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Women in the Mosque: A History of Legal Thought and Social Practice .  
By Marion Holmes Katz

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document a moment of important social and cultural transformation and can serve as an excellent starting point for future research projects.

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*Women in the Mosque: A History of Legal Thought and Social Practice.* By Marion Holmes Katz. Columbia University Press, 2014. 432 pages. \$65.00 (hardcover), \$64.99 (e-book).

What does it say about the academic study of women and Islam when the discrepancy between rules restricting women's access to mosques and historical evidence of women's unceasing presence in mosques has not been investigated until 2014? At least, that is the question raised by Marion Holmes Katz's book, *Women in the Mosque: A History of Legal Thought and Social Practice*. There has, until now, been a gap in our knowledge of the actual impact of restrictive norms on women's religious behaviors as those restrictions have evolved over time. This book endeavors to change that situation. Using mosque-going as a point of entry to study women's mobility and visibility outside the home, Katz provides a historical survey not only of jurists' and hadith specialists' discussion of women's access to mosques, but also how this discussion reflects fundamental ideas about women's roles as wives, community members, and ritual actors. This well-organized book provides multiple perspectives from which to approach the question of women's presence (or absence) in mosques, across differences of era, geography, and legal doctrine. Discrepancies and continuity are given a nuanced treatment as Katz balances her discussion of intellectual discourse with reports of women's presence in mosques.

This is no facile account of women's rights in Islam. Nor does Katz demonstrate the existence of a singular, definitive answer to the question, are women entitled to have access to mosques, and its ancillary questions, who has the authority to deny women's access to mosques, and for what reasons. She shows that some scholars argued the authority rested with male family members or religious leaders, while others located it with government. Still others supported women's entitlement to attend public prayers in mosques, based on the well-known hadith, "do not prevent the maidservants of God from [going to] the mosques of God," but devalued their attendance in favor of private worship (e.g., in the remotest, darkest chamber of her home). As for the reasons, Katz points out the contradiction between the Prophet's admonition in the above-cited hadith and the aptly named "A'isha report," issued by the Prophet's wife after his death, which declared, "If the Messenger of God had lived to see what women have innovated, he would have forbidden them from visiting the mosque, as the women of the Israelites were forbidden" (18). How does one navigate the tension between the idealized and inclusive admonition of the Prophet and the subsequent practical, if not hard-nosed, advice of the Prophet's wife? The attempt to answer that question is the leitmotif of Katz's book.

In the introduction, Katz notes that several anecdotal accounts and visual images of women's presence in mosques have appeared over the centuries, and many important mosques have had designated women's spaces in them. In light of well-known legal prescriptions strictly limiting women's mosque attendance, how can this presence be explained? Proceeding from the suggestion that early Sunni discourse on women's mosque attendance "did not always determine historical realities" (2), Katz has gone to great length to evaluate legal discourse countering women's de facto presence in mosques, from the generation of the Prophet to the present. She analyzes the dynamics between evolving Sunni juristic debates, governmental regulation, and social practices with respect to the acceptability and merit of women's mosque attendance.

Chapter 1 begins with the question of women's mosque attendance as a legal problem: what have the four major Sunni schools of Islamic law had to say about it? Law as an autonomous discursive field yields a spectrum of solutions to the "problem" of women's mosque attendance. Fairly early in Islamic history, the concept of *fitna*—the "sexual temptation and chaos assumed to result from the interaction of unrelated men and women" (25)—appeared in juristic discussion of women's mosque access, and became central in at least the Maliki discussion of women's presence in mosques from the fifth century AH/twelfth century CE. Though other schools of legal thought considered *fitna* to refer to political strife or "testing" in general, among Maliki thinkers, the more sexualized notion influenced the denial of mosque access for women. In later developments, the concept propelled thinking about taxonomies of women. Those who were older, probably postmenopausal and therefore less sexually desirable, were permitted to attend public prayer, while younger women were a problematic category. Some (not just the Maliki school) even go so far as to create a taxonomy of appearance so that those who have seductive potential, whether young or old, can legitimately be denied access. However in spite of this differentiation among distinct categories of women, by the seventh century AH/thirteenth century CE, Katz argues, "women were well established in *fiqh* discourse as a much more monolithic group pervasively associated with the fear of sexual chaos" (105).

Katz examines the juridical arguments chronologically and highlights the core issues of gender under negotiation among hadith specialists and jurists in the face of changing patterns of women's presence in public spaces. We are told that quite apart from the observed behavior of women, *ideas* about women's participation or nonparticipation in public prayer "deeply informed at least some scholars' religious imaginations and their vision of gender roles" (109). The discursively constructed positions of male jurists who found reasons to limit women's mosque attendance never efficaciously reflected social reality, because in spite of what the jurists maintained, the historical record shows that women participated in various activities in mosques including prayer. But the jurists' positions were available for active deployment against women's presence when "real behavior" became problematic.

Instances of problematic "real behavior" are the subject of the next two chapters of the book. Chapter 2 reveals popular attitudes toward women's presence in the mosques in Cairo, Jerusalem, Istanbul, and cities in Iraq from the seventh

century CE to the seventeenth, and documents everything from hadith transmission sessions presided over by female authorities to mixed audiences before preachers and teachers. Women's presence seems to have been routine, if not without opposition from the religious elite.

