

The Shape of Arab Feminism on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Much has been said about the influence of Western culture on social movements worldwide, and this claimed influence has caused some to accuse Arabic feminism of being merely an alien import to the Arab world. New waves of feminism have arisen as a reaction to the claimed prevalent western culture. Global Feminism argues that women worldwide experience similar subjugation in many social constructs because many cultures are based on a patriarchal past, but other waves reject the concept of a universal women's experience and stresses the significance of diversity in women's experiences and see their activities as transnational rather than global. Others expect that the confrontation of secular and Islamism paradigms will dominate. Social Media has global reach, and there are signs that Facebook pages are used by feminists worldwide to boost their social and political activism. Facebook gives public pages' owners the ability to associate their pages with pages with similar ideologies. This provides a global space where feminist pages are clustered and exposes clues about their patterns of influence. By crawling Arabic feminist pages over Facebook, this paper builds a dataset that can be analysed using social network analysis tools and reveals the map of influence between Arabic feminist network and the western, transnational, and Global feminist networks. The map shows that Arabic womens pages are clustered in two segments: Arab feminism, and Sect feminism. The later consists of pages which distance themselves from associating with 'secular' feminism pages whether they are Arabic or not, and in contrary to the former, they are less likely to restrict themselves with national Identity.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Social and professional topics** → **Cultural characteristics; Women;**

KEYWORDS

Globalization, Facebook, Feminism, Web Science, SNA, Social Network Analysis, Post-colonialism, Arabic Feminism, Women Empowering Projects, Nationalism, Islamic Feminism, Muslim women, Arab women Activists, Identity politics, Salafism, Salafist movement, Islamist ideology, Salafist movement.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The processes of globalization suggests the emergence of a "global space" within which rational debates, and collective action take place[52]. The rapidly advancing technologies that have fostered the expansion of a global economy have aided the rise of transnational social movements. Relatively cheap airline tickets, more widely available telephone and Internet access, expanding use of English as a global working language, and a globalized mass media enable people from more diverse classes and geographic origins to share information and cultivate cooperative relationships across huge distances[59]. Therefore, a new literature is dedicated to explore this emergent global space: "transnational public sphere"[29], "transnational social movements"[60][3][10] as well as "transnational feminist networks"[51][25][63].

Feminism is a range of political and social movements. Each has its own ideology and strives for its own goals. However, these goals and ideology might intersect in various degrees. Hawkesworth [34] argues that globalization is a feminist issue, and argues that women have forged international networks and alliances to address specific gender issues beyond the borders of the nation-state. McLaughlin[47] asserts that thinking through transnational feminism goes beyond locating Anglo-American feminists' complicity in colonial and neo-colonial discursive formations, instead offering an opening into collective feminist praxis within global contexts and revealing new possibilities for collaboration. Cooke [16] marked women's participation in the Arab Spring as a transnational feminist revolution "because it involved not just one people exceptionally up in arms against its colonizers or unjust rulers; several societies simultaneously rose up against cruel men. Even if not all those dictators are gone, the people now realize that they too have power. They are listening to each others' music, admiring each others' art, reading each others' stories, and building their own activism out of those resonances."

Web Science offers the potential to investigate these questions with new methods and sources of data. This paper therefore aims to investigate the claimed influence of Western feminism on Arab feminism by exploring the ideological clustering of online communities, and in particular by analyzing the online spaces of activism provided by Facebook Pages. Facebook allows page owners to associate their pages with other pages. This functionality enables activists to situate their pages in the context of other like-minded pages. Analysing the network established by these clustered pages using social network analysis enables us to get some indicators

about the extent of connection and influence between Western and Arab feminism.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the literature around globalisation and feminism, and explores the potential identity of an Arab feminism. Section 3 then presents the methodology used to create our sample of the Facebook pages network, and our approach to the analysis. Section 4 then describes the network and gives the details of that analysis, in particular investigating the existence of different clusters that can be mapped to the different types of feminism. Section 5 presents a discussion of the findings, and applies them to the question of the relationship between Western feminism and different forms of Arab feminism. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper, discusses the advantages and limitations of our approach, and outlines our plans for future work.

