

You Still Don't Know About Islam (Part 2)

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SPEAKERS

Simpsons, If You Don't Know, Now You Know, Megan Goodwin, Bonus Ending, Dr. Debra Majeed, A Little Bit Leave It, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:18

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Megan Goodwin 00:41

What's up nerds?! Hi, hello! I am Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions, race, and gender.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:48

Hi, hello. I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, a historian of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and South Asia. Well, hi hello, Megan! How ya hangin' in?



Megan Goodwin 00:57

I mean... I'm still here! Pandemic fine is, I think, the only answer. I... don't know that I'll ever be less mad about the large adult failstate in which we live! But uh, yeah! I'm glad we're here. I'm glad to be talking to you. These are always fun!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:16

They are, indeed. I'm so thrilled to get to do this fun stuff with you.



Megan Goodwin 01:19

I know! I'm a goddamned delight. *giggles*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:23

chuckles Alright, so, here we are! Doing another Islam episode. Is there anything you're looking forward to, anything we *absolutely* must say?



Megan Goodwin 01:29

I mean, I am stoked beyond measure that Dr. Debra Majeed is joining us later on. She is Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Beloit College, and is a religious historian who makes the interconnection between religion and gender and justice central to her life's work. We're going to talk about it later, but her book "Polygyny: What It Means When African American Muslim Women Share Their Husbands" is so, so good. I love to teach it, I love to read it, it's so smart, and just what a treat that she's here! I am also stoked that you, as promised, will talk more about Islam in a bunch of places. I think you said you'd make sure we got to West Africa, since, well, we'll say why below. No spoilers.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:07

Okay, fair. No spoilers. But I'm itching to get to the good stuff. So, let's just go!



Megan Goodwin 02:11

Yeah, yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:12

How could this happen? I was so careful. I picked the wrong play, the wrong director, the wrong... LESSON PLAN! *Where did I go right?*



Megan Goodwin 02:23

Oh, Mel. For the sake of good pedagogy, let us restate the plan. Today, we're talking about Islam, again, for two reasons. First, because we've been telling you for all the episodes ever, religion is imperial, which has meant, for our topic today, that Islam gets a particularly nasty gloss in the world religions paradigm. And second, we think you can't call yourself religiously literate without actually knowing how Islam is practiced in communities, or that Islam looks different in different regions, times and cultures.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:57

Absolutely. Which brings us to the thesis! Today we're going to push back on the world religions model HARD by talking about Islam in places that fall out of scholarly work, that don't fit neatly into many-- maybe even most-- subcategories within the world religions model, or even the study of religion, writ large. In short, we're talking about Islams that get swept under, marginalized, ignored despite their import-- and being marginalized by power structures does NOT mean a lack of importance, nerds.



Megan Goodwin 03:30

Nope.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:31

Which kind of means that we're going to talk a lot today about Black, African American, and African Islams. Because HOOO boy do we need to address anti-Black racism in the study of Islam, the study of American religions, and the whole ass world religions paradigm.



Megan Goodwin 03:47

Yeah, hoo boy indeed! Stone cold bummers PLUS new information about vibrant communities? Man, if we weren't best friends before, we would be now. So that brings us to the 101 on today-- *clicks tongue*-- the section where we do professor work!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:03

Best friends don't let best friends ignore systemic and pandemic-levels of anti-Blackness. Nope, no sirree Bob.




Megan Goodwin 04:08


They certainly do not. And THAT is a good ethic of care. Here for it. But let's start with the basic assumptions-- and I'm going to lob this one to you, but I'll bet you'll be mad about having to answer it. Hey! How do we know that anti-Blackness is a problem within the world religions paradigm? Or, anti-Blackness is a problem within Islamic studies? Orrrrr (I mean, I know how we know, but you tell me), how do we know that anti-Blackness is a problem in the study of American religions?





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:34


Gevalt ist mir. I know that's the obvious set of questions, but man. What a hard thing to just... summarize quickly? And what a... what a heavy way to start this episode.


 M Megan Goodwin 04:47
Yeahhh...


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:47
BUT! Let me start with each of those as its own thing.


 M Megan Goodwin 04:51
One step at a time is usually a good move. I approve, as someone who likes a direct and transparent pedagogy, and also as somebody who tends to trip if I am not very careful about where I'm putting my feet. So, I generously will take the American religions piece off your plate, since, as you so often remind me, you small, TINY, obnoxious lady, you, that is the one region I actually do.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:16
HA! Yeah. Thanks.

