



# Bodies of Text: Learning to be Muslim in West Africa

## Thirteenth Cadbury Fellowship Scheme and Workshop 2016

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European Research Council  
Established by the European Commission

The Department of African Studies and Anthropology at the University of Birmingham invites applications for the 2016 Cadbury Fellowship Scheme, which focuses on 'Bodies of Text: Learning to be Muslim in West Africa'.

Three or more visiting fellows from Africa will be appointed to participate in a ten-week schedule of seminars, discussion groups, and other activities. One aim of the scheme is to assist new scholars to develop a research paper and bring it to publication, and the programme will culminate in an international conference to be held at the University of Birmingham on 30 June and 1 July 2016 at which the visiting fellows will present their papers alongside an international cast of both established and younger participants.

The programme is supported by the Cadbury Fund held at the Department of African Studies and Anthropology and the European Research Council (Starting Researcher Grant No 283466, Knowing each other: everyday religious encounters, social identities and tolerance in southwest Nigeria). It is organised by the University of Birmingham in collaboration with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Northwestern University Consortium for African Studies.

Fellowships will cover return air-fare, accommodation and living costs for a period of up to ten weeks. The deadline for applications for fellowships is Monday 30 November 2015.

### **Bodies of Text: Learning to be Muslim in West Africa**

Organised by the Department of African Studies and Anthropology, the 2016 Cadbury programme explores the practices, disciplines and debates through which West Africans learn to be Muslims. Focusing on the elaborate and complex systems of Islamic learning that have emerged in the region, we ask how knowledge about being Muslim is passed on and acquired through the circulation of ideas and texts, and through physical, emotional and social forms of discipline. In the often multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies of West Africa, how does one learn to be Muslim and differentiate him/herself from non-Muslim others? And how does one develop a particular Islamic identity amongst many ways of being Muslim? We aim to explore in particular the following topics:

- **Text and the body:** The circulation of ideas about being Muslim occurs through bodies of text but also through the body itself. How do the ritual and repetitive uses of an individual's human body contribute to the establishment of Muslim identity? How do men and women learn to be Muslim through the physical disciplines of particular religious practices but also through daily labour, recreation, dress and bodily comportment. What insights can be gained by thinking about these kinds of physical practices as a part of the circulation of what it means to be Muslim?
- **Teaching and learning processes, technologies, and relations:** How are texts and bodily practices that inform religious learning produced? How are they circulated and received by different groups? In what ways do texts and practices of Islamic education support particular (political, economic or intellectual) interests and ambitions? How, if at all, do they enable the reproduction of particular social formations? How, if at all, do they bring about social change and introduce new ways of being Muslim? Who is recognised as an appropriate teacher in different contexts? How does the relationship between teacher and learner influence the learning process?

- **Power/Knowledge:** In what ways are different forms of learning associated with different epistemologies and Islamic traditions? How can we study the genealogies of particular discourses of Islamic identity and of religious education? Do different forms of knowledge and learning technologies reflect differences between men and women, as well as persons of different ages, generations, and status groups? How do structural forms of knowledge production and individual choice influence the ways in which people learn to be Muslim in different African contexts and at different moments? How are such differences embodied?
- **Hierarchies:** How, if at all, do social hierarchies structure the production of, and access to, religious education? Religious education has the potential to either entrench or undermine social hierarchies: what determines its role in shaping, changing, or maintaining inequalities? In what ways is social difference expressed (or challenged) through textual debates and bodily practices?
- **Denials and refusals:** And finally, how does the refusal to know or learn certain things, to engage in specific routines of learning, or to learn from particular people relate to different Muslim identities or forms of self-assertion? In what ways is resistance to knowledge associated with the body and physical practices?

### Who is eligible for a Cadbury Fellowship?

We are looking for early-career African scholars who have something to contribute to the theme, and whose research would benefit from a residential fellowship of ten weeks at the University of Birmingham. They should be in the early stages of their academic careers and based in an institution on the African continent. They should have a PhD or be close to completing one. It is intended that the Fellows will have time to use the University's excellent library resources, discuss their work with academic staff and research students at DASA, and contribute to the intellectual life of the department by participating in academic and cultural events here.

### How to apply for a Cadbury Fellowship

Fellowships will cover return air-fare, and accommodation and living costs for a period of ten weeks. If you would like to be considered for the 2016 scheme, please: send your application by email to **ALL THREE** recipients:

1. Dr PF de Moraes Farias ([paulofarias@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:paulofarias@blueyonder.co.uk))
2. Dr Insa Nolte ([m.i.nolte@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.i.nolte@bham.ac.uk))
3. Dr David Kerr ([d.kerr@bham.ac.uk](mailto:d.kerr@bham.ac.uk))

In your email, please let us know how you learned about this programme and confirm that you can get away for ten weeks from 2 May to 8 July 2016. Attached to your email should be two documents:

1. A research project description in English of not more than 1,000 words on the theme, showing what research you have already done and what you would work on during the fellowship.
2. A short CV (not more than 3 pages) and the names of two referees.