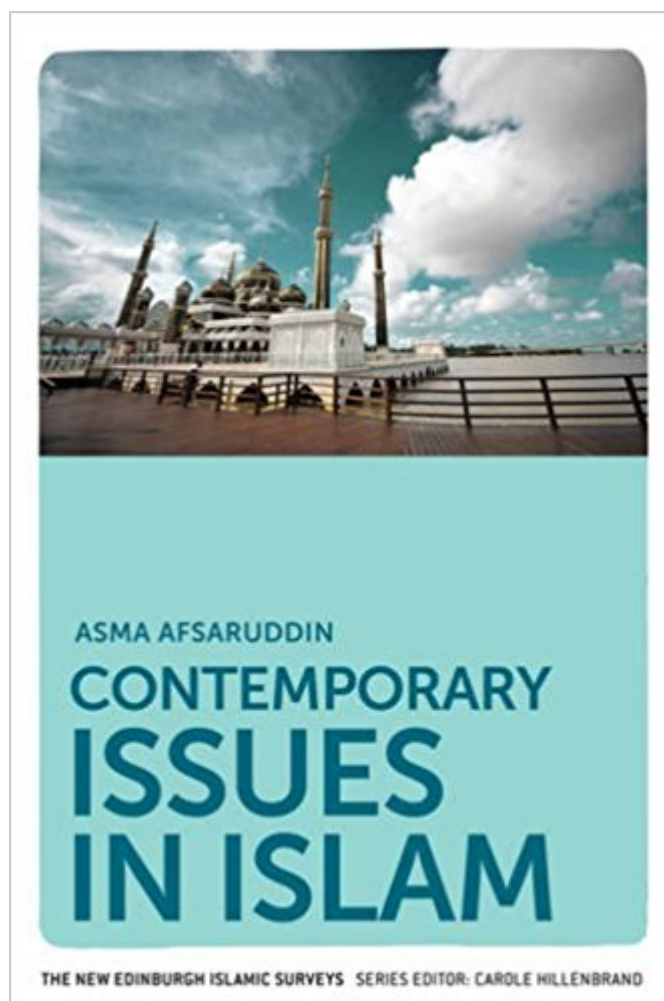


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# Contemporary Issues In Islam (The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys EUP)



## Synopsis

Received an honorable mention at the 2016 British-Kuwait Friendship Society Book Prize

Key 'hot-button' contemporary issues in Islam, often at the centre of public scrutiny, are the focus of this book. By placing the discussion of topics such as the Sharia, jihad, the caliphate, women's status and interfaith relations within a longer historical framework, *Contemporary Issues in Islam* reveals their multiple interpretations and contested applications over time. Most public - and occasionally academic - discourses in the West present the Islamic tradition as unchanging and therefore unable to respond to the modern world. Such an ahistorical approach can foster the belief that Muslim-majority and Western societies are destined to clash. This book reveals instead the diversity and transformations within Islamic thought over time. Focusing on this internal diversity permits us to appreciate the scriptural and intellectual resources available within the Islamic tradition for responding to the challenges of modernity, even as this tradition interrogates and shapes modernity itself.

About the series: The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys is a well-established and highly regarded series of over 30 volumes introducing key areas within Islamic Studies. Each book is written by an expert in the field, offering an overview of its subject as well as presenting original thinking, making it suitable for students and academics alike.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This long after 9/11, Western public discourse about Islam appears to be getting (if possible) even less subtle and nuanced than ever before. Complex questions about context, power and history are

increasingly shunned in favour of simpler and simpler questions about Islam's timeless essence. Asma Afsaruddin reminds us in this learned and timely book that only a longer historical view allows us to better understand the complexities of the public expression of Islam in modern conditions that have been both imposed on Muslims from without and developed by them from within." -- Andrew March, Yale University "For many westerners, Islam appears peculiarly resistant to democracy, freedom, and women's rights, while simultaneously prone to violence and oppression. While numerous Muslims can critique and challenge these stereotypes through personal contacts and dialogue, few of them write books in English that are up to this task. Fortunately, we now have Asma Afsaruddin's new book, *Contemporary Issues in Islam*, which presents an openly liberal Muslim argument that Islam is (or should be) democratic, peaceful, empowering to women, and a collegial participant in interfaith dialogue." -- Scott C. Lucas, *Los Angeles Review of Books* "Contemporary Issues in Islam is a mature work that reflects decades of careful research and intellectual synthesis with ample attention to both primary and secondary literature. The monograph will likely appeal not only to scholars and students in religious studies and Islamic studies, but also political science and history as well as journalists." -- Elliott Bazzano, *newbooksnetwork.com* "Reading no more than the contents section of this book, one gets a pretty good idea of its considerable overall importance, dealing as it is with "The Shoals of Modernity

Asma Afsaruddin is Professor of Islamic Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at Indiana University, Bloomington. She is the author and/or editor of seven books, including *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (2013) and *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (2008). She was named a Carnegie Scholar in 2005.

great product

Asma Afsaruddin has performed a valuable service for readers interested in a deeper understanding of one of the most contentious -- and contested -- issues of our day, that of Islam and its place in a globalizing world dominated by Western economic, political, and intellectual interests. Much of what passes for political speech, social media exchanges, and media accounts about Islam and the Muslim world lacks historical context and instead falls back on simple clichés or deeper discursive trends. Afsaruddin offers a much-needed corrective to this sad state of affairs. She addresses today's 'hot-button' issues of Islam and women, Islam and politics, Islam and sharia with insight and nuance, characteristics too often missing in the Public Square. The book then concludes

with useful chapters on Islam in America and on trends and developments in interfaith dialogue. Contemporary Issues in Islam should be required reading for anyone proposing to author a think-tank White Paper, write an op-ed, make a political speech, or post a blog on the topic. We would all be the better for it.

Contemporary Issues in Islam does what many of us hoped a single book could do – effectively challenge essentializing, stereotypical discourses about Islam and Muslims and replace them with well-researched, historically-grounded, and nuanced accounts of the diversity within the Islamic tradition on a number of critical topics. These include Sharia (not a fixed law at all); politics (no, theocracy is not inevitable); gender (yes, women’s lib is possible in Islamic terms); coexistence with non-Muslims (tolerance is indeed an Islamic virtue), and much, much more. It is hard to over-emphasize the timeliness and importance of this immensely readable, even gripping book as Islamophobia (also discussed in the book) goes into overdrive in the West. The author has done yeoman’s work in writing this book. Although ISIS was only beginning to loom on the horizon when this work was completed, the book’s content is a clear and ringing rebuttal to the group’s poisonous ideology.

My criticism of this book is completely from an editorial standpoint rather than a literary one. As a senior undergrad student who has taken courses in Islam before, this book is fairly difficult to get through. The author seems to pontificate through out the book; often using words just as "intellectual filler". The author refers to the works of Islamic scholars several times without any introduction on who they are or what their significance to Islam is. She also mentions phrases and concepts in Arabic in a very casual manner as if to assume that the reader has some knowledge of or can speak the Arabic language. Overall, the content is stimulating and worth discussing further but I would not recommend this text to an undergraduate class, even to an upper-division undergraduate Islamic religious studies class. And certainly not to an undergrad intro course on world religions. This book’s target audience seems to be Islamic or interfaith dialogue scholars or those working on becoming said scholars. A significant background in Islamic history, jurisprudence, and Arabic are highly recommended before taking on this text. Having said all that, maybe my issue isn’t with this text but with the instructor for assigning it. Oh well.

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