 M Megan Goodwin 05:17
You're welcome.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:18
Okay--

 M Megan Goodwin 05:18
I'll just, I'll just take this tiny little piece of the world and you can do the rest. Thanks. Thanks.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:22
Okay. So. Uhhh... the first question you asked was, how do we know that anti-Blackness is a problem in the world religions paradigm?

 M Megan Goodwin 05:29
Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:30

Okay. Well, we already addressed some of this WAY back in our African Diasporic Religions episode, episode 402. The second episode of this mega season.



Megan Goodwin 05:39

Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:40

And we set a lot of this during our season on race, gender, and religion, BUT, let's start with the basic fact. The world religions paradigm was literally invented at the same time as AND in conversation with the enslavement of Black people. The scientific racism that established whiteness as good, healthy, correct, neutral, and Blackness as bad, ill, incorrect, deviant. We literally cannot and should not think about the world religions model apart from the world in which it was created, sometimes by the very authors of other problematic racist stuff!



Megan Goodwin 06:22

Yeah, no, I don't think we can overstate that some of the scholars, bureaucrats, philosophers, economists, policymakers, and alleged scientists were sometimes one and the same, or besties, or, in one part of their lives the scholar and another part a Parliamentarian, or an expert witness, or part of the colonizing army. Those boundaries are not so rigid, and the racism is everywhere.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:45

A million kajillion percent. So let's talk specifically about the world religions model piece of this.



Megan Goodwin 06:51

Yeah.




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:52

Goodwin, Dr. Rashid said last time that the world religions paradigm divided the world into East and West, and then Dr. Petersen added onto that, and both of them ended up saying that this makes Islam really confusing when you're working within this system Because it's an Abrahamic religion, it comes literally from the same Arab, Middle Eastern lands that Judaism


and Christianity come from. So, naturally, if those religions from the Middle East are Western, then non-Western religions from the real east, like Asia, are Eastern. Except that Islam is big in the East. So already, Islam being Eastern is factual and missing from the paradigm.

 Megan Goodwin 07:37

Yeah, okay. Wait. You're not wrong, obviously. But also, I know from prior episodes that you are big mad about Orientalism-- the bias against the so-called East which definitely includes bias against Islam. So, what is... what is happening here?

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:52


Yeah, exactly.

 Megan Goodwin 07:53

What? No, that's not helpful. What... what is happening?!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:57

laughs Okay. Because the world religions paradigm, which assumes East and West, because 18th and 19th century religio-racism, it doesn't make sense. So of course I didn't say anything helpful!

 Megan Goodwin 08:08

laughs

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:10

It is fluid. The system itself is fluid to suit the needs of white Christian supremacy, full stop. Islam is Eastern when it's convenient-- when Islam is a threat to Christianity, when Islam needs to be made fundamentally other and exotic, incompatible with Western ideas and norms. It is Western, though, when we want to claim multiculturalism, everyone's in the same boat, the nearness of Islam is a way to prove its wrongness. Close! So close! But, no cigar! But Megan?

 Megan Goodwin 08:42

Yes, IRMF?

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:44

Where is Africa-- the whole ass continent-- in any of this?

M

Megan Goodwin 08:50

Okay, let me think. I-- well, it's not East... but it's not West? But, I don't know. I... I assume some of Northern Africa-- like, the brown, Arabic speaking, maybe Arab parts of northern Africa-- get classified as East, because they fit a model of Islamic or how we think about Islamic?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:13

Okay, fair. Even though that makes me livid (and I know that you're saying this because we are doing a bit here)--

M

Megan Goodwin 09:20

Yes!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:20

But, obviously this makes me livid, because Morocco is definitely west of like, HALF of Western Europe??

M

Megan Goodwin 09:27

Yeah. It's very West. Like... *laughs*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:29

So what about Africa, though? You sort of rationalized the question, and we are making a joke about it. So neither of us are really answering it, but-- so let's-- let's come back to this question! What about Africa?

M

Megan Goodwin 09:40


Yeah, okay. So, the part where Africa gets left out is perhaps your literal point here, you tricky, tricky bitch.




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:47

Yeah, basically. Africa, the whole ass continent, is either divided up using racially motivated and fucking suspect assumptions into areas like "northern Africa," "brown Africa," and "sub-Saharan Africa" which is again code for where we expect to find "brown" versus "Black"

...sub-Saharan Africa, which is, again, code for where we expect to find brown versus black skin. Which, so you hear me say it, isn't even in the LEAST accurate.