2 BACKGROUND

Egyptian women first used the term feminism in public in 1923 [5], but the rise of modern Arab feminism is widely attributed to the groundbreaking book of Qasim Amin, "The Liberation of Women", published in 1899. Amin[2] claims that the education and liberation of women was essential to strengthen and emancipate the Egyptian nation from British colonial rule. He argues that men oppressed and silenced women, which caused society in general to suffer. However, attribution of the rise of Arab feminism to Amin's work has received criticism by recent feminist scholars. Badran and Cooke [9] argue that Amin is not the movement's founder in any sense of the word and call the feminism attributed to him men's feminism, associating its development with contact with Europe, whereas in comparison women's feminism arose out of women's reflections on their own lives and problems. Leila Ahmed [19] builds on this critique, arguing that Amin's ideas are built on a comparison with the West, in which the West is refined, cultured, and advanced, and the East is not.

2.1 The hegemony of Western Feminism

Amin's work was not alone in receiving such critics. Homogeneous perspectives and presuppositions in some of the Western feminist texts that focus on women in the third world was criticized too in many works[26][65][13].

Scholars argue that the feminist movement in the West has been taken as "the" feminist movement[53].

Using her account on Central and Eastern European Feminism, Cerwonka [15] confirms the hegemony of Western feminist experience "In the East-West divide discourse, people remark on the challenge of trying to identify and theorize gender issues important to post-state socialist societies in the shadow of an already well-established feminist legacy from North America and Western Europe". Hana Havelkova[36] explains "the tensions in the dialogue between Western and East European women are rooted in the direct application of Western feminist theory to post-communist reality, which leads to the false assumption that East European women are second-class citizens and that they are conservative".

Women's and gender studies have become more international in scope in response to pressure from university administrations and governments and the increased border crossing of faculty and students, and as a consequence of widespread use of the Internet[15].

However, there is some dispute around the degree of influence that western feminism has placed on other feminist movements in non-Western countries. This dispute is documented in the emerged literature of global or post-Colonial feminism[40][24][54], global south feminism[25][23][21] and transnational feminism[14][48][30][62].

Arab feminism is an example of a feminist movement that has been accused as being part of a cultural invasion that accompanied colonialism [50][64].

Arab feminism is also frequently overlooked in Western discourse. "The textured image of exoticism which has been woven in the West over the centuries still dominates the way in which the Arab world is perceived. Orientalist discourses have influenced the way that Arab feminism, in particular, has been received and understood in the West. According to such discourses, the movement for women's liberation is, again, not indigenous to Arab countries. When such movement is recognised, it is described as mere imitation of similar movements in Europe and the USA"[27].

To some the cultural gulf is significant. "It is even argued that Western feminists have described Arab women's lives as being so different from theirs that they cannot possibly develop any kind of feminism. Even when Arab women speak for themselves, Elly Bulkin argues, they are accused of being pawns of Arab men"[27].

It is also the case that images of Muslim women were decontextualized and circulated in the American mass media to depict the veil as an icon of Islamic fundamentalism, and thus Islam as an enemy of both Muslim women and Western democracy[66].

2.2 The Influence of Islamism

The relationship between Islamism and Feminism is complex. "Beyond the enduring anxiety of Islamism versus secularism, there are women in the Arab and Muslim world who are deeply concerned about the forceful imposition of sharia law. There are other women for whom the sharia is not an imposition but a blessing"[18].

The term Islamic feminism has emerged since the 1990s and brought a widely discussed phenomenon. "On one hand, this debate is due to the ways in which it is embedded in the wider discourses concerning women's rights and Islam, and the position of women in Muslim-majority societies as well as of Muslim women in societies. On the other hand, the debate entangles the controversies between the labeling practices and the positionalities of those who seek to resist the given labels: who is entitled to speak as and/or name someone else as an 'Islamic feminist'?"[43].

Part of the issue is that as part of their polarising political project, Islamists reinvigorate not only the secular/religious binary but also East/West, public/private and male/female oppositions. Their consistent promotion of the notion that the secular is alien, foreign, non-native and hence inauthentic and that the religious constitutes the indigenous, native and authentic, affected feminisms negatively and has brought divisive implications. This is in contrast to earlier practice in Muslim majority societies when feminist movements were locally grounded and organised within a national context [7].

