

Dr. Amina Tawasil

Contributions of Ethnographic Fieldwork to the *Fiqhī* Discourse on Family Life

ABSTRACT:

The ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Iran between 2008 and 2011 reveals how some religious conservative *howzevi* (seminarian) women understand marriage and motherhood as constitutive of idealised womanhood. For them, the pursuit of marriage and motherhood simultaneously enables their participation in the highest levels of Islamic education and their religious and political authority in Iran. Such aspirations imposed both regulatory and emancipatory effects on the *howzevi*'s life. Two self-imposed practices I observed from women were the practice of asking permission from the husband and having the desire to marry a man whom she expected would want to be asked for permission. This understanding would not have been made possible without having spent time with the women on-the-ground for a long period of time. In this paper, I discuss aspects of the paper that was greatly impacted by longitudinal fieldwork. I argue for serious consideration of how ethnographic fieldwork contributes to critical discussions of Islamic Jurisprudence regarding family life.



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BIO:

Dr. Amina Tawasil is a Lecturer in the Programs in Anthropology at Columbia University's Teachers College. Her first research focus was on the intersection of women and Islamic education specific to the Middle East. She conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Islamic Republic of Iran for over a year and a half. Her book manuscript from this fieldwork, "*Shirini: The Work of Howzevi (Seminarian) Women in Iran*," is under review with Indiana University Press, Public Cultures of the Middle East and North Africa Series. Slow work, apprenticeship as education, oral history, storytelling, and labor migration are some of her general research interests.