 Megan Goodwin 10:15

Yeah, no. That's wrong.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:16


It is actually grotesquely assumptive and, again, built within racist paradigms.

 Megan Goodwin 10:21

Woof.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:21

But Africa as its own thing does not exist in the world religions model. Islam exists as this nebulous thing that can't really fit into east and west-- again, remember, west almost exclusively means white Christians. (And we're gonna get to how Judaism was written OUT of westerners in the Making Mel Brooks Proud Judaism episode. Hold on to your butts.) Africa is missing in the model. So, if that's true, if Africa is missing in the model, then Islam can't be African in the model. And, huh! Fuck, do we have a problem!

 Megan Goodwin 10:54

Yeah, that's a big problem. That's a really big problem! Because even *I* know that Islam is the second largest religion in Africa, and that there are thriving, millennia-old Muslim communities in places like Senegal, Mali, Nigeria in western Africa, and Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi in eastern Africa-- there's a lot of Islam in Africa! What the hell!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:12

Like so much. Like, SO much.

 Megan Goodwin 11:14

Okay. So, I hear you say, as always, the world religions paradigm is a problem, here because it does not even THINK about Africa! It's just dropped out a whole ass giant continent. And it treats Islam-- the world religions paradigm treats Islam in a bizarre way. So even though Black Africans have also been Muslims for a lo-- such a long time!-- Black African Islam is often

ignored within the framework through which we-- like, scholars, but also media and policymakers-- it's how we understand religion. Africa, just like-- Africa and African Islam just drop out of how we're thinking about religion in the world.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:56

That's exactly what I'm saying. And it's specifically Black Africa, right? Because it's not... it's not an imagination of places like Egypt, which gets racially portrayed in a different way. Right? So it's... it's all the things. And what that means, practically, is that when you study Islam at university, you will likely never encounter a class on African Islam. Perhaps you have a cool professor who points this out, but you really might not. Or perhaps you go to one of the few VERY elite universities that has a Africanist who is also an Islamicist on staff. But, chances are you might not. African Muslims have long histories, huge numbers, unique cultures. But our system of organizing information is such that they are literally left out-- of a world religions class, because Islam is covered by talking about the Middle East (usually), and out of an Islamic class, because most Islamicists, myself included, are not trained in African Islams.



Megan Goodwin 12:56

Yeah! Yeah. No, that's... that's trash. And... let me add to that trash. As promised, I'm going to talk about what's now the United States, because in American religions, we also don't have a spot for Islam. Islam is maybe part of a multicultural, multireligious USA-- like, there were Muslims in what's now the US before there WAS a United States. But to get a degree in the subfield of Islam is not also-- usually, anyway-- to be trained in the subfield of American studies. We have lots of links on this in the homework, but anti-Blackness and Islamophobia in the system of the world religions paradigm-- the system that we're all still in-- means that black Muslims in the US are vastly underrepresented in American religions and American studies.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:46

Yeah. Which is why I wanted to make sure that we said all of this, out loud, but also make sure in today's episode on Islam that we are specifically talking about Black, African and African American practices.



Megan Goodwin 13:58

Yeah! Well done making us all collectively care more about context and intellectual history!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:03

You're welcome. It's kind of my whole thing.



Megan Goodwin 14:06

Well with that graceful pivot, what can you tell me about Islam in Africa-- the whole ass continent? What's an example you've got? I know how much you love a case study.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:15

So graceful. We are basically ballerinas.



Megan Goodwin 14:19

How did you know that I used to study THE DANCE? No joke. I took four years of ballet when I was a wee gingerlette. It did... not stick. But yeah! That's us. Definitely not deeply clumsy or more into contact sports with grunting and shoving or in my case, elbow strikes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:33

Right... right. Alright, so for this, I think I'm just gonna lay out what I find fun to teach. So let's talk Timbuktu in Mali. I feel like if you grew up with Looney Tunes, Timbuktu along with Albuquerque were just funny-sounding-to-white-folk place names that represented something far off.



Megan Goodwin 14:50

Yeah, like Abu Dhabi, where Garfield kept trying to send Nermal.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:53

Exactly. It's fun how we use Orientalist and racist ideas in media meant for children!



Megan Goodwin 14:59

How 'bout that?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:00

Super fun! Different episode, though.



