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“The Concept of Authority in Muslim Societies:
Political, Religious, Social and Literary”

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ABSTRACT

“Muslim Elites: The New Islamic Political and
Religious Authority in the West?”

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Very little research has examined the emergence of Western-born Muslims into the elite professions that are central to the operation of the capitalist free market and that serve as a central location of economic and political power. Less research still has examined how this is shaping citizenship among Muslims and the future of Islam in the West. These professions include finance, trade and auditing, and supporting free-market infrastructure including commercial law, consulting and the entrepreneurial arms of government public service. Many Muslim men and women in these professions maintain a commitment to their faith and are often at the forefront of identifying opportunities for the application of Islamic principles to the free market and developing these through the development of such social engineering mechanisms as Islamic finance and home loans, Islamic wills, marriage contracts, businesses and context-specific solutions for Muslim clients. These may have potentially profound impact on citizenship and belonging for current and future generations. The political and economic clout (and broader potential public appeal) of these new Muslim elites often significantly outweighs that of the Imams and Sheikhs. Other new Muslim elites trade in intellectual and cultural capital to shape wider public discourse at a level well beyond that of faith leaders. The paper, grounded in empirical research, explores these developments across the Western contexts of Australia, the United States and England, three countries with capitalist free markets and significant Muslim minorities.