



Feminism (Arabic)

Nisā'iyah and *Niswiyyah* are Arabic terms for feminism. Both are nouns that derive respectively from *nisā'* and *niswah* which mean women. *Nisā'iyah/Niswiyyah* correspond to *womenism or *womenist, not feminism. However, in Arabic, there could be a precise calque of feminism: *unthawiyyah*, which derives from *unthà* (female). Interestingly, *unthawiyyah* never appeared in the first feminist generation's discourse. They used *nisā'iyah* (*womenism) and its derivatives with reference to women's movements in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century. It should be noted that women activists in Muslim majority Arabic societies, especially in Egypt, discarded consciously the set of *unthà/unthawiyyah* which connotes three semantic dimensions: biology, sex and reproduction. Instead, they chose *nisā'iyah/niswiyyah* to refer to gender representations of women as social individuals. Hence, they wanted to address social –not biological or sexual– issues. Recently, many Muslim feminists (e.g. Islamic feminists) use the term *niswiyyah* to describe their commitment calling themselves *niswiyyāt* (*womenists). Others reject all words that refer to *feminism* because it is a Western product that contradicts Islamic values and reminds them of colonialism. These groups prefer expressions like *ṣaḥwat al-mar'ah al-muslimah* (Muslim women awakening), *ḥurriyat al-mar'ah* (women liberation) and *musāwāt al-mar'ah* (women equality). They would prefer terms like *nāšīṭah* (activist) and *bāḥiṭah* (scholar) rather *niswiyyah* (feminist).

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