Megan Goodwin 15:02

HA.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:03

But, in real life, out of Garfield, and Bugs Bunny, and other various media's, Timbuktu was, for centuries, a center of Islamic learning, Muslim practice, major kingdoms and empires, and really like incredible architecture, which I admit, is harder to talk about than it is to look at so I'm gonna stash some images in the show notes.



Megan Goodwin 15:22

Smart.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:23

When I say Timbuktu was the center of learning, I do not mean small potatoes. Some scholars estimate that at its height, the university basically had 25,000 students.



Megan Goodwin 15:32

Damn!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:33

That's the size of a major land-grant, big 10 college in the US today, and this was in the 14th through 16th centuries. That means that scholars from all over-- definitely other African regions, but also the Middle East, Persia, and further afield in Asia-- came to Timbuktu, a city in modern day Mali. And they came there specifically because they considered it a central place of learning, not just for Qur'anic studies or religious education, but for things that Muslims got famous for, like math (hello, algebra)--



Megan Goodwin 16:07

Thank you for that.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:08

--and astronomy, because only y'all crazy ass Europeans thought the world was flat.



Megan Goodwin 16:13

And shoutout to Dr. Ali Olomi for making us think more about Muslim astrology, because that's really interesting and dope. Shoutout, call back... please continue.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:22

Except I said astronomy, not astrology, but whatevs.



Megan Goodwin 16:26

laughs Whatever. Stars. I'll just cut it out. I don't know what words mean. Please keep trekking.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:31

There are still vital manuscripts of all sorts held there, and again, ignoring the role of African Muslims and Islam doesn't make this place less important. It just makes you stupid.



Megan Goodwin 16:42

It does make me stupid. I'm less stupid now than when we started, though. Cause I learned all that! What else can you teach me?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:48

Uh, okay! I want to mention that Senegal, another western African nation, has quite a famous and important history not only of Sufism, what Omid Safi talked with us about WAY back in season one, but also of Islamic music and rituals involving music, dance and chanting.



Megan Goodwin 17:05

Cool! Lots of students show up in my classes thinking about Islam and... as, like, a prohibitive religion? That Islam like bans music and art. So, yeah! Talk to me about Islamic music and art in western Africa!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:19

Okay. So, Senegal is something like 95% Muslim. It is overwhelmingly a Muslim-majority state. But beyond that, scholars and data suggest that something like 95% of Muslims are part of Sufi orders.



Megan Goodwin 17:33

Oh wow!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:33



So-- which is to say that they are Muslims who also belong to collectives that study, pray, sing, gather together, and usually subscribe to what a lot of folks call "mystical" Islam. And I said mystical in that silly way because I-- like, the word makes me itchy. I would-- I would maybe suggest Sufi Islam is something like that, and it also is something that stresses a personal transcendent relationship with God within a community. (Hashtag it's complicated.) But I get itchy about the word mystic because it's either sounds insane-- like, like literally, it sounds like what people used to be incarcerated in mental institutions for, particularly when they were racialized others-- or mystic sounds like what Omid likes to call "Islam lite," or "diet Islam," which isn't the case either.



Megan Goodwin 18:25

Right. Or it gets removed from Islam altogether, like we saw when he talked about Rumi, right? People, white ladies and bookclubs loooooove them some Rumi. They are often very surprised to find out that Rumi was Muslim! Anyway.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:40

Yeah. Yeah. So, suffice it to say that Sufi traditions, which are found in both Sunni and Shi'i Islam, take love, connection, peeling back the veil of this existence to a brighter reality really seriously, on top of the other, like, so called "regular" Muslim things that Muslims do, like prayer, or fasting during Ramadan, or charity work.



Megan Goodwin 19:03

Yeah. Okay. So, what does Senegalese Islam really look like? It seems like it's Sufi, but practically, what's involved in that?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:11

Well, so one of the hallmarks of Sufi orientations within Islam is that the end-goal is experiencing what is called annihilation in God, or "fana." That doesn't mean death-- famously, the Sufi injunction is to "die before you die," which always confuses my students and sounds pretty grim, but for Sufi philosophers and poets means something like both experiencing God directly, and then coming to the realization that what we see here in this mortal realm isn't all there is. It's just, like, knowing. Not just, like, knowing that, but seeing it, feeling it, comprehending it, having some sort of revelatory story experience. This is the part of Islamic studies where I, quite frankly, flail, because words don't really add out when we're talking about this kind of experiential phenomenon.