"Islamic Feminism", which is defined as a cross-border movement that brings together all Muslim women seeking to redefine their identity in a more genuinely modern manner that befits their religion and culture"[31] should be distinguished from the

Table 1: Thematic Coding of the pages

Feminism Theme	Markers
Arabic	Location, national names or symbols, Arabic Language
Western Sect	Location, Sexual rights, Abortion, national western names or symbols using Political-Islam names or symbols
Non western	Stating it is international, Location, nationality, race or multi-races, custom-dresses
Transnational Project	Stating it is national chapter of international project for empowering women

Islamist’s project regarding imposing what is so called ‘sharia law’ over everyone including women.

2.3 The Influence of Nationalism

National consciousness is considered as a reaction to Western colonialism. Most research on Arab feminism denotes the interconnection between feminism and nationalism in the Arab world[42][9][4]. "Feminism is not autonomous, but bound to the signifying network of the national context which produces it"[41]. In the case of Arab states, Feminist and national consciousness emerged at the same time and as a reaction to Western imperialism since the early 19th century. However, those who oppose the emancipation of women argue that feminism irrelevant to Arab culture[27]. Nevertheless, the extent to which feminists’ views are grounded in their own culture has been overlooked in the discourse of feminism[22]. In a discussion linking Western colonialism and feminism, Leila Ahmed [1] distinguishes two strands of feminism propounded by Egypt’s “First Feminists”. The first stand is the Westward looking feminism advocated by Huda Sha’rawi (1879 – 1947) and the other one, espoused by Malak Hifni Nasif (1886 – 1918) that did not affiliate itself with Westernization. "Nationbased feminist movements, such as the pioneering Egyptian feminist movement, accessed the world of international feminism and did so on its own terms. These national feminist movements were organised and directed by women as citizens of different religions. Organising activism along communal lines and exporting social movement activism from the global arena to national space is new to our time"[7].

National liberation movements, in general, brought changes that vary in the pace and extent according to the intervention of Western imperialism. One of these changes is the situation of Arab women [27].

2.4 Transnational Projects for Empowering Women

“The concept of patriarchy probably must be seriously addressed in any theoretical work that claims to be feminist” [11]. “A patriarchy may be thought of as having two basic components: A structure, in which men have more power and privilege than women, and an ideology that legitimizes this arrangement”[61]. This system, which MacKinnon [45] calls “perhaps the most pervasive and tenacious system of power in history,” characterizes most societies, past and present, albeit with significant variations in particular historical epochs, under different modes of production, and across cultures, classes, and other social structures[11][12][20]. Change in patriarchy and patriarchal structures has been conceived either as a top-down or bottom-up process, depending upon which

approach to women’s position within the patriarchy has been adopted. Some see that women are powerless; these are likely to promote the idea of “empowering” women, implying a top-down approach. Whereas, some argue that despite patriarchal subordination, women have power; these perceive empowerment as inherently a bottom-up process[39]. Arab states embody various patriarchal structures and Arab society clings to a patriarchal system[67]. However, Nation-states, international organizations and other actors are legitimized to empower Arab citizens, women among them[67][49]. In recent years, development agencies have substantially increased funding for ICT projects that specially aim to empower women[46]. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been increasingly promoted as a key solution for the empowerment of historically disadvantaged groups, such as women and minorities in the Global South[33][38][32].

3 METHODOLOGY

Crossley [17] argues that Facebook and feminist blogs enlarge and nourish feminist networks, create online feminist communities, expand recruitment bases for online and offline mobilization, and increase opportunities for online interaction with adversaries. Arabic female activism is a clear example. There are signs that female activists used Facebook in the Arab world during the recent political movements[57]. Facebook pages are used by Arab women to group themselves and boost their social and political activism[56][28][55]. They also associate these pages with other pages that strive for similar goals or that hold to the same ideology. Some of these associated pages represent activism in wider geographic areas or that work as international hubs.

It is clear that these Facebook pages are potentially a valuable source of data in understanding the different feminisms described in Section 2. Therefore in order to obtain some empirical evidence, and to explore these relationships in more detail, we undertook a network analysis of Arabic Facebook Pages relating to women with a topic that was predominantly political or related to activism, with the aim of analyzing the network formed by these pages and studying how they are situated among similar Arab and global pages.

3.1 Sampling: Collecting Data from Facebook

We created the network we intended to analyse using a snowball sample approach. To create an initial starting set a search was made using Facebook’s own search engine for pages with titles using the words usually used in Arabic to refer to women.

