CON**TEXT**

The Production and Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in Europe: Authority, Ethics, and Methodology in the Politics of Imam Training[*]

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Abstract

This article deals with the training of imams to work for Muslim communities in Europe with a migrant background. Imams are considered the prime actors in conveying Islamic knowledge and the training of these figureheads is a crucial issue with many implications. Imam training is a particular aspect of a broader multifaceted process that includes the production, transmission, reception, and interpretation of Islamic knowledge. Imam training is thus part of the much broader issue of the positioning of Islam and Muslims in Europe, particularly given European governments' intention to take a more active role. It should be analyzed within this broader political and historical context. The "politics of imam training", as I call the ongoing debates, negotiations, and initiatives involving the various stakeholders, entail more than just educational logistics. At heart, these are issues of authority and legitimacy and ultimately the questions of who is entitled to produce, transmit, and, of course, teach Islamic knowledge, and who is accepted by Muslim communities. This aspect has not been widely addressed by researchers.

Key words: Islamic knowledge, Imam training, Muslims in Europe, Islamic authority, Governance of Islam

Introduction: the stake

In November 2020, shortly after the terrorist attacks in Vienna, the president of the European Council, Charles Michel, called for the creation of a European institute to train imams "as a way to curb hate speech and to prevent terrorism."[1] National governments have taken a number of initiatives with the same aim of getting involved in the institutional infrastructure for educating imams across Europe in recent decades.[2]

In this article I look at the discussions, negotiations, arrangements, and opportunities associated with training imams to work in Muslim communities with a migrant background in Europe. Imams are considered the prime actors in conveying Islamic knowledge, and the training of these figureheads is a crucial issue with many implications. Imam training is thus a particular aspect of the broader multifaceted process of the production, transmission, and, ultimately, reception and interpretation of Islamic knowledge.

With European governments intent on taking a more active role, Imam training is part of the much broader issue of the positioning of Islam and Muslims in Europe and should be analysed within this broader political and historical context. Opportunities, discussions, and arrangements differ considerably from country to country. In some countries the government is hardly or not at all actively involved; in others there are plans to set up state-sponsored training infrastructures. In countries with sizable Muslim populations of a migrant background, imams tend to be trained abroad (mostly in countries-of-origin). The number of "home-grown" imams (trained in the country of residence) is still relatively low but clearly on the rise. In practically all countries, there are initiatives to set up and extend training facilities. Most Islamic movements active in Europe have their own standards for quality and training programmes. Imams educated within these organisations usually work for their own communities.

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1   H.A Hellyer, "European Muslims are already European. Top-down efforts to train the continent's imams will only make things worse", Politico (November 20, 2020), https://www.politico.eu/article/european-muslims-are-already-european/

2   For an overview see, e.g., Franck Fregosi, *La formation des cadres religieux musulmans en France* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1998); Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999); Jean-François Husson, *Training imams in Europe the current status* (Brussels: King Baudouin Foundation, 2007); Willem Drees and Pieter Sjoerd Koningsveld, *The Study of Religion and the Training of Muslim Clergy in Europe Academic and Religious Freedom in the 21st Century* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2008); Hussain Dilawar and Henry Tuck, *The Education and Training of Islamic Faith Leaders in Europe: A Comparative Evaluation of Approaches in France and Germany* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2014); Ednan Aslan and Zsofia Windish, *The training of imams and teachers of Islamic knowledge in Europe* (Vienna: Peter Lang, 2012); Mohammed Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter, and Niels Valdemar Vinding (eds.), *Imams in Western Europe: Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Niels Valdemar Vinding and Raida Chbib, *Education and Training of Muslim Religious Professionals in Europe and North America* (Frankfurt am Mein: Academy for Islam in Research and Society [AIWG], 2020).

All EU member states have constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion, which entails that Muslims are in principle free to worship, organise themselves, open mosques, and hire imams. Some countries also offer official recognition as a religious denomination. The situation on the ground differs considerably between countries.[3] This is a result of the combination of historic state-religion relations, political decision-making, and the image of Islam and Muslims.

