

Toward critical and discursive engagement with Muslim faith:

Exploring Muslim feminist's role in challenging the construction of religious legal knowledge

Ibrahim Moosa sees any representation of Islam as “constructions” in the language of modern humanity. Remembering though that people in many different ways possess fully-formed bases of knowledge, and that these people self-identify as Muslims wholeheartedly practice Islam, I believe that Muslim feminists express what Islam is from their own standpoint. They use their experiences as female Muslims and produce constructed vision of their faith through critical engagement with it. The faith that has been informed by Muslim women's very identities as their voices have been marginalised from the center of political, economic and knowledge-production power.

This essay will explore the emergence of Muslim feminism, and offer a brief look at Muslim feminists' approaches to the notion of gender equality. Next it will consider Muslim feminists' diverse contributions to both feminist discourse and to the world of Islam. These contributions include challenges to both the essentialist view of Muslim women as doomed and victimized, and the traditional means of religious knowledge production. Muslim feminists also offer alternative approaches to the entrenched, official, male-dominated and gender-polarized traditionalist Islamic cannon through discursive and critical engagement with Islam, specifically by exploring questions of power, the role of history and the importance of ethics and a broad socio-moral theory behind its man-made legal aspects in constructing and understanding the Islamic faith.

In order to bring the marginalised voices of Muslim women to the center of both classic religious knowledge production and global feminism, I wish to consider a number of postmodern themes, including deconstruction, the undercutting of singular narratives and the infinite semantic nature of text. As well, I will explore the potential for improved extra religious communication offered by the postmodern vocabulary generally.