While there are two main words (المرأة: woman - single, النساء: women - plural), the Arabic language gives more options by adding suffix

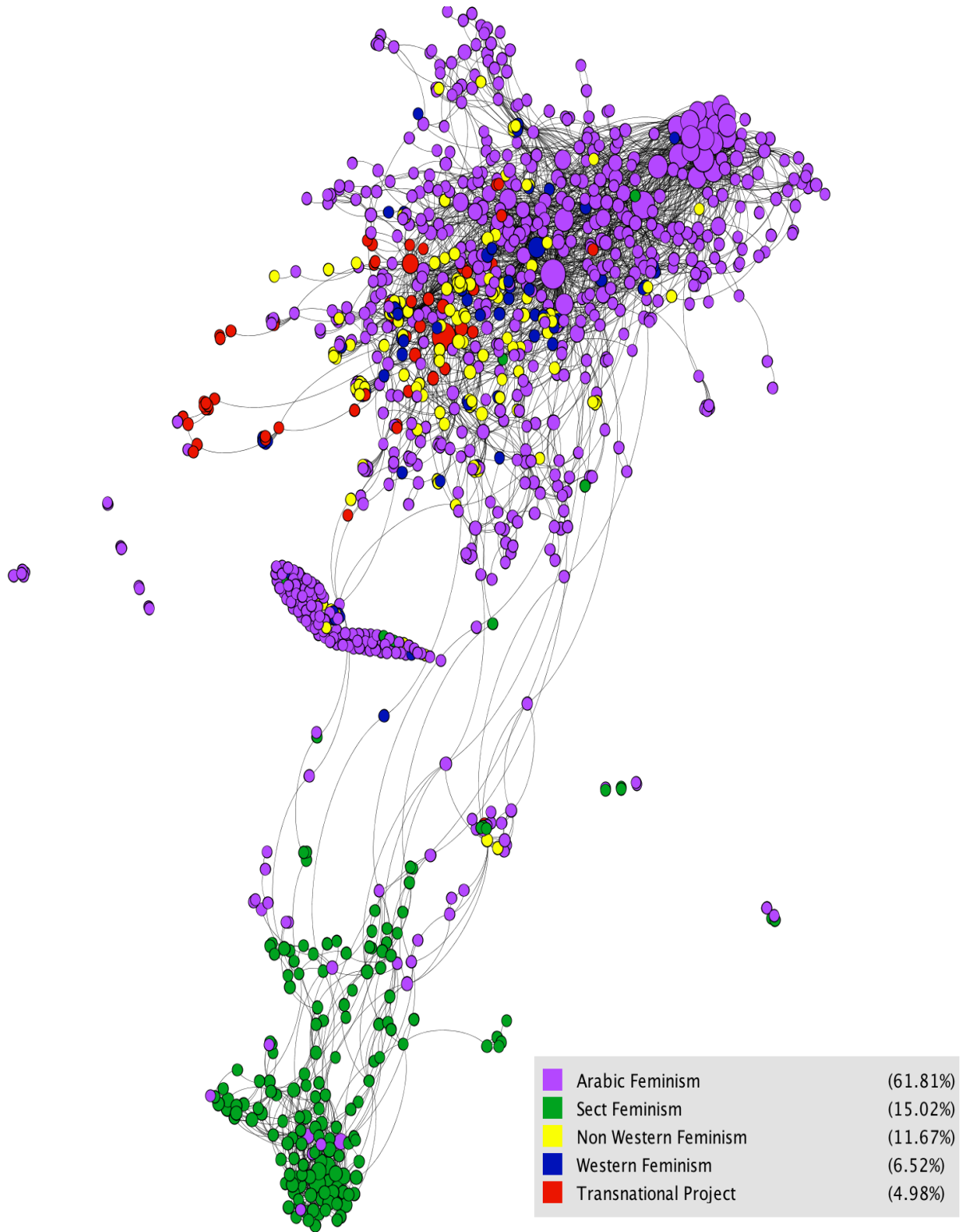


Figure 1: The graph of Facebook pages, connected by like relations, colour coded according to theme.

(اات : ات) to any adjective to make it a name of women with that adjective (i.e. اثارات : female rebels , اثااطات , اثااطات : Female activists).

Our search took these words (woman, women, female rebels, two words for female activists) to get lists of pages that will be used as a starting set for the snowball process.

We then manually filtered the search results according to two criteria. Firstly, the pages were genuinely related to women (the Female suffix makes it relatively straightforward to do this), and secondly that they related to activism in some way (for example, they were centered on a female activist, politician or blogger).