All countries in Europe with sizable Muslim migrant populations have private community-based activities for training and Islamic education. In the UK, most such activities are organised by community-funded Muslim seminaries (*Dar-al-ulum*). In the Netherlands, thanks to its "pillarized" school system, a legacy of its pillarized history, private educational institutes can ask for official recognition by accreditation and so financial support from the state, based on article 23 of the Constitution[4]. The Islamic University of Rotterdam is currently engaged in an ongoing bid for official recognition as an applied science university.[5] They have an accredited programme for Islamic spiritual care. In Germany, outside of some local initiatives, most training facilities are organised by Muslim organisations that train their own personnel. The biggest is the German branch of the Turkish state-backed *Directorate of Religious Affairs* (*Diyanet*) (DITIB).[6]

European governments' keen interest in monitoring the activities of Muslims dates back to the early stages of migration. The authorities in Europe have, however, shown a stronger sense of urgency about monitoring the work of imams since 9/11 and in reaction to the growing number of online preachers.[7] Their involvement often goes further than monitoring, ranging from facilitating or curbing initiatives by private stakeholders to offering financial incentives or setting up state-commissioned educational infrastructure. During the early stages of migration, many countries made agreements with countries-of-origin to send qualified imams. This was not just the only option then available to meet Muslims' growing demand for religious accommodation. It was also considered the best way to ensure at least some control over who was entering the country.

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3   For a more detailed description see the Egdūnas Račius, et al. (eds.), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe 12* (Leiden: Brill, 2021). The Brill *Annotated Legal Documents on Islam in Europe* series is a useful source of references in this respect. A book has been or will be published in the near future for each European country, providing an overview of the relevant legal issues for Muslims.

4   Naar een nieuwe schoolstrijd?", *BMGN*, 119:4 (2004).

5   Niels Valdemar Vinding and Raida Chbib, *Education and Training of Muslim Religious Professionals in Europe and North America* (Frankfurt am Mein: Academy for Islam in Research and Society [AIWG], 2020).

6   Thijl Sunier and Nico Landman, *Transnational Turkish Islam, Shifting Geographies of Religious Activism and Community Building in Turkey and Europe* (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

7   Ron Geaves, "Drawing on the Past to transform the Present, Contemporary Challenges for Training and Preparing British", *Imams Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 28:1 (2008). Frank Peter, "Training of Imams and the Fight against Radicalization", in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook* (Barcelona: IEMed, 2018).

Today, there is much greater demand for imams familiar with the situation in the country of residence and so for "home-grown" imams. The provisional deficit in training facilities across Europe has resulted in special courses being organised in countries-of-origin for imams from Europe. The *Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs* (Diyanet) has set up such courses and similar initiatives have been explored in Morocco.[8]

Growing concerns about radicalisation and foreign influence have also led to stricter conditions for employing imams at mosques. In many countries, foreign imams must take additional courses. In the Netherlands, all imams who have entered the country since 2002 must finish an "integration course" in which they are taught about Dutch society and its "basic values". Attendance at similar courses is mandatory in both France and the UK. In many countries there is an implicit pressure to reduce the number of imams coming from abroad.[9]

The extent to which national legislation facilitates training activities or the accreditation of training programmes varies by country. Accreditation requires stakeholders to engage with national educational legislation and the national educational structure. In general, recognition, accreditation, and funding are considered the most challenging obstacles to setting up domestic imam training programmes.[10] In France, there is hardly any such provision in the educational and legal system. Imam training is basically a private affair with no state involvement. There is legislation governing private education, but it is limited in scope. As a result, imam training is almost entirely an activity of private stakeholders.[11] In the past, recommendations have been made by state commissions for the French state to take a more active role in religious educational affairs but without success.[12] In Denmark the situation is comparable to that in France, in that there are no legal options for the accreditation of private (religious) educational programmes.[13]

It is often argued that European governmental involvement in religious matters like imam training should be understood in the context of dominant secular-liberal state ideologies. While this is to some extent a relevant point of reference

8   Thijl Sunier and Nico Landman, *Diyanet, The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs in a Changing Environment*. Benjamin Bruce, *Governing Islam Abroad, Turkish and Moroccan Muslims in Western Europe*.

