ISLAMIC AND ARAB FEMINISM AS AN ELEMENT OF WOMEN'S IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Mg. oec., Mg. theol. **Inese Dāvidsone**
PhD student at the University of Latvia, Latvia

Abstract

This article investigates the development of Islamic and Arab feminism as frameworks for constructing women's identity in the 20th and 21st centuries. It distinguishes between Islamic feminism, which operates through the reinterpretation of sacred texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith, and Arab feminism, which is more often embedded in secular, nationalist, and postcolonial discourses. It explores how Arab women writers have negotiated between religious tradition and feminist agency, producing hybrid models of identity that bridge the personal and the political.

Tracing the evolution of feminist thought through four historical waves, the research highlights thematic developments such as legal rights, education, intersectionality, and digital activism. Particular attention is given to the reinterpretation of patriarchal concepts like *qiwāma*, the reclamation of religious authority by female scholars, and the role of literature in amplifying women's voices.

The article argues that both Islamic and Arab feminisms challenge hegemonic Western feminist narratives by offering culturally embedded alternatives rooted in lived realities and theological introspection. These feminist movements do not reject religion but instead aim to harmonize faith with gender justice, making them powerful vehicles for societal transformation.

This study contributes to global feminist scholarship by presenting a nuanced, interdisciplinary approach to identity construction, one that foregrounds agency, tradition, and transformation in equal measure.

Keywords: *feminist waves, interaction, religion, tradition, Arabic literature, Islamic feminism, Arab feminism*

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CULTURE CROSSROADS

Introduction

The evolution of feminism has been marked by successive "waves" that have continually reshaped cultural paradigms, intellectual discourses, and methods of inquiry. In the second half of the 20th century, the second wave of feminism significantly transformed global attitudes toward gender roles, laying the foundation for civil liberties and gender equality that are now frequently taken for granted. While rooted in Western liberal and socialist traditions, feminist discourse also resonated within non-Western societies, including the Arab world, where it was reinterpreted through specific cultural, religious, and political lenses.

In the Arab context, feminist thought evolved more gradually, facing resistance from entrenched patriarchal norms, colonial legacies, and religious traditions. Yet, despite these challenges, Arab women authors and intellectuals developed a distinct feminist discourse that addressed the complexities of identity, agency, and social transformation within Islamic and Arabic frameworks. This study explores how Arab feminist voices rearticulate global feminist ideals in ways that remain culturally resonant and contextually grounded. Attention is given to the reception and transformation of Islamic feminism – a strand of thought that reinterprets Islamic texts to promote gender justice. The article highlights how concepts such as intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, and literary activism are embodied in the works of authors like Nawal El Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi, and Huda Shaarawi.

Furthermore, the article traces the four waves of feminism, not only as chronological movements but as evolving epistemologies that reflect shifting understandings of gender, power, and cultural belonging. The central hypothesis tested is whether feminism, originally rooted in Enlightenment and Western secular ideologies, has developed a culturally embedded, Arab and Islamic specificity. This is reflected in the ways Arab feminist writers reconcile traditional family values with the expanding roles of women as social, intellectual, and political agents. By bridging religious ethics and feminist principles, these writers challenge monolithic representations of Muslim women and offer alternative models of female identity and empowerment.

1. The idea of feminism

The term "feminism" comes from the Latin word *femina*, meaning *woman*. Feminism[1] has played as positive a role in women's lives as liberalism and the ideals of freedom have in the lives of individuals and entire nations. The Dictionary of

[1] I deliberately pluralize the term *feminism* to acknowledge that there are multiple feminist theories and movements, which I will discuss in the text. These movements are so diverse that "it is impossible to speak of feminism in terms other than the plural."

Foreign Terms provides two definitions of feminism: a women's movement advocating equality with men and an ideology that demands equal rights for women [Baldunčiks 2007]. The Oxford Dictionary defines *feminism* as a state of femininity. Webster's Dictionary defines *feminism* as the principle that women should have the same political rights as men.

Feminist theory refers to a worldview that engages with critical intersectional perspectives. Feminist theory is a "deeply collective" practice that reflects a shared "politics of engagement" [Mohanty 2003: 122]. Feminists agree that women face social and/or material inequalities simply because of their biological identity and are committed to addressing these issues. This is a challenge, but there are many ways in which such challenges can be addressed in different contexts [Pilcher, Whelehan 2004: 48].