Megan Goodwin 20:02

Yeah, okay. I'm also getting a sense, more clearly now, of what you said in the last episode was that, like, Sufi isn't a third checkbox when we're talking about kinds of Muslims, right? Like, it's not a Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi option. This is a way of being in relationship to God and community that

isn't, like, a demographic percentage.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:24

That's exactly right.



Megan Goodwin 20:25

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:26

Which-- and frankly, like, this problem of explaining Sufism-- which I'm overstating on purpose because I want folks to feel that it isn't a third box, it's not super... it's not simplistic-- Sufi music is one of the ways that we might talk about something that's actually hard to talk about. So, in Senegal, there is a long, vibrant, incredible history of music accompanying Sufi dhikr rituals, or remembrance rituals. In other places in the world, there is music, chanting, or dance-- famously, for example, lots of folks have heard of the whirling Dervishes of Turkey. Those guys are-- that's a Sufi order, and they're doing Sufi ritual. The music in Senegal is so infused with Sufi Muslim imagery, and then in turn, the explicitly ritualistic music is so tied to religious experience that, frankly, it's a bit famous (even if white, American, non-Muslims don't know about it).



Megan Goodwin 21:20

Huh! So it seems like what you're saying is that this overwhelmingly Muslim place, Senegal, has an overwhelming orientation to mystical or Sufi Islam, and then specifically, there are musical traditions met to articulate, artistically, one's relationship to the Divine. And, you're suggesting that this is so widespread, that popular music has some of these features in religious ritual uses of these songs-- beats sounds, all of this is unique to the space, but also, it has influenced and shaped and gone beyond just, like, explicitly Muslim ritual practice.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:57

Yeah. Perfect. So much better than what I managed.



Megan Goodwin 22:01

I don't know that that's true, but it was shorter. Anyway, I want to switch it up for a minute and talk about Black Muslims in what's now the United States, many of whom trace their ancestry to enslavement, but not all of whom trace their Islam to the same sources. Like you said already, in the world religions paradigm, Africa just falls out, just, like, disappears from the map, except for, like, old school terms that I loathe, like "animism."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:28

Oh, my god. Yeah. I totally forgot about that piece. Gross. Continue.



Megan Goodwin 22:32

Yeah, yeah. I can't help but wonder if Africa and Islam and African Islam falling out of how America thinks about its history... just doesn't tie to larger anxieties about admitting that, like, the founding of America is gross and based in enslavement. Anyway. Islamic studies-- everyone gets trained within a world religions paradigm in which Africa falls out. I feel like you maybe even have an article about overrepresenting the Middle East in the JAAR...?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:08

Yeah, yeah. Enough. Continue.



Megan Goodwin 23:09

laughs Okay, but people should read it. Anyway, what I think I want to say, really, is that there's-- while there's too much to say about Black Islam-- even Black American Islam for a segment bit-- but that Black Muslims in the US creatively interpret Islam in ways that reflect the experiences, the realities, of anti-Black racism, almost from the minute we see Islam in what's now the United States. And we see it early, as in: one of our most reliable and cited primary sources of enslaved people is Omar ibn Sayyid, who kept a journal in Arabic. Because bro was literate in Arabic and he was a Muslim! We also see the development of Black liberation theology centering Islam as liberatory, as specifically both a religion of Black ancestors, but ALSO explicitly NOT the religion of white Christians enslavers. AND we see in Black Islam in the US structures of care that come from gendered ways of thinking about families, and kin, some of which stems from the brutal and disgusting ways anti-Black racism and slavery disallowed Black people to have families, which is as good a way as any to set up for Dr. Majeed's contribution to the episode.



Dr. Debra Majeed 24:22

My name is Debra Majeed and I study gender in Islam with a particular focus on family law issues. I've also started a nonprofit called the Muslim Family Advocacy Project. I care that neighbors, colleagues, family, and friends know about what I'm passionate about to expand their awareness of the lived realities of Muslim women, and the complex and rich dynamics of Muslim family life in the US. Muslim women are often viewed and projected within the narrow prism of victimhood. While some women-- far too many-- are marginalized and impoverished largely on the basis of gender, others of us are leaders of nations, states, corporations, and religious authorities in our own mosques! Our experiences as Muslim women are not the same, nor are we monolithic in thought or practices. Still, wherever we are, we remain central to the fabric of the global community of faith and, in the US, American Muslim life. Tradition or the norms of a particular region, even individual communities, are often linked to and influenced by

