Women’s production of scientific feminist knowledge in Arab-Islamic society is rarely systematically addressed. The available literature reflects preconceptions and misconceptions about women’s feminist scientific production of knowledge in the Arab world. In response to this, it is necessary to provide a systemic view of women’s scientific production of knowledge in Arab-Islamic education and society. The focus then shifts from the ‘woman question’ in Arab-Islamic society to the more radical ‘science question’ in feminism, education and society in general.

The author’s thesis examines the process involved in the production and construction of Al-Sa’idawi’s (Egypt) and Mernissi’s (Egypt) scientific feminist knowledge in its systemic relation to Arab-Islamic education and society from 1970-1990. The aim is twofold: to situate Al-Sa’idawi’s and Mernissi’s scientific feminine mode in its systematic relation to the power structure of scientific practice in education and society from 1970-1990, and to examine and evaluate Al-Sa’idawi’s and Mernissi’s feminist research in view of the power structure that governed scientific practice in education and society from 1970-1990. Theoretical and empirical works of both authors from 1970 to 1990 were selected in order to discover their respective articulations of gender from their perspective as women.

Research conducted by the author is based on the rationale that different world systems of education have culturally specific socio-pedagogical practices that shape both the process of knowledge production within culture and regulate the relations between the individual/society and individual groups. It offers an epistemological study of women’s scientific productions in Arab-Islamic education and society. Furthermore, it presents a reflexive model that reconciles particularism and universalism in the cross-cultural analysis of feminist knowledge, hence avoiding the traps of cultural relativism and scientism.

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The findings indicate that Al-Sa’idawi’s and Mernissi’s feminist scientific perspective is marked by an ambivalent feminist consciousness, and is therefore inadequate to represent the plural socio-political reality of Arab-Muslim women, or the diverse reality of women’s scientific practices. Also, on the basis of Al-Sa’idawi’s and Mernissi’s appropriations of the disciplines in the social sciences, the thesis describes how the authors’ scientific feminist paradigm is parochial with respect to the Islamic post-modernist scientific practices in higher education and mainstream culture; hence lacking scientific validity and moral authority in women’s studies in the region. Moreover, the thesis discusses why the authors’ respective scientific approaches and epistemologies fail to offer sustainable egalitarian sociopolitical projects that make realistic progress in the status and rights of Arab-Muslim women, or contribute to the advancement of Arab-Islamic women’s studies in the region.

The thesis concludes that these findings show the need for a change of paradigm in favour of a systemic scientific paradigm that combines the particularism of the Arab-Islamic identity with the universalism of feminist egalitarian goals derived from women’s concrete social experiences. Finally, the study illustrates with the example of Morocco how local feminist post-modernist projects, affiliated with the Islamic tradition of political governance, and scientific practice have yielded to both the scientific development of women’s studies and to the advancement of women’s status and rights in Arab-Islamic society since the 1980s.

Notes


2. Feminism is defined as ‘an international socio-political movement with plural origins, multiple cultural/historical manifestations, and diverse epistemologies that shape the discursive feminist practices in the world community.’

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