

Abstract

This study shows how Western academic writings on Palestinian women are determined by colonial relations between the West and Palestine, and therefore argues that these writings remain part of a colonial discourse. The fact that women in the West suffered and are still suffering from exclusion and subordination by the patriarchal capitalist system didn't mean that Western women researchers' discourse on colonized women would be less racist or sexist than the colonial discourse on colonized peoples.

The study uses Foucault's notion of discourse in looking at texts written by Western women researchers on Palestinian women. Discourse here is considered as an institutional regime based on economic, social, and political powers that determine the rules and mechanisms according to which it works. The analysis, then, looks at the way in which contradictory colonial relations are reflected in the texts on Palestinian women produced in the Western academic institution.

The argument is that knowledge constructed on colonized societies is based on a colonial rational that seeks to reestablish and reinforce capitalist colonial relations of domination and subordination. This rational is present also in the Western researchers' discourse on Palestinian women. In this discourse, Palestinian women, their lives and struggle are objectified as an object of study, to be manufactured and formed by Western women researchers according to rules and regulations laid by colonial discourse. In this way, representations of Palestinian women in Western researchers' writings are a main strategy used to sustain colonial domination on Palestinian women and their society.

Two main colonial discourse rules are maintained in Western women researchers' discourse; the first is the West as the ultimate end to which the Palestinian society must reach by ridding itself from tradition and culture of which Palestinian women are made a symbol, making their status and roles main indicators of its traditionalism and\ or movement towards modernity. The second

is emphasizing an essentialized difference (inferiority) of Palestinian women from Western women (whose superiority is taken for granted), maintaining the rule of essentialized difference between the Western colonizer and the oriental colonized in the discourse of Western academic women researchers. This emphasis is clear in looking at what is perceived as positive changes in Palestinian women's lives as a product and result of the influence of Western and Zionist colonialism, in the same time that the inferiority of Palestinian women's situation is emphasized as being due to the Palestinian Arab culture.

Palestinian women in Western academic women researchers' discourse appear lacking agency, oppressed and victims of their colonized culture that deprives them from developing a feminist consciousness, or achieving any gains in what Western women researchers perceive as women's interests. The question in such a discourse about the rationale behind joining the resistance to Occupation is answered by Western researchers' predetermined conclusion; that Palestinian women's participation in the resistance did not achieve any gains for "women" but rather it has exploited them. The struggle of Palestinian women is said to be an extension of their traditional roles, which are, in liberal Western feminism terms, their "reproductive roles". In other words, Palestinian women's participation in resisting the occupation is written as not feminist and not political, but rather as an expression of some primitive kind of consciousness and action. In this way, the study shows how Western academic writings on Palestinian women are based on the same racism and sexism on which the colonial discourse is based.

In their discourse on Palestinian women, Western women researchers claim a sex based solidarity with Palestinian women, in an attempt to obscure colonial power relations between the two groups of women. They criticize what they perceive as subordination of Palestinian women to the national agenda without questioning their colonial one that is based on a pretension of solidarity while excluding Palestinian women's struggle from what is believed to be feminism. The oppression faced by Palestinian women under occupation is overlooked by the

assertion that fighting against it is not part of “women’s” struggle for their “interests”. The main argument in this discourse is that feminism has nothing to do with the struggle against colonialism, and women’s participation in such a struggle is a diversion that expresses lack of consciousness among Palestinian women who are unable to locate the real site of their struggle.

The study demonstrates that the relations on which the Western women researcher’s discourse is based are those that are based on the exclusion and subordination of the colonized Other who is perceived to be threatening to the Western self, this fear can be seen in the obsession with Palestinian women’s reproductive roles and their participation in the resistance. The Western women researcher’s discourse, like the patriarchal liberal discourse, seeks to contain this danger by putting them in contrast to what is considered as political, and, as in the colonial discourse, by putting Palestinian women in a binary opposition with the Palestinian society and Palestinian resistance movement that resists the modernizing West and promotes a traditional culture. The emphasis is that the former realizes women’s interests, while the latter oppresses and subjugates them.

What this study is trying to argue is that the Western women researcher’s discourse tries to contain the danger it sees in Palestinian women by looking for similarities and differences between Western women and Palestinian women. The first put Palestinian and Western women on the same side, the second put them and their nationality and culture on opposite sides, making the latter the main reason behind their inferiority.