fatou Sow (ed.), *Genre et fondamentalismes/Gender and Fundamentalisms*. Dakar: CODESRIA, 2018. 417 pp. ISBN: 9782869787544.

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“The cultural and the religious takes a more and more important role, [this] disturbs societal debates and contributes to a backlash against progress and women’s rights” [translated from French by authors] (Sow 2018, p. 13).

African feminists increasingly face backlash. Women’s rights, including women’s control over their own bodies and sexuality, may be viewed as an area that is a major irritation for the religious and cultural conservative groups; and their ranks seem to be growing. Over the past decades religious and cultural conservative politics have been expanding in power in several African countries (including Nigeria and Uganda). Gender relations and sexual orientation are one of the primary concerns, as they accord family and women a central role as symbols of the collectivity and its (authentic) culture and future.

The edited volume of *Genre et Fondamentalismes/Gender and Fundamentalism* builds on the reports such as *Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms by Women Living Under Muslim Law* (2004). It is, however, the first academic publication that turns its focus on Africa. The different chapters address *fundamentalisms* and their impact on gender relations. Analyses are firmly embedded within feminist and sociological literatures. CODESRIA’s (*Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique*) Gender Institute is at the centre of the volume. As Fatou Sow, who was a Research Director Habilitation at the Université Paris Diderot, explains in her introduction, the project was expressly motivated by the (fundamentalist) opposition that that African women’s movements meet.

The bi-lingual volume includes a French introduction and an additional sixteen contributions, of which ten chapters are in French and six in English. Authors hail from a range of African countries with a fair amount of contributions on Senegal. The volume, however, covers the continent’s main regions. Taken together, the individual chapters are fused to provide a rich overview of the role that relations between religion, culture, and gender have in impacting political mobilization of the cultural and the religious on women. In going beyond the volume’s self-ascribed scope, the different chapters also lucidly demonstrate how women may work around these constrains or directly resist these political forces.

As the use of the plural “s” in *fundamentalisms* indicates, the authors approach the concept of fundamentalism as a multifarious phenomenon. Important dimensions that emerge out of the contributions include: (1) cultural and/or religious essentialism; (2) linkages to discourses against colonialism, imperialism and globalization and (3) opposition against feminism and women’s

rights. Nonetheless, the concept remains slippery throughout the volume. One of the reasons is that, in preferring fundamentalisms over fundamentalist movements, the actors often stay out of the picture. Additionally, the only dimension that truly binds all the fundamentalisms discussed in this volume is their opposition against gender equality. It is thus not always clear why fundamentalisms have been chosen as the prism of analysis and not another concept, such as *patriarchy*. Be that as it may, the volume does provide important insights in the relations between gender relations, religion and culture.

Following Fatou Sow's, who is a CNRS trained sociologist and the current director of 'Women Living under Muslim Laws', introduction, she provides two highly stimulating chapters: one focusing more directly on fundamentalism and the other on its impact on gender relations. Both draw on a broad conceptual and theoretical reading before concentrating on the Senegalese context. The chapter by Karima Bennoune likewise explores the broader relation between fundamentalism and gender relations, looking at the challenges that different forms of fundamentalisms pose to the rights of women and other minorities in society. The chapter is followed by the contribution of Albertine Tshibilondi Ngoyi, who provides a wide-ranging analysis and critical re-reading of what she terms "negro-African values" in the countries of Central Africa.

The subsequent twelve chapters offer more focused case studies. Maimouna Ndoeye analyses the feminist fight for the penalization of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Senegal, asking why Senegalese feminists drew on arguments of public health and not on arguments about the sexual rights of girls and women. Although Ndoeye sees this tactic as a missed opportunity to deconstruct the control of girls' and women's sexuality, her chapter shows how Senegalese feminists were between two fires: an aggressive and paternalistic Western feminism on the one hand, and local fundamentalists' critiques on the other. If the disrespectful attitude of Western feminists toward FGM victims increased the willingness of Senegalese feminists (and other feminist from the South) to take the lead in the fight against FGM in Africa, it also made them less receptive to (Western) critiques of their approach. At home, Senegalese feminists faced opposition from fundamentalists who mobilized religion and custom against the penalization of FGM. For Senegalese feminists, focusing on public health instead of sexual rights thus was a tacit strategic move.

Érick Zacharie Endémé Tsamenyé's chapter on the emergence of women in revivalist churches in Yaounde, Cameroon, shows how fundamentalist religion pushes women toward new churches. The author compellingly shows how these *alternative* churches may offer recognition and inclusion to women who often live in precarious situations. As one of his interlocutors explains: "*I'm at the center of my new church, an actor, I am listened to and I can give direction to the activities of the church [...] [t]here where I was before I was a sheep, the sheep of Abraham*" [translated from French by authors] (Endémé Tsamenyé, p. 317). But, while Endémé Tsamenyé carefully analyses the appeal of these churches for women, he also denounces the strong social and financial control they exert over them.

The chapter by Rosalie Macchia-Samba takes *Dakaroise* female breadwinners as its subject. Macchia-Samba shows how Senegalese 'fundamentalist' socio-cultural norms on gender relations prescribe the husband as the main breadwinner and thus push female breadwinning spouses to develop an array of strategies to camouflage their activity. She moreover lays bare that the economic activity of women is perceived and experienced as a social tension, both by the

women themselves and their husbands. Thus, if the work of these women is necessary for the survival of the family, it also poses a threat to the family's stability. The high number of working women in Dakar could be interpreted as a sign of their emancipation. In fact, as Macchia-Samba shows, it is an additional sign of the precarity of their life conditions.

In conclusion, the main contribution of the volume lies in the breadth of social science research presented on gender on the continent as well as the quality of the individual contributions. As such, it should interest any scholar or student working on gender in Africa. The fact that this is a bi-lingual publication may limit its readership in its entirety, however single chapters will also hold up outside of the context of the volume. The volume is an asset to both existing and future research and, last but not least, it provides a steady foundation for further activism of African feminist movements across the continent.

### **References Cited**

Imam, Ayesha, Jenny Morgan and Nira Yuval-Davis, eds. 2004. *Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms*. London: Women Living Under Muslim Laws.

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