

Zainab Kabba

DPhil Student in Education

University of Oxford

“The Education of Young American Muslims: Religious Knowledge and Authority in Islamic Learning Institutions”

This study explores the religious educational experiences of a range of young Muslims in America. Focus is placed on the ways in which they use contact with religious knowledge and authority as a way to navigate understandings of what it means to be Muslim in a Muslim minority country. The study encourages readers to understand what it means to participate in a *tradition* of religious scholarship (Hefner & Zaman, 2007), without assigning *modernist* ideas of education. Through a multi-sited ethnographic approach, the study will examine four temporary Islamic learning environments to explore perceptions of knowledge and those who transmit it. Ethnography is conducted through understanding the social construction made in everyday behaviors of life in environments that are familiar or ‘natural’, to a group (Marcus, 1995; Brewer, 2000). This study problematizes the ‘natural’ and ‘physical’ of such environments, often viewed within the historical anthropological framework of researchers immersing themselves in the daily lives of communities different than their own. What happens when the quotidian is not the quotidian, and both the researcher and researched maintain positions of ‘immanent migrant’ (Denzin, 1978)? Is the measure of anthropological success of the research still measured against the ‘sorrow of parting’ (Evans-Pritchard, 1951)? The combined use of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation will illuminate how knowledge is understood, constructed, distributed, and contested by religious scholars and students, and identify factors that play a role in these configurations. How, where, and from whom American Muslims seek knowledge informs the ways in which they navigate their multiple identities and provides insight into ideas of citizenship, integral to discourses around narratives of Muslims in America and the distinct threads they weave through the social fabric of American society.