

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
AMERICAN ISLAM

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Juliane Hammer is associate professor and Kenan Rifai Scholar in Islamic Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on American Muslims, discourses on gender and sexuality, and Sufism. She is the author of *Palestinians Born in Exile* (2005) and *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism: More than a Prayer* (2012). Her work has appeared in *The Muslim World*, *Hawwa*, *Contemporary Islam*, and *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, as well as in several edited volumes. She is currently working on a research project analyzing American Muslim efforts against domestic violence.

Omid Safi is professor of Islamic Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, specializing in contemporary Islamic thought and classical Islam. He is the author of *Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (2006) and *Memories of Muhammad* (2010). He is also the editor of two volumes, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (2003) and *Voices of Islam: Voices of Change* (2006). He has a forthcoming book on the famed mystic Rumi and is currently working on a monograph discussing contemporary Islamic debates in Iran.

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Edited by

Juliane Hammer

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Omid Safi

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*



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## Notes on Contributors

**Su'ad Abdul Khabeer** is assistant professor of Anthropology and African American Studies at Purdue University. Her work explores the intersection of race, religion, and popular culture through ethnography and performance art. Her publications include "Rep That Islam: The Rhyme and Reason of American Muslim Hip Hop" (*Muslim World*, 2007) and "Black Arabic: Some Notes on African American Muslims and the Arabic Language," in *Black Routes to Islam* (edited by M. Marable and H. Aidi, 2010). In addition to her academic writing, Abdul Khabeer's poetry is included in the anthology *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak*. She has written for TheRoot.com, the *Washington Post*, and the Huffington Post.

**Zain Abdullah** is associate professor in the Religion Department at Temple University. His research focuses on topics related to religion and society, Islam and the West, and the formation of global and transnational Muslim identities. He is the author of *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (2010), and his articles have appeared in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *Anthropological Quarterly*, the *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*, the *Journal of History and Culture*, *African Arts*, the *Middle East Journal*, and other periodicals. Abdullah is currently writing a book about Black Muslim conversion and the Nation of Islam in mid-twentieth-century America.

**Liali Albana** is a high school world history teacher and freelance writer. She holds a B.A. from Rutgers University in Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies. She is involved in a statewide social studies curriculum revision initiative through the New Jersey Arab Heritage Commission and the Rutgers University Center for Middle Eastern Studies.

**Maytha Alhassen** is a University of Southern California Provost Ph.D. Fellow in American Studies and Ethnicity, studying historical encounters between African Americans and Arabs, critical race studies, youth popular culture, social movements, oral histories, narratives, and storytelling. Her writings have appeared online on CNN, Huffington Post, and Counterpunch and in academic journals. In addition to her journalistic and academic writing, she has appeared on CNN and Al Jazeera English and contributed an essay to *I Speak for Myself* (2011), a book of American Muslim women's stories. Alhassen is the coeditor (with Ahmed Shihab-Eldin) of *Demanding Dignity: Young Voices from the Frontlines of the Arab Revolutions* (2012).



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**Sylvia Chan-Malik** is assistant professor in the Departments of American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University. Her research and teaching examine the intersections of race, religion, gender, and sexuality through critical frameworks of American transnationalism and comparative ethnic studies, with a focus on the history of Islam in the United States. Before joining the faculty at Rutgers, she was a UC President's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California at Santa Cruz and a Ford Foundation Diversity Fellow. Her articles appear in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*; the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion*; *The Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*; *The Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History*; *The Immanent Frame*; and edited anthologies.

**R. David Coolidge** is the Associate University Chaplain for the Muslim community at Brown University. Previously, he was the Muslim adviser at Dartmouth College and an adjunct lecturer in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at St. Francis College. His publications relating to Islam in America have appeared in *Islamica*, *Islamic Horizons*, and *Illume Magazine* and on various sites online. In addition, he is a member of the Board of Directors for Ta'leef Collective.

