

Indigenous Arab Feminism

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Abstract

Even though early Arab feminist consciousness developed hand in hand with national consciousness, feminism is an indigenous product of the political and socio-economic dynamics within the region. Feminism, nationalism, and colonialism are interconnected in the Arab world, as in many other developing countries. My presentation challenges colonialist and counter-colonialist representations of Arab women. In contemporary media and popular understanding, Arab countries are often associated with conflict, Islamic fundamentalism, tribalism, conservatism, authoritarianism, and women's oppression to the extent that the term, "Arab Feminism", sounds like an oxymoron. However, in-depth research in the history and development of women's movements and discourses on gender justice in Arab countries demonstrate that women's movements and feminisms are not 'western' imports but are indeed indigenous to the cultures of the region. Giving an overview of the beginning of feminist discourses in Arab countries, I argue that Arab women's need for positive change is no more or less than that of women anywhere else.

Keywords: Arab World; feminism; colonial representation