9   Welmoet Boender and Jan Jaap de Ruiter, "The imam as an organic public intellectual", in *Imams in Western Europe, Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges*, Mohammed Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter and Niels Valdemar Vinding (eds.) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018). Anne Fornerod (ed.), *Annotated Legal Documents, France* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

10 Niels Valdemar Vinding and Raida Chbib, *Education and Training of Muslim Religious Professionals in Europe and North America*.

11 Anne Fornerod, *Annotated Legal Documents, France*.

12 Jean-François Husson, *Training imams in Europe the current status* (Brussels: King Baudouin Foundation, 2007). Dilawer Hussain and Henry Tuck, *The Education and Training of Islamic Faith Leaders in Europe, A Comparative Evaluation of Approaches in France and Germany* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2014).

13 Niels Valdemar Vinding and Raida Chbib, *Education and Training of Muslim Religious Professionals in Europe and North America*.

for understanding state agendas, it underestimates the crucial differences that exist between various European modes of governance, which necessitate a more sophisticated approach that takes into account how governments interfere. The specific forms of intervention and ways of monitoring the training of imams are intricately intertwined with their historically developed national civil cultures and specific features of the state and religion relationship in particular nation-states.[14]

In some countries, public universities are involved in Islamic educational programmes. Following a recommendation of the *Academic Council* in 2010, chairs for Islamic theology have been established at seven universities in Germany, with a total budget of around 45 million euro.[15] Graduates in Islamic theology at these universities are not being trained as imams, however. In the Netherlands only the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (a confessional university within the Dutch educational system) offers a scientific BA and MA programme in Islamic theology within its broader programme of religious studies. It is coordinated by the *Centre for Islamic Theology* (CIT) there. In 2006, Leiden University opened a similar programme, while Amsterdam University for Applied Sciences also started a programme in close cooperation with the national *Council of Muslims* (CMO), but both programmes closed due to a lack of students.[16] The Dutch government funded these programmes as they considered them the best strategy for accomplishing a fully-fledged state-controlled imam training programme compatible with their integration policies. The Dutch government is probably the most active in Europe when it comes to state-commissioned training facilities for imams and Dutch governmental involvement dates back to the mid-1990s. Two state-commissioned advices have been published[17] and there was a survey in 2019 to determine Muslim support for such imam training.[18]

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14   Werner Schiffauer, Gerd Baumann, Riva Kastoryano, and Steven Vertovec (eds.), *Civil Enculturation. Nation-state, School and Ethnic Difference in Four European Countries,* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004).

15   Hanna Fülling, *Religion und Integration in der deutschen Islampolitik, Entwicklungen, Analysen und Ausblicke* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019). Niels Valdemar Vinding and Raida Chbib, *Education and Training of Muslim Religious Professionals in Europe and North America.*

16   Welmoet Boender, "Dossier imamopleiding, het Nederlandse 'imamopleidingsdebat' in historisch perspectief", *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid,* 5:2 (2014).

17   Nico Landman, *Imamopleiding in Nederland, kansen en knelpunten* (Den Haag: Ministerie van Onderwijs en Wetenschappen, 1996). Commissie de Ruijter, *Imams in Nederland, wie leidt ze op?* Rapport van de Adviescommissie Imamopleidingen (Den Haag: Ministerie van Onderwijs en Wetenschappen, 2003).

