

AMSS 39th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Cosmopolitan Islam: Globalization, Transnationalism and Muslim Diasporas”

Cosponsored by:
DePaul University, Chicago, IL
September 25, 2010

ABSTRACT

“Ummah Debates: American Student-Travelers in the Middle East”

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By tracing the spiritual journeys of Muslim American youth who travel to Cairo, Amman, and Damascus for *traditional* religious education, a model will be provided for understanding the complex ways religion functions in culturally fragmentary contexts and the processes that create new and deeper connections that transcend borders. Young Muslim Americans leave the US to study Islam for months and even years in a *traditional* manner: informal, undocumented, and unstructured by their US university standards. Still, this complex blend of oral and textual instruction is structured in that it is very hierarchical, accompanied by detailed intellectual genealogies and strict codes of respect for their Arab teachers. In light of the contested nature of Islamic authority, the constructions of authenticity define the religious discourse, particularly the concept of the *ummah*, the global community of believers. Through ethnographic accounts of these transnational pedagogical networks, I will explore the ways Muslim American student-travelers and Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian scholars construct and exist in the social space between the US and the Middle East.