The theoretical basis for feminism is found in the work of Swiss lawyer J.J. Bachofen, *Mother Right*, which presents the idea of a matriarchy in prehistory. Social Democrat A.F. Bebel, in *Woman and Socialism* (1879), argues that the political liberation of women is closely linked to the abolition of exploitation and the social yoke. In the 19th century, men were also involved in the struggle for women's suffrage. For example, the writer John Stuart Mill wrote *The Subjection of Women* under the influence of his wife [Walters 2010: 94]. Patriarchal thinking has convincingly attributed fixed and universal natures to women, a concept referred to as the "myth of eternal femininity" [Beauvoir 2011: 12]. Men define the world from their point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth [Beauvoir 2011: 162]. In order to define the masculine perspective, the other must be imagined to serve as a basis for contrast. However, feminism, in its early stages, was primarily concerned with women's political and legal rights; and this interest has now become only a small part of what feminism seeks to achieve today [Caine 1997: 2].

Feminist ideas have evolved over the last three centuries, but "what feminism means or entails is a complex question without a definitive answer" [Caine 1997: 2]. Feminist movements worldwide have undergone historical periods with different ideologies. The best way to understand feminism is through "cumulative knowledge" of "socio-political changes" in women's lives and how these changes have developed across cultures [Offen 1988: 57]. Historians and theorists seek a framework for their theories and interpretations [Offen 1988: 121].

History shows that women have been subordinated, lacking the means to reclaim their identity, until they illuminate and renew it through their experiences. "How much does 'matter matter'?" [Barad 2007: 64]. Materialist feminists shift the focus from narrative to technology, labour division, objects, and events. They challenge the primacy of narrative, emphasizing "textual repetitions" and problematizing subjectivity and the processes of knowing and speaking [Hemmings 2011: 192].

The feminist program is based on criteria including physical enfranchisement, intellectual, moral, and social emancipation [Bouten 1975: 2].

Feminism's history is divided into four waves: the first wave in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the second in the 1960s and 1970s, the third from the 1990s to the present [Krolokke, Sorensen 2005: 1], and the fourth wave today. The term "wave" is a metaphor, with second-wave feminism building on the ideas of the first wave [Bailey 1997: 20]. However, this metaphor can conflict with how third-wave feminists characterize feminism, as it overlooks key issues and priorities, undermining the continuity across "waves". The common themes of each wave should be recognized, while also acknowledging the diversity of feminist ideas during these periods, which should not be equated with the entire history of feminism, but viewed as distinct historical periods of feminist movements [Mann, Huffman 2005: 58].

1.1. First wave (late 19th–early 20th century)

The first wave of feminism emerged between the 19th and early 20th centuries in England and America [Krolokke, Sorensen 2005: 24]. The first major work on women's rights was Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which was initially ignored and later forgotten [Krolokke, Sorensen 2005: 16]. It was inspired by the French Revolution. The author described women's lives under male dominance, highlighting their psychological and political captivity, as well as their exclusion from the public sphere. Wollstonecraft is a significant historical figure who influenced both literature and the development of women's rights movements [Wollstonecraft 1993: 97]. Feminism is about more than just changing the world. It means a changed psychology and the creation of a new consciousness [Rowbotham 2011: 33].

Using fiction writing as a powerful tool for change, women novelists declared war on patriarchy [Ghandeharion 2017: 6]. The focus was on women's rights, including voting, education, property ownership, and labour rights. In the early twenty-first century, an increasing number of women began exercising political power [Hawkesworth 2012: 1]. In the United States, the first wave of feminism achieved its goal with the 19th Amendment to the Constitution in 1919, granting women the right to vote in all states [Freedman 2002: 463].

1.2. Second wave (1960s–1980s)

The second wave of feminism arose from leftist movements in the U.S., Britain, and Europe, opposing the relegation of women to second-class status [Clercq 2013: 15]. With generational shifts and transnational perspectives, focus moved from a singular "global" viewpoint to specific "unions" beyond national borders [Grewal 2005: 22]. Both World Wars aided women's struggle for rights as they assumed

economic and agricultural roles during men's absence. Feminist visibility also grew through European conferences.

This wave scrutinized patriarchal elements in literature and culture, revealing their role in reinforcing or challenging women's oppression [Tyson 2014: 83]. It sought to combat oppression, promote social equality, and dismantle patriarchy. Gender contradictions reflected social realities, recognizing natural differences yet fundamental sameness between sexes [Nicholson 1997: 1–3]. The second wave was credited with "removing social barriers" limiting women's lives [Clercq 2005: 7].