Starting from the remaining pages in the search set, a manual crawl of each pages' list of liked pages took place. Liked pages that met our two criteria and which were not already in the search set were added to it and edges that represent the like relationship were added to a table of directed edges. In this way we exhaustively expanded the network, until all of the pages in the search set had been crawled.

We did not use a criteria that pages must be in Arabic to be included in our sample network. However, we halted the crawl whenever a non-Arabic page was found and went no deeper. This means that the resulting network includes a rich set of Arabic pages and their interconnections, as well as the relationships they have to non-Arabic pages - however the relationships between these non-Arabic pages was not captured, and they therefore represent the border of our Arabic feminist network.

3.2 Coding the Sample

We applied a deductive approach to coding the pages in the sample according to how well they matched with the different types of feminism. Table 1 shows the five codes that we used, and an example of common markers that enabled us to classify each page. As discussed in Section 2, the literature suggests there might be two strands of Arabic feminism with different attitude to Western feminism, we therefore used two separate codes for Arab women pages. We marked those pages who display political-Islam identities (for example, holding Islamists' flags or symbols with a special code) calling them "Sect Feminism", while leaving the other pages that don't have these distinctive features with the original name "Arabic Feminism".

The expected attitude of Non-western feminisms towards the western and the post-colonial influences made us choose two codes to distinguish the Western feminism from Global feminism (or feminisms of other nations).

This five codes enable us to distinguish the two Arabic feminisms (explicitly-Islamist or not) from those of non- Arabic ones (Western Feminism and the non-western feminism).

The fifth code is used to show the pages of transnational projects implemented in Arabic states such as UN Women projects, or IEEE national chapters.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The network constructed by our sampling process is formed by 1105 nodes and 3331 directed edges and is shown in Figure 1 using a Force Atlas layout algorithm, the size of the node is representing the in-degree (in the range of 0-204). Each node represents a single page, and they are colour-coded according to the themes that we

identified in Table 1. To give some idea of the size and characteristics of each sub-network we filtered the network by each theme in turn, and the results are shown in Table 2. Note that there are no edges in the 'Western' sub-network as a result of our crawl halting when we reached non-Arabic pages.

98 nodes have a degree of 0 and these represent 8.87 % of all pages in our sample. These are pages that were in the initial search set, but which do not like any other pages that fulfill our criteria, and are not liked by any other pages in our sample.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of degree, from lowest to highest. As might be expected this follows a power law, with very few high degree nodes.

The network structure reveals a stark difference between the two types of Arab feminism, and both types also seem to use very different terms to identify themselves and name their pages. There are also significant differences the scope (or intended area of concern) between them. All three observations are explored further in the next subsections.

4.1 Connectedness between feminisms of Middle East with feminism of other nations

The network structure shows a significant difference between the way that pages we identifies as Arab feminism, and those as Sect feminism, connect to other types of pages in our sample.

There are only 86 edges connecting Arab feminism and Sect feminism, while Arab feminism are linked with non-Western feminism pages with 225 edges and with Western feminism pages with 136 edges. Arab feminism pages have 161 edges linking them with Transnational pages.

This shows that Arabic feminism pages are more connected to the other nations feminism pages than to pages of Arabic feminism that use religious ideologies to identify themselves.

Not only are Sect feminist pages less linked to Arab pages, they are linked with only 4 edges with Non-western pages, one edge with Western pages, and no edges at all with Transnational project pages.

This shows that in terms of their network connections Sect feminism pages are more isolated from the outside world than Arab feminism pages, and that objectively we can see that they have very few connections at all (5 edges, across 166 pages).

4.2 Naming Paradigms

We also looked at the terms used in the pages for each category of feminism, although a somewhat coarse measure, these do reveal the different concerns of the different types of feminism as expressed on Facebook.

We counted the common words used and made a comparison between "Arab feminism" and "Sect feminism" in the Table 3. The table is in three sections, where the first section shows the word used to indicate a feminist slant to the page, the second section shows the words which were used to describe goals, and the third section shows words associated with identity.