that dynamic and intersecting forces of culture, economics, law, and religion. Among African American Muslims in the US, for example, most of whom are Muslim by choice, gender segregation in the mosque is rare, as is the belief that women should pray in private and at home. In fact, communing with our Creator and communal public spaces with our men and our children is second nature to us, sort of reminiscent of the time of the Prophet, when he integrated women in communal rituals. Not only would most mosques be void of their vibrancy without our presence, but it is in the mosque that we exert agency over our religious experiences. As one scholar has observed, by occupying, protecting, and appropriating spaces in the mosque, African American Muslim women further a project of religious self-making that bonds us together as women, and enables us to strategize and partner with men, and or on our own, to resist patriarchy and gender oppression in our religious communities. So, what's one festival that helps illustrate varieties of pluralism? For me, the observance of Eid, whether after Ramadan or hajj. It's the best way we Muslims symbolize for ourselves and to the world what acceptance of difference look like. Muslim women and others are working from within and outside of our faith community to respond to an expanded awareness of essential reality. Some models of marriage and family that are promoted as Islamic by imams and other religious authorities are far removed from the embodied practice of Prophet Muhammad, and are out of step with the needs and concerns of contemporary Muslim families. Even when considering marriage, all practices by Muslims are not equal. Muslim marriage, like all others, can be complicated. But we need to shed more light on the many examples in which Muslim women faithfully and creatively deploy Islamic ideals and doctrines to build flourishing marriages, or safeguard themselves and those they love from various threats and harm, and contribute to fruitful community life, while also remaining sane! Muslim women across the world are rediscovering the truth-- that agency is not means to give, but agency is women's to embody, thanks to our Creator. Well, unfortunately, Islam is the devil of the moment. Too often, Muslims are asked, how can we follow a religion that promotes terrorism? The answer is: we do not. In fact, the Qur'an, our holy book, features explicit prohibitions against the actions of killing innocents, and there is an entire ethos about the value of all human life and the responsibility to support that life, and the responsibility to rage against evil, first within our own selves. So for me, there's no relationship between terrorism and Islamic sources. There is a link between terrorism and erroneous interpretations of Islamic authorities, however. With the guidance of Amina Wadud, I have come to appreciate the merits of experience in the work of scriptural interpretation, whether the text is the Divine word is revelation, or the Divine word is embodied human reality. Through her, more Muslim women (including myself!) are experiencing Islam we believe in. We can see ourselves in the text because we see our presence as necessary, important, vital, and appreciated by Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala ["Glory to God, the Exalted"]. In reference to Islam, we too await the return of Isa, or Jesus, and we view his mother, Maryam, as a model of faith in piety for Muslim men and for Muslim women.

M

Megan Goodwin 29:48

I think the thing that I so deeply appreciate about Dr. Majeed's work is how careful and precise she is about presenting the complexities of a marriage structure that is unfamiliar to lots of folks in the US, Muslims included. She's thinking about these complex family structures, both as something that should be taken really seriously, that people enter into with different degrees of willingness, and that, ultimately, one of the contributions I see her work making is a call precisely for what we've been talking about all along-- an ethic of care, a system that both make space for sexual difference, relationship difference, but also take seriously that not

everyone is equally protected under these systems. Her book, in particular, calls for ways both to honor religious commitments and the space made for multiple partner marriages in a way that takes care of the most vulnerable people in those relationships.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:49

Yeah. No, I think that's exactly right. I think one of the things that I really respond to and Dr. Majeed's work is, actually, when we asked her to be on this podcast (and she very graciously accepted), she said that she really bristled at the idea of being called an expert because... you know, we had like a couple of emails back and forth, and it was all in good fun, but she sort of was like, there's a lot of different kinds of expertise, and that PhD is only one of them. And so, I think that one of the things that her work and her activism in community is usually about taking seriously the people you work with, and taking seriously the expertise of people who know their own lives, and can speak, with expertise, about their own vantage point, needs, goals, and commitments, right?



Megan Goodwin 31:39

Absolutely.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 31:39

So I think one of the things that I really admire about her work is not just that, but that, frankly, like, as someone who does ethnography and works in community, that she's really not seeing herself as the interpreter, right? The person who takes novice responses, and then expertly weaves them together, but rather as one person who is doing work in her own expertise, representing the expertise of others, which I think is a radical way to think about people who have been systemically oppressed and persecuted, and taking them seriously. So, I think it's a great model for us.



Megan Goodwin 32:19

It absolutely is. Now it's time to move on to... A Little Bit Leave It!