**Edward E. Curtis IV** is Millennium Chair of the Liberal Arts and professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). He is the author or editor of *Muslims in America: A Short History*; *Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History*; *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960–1975*; *Islam in Black America*; and the *Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*. A former NEH Fellow at the National Humanities Center, Curtis has been awarded Carnegie, Fulbright, and Mellon fellowships. He serves as founding coeditor of the *Journal of Africana Religions*.

**Nabil Echchaibi** is assistant professor and associate director of the Center for Media, Religion and Culture at the University of Colorado at Boulder. His research focuses on religion and the role of media in shaping and reflecting modern religious subjectivities among Muslims in the Middle East and in the diaspora. His work on diasporic media, Muslim media cultures, and Islamic alternative modernity has appeared in publications such as the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *Nations and Nationalism*, *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research*, *Media Development*, and many book publications. He is the author of *Voicing Diasporas: Ethnic Radio in Paris and Berlin between Culture and Renewal* (2011) and the coeditor of *International Blogging: Identity, Politics and Networked Publics* (2009).

**Kambiz GhaneaBassiri** is associate professor of Religion and Humanities at Reed College. He is the author of numerous publications on Islam in America, including *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (2010) and *Competing Visions of Islam in the United States* (1997). His research has been supported by fellowships from the Carnegie Scholars Program and the Guggenheim Foundation.

**Zareena A. Grewal** is assistant professor in the Departments of American Studies and Religious Studies and in the Program in Ethnicity, Race, and Migration at Yale University. She is a historical anthropologist and documentary filmmaker

and has directed and produced two films for television, *By the Dawn's Early Light: Chris Jackson's Journey to Islam* (2004) and *Swahili Fighting Words* (with Mohamed Yunus Rafiq, 2009). Her book, *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslim Youth and the Global Crisis of Authority* (2013), as well as articles in journals and book chapters in edited collections, explores the intersections of race, gender, class, and religion across a wide spectrum of American Muslim communities. Grewal is also the Director of the Center for the Study of American Muslims at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding.

**Juliane Hammer** is associate professor and Kenan Rifai Scholar in Islamic Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on American Muslims, discourses on gender and sexuality, and Sufism. She is the author of *Palestinians Born in Exile* (2005) and *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism: More than a Prayer* (2012). Her work has appeared in the *Muslim World*, *Hawwa*, *Contemporary Islam*, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, and the *Bulletin for the Study of Religion*, as well as in several edited volumes. She is currently working on a research project analyzing American Muslim efforts against domestic violence.

**Rosemary R. Hicks** is a visiting scholar at Bard College with the Bard Prison Initiative, which she joined after completing a two-year Mellon Fellowship with the Center for the Humanities at Tufts University. Hicks earned a Ph.D. in North American Religions in 2010 from Columbia University, where she was a Mellon Fellow with the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy and an American Association of University Women Fellow. Hicks specializes in issues of secularism, pluralism, and challenges facing religious minorities in the United States. She has published in journals including *Religion*, *Comparative Islamic Studies*, *American Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*.

**Sally Howell** is assistant professor of History in the Center for Arab American Studies and the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Her books include *Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit after 9/11* (coauthored with Wayne Baker et al., 2009) and *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade* (with Amaney Jamal et al., 2011). Her essays have appeared in *Anthropological Quarterly*, *Diaspora*, *Food and Foodways*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law*, and *Visual Anthropology*.

**Amaney Jamal** is associate professor of Politics at Princeton University. Her research focuses on democratization and the politics of civic engagement in the Arab world. Among Muslim and Arab Americans, she has examined the pathways that structure their patterns of civic engagement in the United States. Jamal is the author of *Barriers to Democracy* (2009) and *Of Empires and Citizens* (2012), the coauthor of *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade* (with Sally Howell et al., 2011), and the coeditor of *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11* (with Nadine Naber, 2008). Jamal is a principal investigator of the "Arab Barometer Project" and Senior Advisor on the Pew Research Center projects focusing on Islam in America (2006) and Global Islam (2010–12). In 2005 Jamal was named a Carnegie Scholar.

