

Sahar Khamis, University of Maryland, College Park

The Many Faces of Digital Islamic Feminism: From “IslamWay Sisters” to #CanYouHearUsKnow

The term “Islamic feminism” has been controversial and ambivalent in the minds of those who perceive Islam and feminism as two irreconcilable, diametrically opposed concepts. However, the proponents of the concept of “Islamic feminism” (Khamis, 2010) argue that there is no such thing as a “one size fits all” feminism, and that defining feminism within the narrow ethnocentric framework of “Western feminism” is limiting and restrictive, as it fails to capture the nuance, diversity and complexity of multiple feminist identities worldwide. The internet provides Muslim women with unique, unprecedented opportunities to express their complex identities in the overlapping and intersecting political, social, cultural and religious spheres. This paper tackles some of the myriad forms of self-expression online, through which Muslim women reflect the various faces of the phenomenon of “Islamic feminism” digitally. This includes creating a gated, gendered community, such as “IslamWay Sisters” discussion forum, which provides Muslim women with the unique opportunity to enjoy a safe space of social and religious solidarity online (El Nawawy and Khamis, 2009). It also includes creating platforms for Muslim women to engage in all forms of digital resistance, whether against dictatorial regimes, as in the case of the “Arab Spring” uprisings (Khamis, 2011), or against social ills, such as the rising tide of Islamophobia recently. A good example illustrating the last point is the countering Islamophobia Twitter campaign #CanYouHearUsKnow, which American-Muslim women launched, asserting their complex identities, ensuring that their voices are heard loud and clear, and challenging their common (mis)representation as silent and submissive (Khamis, 2018).

References:

El-Nawawy, M., & **Khamis, S.** (2009). *Islam dot com: Contemporary Islamic discourses in cyberspace*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Khamis, S. (2018). American-Muslims’ E-Jihad: Trumping Islamophobia in the Trump era, *CyberOrient*, 12(1). Available at: <http://www.cyberorient.net/article.do?articleId=9923>

Khamis, S. (2011). The Arab ‘feminist’ spring? *Feminist Studies*, 37(3), 692-695.

Khamis, S. (2010). Islamic feminism in new Arab media: Platforms for self-expression and sites for multiple resistances. *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research*, 3(3), 237-255.