

Title—The Routledge Handbook of Islam and Gender

Author—Justine Howe

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Categories: Islam, Gender, Theory, Legal History

Place: The World

Time: 1700-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Howe is the editor of this essay collection that is concerned with how gendered norms and practices in religious contexts are tied to other domains of social power, as well as broader theological and philosophical frameworks. The collection is focused on the study of Islam and gender; all of the contributions demonstrate how gendered norms and practices are essential to exploring the complexities of Muslim social worlds, not just the particular experience of women. For the purposes of the collection, the contributors focused on three primary dimensions of Islam: texts and their interpretations; community; and embodied practice. Howe asserts that the collection demonstrates how bringing gender and queer theory to bear on Muslim materials and contexts yields broader insights into theology, law, economics, politics, and culture. Importantly, Howe underscores that there is no single Islamic position on the status of women or normative gender norms and practices. The collection builds on three key strains of scholarship in the field of Islam and gender: feminist engagements with Muslim sources, historical and anthropological literature that has explored the contours of Muslim women's lives in global contexts, and the more recent turn towards queer theory, critical race theory, and masculinity studies. All of the essays use gender as their analytical framework through which to explore the broader religious and political implications of their objects of study.

The collection is divided into seven parts, each of which contain a handful of essays. The first part builds on scholarship that analyzes gender norms and practices within authoritative Muslim texts and genres that have emerged to interpret them. An essay in this section focuses on Muslim theology and aims to interrogate the assumptions concerning gender and women within theological explorations of God and the divine and its relation to humanity and other forms of creation. The second part shows how gendered hierarchies and practices are implicated in configurations of sexuality and sexual difference. The third part explores the variegated positions of authority that Muslim women inhabit in the modern world. One essay traces the ambivalent dimensions of images, concepts and frameworks related to the feminine in Sufi contexts, and argues that gendered norms are often subverted in everyday practices and sometimes open up possibilities for queer expressions. Part four examines the gendered dimensions of colonial and postcolonial logic and political processes in the hopes of demonstrating how experiences of displacement are themselves gendered. Morgenstein-Fuerst's contribution demonstrates the long reach of colonial gender laws in India by examining the Contagious Disease Act and the triple talaq law to show how legal categories helped to inscribe intersecting gender and racialized hierarchies during the nineteenth century. The collection has a large temporal scope, with the later sections going all the way up to the present and assessing things like Instagram ads.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Social roles taken to be traditional and/or normative (such as women taking care of housework) attest to the important role that gender norms and practices play in community belonging, religious authority and conceptions of the divine
- Modern justification of military intervention into Muslim countries has obvious echoes in imperial strategies that sought to save Muslim women by subjugating them to foreign rule
- There is an ongoing lack of attention to women and non-binary people as agents of shaping their own histories and as important to the history of Islam more broadly