Feminist expression flourished in Western and Eastern poetry, novels, theatre, and film. Despite the absence of formal groups in Poland and Romania, notable female writers contributed significantly [Matynia 2005: 4]. Key issues included sexual freedom and reproductive rights, notably after the 1960s introduction of contraceptive pills.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) revealed women's dissatisfaction with constrained roles, igniting U.S. feminism [Rottenberg 2013: 420]. In the East, Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) depicted a woman's resistance to patriarchy and quest for autonomy [Saadawi 1980]. Fatema Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil* (1975) critically examined gender in Muslim societies, emphasizing women's status in Islamic culture. These authors demonstrate that feminism cannot be understood without acknowledging complex social, political, and economic changes women experienced [Caine 1780–1980: 14]. A feminist viewpoint anchored in a specific culture or era cannot serve as a universal model [Offen 1988: 119]. Egyptian feminist Huda Shaarawi's autobiography *Harem Years* (1987) chronicles her life and women's rights struggle, while Lebanese-American Etel Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose* (1977) explores war's impact on women's identities.

The second wave aimed to challenge and deconstruct patriarchal structures across society, culture, and academia, being "feminist in nature, focusing on helping students bridge the gap between the personal and the political in academic contexts" [Hassel, Nelson 2012: 144]. From this emerged gender studies – centred on recovering women's marginalized contributions in employment, education, and domestic life [Maynard 2004: 29]. This field sought to disrupt hierarchical educational practices [Hassel, Nelson 2012: 144].

Gender studies highlighted marginalized lived experiences, questioning what it means to live a gendered life, whether masculine or feminine, thus challenging patriarchy with an inclusive approach [Darder 2003: 16]. It critiqued canonical knowledge forms, such as the "dead white male" canon, connecting lived experiences with broader social and political issues like labour, domesticity, and power [Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 112]. Women's studies used individual experiences to analyse structures that upheld patriarchy within and beyond academia [Hassel, Nelson 2012: 144].

Feminist activism and scholarship fostered gender studies' growth. Educational theorist Carmen Luke argued that feminist critical pedagogy problematizes "gender" by constructing a masculinist subject, complicating emancipation theoretically and practically [Luke 1992: 25]. This perspective also emphasized intersections of economic, cultural, and social resources, calling for inclusion of gender, class, and racial oppression [Jenway 2001: 60].

However, Elizabeth Ellsworth critiqued this, asserting critical pedagogy's language perpetuates "repressive myths" sustaining dominant relations [Ellsworth 2013: 188]. She questioned the homogenizing discourse of oppression, asking: "What in diversity are we silencing in the name of a 'liberating' pedagogy?" [Ellsworth 2013: 188]. This led to critical pedagogy's characterization as a "very boy thing", with a masculine rhetorical stance of "he who knows" [Lather 1988: 488]. Such critique is crucial in feminist analyses of higher education, exposing privilege and objectivity embedded in knowledge structures shaping curricula. In the Arab world, feminist works were vital for liberation against autocratic power rooted in state and family authority [Saadawi 2009: 352].

1.3. Third wave (1990s–2000s)

At the core of third-wave feminism lies a generational division, alongside key features such as a critical approach to gender and identity, intersectionality, and a global outlook [Rupp, Taylor 1999: 363]. This wave emphasizes an intersectional framework promoting an ethic of "radical interconnectedness", where difference is met with curiosity and respect [Keating 2009: 89]. By highlighting diverse experiences across race, class, sexuality, and other axes, intersectionality challenges dominant social imaginaries and invites intervention in historical memory [May 2015: 53].

Third-wave post-feminism critically addresses the limitations of the second wave, which often imposed rigid categorizations on women and overlooked significant intra-group differences [Snyder 2008: 175]. Unlike its predecessor, third-wave feminism rejects the notion of a singular "female identity", advocating instead for pluralism and self-determination, enabling all women to negotiate equality and liberation regardless of difference [Dicker, Piepmeier 2003: 9; Snyder 2008: 175].