The word "Feminism" (or its directives, such as "Feminist") is used very sparsely within the sample. It is used in English (10 occurrences) and French (6 occurrences) and even Arabic spelled in Latin letters (2 occurrences), but only used only 4 times in

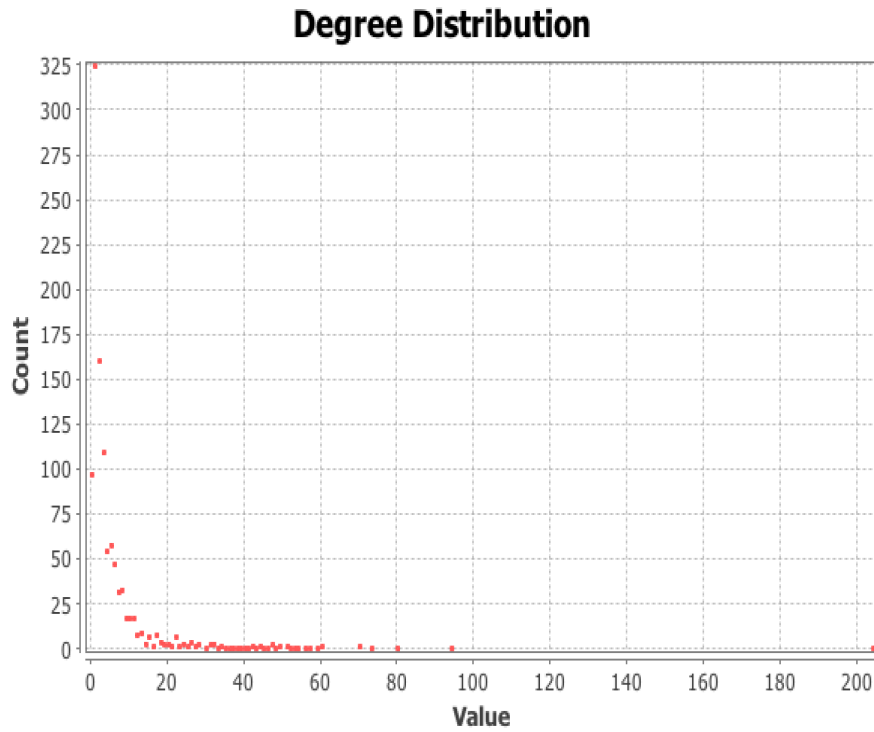


Figure 2: The degree distribution of the overall sample

Table 2: Results

Feminism Theme	Nodes	Edges	Diameter	Avrg.Degree	Density
All Pages	1106	3332	22	6.029	0.003
Arabic	683	2096	13	6.138	0.004
Sect	166	495	9	6.037	0.019
Non Western	129	8	1	0.128	0.001
Western	72	0	1	0	0.001
Transnational	55	48	4	1.811	0.017

Arabic (making a total of 22 occurrences in the sample, less than 2.6%). Pages coded with “Sect feminism” did not use it at all. This scarcity across the sample could be because it is assumed within these particular spaces, but it may also indicate that the word itself is explicitly avoided - perhaps because of its associations with colonialist interpretations of feminism [64]. We consider this further in the discussion below.

Issues normally associated with Western feminism do appear in the the Arab feminism pages (words such as “violence” or “harrassment”), appearing 83 times in the sample. But there is not a single use in the Sect pages.

In the third section we see a variety of identities in the Arab feminism pages, ranging from the debate around veiling, to aspirations of freedom and liberation, to stronger terms associated with direct action (“activist” or “rebels”). In the Sect feminism section the identities are much narrower. There is a shared concern with the issue

of whether of not to wear a veil - although the Arab feminism pages identified with unveiling (11 occurrences) and the Set feminism with veiling (10 occurrences), however the most significant group identifies as Salafi (a religious-political ideology associated with a strict interpretation of Islam), these 48 pages represent 28.9% of the total Sect sample.

Intended Scope. The intended scope of pages (in most of the cases) is declared in the title of the page or in the “about” section of the page. We manually inspected each of these in order to classify the page as either personal (relating to the activities of a specific individual), city (focused on a major metropolitan area), country (mainly focused on a particular nation state), or pan-arabic (the widest focus, covering the Arab world).