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**Akel Ismail Kahera** is professor of Architecture and associate dean for research and graduate studies in Clemson University's College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities. Kahera is the author of more than two dozen scholarly essays on history, the theory of architecture, and urbanism, as well as the author of three books: *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender, and Aesthetics* (2002); *Design Criteria for Mosques* (2009); and *Reading the Islamic City* (2011). He received a bachelor's degree in Architecture from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn; a master's in Architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies (in the fields of architecture, law, and urbanism) from Princeton University.

**Michael Muhammad Knight** is the author of nine books, including a monograph on the Five Percenter movement, *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip-Hop, and the Gods of New York* (2007); an American Muslim travelogue, *Blue-Eyed Devil* (2006); a hajj narrative, *Journey to the End of Islam* (2009); and the novel, *The Taqwacores* (2004). He obtained his master of Theological Studies degree from Harvard in 2011 and is currently a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His doctoral research investigates engagement of the *sunnah*, the personal example of the Prophet Muhammad, in American Islamic discourses.

**Karen Leonard** currently chairs the Anthropology Department at the University of California at Irvine, where she is also a professor of Anthropology. She is the author of *Locating Home: India's Hyderabadis Abroad* (2007), a multisite ethnography of the diaspora from Hyderabad to Pakistan, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, the United States, and the Gulf states of the Middle East (2007); and *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* (2003). Leonard has published on the history and culture of India, especially the former Hyderabad state, and on Asian American and Muslim American history and culture.

**Debra Majeed** is professor of Religious Studies at Beloit College. She is the first African American female and first Muslim to be tenured in the 166-year history of Beloit College. She has published in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, *The Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in America*, *The Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures*, and *Delving Deeper Shades of Purple: Charting Twenty Years of Womanist Approaches in Religion and Society*. She is completing a manuscript on polygyny and African American Muslims that is forthcoming from the University Press of Florida.

**Kathleen M. Moore** is professor of Religious Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara, where she specializes in law and religion. Her research interests lie at the intersection of politics, religion, and law. She has authored three books and several articles on the topic of Islam and Muslims in the United States and Britain, the legal status of Muslim Americans, immigration politics, and pluralism. Titles include *Al Mughtaribun: American Law and the Transformation of Muslim Life in the United States* (1995; revised and expanded edition forthcoming), *Muslim Women in America* (coauthored with Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith, 2006, 2011), and *The Unfamiliar Abode: Islamic Law in the United States and Britain* (2010).

**Omid Safi** is professor of Islamic Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, specializing in contemporary Islamic thought and classical Islam. He is the editor of the volume *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (2003) and of *Voices of Islam: Voices of Change* (2006). He is also the author of *Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (2006) and *Memories of Muhammad* (2010). He has a forthcoming volume from Princeton University Press on the famed mystic Rumi and is currently working on a monograph discussing contemporary Islamic debates in Iran, to be published by Harvard University Press.

**Richard Brent Turner** is professor of Religious Studies, African American Studies, and International Studies at the University of Iowa. He is the author of *Islam in the African-American Experience* (1997, 2003) and *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans* (2009). Other writings have appeared in the *Muslim World, Souls, Journal of Religious Thought*, and the *Black Studies Reader*.

**Gisela Webb** is professor of Comparative Religion and Islamic Studies at Seton Hall University. Her research and publications include studies on medieval and contemporary Islamic mysticism and spirituality, Islam and Sufis in the United States, women and gender in Islam, death and dying in Islam, and religious approaches to Alzheimer's. Her publications include the edited volume *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America* (2000), *Intimations of the Great Unlearning: Interreligious Spirituality and the Demise of Consciousness Which Is Alzheimer's*, and "Third Wave Sufism in America and the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship" in *Sufism in the West* (edited by Jamal Malik and John Hinnells, 2006).