This period's postfeminism calls for a more pluralistic, diversified feminist discourse, emphasizing the inclusion of marginalized voices absent from prior waves. Key contributors include Susan Muaddi Darraj, Rene Denfeld, Andrea Dworkin, Susan Faludi, Daisy Hernandez, Catharine MacKinnon, Camille Paglia, Bushra Rehman, Katie Roiphe, Rebecca Walker, and Naomi Wolf [Snyder 2008: 256].

A pivotal figure is Kimberlé Crenshaw, a founder of intersectionality theory, who contends that intersectional thinking – an open, critical approach to power – cultivates resilient knowledge and involves interdisciplinary and activist

efforts [May 2015: 11; Hancock 2016]. This approach expands feminist work's scope, fostering solidarity across movements while critiquing systemic power structures.

1.4. Fourth wave (2010s–present)

Feminist Kira Cochrane argues that the fourth wave of feminism began in 2013 in response to gender-based violence, with technology playing a key role in spreading feminist ideas through online platforms [Cochrane 2013]. This wave saw transnational feminist movements emerge in countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and India [Cochrane 2013: 18].

The #MeToo movement, founded by Tarana Burke in 2006, brought attention to sexual violence, particularly affecting minority women. It highlighted the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and gained global traction, fuelling fourth-wave feminism in countries like Brazil, Japan, and South Korea [Jaffe 2018: 83; Perez, Ricoldi 2024: 301]. The literature of the fourth wave covers topics such as gender studies, cultural critique, and critical race theory, focusing on social justice and revolutionary change [Perazzone 2023: 595]. Feminism is now seen as a mass movement addressing liberation beyond women, considering racial and class differences and the need for political liberation across borders [Rudan 2023].

The fourth wave also tackles issues of Muslim women's rights, contested by global masculinities and power dynamics over women's bodies [Huma 2008]. Campaigns like #TimesUp and #EverydaySexism continue to address gender inequality and sexual violence.

This wave builds on previous ones, confronting their limitations, and emphasizes feminist solidarity based on shared experiences and empathy, promoting a more inclusive and intersectional feminism [Biana 2020: 23].

2. Elements of the Islamic feminist construction of women's identity

To ensure conceptual clarity, it is important to distinguish between Islamic feminism and Arab feminism. While both engage with gender equality in Muslim contexts, they differ in ideological foundations, socio-cultural frameworks, and modes of expression. Islamic feminism, a socio-religious and intellectual movement rooted in Islamic tradition, argues that gender equality is inherent in Islam. It calls for reinterpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith to counter patriarchal readings shaped by historical contexts. Scholars like Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Ziba Mir-Hosseini challenge concepts such as *qiwāma* – often read as male superiority – and promote "ethical, gender-sensitive hermeneutics" [Mace 2015; Mir-Hosseini 2014]. Yet, its internal contradictions remain debated [Abdallah 2017: 216].

Islamic feminism emphasizes reinterpretation of sacred texts from women's perspectives. Fatima Mernissi argues many discriminatory hadiths stem from political

agendas, not prophetic teachings. She stresses the need to assess their authenticity and socio-historical context. Feminists in this tradition claim the right to interpret religious texts, assume spiritual leadership, and participate in civic life, redefining women's roles in Islamic society.

In contrast, Arab feminism developed within Arabic-speaking societies as part of secularist, nationalist, and anti-colonial discourses. Though encompassing both secular and religious elements, it often critiques patriarchal structures and emphasizes women's intellectual agency and activism. Leading voices include Huda Shaarawi, Nawal El Saadawi, and Etel Adnan, whose work bridges national and global feminist concerns. Arab feminist texts may also invoke Islamic discourse to critique gender norms while asserting cultural identity [Badran 1996: 240; Ghandeharion et al. 2017: 6; Gohar 2016: 174].

Huda Shaarawi's 1928 public challenge to gender norms marked a pivotal moment [Cooke 2006: 568], though the movement encountered friction between Ottoman traditions and European modernity [Golley 2010: 27]. Islamic feminism, by contrast, critiques colonialist narratives of "saving Muslim women", promoting a decolonized historiography [Abdallah 2012: 53; Mbembe 2017].

By the 1970s, theorists like Nawal El Saadawi emerged, critiquing both religion and Western feminism. Her work provoked conservative backlash but emphasized indigenous feminism grounded in Arab women's lived realities [Cooke 2004: 76; Golley 2010: 4; Saadawi & Wilmuth 1995: 441]. The shift of women from private to public spheres – such as corporate and governmental roles – was paralleled by an increase in gender-critical literature that interrogated the socio-economic structures of gender [Zuhur 2001: 78]. Feminism in this context is viewed both as a product and a driver of social and literary transformation [Offen 1988: 119].