A Little Bit Leave It 32:33

A Little Bit Leave It



Megan Goodwin 32:37

Where we're letting you know what we think the most important, most interesting, or most challenging part of the topic is. It is a little bit to leave you with. For me, little bit leave it today is that Islam is literally everywhere, and no matter how much you know about Islam and

Muslims, there's always more to learn. Today, I hope we learned that both Black Muslims-- duh, exist, and have existed for literally centuries-- and that anti-Blackness has shaped how we think about Islam and Muslims, both globally and here in the US.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 33:07

Yeah. Yes. I guess I'll follow that up with... *blows raspberry* Yeah, I said this last time, but I'm gonna build on it. I'm just gonna commit.



Megan Goodwin 33:16

Yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 33:16

Islam is plural and global. AND we miss a lot of the Islams that happen in the world-- historically, locally, contemporarily-- because we do not take Africa, as a whole ass continent, or Black folk seriously, regardless of where those folk live. We here is white people, but also white institutions. That's education, of course, but also healthcare, law, housing, you name it. That's it. Islam is plural. It's global. And it's Black. And it's African. And we do better when we know about the richnesses of our world.



Megan Goodwin 33:49

Yes, we do. And if you don't know, now you know--



If You Don't Know, Now You Know 33:52

If You Don't Know, Now You Know



Megan Goodwin 33:54

The segment where we get one factoid each. Today, I have a good one. It is not specifically about Black Muslims, but it is about Islam in the US, and I learned it from our beloved Dr. Kathleen Marie Foody. Did you know, IRMF, that the "Halloween" franchise, which irrevocably changed American horror, was produced by a Muslim dude? His name was Moustapha Al Akkad, and I WILL find a way to footnote him in my next book. You mark my words.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:19

I did NOT know that, because I don't really care about horror.

M

Megan Goodwin 34:23

laughs Fair enough. I care about a deeply. "Halloween" was an inflection point, I would argue, in the way that Americans understand horror. And the fact that it was bankrolled-- like, the entire franchise was bankrolled by a Muslim dude is the thing that I just learned and I'm very interested in.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:39

I love that! I also don't know what people know, so I guess I'll say this one as my little factoid. Swahili is one of those languages that just shows how cosmopolitan, how globalized the world is if you actually pay attention and, like, learn some shit. So. Swahili, because I can't assume that anyone knows anything, is an African language spoken in Eastern Africa in countries like Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda-- and other places too, but those are... those are the ones I know. It is in the Bantu group of languages, which are indigenous to eastern Africa, BUT, what I love-- this is my fun fact!-- is that Swahili also has something like 20% of its vocabulary drawn directly from other languages. Predominantly among those is Arabic, as well as Persian, Hindustani, Portuguese, and Malay. Which shows us that folks who spoke and speak this language were active on the Indian Ocean, because those "loan words" all assume trade, cohabitation, shared community, shared culture. So, the "too long, didn't listen" is that Swahili is evidence that Africa is not separate from the rest of the world, regardless of what white European colonizers would have you believe.

M

Megan Goodwin 35:55

Hmm, hmm. *If You Don't Know, Now You Know* Well, don't pack up your stuff yet, nerds. There's always more to learn, which means it's time for homework.

S

Simpsons 36:06

Homework!

M

Megan Goodwin 36:07

As always, we've got citations, references, and other goodies and transcripts stashed at keepingit101.com for every single episode, including this one. Check it out! Alright, I'm going to start us off-- and I will most importantly start us off by thanking our guest, Dr. Majeed, again, and also I will just tell her-- *giggles* I don't need to tell her, she knows-- tell YOU to read her work, starting with "Polygyny: What It Means When African American Muslim Women Share Their Husbands." I will say, obviously, this works beautifully in classes about Islam, but I have used it in American studies classes, I have used it in religion and sexuality classes-- highly recommended if you are looking for public facing, publicly available outside the university ways to think about her work. She has an episode on the New Books Network about the book. She has a really accessible review on Reading Religion, there's a TED talk, AND she writes a conclusion for Dr. Keica Ali's "Half of Faith: American Muslim Marriage and Divorce in the 21st Century."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:05

Yeah. Which is open source.