18   Onderzoek Labyrinth and Advies, *Imamopleiding in Nederland, een verkenning van draagvlak* (Utrecht: Labyrinth, 2019). This involvement is no doubt based on the Dutch history of religious pluralism during the first half of the 20th century. The Christian Democrat Party, which had a dominant position in Dutch governments from the 1920s until well into the 1990s, has always been in favour of state-funded religious education. An intriguing condition was that any state-funded training program had to have majority support from the relevant religious community. Internal ideological disagreements were secondary. Muslims were bound by this clause too. Current government engagement, however, should also be traced back to the Dutch government's elaborate integration programmes. Their interest in training was due to their idea that imams could form a bridge between the Muslim population and the wider society that strengthened Muslim social participation and citizenship. Bridging has always been a central policy goal in Dutch integration politics. Imams from abroad would have the opposite effect.

This brief and incomplete account of initiatives and activities in European countries demonstrates that European governments do actually interfere in the curricula of training programmes to "domesticate" Islam and organise religious activities and religious communities after the political format of the national state with the ultimate aim of creating a specific "brand" of Islam. Domestication is a mode of governance, a broad and complex disciplining intervention that controls but also creates appropriate subjectivities and objects of governance. I have referred to the domestication of Islam as:

> …a process of containment, pacification and legitimization based on a national imaginary. It is about the place of Islam in European societies and the challenges they face, against the backdrop of a particular conception of national identity. Different nation-states have historically grown nationally specific modes of dealing with religious difference, sometimes informed by colonial practices, experiences and histories, so the domestication of Islam takes on nationally specific features and outlooks.[19]

Bowen shows how the French state's strategies to create "domesticated forms of Islam" have entailed a set of dilemmas for the state when it comes to controlling transnational religious communities. They revolve around three basic issues: the behaviour of Muslims, the extent to which the Republic wishes to control Muslims, and the adaptation of Islamic to French norms.[20] Other European states grapple with similar challenges. The figure of the imam epitomises these concerns and is considered a pivotal element in such endeavours. Attempts by European governments to initiate new training programmes are intended to gain influence over the training of imams being appointed to Muslim communities in their countries. As El Asri argues, "Training religious leaders in Europe is almost analogous to directly touching the construction of a semiotics of faith, which involves considering the selection of methodologies, the choices of scientific disciplines, and the filtering of theological currents."[21] Hashas refers to the European imam as a "nationalised religious authority" expected to disseminate a depoliticised ethical message in line with the principles of the secular liberal state and its integration goals.[22]

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19   Thijl Sunier, "Domesticating Islam: Exploring Academic Knowledge Production on Islam and Muslims in European Societies", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37:6 (2014), 1142.

20   John,Bowen, "Beyond Migration, Islam as a Transnational Public Space", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30:5 (2004).

21   Farid Al Asri, "Imam training in Europe: Changes and challenges", in *Imams in Western Europe: Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges*, Mohammed Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter, and Niels Valdemar Vinding (eds.) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 102.

22   Mohammed Hashas, "The European imam, A nationalized religious authority", in *Imams in Western Europe, Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges*, pp. 79-101.

Research into imam training in Europe

The training of imams and the outcomes of negotiations and discussions entail more than educational logistics. They have to do with issues of authority, legitimacy, and engagement with Muslim communities. This aspect has received remarkably scant systematic attention in the academic literature. The "politics of imam training", as I call the ongoing debates, negotiations, and initiatives various stakeholders are involved in, is ultimately a question of who is entitled to produce, transmit, and, ultimately, teach Islamic knowledge to Muslims of a migrant background in Europe and who the Muslim communities themselves find acceptable. Before unfolding the argument further, I shall give a brief and necessarily sketchy overview of the relevant scholarly output in this field and trace a number of themes and perspectives that emerge in the literature. Such an overview can hardly be complete.[23] The role of imams and the production and teaching of Islamic discourse is a boom topic of academic inquiry and is covered by virtually every book on the organisational characteristics of Islamic landscapes across Europe.[24]

There have been several reports published in recent years that provide a country-by-country overview of training activities,[25] as well as publications focus-

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23   I have confined myself to publications written in English, German, French, and Dutch, which are languages I can read directly. This is no doubt a shortcoming in this overview. I have also left out the many publications with an Islamic theological focus, as my main argument concerns the socio-political context of the position of imams in Europe.

