

Can Islam & Feminism be Reconciled? Islamic Feminism in France

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ABSTRACT

Religion is often viewed as a systemic perpetuation of patriarchy that has no space for the beliefs of feminism. Muslim women particularly have received much global attention, continuously represented as “passive victims of oppressive cultures” and the “embodiments of a repressive and ‘fundamentalist’ religion.” In the case of Muslim women born and raised in the West where secular feminist discourse is rampant, many find themselves left out of feminist conversations. Muslim women’s lives find themselves dictated by laws and regulations meant to “save” them from the patriarchal religion, in turn, Muslim women’s voices and concerns are often lost. Islamic feminism offers a solution to women living in the intersection of secularism and religion by providing them with the reading and agency to make their voices and existence heard in the same spaces that questions those voices and consequently make laws on their behalf. This paper delves into a comparative research analysis between the social movements of secular feminism versus Islamic feminism to analyze its effectiveness and inclusivity for religiously affiliated women. Utilizing the case study of France, a highly secularized Western state, the paper analyzes the effects of secular feminism on French Muslim women. When the question of citizenship regards not only legal status but rather an acceptance of secular, anti-religious, national norms, and values, how do people who hold legal status balance disconformity to their respective nation’s norms and values of secularism? Can Islam and feminism be reconciled?

Keywords: Gender; Intersectional Feminism; Public Policy; Religion; Sociology