2.1. Role of Islamic feminism in society and culture

By reinterpreting Islamic texts, Islamic feminists reshape perceptions of women's roles, advocating for education, economic independence, and political participation while respecting religious tradition. They restore women's voices in Islamic discourse, offering interpretations that promote gender equality and active societal roles [Akbar Akhgari 2020].

Key themes include education, as Islamic feminism stresses equal access to knowledge, reviving the legacy of female intellectuals [Sadiqi 2025]; economic independence, affirming women's rights to property and financial autonomy [Sirri 2024]; and political participation, challenging restrictions on women's roles in decision-making [Sirri 2024]. Islamic feminism critiques patriarchal norms misattributed to religion, advocating for women's rights within an Islamic framework without questioning the faith itself [Akbar Akhgari 2020].

2.2. Patriarchy structures and religion

Islamic feminism argues that patriarchal structures limiting women's roles in religious and social spheres are rooted in cultural traditions rather than authentic Islamic teachings [Svensson 2000]. Feminists contend that Islam originally granted women greater rights, which were later restricted by patriarchal norms. They call for accurate interpretations of religious texts that uphold justice and gender equality [Gray 2013].

Key concerns include women's access to education and employment. Although Islam supports knowledge for all, societal barriers often prevent women from reaching their full potential. Feminists demand equal education opportunities to empower women in shaping their futures and participating in public life [Abdali 2023].

Another critical issue is women's inheritance rights. While Islam grants these rights, cultural norms frequently undermine them, limiting women's economic independence [Gray 2013]. Feminists advocate for full recognition of women's financial autonomy, including inheritance, employment, and entrepreneurship [Abdali 2023].

Islamic feminism challenges religious and cultural justifications for gender-based violence, advocating for stronger protections, education, and shifts in societal attitudes [Sirri 2024]. It also calls for women's equal participation in political and public life, demanding inclusion in decision-making and activism [Svensson 2000].

2.3. Self-determination and subjectivity

In the context of Islamic feminism, self-determination is vital for empowering women to make decisions aligned with their personal values and goals [Anwar 2006]. This includes autonomy in societal roles, education, relationships, and careers, free from external pressures. Women's choices should reflect their unique preferences and capabilities, deserving both respect and support [Ali 2000]. Crucially, autonomy must harmonize with Islamic teachings [Skah 2014].

Women are entitled to make free choices in areas such as education, marriage, and family, which fosters both personal fulfilment and societal development [Oladi 2024]. Islamic feminism proposes a new model of female identity that merges religious commitment with individual rights. Unlike traditional frameworks that confine women to familial roles, this model promotes a multidimensional identity – encompassing roles as mothers, wives, and active public participants [Anwar 2006].

This framework allows women to live autonomously within their faith [Oladi 2024]. Islam affirms women's right to freedom and individual choice, provided these align with religious principles [Ali 2000]. Islamic feminists argue this balance enables women to realize their potential without compromising their faith [Skah 2014],

presenting self-determination as the ability to follow a path shaped by both personal values and religious beliefs [Anwar 2006].

Subjectivity plays a central role, emphasizing a woman's awareness of her needs, desires, and goals [Oladi 2024]. This challenges traditional limitations and repositions women as active agents with the right to spiritual and personal development beyond gender-based restrictions [Skah 2014]. Islamic feminism thus contributes to a global feminist movement that defends women's rights while respecting cultural and religious traditions, integrating feminist principles with Islamic ethics [Ali 2000].

2.4. Building a dialogue between Western and Islamic feminist approaches

Western feminist theories often promote universal values presumed to be applicable to all women, regardless of cultural or religious background. However, such universality has been critiqued for being rooted in Western sociocultural norms that do not always translate across global contexts [Shaikh 2003; Tohidi 2003: 160]. As Hirschmann observes, "calls for cross-cultural dialogue may seem naive given the history of Western dominance, but they remain essential for a more inclusive feminist praxis" [Hirschmann 1998: 352].

Islamic feminism offers an alternative framework by integrating feminist principles with Islamic values and traditions. Rather than rejecting the notion of gender equality, it reinterprets it through a religious lens, asserting that women's rights can be grounded in Islamic identity and communal norms [Moghadam 2002; Bahi 2011]. According to Moghadam, Islamic feminism "opens up a dialogue between religious and secular feminists, where reinterpretations of texts are made alongside recognition of universal standards" [Moghadam 2002].

