

**Title—On the Muslim Question**

**Author—Anne Norton**

**Year—2013**

Categories: Islam, Theory, Europe, Politics

Place: Western Europe

Time: 1985-2010

Argument Synopsis:

Norton's book attempts to deconstruct the dominant view in the post 9/11 world of a clash between Islam and the West. The discourse claims that Islam is against democracy, supports violence and terrorism, and treats women in a way that cannot be tolerated by Western civilization. She frames this issue as an issue of the "Muslim Question" in Europe and the United States. She claims that the Muslim question lies at the center of political and philosophical discourse that is shaping the modern world. Norton compares the current Muslim question with the 'Jewish Question' that dominated Enlightenment Europe through the early half of the twentieth century. She argues that both the Muslim and Jewish question revolve around the questions of citizenship, equality and discrimination. It is characteristic of the Jewish question in its practical and historical form that Jews were marked out a political threat even as they were subject to political assaults. She reveals that the Muslim question is not so much about Islam and more about Western values and civilization. She argues that the concerns the West direct at Muslims reveal sites of domestic anxiety. In other words, the Muslim question is connected to fears for national and international security. Norton explicitly rejects Derrida's construction of the Muslim as the "other of democracy," which linked Islam to fascism and excessive procreation.

The status of women, their dress, sex, and sexuality are recurrent themes throughout the book. Norton argues that the framing of the Muslim world as hyper-masculine accomplishes other objectives for the West. She claims that attention to the plight of Muslim women turns the gaze of potential critics away from the continuing inequality of women in the West. Norton explains the Western opposition to the veil as a challenge to capitalism and the commodification of female sexuality.

Norton also discusses the various controversies, including the Rushdie affair and the Dutch cartoon affair, where Muslims are portrayed as presenting special challenges to the exercise of freedom of speech. In discussing the Rushdie affair specifically, Norton argues that British Muslims were within their rights in voicing anger against the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. She maintains that freedom of speech does not need to be provocative or insulting. Rushdie's life was also not endangered by British Muslims who, according to Norton, had no intention of carrying out the fatwa. In her discussion of terror, she notes a similarity between modern terrorists and Protestant reformers—both products of modernity who used terrorist strategies to pursue their goals. One criticism of the book is she only really discusses Western intellectuals who talk about the clash of civilizations, ignoring the discourse from the Muslim world on the same topic.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Sexuality divides the world into Islam and the West
- The concerns the West directs at Muslims maps sites of domestic anxiety—Europe is faced with questions about the status of women, sexuality, equality and difference, faith and secularism
- Figure of the Muslim has become the axis where questions of political philosophy and political theology, politics and ethics meet