24   See, e.g., Jan Rath, Rinus Penninx, Kees Groenendijk, and Astrid Meyer, *Western Europe and Its Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Anthony Shadid and P.S. Van Koningsveld, *Intercultural Relations and Religious Authorities: Muslims in the European Union* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002); Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Marcel Maussen, *Constructing Mosques. The governance of Islam in France and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: ASSR (Doctoral thesis), 2009); Jonathan Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims: The State's Role in Minority Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity* (Boulder: Lexington Books, 2012); Kerstin Rosenow-Williams, *Organising Muslims and Integrating Islam in Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Ahmet Yükleyen, *Localizing Islam in Europe* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press , 2012); Elvire Corboz, *Guardians of Shi'ism: Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); Elvire Corboz, "Shi'i clerical networks and the transnational contest over sacred authority: dynamics in London's Shi'i Triangle", *Global Discourse: An interdisciplinary journal of current affairs*, 9:4 (2019), 721-739; Raida Chbib, *Organisation des Islams in Deutschland. Diversität, Dynamiken und Sozialformen im Religionsfeld der Muslime* (Baden-Baden: Ergon Verlag, 2017); Mario Peucker and Rauf Ceylan (eds.), *Muslim Community Organizations in the West: History, Developments and Future Perspectives* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2017); Benjamin Bruce, *Governing Islam Abroad: Turkish and Moroccan Muslims in Western Europe* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019).

25   See, e.g., Jean-François Husson, *Training imams in Europe The current status* (Brussels: King Baudouin Foundation, 2007); (2007); Ednan Aslan and Zsofia Windish, *The training of imams and teachers of Islamic knowledge in Europe* (Vienna: Peter Lang, 2012); Dirk Halm, Martina Sauer, Jana Schmidt and Anja Stichs, *Islamisches Gemeindeleben in Deutschland (im Auftrag der Deutschen Islam Konferenz)* (Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2012); Valdemar Vinding and Raida Chbib, *Education and Training of Muslim Religious Professionals in Europe and North America* (Frankfurt am Mein: Academy for Islam in Research and Society [AIWG], 2020).

ing more explicitly on the production of Islamic knowledge in Europe,[26] and a growing body of literature dealing with new forms of online preaching and online knowledge platforms.[27] While some monographs and articles focus explicitly on the figure of the imam and the Muslim intellectual in specific political contexts,[28] other studies focus more on the governance and monitoring of Islam by European governments, including the increasing securitisation of Muslims.[29] Finally,

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26 See, e.g., Robert Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Alexandre Caeiro, "The Power of European Fatwas: The Minority Fiqh Project and the Making of an Islamic Counterpublic*", International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 42:3 (2010), 435-449; Alexandre Caeiro, "Secular Governance and Islamic Law. The Globalization of the Minority Question", *Sociology of Islam*, 7:4 (2019), 323-343; Martin Van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi, *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Roel Meijer and Edwin Bakker, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe* (London: Hurst, 2012); Masooda Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change. Evolving Debates in Muslim-Majority Countries* (Volume 1) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Masooda Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change. Evolving Debates in Muslim-Majority Countries* (Volume 2) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Semiha Sözeri, *The Pedagogy of the Mosque. Portrayal, Practice, and the Role in the Integration of Turkish-Dutch Children* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam (Doctoral Thesis), 2021).

27 Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World: The emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) and Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018 [Kindle Edition], [2009]) provide a good overview of this quickly expanding field. See also Stig Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion." *Media, Culture and Society*, 38:1 (2016), 8-17.