This approach enables a more culturally responsive feminist discourse, promoting mutual respect and meaningful engagement across ideological divides. Ehsan argues that Islamic feminism should not be viewed as a deviation from feminist norms but rather as "a contextualized form that aligns with religious identity and communal values" [Ehsan 2023]. In doing so, it fosters collaborative efforts among women from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds on issues such as justice, equality, and human dignity [Al-Hibri 1999].

Islamic feminism also prioritizes the balance between women's autonomy and the preservation of religious and cultural integrity. Crabtree and Husain describe this dialogical approach as a platform for reconciling secular and faith-based visions of justice through mutual recognition and intellectual respect [Crabtree & Husain 2012]. Rather than imposing a single normative model, it invites plurality in understanding gender rights and social justice.

Moreover, Islamic feminism engages critically with issues such as veiling, education, employment, and inheritance, acknowledging their varied interpretations

across Muslim societies. Shaikh suggests that "instead of imposing one model, dialogue should allow different feminist approaches to converge in addressing shared issues from diverse standpoints" [Shaikh 2003]. In this way, Islamic feminism contributes to women's empowerment without compromising religious commitments, resisting both cultural essentialism and secular universalism [Ahmed-Ghosh 2008; Ahmed 2012].

2.5. Global challenges and solidarity

The global feminist movement plays a central role in addressing gender inequality across borders, with Islamic feminism contributing a contextualized, faith-conscious perspective that enriches intersectional solidarity. As Petersen observes, Islamic actors "translate global gender norms into culturally appropriate practices through a lens of Islamic solidarity" [Petersen 2018: 206].

Islamic feminism frames women's rights as a global issue, calling for locally grounded yet internationally connected activism [Vargas 2003: 913; Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 104]. As Vargas notes, "we are a global solidarity movement, united in our diversity (...) integrating gender justice with economic justice" [Vargas 2003: 913].

It aligns with broader feminist struggles against violence, poverty, and unequal access to education, especially in the Global South [Al-Ali 2020: 310]. The movement also critiques dominant feminist epistemologies by offering a culturally embedded, religiously grounded vision of gender justice. As Weldon observes, "the movement against gender violence has achieved transnational cooperation through shared feminist norms rooted in solidarity" [Weldon 2006: 457].

Islamic feminism challenges patriarchal interpretations of religion, linking core principles like *tauhid* to human rights efforts [Robinson 2020], and reaffirms women's rights to education, work, and political participation [Ahmed-Ghosh 2008: 106].

Conclusions

This article has shown that Arab and Islamic feminisms, though interconnected, stem from distinct socio-political and intellectual contexts. Arab feminism often emerges from nationalist and postcolonial movements, while Islamic feminism is grounded in religious discourse, seeking to reinterpret sacred texts through gender-equitable hermeneutics.

The study confirms the central role of Arab women writers in fostering culturally grounded feminist consciousness. Their works resist the notion that feminism in Arab societies is merely a Western import. Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* critiques social and religious constraints, while Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil* reclaims Islamic sources to advocate for women's autonomy, demonstrating how literature serves as a space of resistance and redefinition.

By tracing feminism's four waves, the article highlights its evolution from suffrage and education to contemporary debates on identity, intersectionality, and digital activism. This diachronic lens illustrates that feminist discourse is dynamic, shaped by political, religious, and technological change.

Islamic feminism, in particular, counters orientalist and colonial narratives by advancing gender-just interpretations of Islam. Scholars such as Amina Wadud and Ziba Mir-Hosseini critically re-evaluate concepts like *qiwāma* to align with contemporary ethics of justice and equality.

The study also redefines female subjectivity: women emerge not as passive objects but as agents shaping religious knowledge, political structures, and cultural narratives. Islamic feminism promotes a multidimensional female identity rooted in spirituality, intellectual autonomy, and civic participation.

In sum, Arab and Islamic feminisms contribute to a decolonial, pluralistic model of gender justice. They expand the global feminist lexicon and offer an ethical framework affirming both religious belief and gender equity. Arab and Muslim women's identities are thus reimagined through indigenous voices, demonstrating that feminism can thrive within, rather than outside, Islamic and Arab cultural traditions.

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