While transnational project pages are obviously defined by the nature of their projects. The intended scope of Arabic and Sect

Table 3: Words Used in The titles

Word	count in AraFem	count in SectFem
نسوية (Nasawyia)	4	0
Feminist	10	0
Femes	6	0
Nasawyia	2	0
عنف (Violence)	15	0
تحرش (Harassment)	18	0
حجاب (headscarf)	8	3
حرية (Freedom)	17	0
ثورة (Revolution)	25	0
متنقيات (Face-veiled)	0	10
سافرات (Not veiled)	11	0
سلفيات (Female Salafi [44])	0	48
مناضلات (female Activists)	20	0
متحررات (liberated women)	12	0
حرائر (Free women)	12	1
متنردات (female rebels)	13	0
لا قديسات ولا عاهرات (Not saints nor whores)	9	0

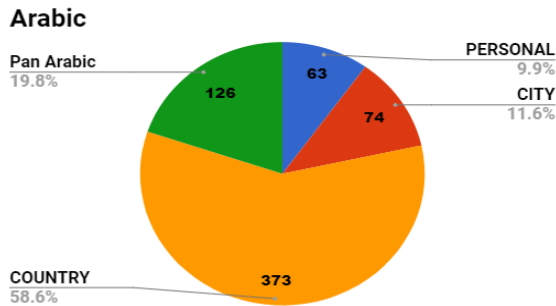


Figure 3: The Scope of Pages in the Arab Feminism Sample

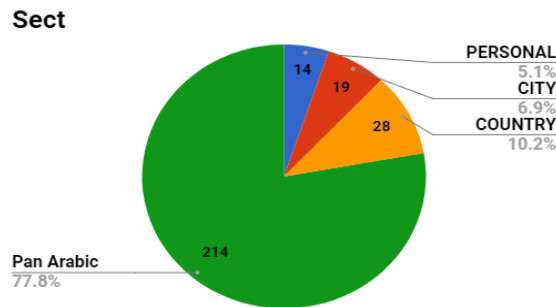


Figure 4: The Scope of Pages in the Sect Feminism Sample

pages varies considerably. Pages marked as Sect feminism in our thematic coding are most likely do not restrict their intended scope or its target publics by state or city names, 77.8% of our sample where classified as Pan-Arabic. The detail of all percentages are

shown in Figure 4. While the Arab feminism pages are more likely to define their intended scope by stating the country or the city name where their activity is based (58.6% were classied as focused on country), this is shown in Figure 3 .

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Two major feminist paradigms

Badran [6] reports two major feminist paradigms. She denotes that these two feminisms evolved in historical contexts in which new subjects and identities were being re/fashioned out of shifting combinations of religious and national affiliation. Our network clearly exposed this expected polarization around the identity of women activism. The two Arab segments of the network (Arab and Sect feminsim) show multiple distinct characteristics, including openness to other nation’s feminisms, and openness to transnational women empowering projects.

At the outset of her book, Badran differentiates between Western feminisms and Muslim women’s feminisms, which have been termed “secular feminism” and “Islamic feminism” respectively. She then examines how in the Muslim world “secular feminism” has been “action-oriented” and emerged as a social movement “in the context of a secular territorial nation-state composed of equal citizens regardless of religious affiliation, whereas “Islamic feminism emerged as a new discourse grounded in independent investigation and interpretation of the Quran and religious texts (ijthad). Badran’s main argument, however, is that the emergence of “Islamic feminism” in Muslim countries did not indicate the nonexistence of “secular feminism” even as gender equality has been approached differently there.” [64]

As shown above the words that refer to feminism are used in the title of only 22 pages. All of them are coded as Arabic Feminism in our dataset. Drawing on Badran, best known for her writing on Islamic feminism, we can assert that Arab women activist are avoiding calling themselves feminists. In 1994 she identified “a kind of feminism or public activist mode without a name. It is represented by Muslim women who decide for themselves how to conduct their lives in society. Because the women who do this work resist the term feminism, which has largely “Western association”. She shows that pro-feminist women avoid the feminist label for pragmatic reasons, the term is confining and potentially misleading. Further, Islamist women reject feminism as “superfluous or heretical”, and therefore also preclude the possibility of an “Islamic feminism.” Despite these proscriptions upon feminism, Badran explains that this gender activism is a new and “unencumbered, analytic construct,” and its protagonists (amongst them feminists, pro-feminists and Islamists) represent a convergence that “transcends ideological boundaries of politically articulated feminism and Islamism.”[58] Our data certainly supports this view.