28 See, e.g., Felice Dasseto & Albert Bastenier, *L'Islam transplanté. Vie et organisation de minorités musulmanes de Belgique* (Bruxelles: EPO, 1984); Jytte Klausen, *The Islamic Challenge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jonathan Birt, "Good Imam, Bad Imam: Civic Religion and National Integration in Britain post-9/11", *The Muslim World*, 96:4 (2006), 687-705; Sophie Gilliat-Ray, "Educating the Ulama: Centres of Islamic Religious Training in Britain", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 17:1 (2006), 55-76; Welmoet Boender, *Imam in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007); Ron Geaves, "Drawing on the Past to transform the Present: Contemporary Challenges for Training and Preparing British", *Imams Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 28:1 (2008), 99-112; Betina Gräf and Jakob Skovgard-Petersen (eds.), *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī* (London: Hurst, 2009); Ellen van de Bovenkamp, *La popularité de Tariq Ramadan au Maroc* (VU Amsterdam, Doctoral Dissertation, 2017); Mohammed Hashas, et al. (eds.), *Imams in Western Europe: Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Frank Peter, "Training of Imams and the Fight against Radicalization", in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook* (IEMed: Barcelona, 2018), 342–345; Semiha Sözeri, Hülya Kosar Altinyelken and Monique Volman, "Training Imams in the Netherlands: the Failure of a Post-Secular Endeavour", *British Journal of Religious Education*, 41:4 (2018), 435-445; Hansjörg Schmid and Noemi Trucco, *Bildungswege von Imamen aus der Schweiz* (Freiburg: SZIG Universität Freiburg, 2019); Hansjörg Schmid, "'I'm just an Imam, not Superman' Imams in Switzerland: Between Stakeholder Objects and Self-Interpretation", *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 9:1 (2020), 64-96.

29 See, e.g., Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Michael J. Balz, "Taming the Imams. European Governments and Islamic Preachers since 9/11". *Islam and Christian-Muslim relations*, 9:2 (2008), 215-235; Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar, *Governing Muslims and Islam in Contemporary Germany. Race, Time, and the German Islam Conference* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Martijn de Koning, et al., *Islamic Militant Activism in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany: 'Islands in a Sea of disbelief'* (London: Palgrave, 2020). In many countries, imams and imam training are a topic frequently addressed by security services in pursuit of the prevention of radicalisation.

there is a steadily growing body of more conceptual and analytical literature on the making of Islamic authority.[30]

Most of the reviewed literature covers a wide variety of themes and topics and provides a description of the debates, negotiations and arrangements, activities, initiatives, and, in general, ramifications of the institutionalisation and bureaucratic incorporation of training programmes in various countries. Some offer explicit cross-national comparison to show how different political and national contexts offer different outcomes and possibilities. In many cases, policy-oriented recommendations for the future are added.

Systematic review of the literature brings to the fore a number of perspectives and problem definitions, revealing underlying assumptions and approaches. The first and most common perspective is the political context of the national state as that in which the production and dissemination of Islamic knowledge is embedded or into which it is supposed to integrate. The imagined net result of this process would be to "adapt" imam training to national political contexts. This has resulted in analyses of the political opportunity structure of these national contexts and the limits and possibilities entailed. It also results in descriptions of how imam training is tangled up with the more general cultural encounter, creating challenges, dilemmas, and even security issues. Such a national perspective may be an obvious and even self-evident one, as national political context is a powerful force that largely determines opportunities and developments and cannot be ignored. The adoption of such a perspective runs the risk of restricting analytical rigour to the level of national integration, however, and so disregarding relevant developments that fall outside the context of the national state.[31]

Another common tendency is an almost exclusive focus on the producers and providers of Islamic knowledge and on the institutional settings and educational and organisational logistics within which imams operate, viz., the "supply side".

