

Religion versus Secularism on Women's Liberation: The Question of Women Liberation and Modern Education

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Abstract : The nineteenth century was characterized by major educational reforms in the Arab World. One of the unintended outcomes of colonization in Arab countries was the initiation of women liberation as well as the introduction of modern education and its application in sensitizing people on the rights of women and their liberation. The reforms were often attributed to various undercurrents that took place at different levels within the Ottoman Empire, and particularly the arrival and influence of the Christian missionaries were supported by the American and European governments. These trends were also significantly attributed to the increase in the presence of Europeans in the region, as well as the introduction of secular ideas and approaches related to the meaning of modernity. Using literary analysis as a method, this paper examines the role of an important male figure like the political activist and writer Qāsim Amīn and the religious reformer Muḥammad 'Abduh in starting this discourse and shows their impact on the emancipation of women movement (*Tahrīr*), and how later women led the movement with their published work. This paper explores Arab Salons and the initiation of women's literary circles. Women from wealthy families in Egypt and Syria who had studied in Europe or interacted with European counterparts began these circles. These salons acted as central locations where people could meet and hold discussions on political, social, and literary trends as they happened each day. The paper concludes with a discussion of current debates between the Islamist and the secularist branches of the movement today. While the Islamists believe that adhering to the core of Islam with some of its contested position on women is a modern ideology of liberation that fits the current culture of modern time Egypt; the secularists argue that the influence that Islam has on the women's liberation movement in Egypt has been a threat to the natural success and progress of the movement, which was initiated in the early nineteenth century independent of the more recent trends towards religiosity in the country.

Keywords : educational model, crisis of terminologies, Arab awakening, nineteenth century

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