5.2 Identity politics

The words used in the title of pages reveal the ideology behind the two strands of feminist pages. While words such as right, violence, harassment are used widely in the pages of Arabic feminism, you find them rarely used and words that reveal identity are used instead (veiled women). This brings more evidences to what Marieme Helie-Lucas[35] is arguing about in an article titled “What is your

tribe?"Women's struggles and the construction of Muslimness". She accuses "many well-meaning people, outside as well as inside Muslim contexts, in good faith, play into the game of fundamentalists and their identity politics. There are many forms and varieties of fundamentalism. However, they have common characteristics. In particular, one key element of their politics is the control of women".

The titles of most Sect pages show identities expressed by veiling and other customs, they ignore the common causes of women struggle such as the struggle to stop all sort of violence. This struggle form " a new strand of feminism triggered by the physical and sexual violence perpetrated against women. It is felt and recognized but often unnamed. Anti-sexual-violence activists not only works to stop violence through direct action, but it investigates the root causes and contexts of sexual violence and works to turn around the thinking of offenders whom they detain. The activists develop and share with offenders a feminist analysis of aggression against women that is contextualized in the sociology and culture of their environment." [8]

Htun and Weldon [37] show that, over four decades, the autonomous mobilization of feminists in domestic and transnational contexts (and not leftist parties, women in government, or national wealth) is the critical factor accounting for policy changes on violence against women. Their analysis suggests that the impact of global norms on domestic policy making is conditional on the presence of feminist movements in domestic contexts, pointing to the importance of ongoing activism and a vibrant civil society. Therefore it could be argued that absence of such common causes in the Sect pages means that we should not interpret them as feminist at all, but rather women's part in a separate religious and ideological debate,

5.3 The claimed holistic feminism

Observing the feminist trajectory during the last century, Badran [7] reported the transition from secular feminism to Islamic feminism to "the emerging Muslim holistic feminism". From the feminism which created in the twentieth century by Muslim and non-Muslims in contexts of anti-colonial struggle and early nation-state building to the emergence of a new feminism in the time when religious identity is fore-fronted and there is an international preoccupation with Muslim women's rights. "communalism is being fed from within the world of feminism and more specifically through progressive Muslim women's global organising. I look at Musawah (equality in Arabic), which is a transnational organisation created and run by and for Muslims. Musawah announced itself as 'A global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim Family at its launch in the spring of 2009 at a large conference in Kuala Lumpur. The event was hosted by Sisters in Islam, the veteran Islamic feminist organisation now two decades old, which has played a central role in the creation of Musawah." [7]

Although the Sect pages show more emphasis on pan-arabic issues, it is the Arab feminism pages that best display the links described by Badran, clearly manifest in the connections with transnational and Western feminist movements.

6 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have applied Web Science methods to help understand the shape of on-line Arab feminism. Much has been written about how globalization, and on-line communication platforms, have created a global political space. This has caused some to accuse Arabic feminism of being an alien import to the Arab world, and problematic because of its association with Western colonialism and secular values. We set out to investigate these links, and in particular to explore the structure of Arabic Facebook pages associated with women - examining their connections to global and transnational networks, the language with which they identified themselves, and the scope of their concerns.

Based on a snowball sample, we built a network of 1106 pages and 3332 edges (representing Facebook likes between pages). In this network we discovered two distinct sets of Arabic pages, linked by only 86 edges.

The first, which we labeled Arab feminism, is larger (683 nodes), has a more significant link to western, national, and transnational pages (522 edges), is concerned more strongly with common global feminist issues (e.g. violence, or harassment), identifies with freedom and activism, and tends to have a national (58.6%) or city (11.6%) scope.

The second, which we labeled Sect feminism, is smaller (166 nodes), has almost no links to western, national, and transnational pages (5 edges), is not concerned with global feminist issues, identifies with Salafi (a strict and political interpretation of Islam), and tends to have a pan-arabic scope (77.8%) perhaps because ideology has no borders.

We could differentiate these as between activism that is effectively the women sections of Islamist movements (Sect) and Muslim women's struggle for their rights (Arab). The intricacy of the history and politics makes the naming of these two approaches a complex issue as using Islam as a name might not only be mistaken with Islamist activism but also by implication suggests that other female activists are secular - which is not (usually) the case.

Our work supports the argument that Arabic feminism includes both Western-style values of women's equality and liberation, and a more Islamist interpretation of feminism focused on women's role in Islam. But it also shows that rather than being a continuum of values, there is rather more of a division between these two groups. In the first the influence of other feminisms is limited, but in the second there is a more radical reinterpretation of those values in an Islamic and Pan-Arabic context.

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