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30   See, e.g., Jeanette S. Jouili and Schirin Amir-Moazami, "Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority among pious Muslim Women in France and Germany". *Muslim World*, 96:4 (2006), 617-642; Jeanette S. Jouili and Schirin Amir-Moazami, "Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority among Pious Muslim Women in France and Germany" in *Islamic Feminism: Current Perspectives*, Anitta Kynsilehto (ed.) (Tampere: Tampere Peace Research Institute, 2008), 57–90; Frédéric Volpi and Bryan S. Turner, "Making Islamic Authority Matter", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24:2 (2007), 1-19 (Special issue Theory, Culture & Society); Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach, *Women, Leadership and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Allen James Fromherz and Nadav Samin (eds.), *Knowledge, Authority and Change in Islamic Societies: Studies in Honor of Dale F. Eickelman* (Leiden: Brill, 2021). Marleen de Witte, Martijn de Koning, and Thijl Sunier, "Aesthetics of Religious Authority: introduction", (special issue) *Culture and Religion*, 16:2 (2015), 117-125; John Bowen, *On British Islam. Religion, Law, and Everyday Practice in Shari'a Councils* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Tanya Walker, *Shari'a Councils and Muslim Women in Britain. Rethinking the role of Power and Authority* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

31   This has been referred to as methodological nationalism, the conceptual equation of society with the nation-state and the idea that the nation-state is the neutral (even natural) analytical level at which society has to be assessed (Daniel Chernilo, "Social theory's methodological nationalism", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9:1 [2006], 5-22).

Though essential, this is often at the expense of rigorous assessment of the proposed intervention in the content of the training programmes or of the reception and digestion of Islamic knowledge, viz., the "consumer side".

The recent boom in research on radicalisation, on the role of so-called "hate imams", and on foreign financial and ideological influence has often ignored the fundamental question of how impressionable audiences are or how susceptible to such influences. The crucial question of why a given imam is legitimate or has authority among ordinary practitioners necessitates analysis of the field of forces within which he operates. Sözeri et al.[32] address the question of why the establishment of state-funded Islamic theology and imam-training programmes in the Netherlands has failed, arguing that a lack of trust in the organisers is one of the main reasons. The authors' observations and conclusions are one of the very few assessments of the perceived legitimacy of educational programmes among recipients.

The quest for imams

How should one assess the longstanding interest of European governments in the production, dissemination, and teaching of Islamic knowledge and its effects? Hefner and Zaman[33] link Western concerns with religious education to anxieties about Muslim radicalisation and trace them back to the moment the Taliban entered Kabul in 1996. Concerns were already being expressed by European governments about the role of imams during the 1980s, though worries about radicalisation were much less prominent.[34] In the 1970s and early 1980s, European governments hardly bothered with the activities of Muslims in this regard, because they were expected either to return to their countries-of-origin or assimilate into the host society. The training, recruitment, and employment of imams were considered an internal affair and left entirely to Muslim communities and their organisations.

Muslims of a migrant background in Europe had a need for religious knowledge and guidance from the beginning, despite the relatively isolated position of early migrants. By the mid-1960s, the *Turkish High Council of Religious Affairs* had already published a booklet with answers to questions from Turkish Muslims in Europe prompted by life under new and unfamiliar circumstances.[35]

32　Semiha Sözeri, Hülya Kosar Altinyelken and Monique Volman, "Training Imams in the Netherlands, the Failure of a Post-Secular Endeavour", *British Journal of Religious Education*, 41:4 (2018).

33　Robert Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Schooling Islam, The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

34　See: Anthony Shadid and P.S. Van Koningsveld, *The Integration of Islam and Hinduism in Western Europe* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991); *Intercultural Relations and Religious Authorities, Muslims in the European Union* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002); Thijl Sunier and Nico Landman, *Diyanet, The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs in a Changing Environment* (Amsterdam/Utrecht: VU/UU, 2011).

35　Jan Den Exter, *Diyanet, een reis door de keuken van de officiële Turkse islam* (Beverwijk: Peregrinus, 1990); Anthony Shadid and P.S. Van Koningsveld, *Intercultural Relations and Religious Authorities, Muslims in the European Union*.

