

Center for Global Islamic Studies and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies

**Kecia Ali**

Professor of Religion, Boston University

**Tuesday, March 6, 2018**

**4:15pm | STEPS 101**

**"Contesting Muhammad:  
Contemporary Controversies in Historical Perspective"**

Muhammad has been a contested figure since he lived a millennium and a half ago. His life story has been by both Muslims and non-Muslims, in myriad ways. Muslim praise has highlighted different aspects of his persona, from spiritual luminosity to diplomatic skill, as time and context demanded. Non-Muslims criticisms have been deeply shaped by preoccupations closer to home: Muhammad has been, variously, a pagan, an arch-heretic, an antichrist, and an imposter. Yet over the last two centuries, hagiographic and polemical writings have merged into a single, contentious, story, usually devoting substantial attention to Muhammad's relationships with women, especially his first wife, Khadija, and his young favorite, Aisha. Modern Muslim accounts of these marriages arose in tandem and in tension with Western depictions, and were shaped by new ideas about religion, sexuality, and marriage. Exploring these contested images of Muhammad as a husband illuminates key forces in contemporary Muslim thought, illustrates connections between Muslim and Western views of the Prophet, and shatters the illusion of timelessness in ideas about Muhammad.

**Wednesday, March 7, 2018**

**7:00pm | Roemmele Global Commons, Williams Hall**

**"Muslim Feminism, Islamic Law,  
and the Quest for Gender Justice"**

Feminism is a fraught term in contemporary America—does it mean one supports women's equality with men? A radical overthrowing of all systems of oppression? Is feminist even the right term? Islamic feminism is equally contested. Muslim advocates for gender justice navigate their tradition in a range of contemporary contexts. Sometimes disagreeing about priorities and methods, they bring a range of approaches to treat scripture, interpretation, national laws, and international human rights norms. Focusing on Muslim women academics and activists, Kecia Ali explores their vibrant and necessary work in the fields of scriptural interpretation, family law reform, and religious inclusion.

Kecia Ali is Professor of Religion at Boston University. In addition to her most recent book, *Human in Death: Morality and Mortality in J. D. Robb's Novels* (Baylor 2017), she is the author of several books about Islam. *In Sexual Ethics and Islam* (2nd ed. Oneworld 2016), *The Lives of Muhammad* (Harvard 2014), and other publications, she explores the complex intertwining of Muslim and Western norms about gender, sexuality, and marriage. Her current projects include an introductory book on *Women in Muslim Traditions*. You can read more about her at [www.keciaali.com](http://www.keciaali.com).

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