Chapter 3 turns to a specific incident in Mecca in 937 AH/1530 CE, when authorities decided to ban women from the Sacred Mosque during nighttime hours. The ban was precipitated by political events: the defeat of the Mamluks and the arrival of the Ottoman administration to the Hijaz. The Ottoman *amir*, a political authority, ordered the gates of the Sacred Mosque shut at night to prevent dogs from entering. One thing led to another, as they often do, and allegations of sexual improprieties "too dreadful to mention" (206) led to the ban on women's presence in the mosque after the *isha'* prayers, unless they were circumambulating the Ka'aba. Soon enough, zealous guards used the ban as an excuse to harass even those women who circumambulated. Women were forced out altogether and the gates locked behind them. Katz examines a manuscript compiled by Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Ghaffar, preserved in Cairo, which was the author's passionate attempt to get the Meccan ban reversed. Katz's main focus is on the efforts Ibn 'Abd al-Ghaffar takes against the ban and his argument that women should not be denied the opportunity to occupy worship space without just cause to remove them. Women were banned from sacred space during nighttime hours even when innocent of sexual behavior, and thus, for Ibn 'Abd al-Ghaffar, the restriction was overbroad. Katz points out that he argues "whereas scholars of various schools have expressed varying degrees of disapproval for mosque attendance by women of different categories, they have never actually declared it to be forbidden" (247). In his defense of the concept of individual moral responsibility, he avoids the concept of *fitna* and "what by that time had become the term's global and essentialistic association with the presence and visibility of women" (250).

Katz's final chapter looks at modern developments and the underlying construction of gender in modern legal discussions of women's mosque access. In the twentieth century, many Muslim reform thinkers not only welcomed women's presence in mosques but also sought to change how women used sacred space. Chastising women for their superstitious practices of the past, reformers saw mosque attendance as an opportunity to properly educate women. Excluding women from mosques had only contributed to their ignorance, and the mosque would become one of the sites of the formation of the "new woman." By the 1980s, attitudes shifted in favor of a public role for women. Katz notes that by the end of the twentieth century, gender-defined femininity was constructed "in terms of domesticity and nurture rather than sexual desire and social danger" (275), and women's attendance at mosques was "positively desirable" (276).

Katz concludes by posing a chicken/egg dilemma: did women's successful assertion of their desire to be present force the hand of religious thinkers to approve of and accommodate women in mosques, or did the development of normative justifications of women's presence embolden women to attend mosques in greater numbers? It is not clear that a causal relationship can be determined, though Katz notes, "only fieldwork-based case studies can elucidate the

process in specific contexts” (289). Overall, this book is praiseworthy for its extensive use of textual sources, making it an excellent source for the study of intellectual discourse on women’s mobility and visibility in Islam.

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*What Is a Madrasa?* By Ebrahim Moosa. University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 304 pages. \$28.00 (hardcover), \$27.99 (e-book).

Alternating between personal memoir, history, and a qualitative study of Indian and Pakistani madrasas, Ebrahim Moosa’s *What Is a Madrasa?* endeavors to address this politically fraught question, while also proposing ways to ensure the madrasa’s future relevance in an ever-changing geopolitical and religious landscape. Written for a general public, students and teachers, as well as for the policymakers and his former madrasa teachers whom he addresses directly, the book weaves together the histories, practices, and roles of madrasa education in India and Pakistan. From preserving and circulating particular forms of knowledge to shaping religious subjectivities and impacting political sentiments, madrasas are an integral part of how Islam is understood, enacted, and transmitted. Moosa examines their multiple functions and their heterogeneous iterations, balancing his appreciation for their particular contributions to the sustenance of Islamic scholarship and subjectivities with a critical stance on increasingly narrow purviews that have shifted the madrasa system from a “republic of letters” to a “republic of piety.” Narrating himself as a beneficiary and supporter of the madrasa system, Moosa offers possible reforms and approaches to curricula, which he believes will not compromise authenticity, but will reinvigorate the “cosmopolitan instincts” that have been a historically dynamic part of Islamic scholarship through its history (231).

The book is divided into four sections. In the first section, “Lived Experience,” Moosa traces his own intellectual journey and search for an “authentic” Islamic knowledge from the multi-ethnic and multi-religious public schools of Cape Town, South Africa, to the Deoband and Nadwa madrasas of India. Reflecting on those experiences from his current position as a scholar of religion based in the American academy, he considers both the limits and benefits of his madrasa education. He advocates for shifting madrasa curriculum toward a “big picture” approach that engages students in the specificities of historical context and individual biographies toward a greater understanding of Islamic thought and practice across time and space in relation to social scientific and humanistic understandings of the world. Opponents of such approaches see “the madrasa as a model of a counter-utopia” or a cultural bulwark that resists encroachments of a materialistic West, as well as the hostilities of the colonial nation-state and the “failing postcolonial state” (51). While an advocate for pious imperatives, Moosa laments the exclusive prioritization of the “knowledge of