**Timur R. Yuskaev** is assistant professor of Contemporary Islam and director of the Islamic Chaplaincy Program at Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut. His forthcoming book, *Speaking Qur'an: The Emergence of an American Sacred Text*, reflects his academic interests, which include anthropology of the Qur'an, Qur'anic hermeneutics, the study of Muslim modernities, American religious history, and memory studies.

## Note on Transliteration

It is customary for Islamic studies scholars to explain their transliteration system, in part as proof that we are aware of the complex rules guiding our field and the languages associated with it. We have used a very simplified transliteration system for Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Turkish words. Those familiar with these languages will easily identify the correct terms and those who are not will benefit more from the explanation in the glossary. In addition to ease of reading, we have refrained from using a more complicated system because American Muslims generally use simplified transliterations of key religious vocabulary that has been integrated into American Muslim English, including the use of English plurals for Arabic words.

## Glossary

**adhan.** The call to prayer, for five daily prayers (see *salat*).

**da‘wah.** Literally “invitation.” Used to describe missionary activities to spread Islam.

**dhikr (or zikr).** Invocation or remembrance. The term for a particular Sufi practice involving the invocation of one of the Divine names, or the very term Allah, with the aim of attuning the consciousness of the faithful with that of Divine Presence.

**Eid al-fitr.** Feast of Fastbreaking. The celebration at the end of the month of Ramadan.

**fatwa.** A ruling or decree issued by an Islamic legal scholar.

**fiqh.** Human interpretation of *shari‘ah* (Divine law), Islamic jurisprudence.

**hadith.** A saying of the Prophet Muhammad. Also used for the collected sayings of Muhammad.

**hajj.** Pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam.

**halal.** Lawful or permissible according to Islamic law.

**hijab.** One of the terms for the Muslim headscarf.

**ijma‘.** Consensus of a community of scholars on a legal issue.

**imam.** In Sunni Islam, the leader of congregational prayer. In a Shi‘i context, the title for the immediate descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Also used as a title for mosque and community leaders in the American context.

**marja‘ (pl. maraji‘).** The title of a leading Islamic legal scholar in Twelver Shi‘ism, one to whom the followers turn for authoritative interpretations.

**mawlid.** Celebration in honor of the birthday of an important religious figure, including that of the Prophet Muhammad.

**mazar.** Tomb or mausoleum of an important religious figure.

**Mi‘raj.** The night journey and heavenly ascension of the Prophet Muhammad.

**muezzin.** Caller to prayer.

**nikah.** Marriage ceremony.

**niqab.** Face “veil” or cover that some Muslim women wear.

**pir.** Elder religious leader figure, especially in Sufism. Same as shaykh.

xx *Glossary*

**qutb.** Literally “pole.” Term for the function of a high-ranking Sufi teacher as a vertical axis that connects this world to God.

**Ramadan.** The month of fasting in the Islamic calendar.

**salat.** The five daily prayers, one of the five pillars.

**shahadah.** The Muslim testimony of faith, first of the five pillars of Islam, declaring “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is God’s messenger.”

**shari’ah.** Divine law, sometimes used for Islamic Law. To be distinguished from fiqh, which is jurisprudence.

**shaykh.** Elder religious leader figure.

**sunnah.** The life acts of the Prophet Muhammad, including his sayings (see *hadith*).

**tariqas.** English plural of the Arabic term *tariqa*, which literally means “mystical path.” A hierarchically structured Sufi community led by a Sufi shaykh or pir (teacher).

**tawhid.** Oneness of God. Article of Islamic belief in the absolute unity and oneness of the Divine.

**‘ulama.** Religious scholars, with expertise in Qur’anic interpretation and law.

**ummah.** Muslim community.

**zakat.** Alms, charitable giving, one of the five pillars of Islam.