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Ali, Muna. *Young Muslim America: Faith, Community, and Belonging*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

el-Sayed el-Aswad Ph.D.
University of Bahrain, elsayedelaswad@gmail.com

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The book is a welcome contribution to both Muslim American studies and identity scholarship as it tackles the identities, views, and roles of young Muslims, particularly those belonging to the second and subsequent generations of Muslim Americans of immigrant and convert backgrounds. The study assesses how young Muslims Americans view themselves and their community, how they discuss the rhetoric of race, ethnicity, gender, and religious interpretation within their communities, how their faith guides their daily actions, and how they envisage a future for themselves. It is worthy to note the book is based on the author's doctoral dissertation titled "Generation Next: Young Muslim Americans Narrating Self While Debating Faith, Community, and Country," Arizona State University, 2013 (See the link: https://repository.asu.edu/attachments/125875/content/Ali_asu_0010E_13365.pdf). This is not objectionable, but the manuscript would have been more convincing if the text and bibliography were comprehensively updated.

The book is organized into eight chapters including an introduction and conclusion. In addition to Chapter 2 that provides a brief history of Muslim America, the rest of the chapters are framed by four core narratives. The first narrative, discussed in Chapter 3, concerns the presence of an identity crisis among young Muslims. This identity crisis is caused by a conflict between the homeland culture (religious East) and that of the new land or American society (secular West). The second narrative, addressed in Chapter 4, involves a drive to salvage "pure/true Islam" from its cultural contamination or cultural Islam represented in such ideologically oriented groups as fundamentalists, Islamists, modernists, traditionalists, and secularists. However, younger Muslim Americans advocate a cultureless Islam.

The third narrative, covered in Chapter 5, is about the Islamization of America triggered by those advocating Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. This narrative concerns the issue of saving America from a Muslim cultural takeover. The fourth narrative, tackled in Chapters 6 and 7, addresses mechanisms for creating a Muslim American culture and Muslim American community by going beyond generational, gender, and ethno-racial elements that divide Muslim American immigrants and converts. The focus is on cultural citizenship that allows Muslim Americans to have a sense of belonging while being different as well as to acknowledge the cultural contribution of black American Muslims to American society. This is to say that Islam also includes black Americans, not merely the brown and alien.

The method utilized in the study raises critical concern as it implies gender bias applicable to both the questionnaire and interviews. The researcher claims to use both informal and formal interviews, however does not make any distinction between them. The author administered and relied on a "self-administered questionnaire" from which there were a disproportionate number of female and male respondents. For example, of the total 246 participants who completed the questionnaire, the number of women (163) doubled that of men (83). The same problem is reflected in the interviews in which the number of female interviewees (28) almost doubled that of male interviewees (15). A discussion of findings, which is not apparent in the text, should clarify potential gender differences; instead, however, the author provides a more generalized discussion of gender issues. Concerning the variable of age, the participants of the survey ranged in age from 18 to 51 years, with 77 percent of the participants under the age of 30. The rationale for including those whose age was beyond 30 is not provided. The author specifies the children or grandchildren of immigrants and converts born

in the United States or whose parents immigrated or converted before the children were 13 years old, but explanations regarding this specific age criterion is not provided.

The author claims that she chose the difficult task of applying a multi-sited ethnography conducted in the metropolitan areas of the greater Chicago area (or Chicagoland) and the Phoenix-valley. However, the study, Ali argues, is not confined to a specific location such as an organization, a mosque, or a residential neighborhood within these locales. Rather, it focuses on a particular community of knowledge and practice. The rationale for this, the author argues, is that the young Muslim Americans being studied, having diverse perspectives and residing in rapidly changing urban communities in a pluralistic society, “were everywhere and nowhere” (p. 8). The result is that the research relies on a series of out-of-context *snapshots* or ethnographic snippets. As Ali states, conducting ethnographic study by focusing on a particular locale would have been easier and could have produced a “thicker” description (p. 11). Such a statement implies that the current multi-sited fieldwork is not as easy and thick as one focusing on a specific locale. It is arguable to hint that ethnography of a particular locale (village or city) is an easy task.

Additionally, the extensive and dry exposure of literature and theoretical arguments eclipses the views and perspectives of the young Muslim Americans, described as being limited. For example, in discussing the issue of pure/true Islam, the author states (p. 292) that she “drew on Asad’s [Talal] idea of Islam as a discursive tradition and situated this ‘purity’ narrative in that tradition, teasing out its various strands, including how younger Muslim Americans, as represented (however limited) by the project collaborators, have used it.”

While it is not required to cite all references related to the general topic of Muslim Americans, it is advised to cite those references related specifically to the topic. In her discussion of both the family as one the primary American Muslim institutions, and gender issues, the author fails to cite the work of Barbara Aswad and Barbara Bilgé (1996), *Family and Gender Among American Muslims: Issues Facing Middle Eastern Immigrants and Their Descendants*. The author also fails to mention my (el-Sayed el-Aswad’s) own 2012 study, *Muslim Worldviews and Everyday Lives*, particularly Chapter 6, “Multiple Worldviews and Multiple Identities of the Muslim Diaspora,” that discusses the dual heritage and multiple identities of Muslim Americans,¹ including “Muslim American youths who contribute toward shaping a future worldview of Islam in the United States that is radically different from the Islam found in their parents’ countries” (el-Aswad 2012, 136). Such a statement has been reiterated by Ali, who said that because younger Muslim Americans represent and express multiple heritage (Islamic, ethnic, and American), they are defining Islam and America.

Generally, Muslims were not as well represented in this study as compared to a previous and comprehensive study, *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago* by Garbi Schmidt (2004) that Ali cited passingly on page 13. According to Schmidt, Muslim identity is not entirely to be understood as “either-or” but as “both-and” in the sense that an individual can be Pakistani or Arab, and Muslim and American at once.

Additionally, except for a photo exclusively of four young women shown on the cover page, the book does not include pictures, figures, or illustrations related to the multi-sited ethnography of Chicago and the Phoenix valley.

Though there are weaknesses with the methodology, the book deserves to be read and reviewed. However, because of its reliance on extensive literature rather than on thick ethnography it may not be suitable for undergraduate students. Despite these shortcomings, the book provides insightful contentions that Muslim American culture is akin to America itself,

being made of a collective and ever-changing array of varied components. And the Muslim American community, like America, forms a dynamic rather than a finished product.

el-Sayed el-Aswad PhD
Independent Scholar
elsayedelaswad@gmail.com

Notes

¹ Related studies include el-Sayed el-Aswad's works: "Images of Muslims in Western Scholarship and Media after 9/11." *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 22(1): 39–56, "The dynamics of identity reconstruction among Arab communities in the US." *Anthropos*, 2006 101(1): 111–121, "Narrating the Self among Arab Americans: A Bridging Discourse between Arab Tradition and American Culture" *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 2010, 20 (2): 357-385 and "Muslim Americans" In Carlos Eliseo Cortés [Ed.] *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*. 2013: 1525-530, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.