Megan Goodwin 37:06

It IS open source. I actually noted it at the end because there's other great stuff in there, as well, on domestic violence, suggesting "Khalidah's Story: An African American Muslim Woman's Journey to Freedom," which is available through the Faith Trust Institute. Dr. Majeed also has a chapter called "Polygyny and the Performance of Gendered Power among African American Muslims" in "New Horizons of Muslim Diaspora in North America and Europe." Beyond-- oh, well, she obviously shows up on Dr. Kayla Wheeler's "Black Islam Syllabus," but you should read the rest of the syllabus, too, for more important contributions about Black Muslims, and African Islam, and African American Islam on the Black Islam syllabus, which we have linked to before and we shall do it again. Dr. Kayla Wheeler and a number of other smart folks, including our guests from last time, Kristian Petersen, have contributed to the great online resource Sapelo Square, which focuses explicitly on Black Islam. It is edited by Su'ad Abdul khabeer, whose book "Muslim Cool" is also amazing and you should check out. And the last thing I will say is that thinking about marriage, divorce, dating, and relationships in American Islam, I must recommend the awesome and, as we said, open access compendium, "Half of Faith," edited by our beloved Dr. Kecia Ali and with contributions from so very many of our faves, including Juliane Hammer, Aminah Beverly Al-Deen, AND today's honored guest, Dr. Debra Majeed.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 38:34

Awesome! Well... well, you did a lot of America, so let me keep it simple and stick to NOT what's now the United States, as is... as is my general jam. So, I talked about Senegal, so let me give you some reper... let me give you some resources there. So, Laura Cochrane has a book called "Everyday Faith in Sufi Senegal," which is really good, um, and pretty recent. Mamadou Diouf has one, an edited volume, called "Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal," which, as an edited volume, there's a lot of range and variety in there, but all about those things. And then there's Oludamini Ogunnaike's "Deep Knowledge: Ways of Knowing in Sufism and Ifa, Two West African Intellectual Traditions," which is a brand new book. I think it was out last year. He has a number of public talks also, though, no, not all on this topic, but I will try to find you links to his public scholarship in the show notes. too! So that's on Senegal.




Megan Goodwin 39:39


Super interesting! Sorry, that sounds super interesting. I didn't know about this book.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 39:42


Oh, SUPER rad. That was on Senegal. Let me move on to Mali and Timbuktu, as well as a few publicly available resources since that was the other main example I gave y'all. So, there's this film called "Journey to Timbuktu," which is... fine, and it's on YouTube, and it's watchable.


 Megan Goodwin 39:58
laughs


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 39:58
I think it's actually quite good. There's things in film that I always want to critique that, on an audio medium you can't do, but it teaches well as long as you're willing to do that critique, okay?


 Megan Goodwin 40:06
Okay.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:07
Then I will say, there's an edited volume called "The Meanings of Timbuktu," which is pretty dated, but also worth your time. I'm gonna leave out the author's on that, because I don't know how to do that without...

 Megan Goodwin 40:20
That's fair!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:21
Just edit me.

 Megan Goodwin 40:22
Yep.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:22
And then, for good measure, I want to offer a book that's actually really good, but it pushes back on what I said in this episode on Timbuktu as unique-- which I don't know that I was saying, but I absolutely was presenting Timbuktu as special because it was our one example! For good measure. I have a book that pushes back on Timbuktu as unique. There's Ousmane Oumar Kane's "Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa," which is really great, and you should pick it up.



Megan Goodwin 40:49

Awesome! Big thanks to those of you writing reviews on iTunes, Amazon, and Google. It really helps! And if you want to be our Nerd of the Week, write us a review! That's how we can see your silly handle, you sillies! Our Nerds of the Week this time are... *laughs* okay: Pertusaria? I want to say? a_j_l, and... I think this is towatcher and not towatcher, but you know. You do you.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 41:14

laughs Join us next time for more HISTORY OF THE WORLD (RELIGIONS) PART 1, when we chat about Christianity and are helped out by guest expert Dr. Jorge J. Rodriguez V.



Megan Goodwin 41:25

Yes!! Holding onto my own butt about that episode. Shoutout to our research assistant, Alex Castellano, whose transcription work makes this pod accessible and therefore awesome. Need more religion nerderie? You know where to find us! Twitter. The answer is Twitter.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 41:40

You can find Megan on Twitter, usually every hour of the day, @mpgPhD, and me the other hours of the day, @ProfIRMF, or the show @KeepingIt_101. Find the website at keepingit101.com. Pick the Insta. Drop us a rating or review and become nerd royalty. Peace out, nerds.



Megan Goodwin 42:03

And do your homework! It's on the syllabus.



Bonus Ending 42:07

Senegal Sufi music