Initially, imams were brought in from countries-of-origin only on special occasions, like Ramadan. With the opening of mosques, a more permanent supply of imams was needed. For the first generation of migrants, attachment to religious authorities in their countries-of-origin was self-evidently based on loyalty to their country of origin and on familiarity. When they needed religious advice about new situations, they resorted to religious facilities and authorities in their countries-of-origin or in other Muslim majority countries. For this first generation, interaction with the surrounding society was superficial and incidental. Muslim communities lived relatively isolated lives and consisted predominantly of men. Local mosques were not just places to fulfil religious duties. They served a strong local function as places where Muslims from the same ethnic or regional background could meet.[36]

During the 1980s, European governments became increasingly interested in what was going on in "their" Muslim migrant communities and what was being taught in the mosques. The role of imams in integrating Muslims became an important political issue.[37] Several European governments negotiated with country-of-origin governments and especially with the *Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs* (Diyanet) about the supply of qualified imams and agreements were signed to send certified imams to Europe.[38] These "imported" imams were to function as intermediaries between Muslim communities and the new society. They were also supposed to be allies in the effort to spread a "moderate brand" of Islam.[39] Islamic schooling and guidance of the various Muslim communities has remained prominently on the political agenda ever since. In the 1990s, the production and transmission of Islamic knowledge became a pivotal point in the development of Islamic landscapes in Europe.[40]

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36   Thijl Sunier, Heleen van der Linden, and Ellen van de Bovenkamp, "The long arm of the state? Transnationalism, Islam, and nation-building, the case of Turkey and Morocco", *Contemporary Islam*, 10:3 (2016), pp. 401-420.

37   See, e.g., Jan Rath, Rinus Penninx, Kees Groenendijk, and Astrid Meyer, *Western Europe and Its Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Welmoet Boender, *Imam in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007); Kerstin Rosenow-Williams, *Organising Muslims and Integrating Islam in Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Thijl Sunier, Heleen van der Linden, and Ellen van de Bovenkamp, "The long arm of the state? Transnationalism, Islam, and nation-building: the case of Turkey and Morocco", *Contemporary Islam*, 10:3 (2016), 401-420; Mohammed Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter, and Niels Valdemar Vinding (eds.), *Imams in Western Europe: Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar, *Governing Muslims and Islam in Contemporary Germany: Race, Time, and the German Islam Conference* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Benjamin Bruce, *Governing Islam Abroad: Turkish and Moroccan Muslims in Western Europe* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), Semiha Sözeri, *The Pedagogy of the Mosque. Portrayal, Practice, and the Role in the Integration of Turkish-Dutch Children* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam [Doctoral Thesis], 2021).

38   Thijl Sunier and Nico Landman, *Diyanet, The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs in a Changing Environment*.

39   Jan Rath, Rinus Penninx, Kees Groenendijk, and Astrid Meyer, *Western Europe and Its Islam*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Thijl Sunier and Nico Landman, *Diyanet, The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs in a Changing Environment*; Luis Manuel Hernandez Aguilar, *Governing Muslims and Islam in Contemporary Germany. Race, Time, and the German Islam Conference* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

40   Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999); Adis Duderija and Halim Rane, *Islam and Muslims in the West, Major Issues and Debates* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

It also became clear in the 1980s that the majority of migrants would be staying in Europe permanently, given that they had brought their families. For the next generation, routines and practices developed with the first generation in mind would be much less useful and adequate, and the question of where to find the right religious sources and right guidance was not at all so obvious for them. Established centres of Islamic learning in Muslim majority countries had difficulty responding effectively to these changing circumstances and to the implications of life as a religious minority.

Several new initiatives emerged to guide "European Muslims" and a discussion arose on Islamic jurisprudence for minorities *(fiqh al-aqalliyat)* and what "European Islam" might imply. One of the earlier initiatives was the Dublin-based *European Council for Fatwa and Research* (ECFR), founded in 1997 and intended to develop a centre for religious guidance for Muslims in Europe. But there were several more such initiatives in competition for audiences.[41] Many of them also issue fatwas regularly,[42] and they paved the way for subsequent (predominantly online) knowledge platforms.

It has not been just a matter of the development of Islamic law in ways that suit changing circumstances. The emergence of a vocal and highly educated generation of young pious Muslims, born or raised in Europe, required radically different forms of religious knowledge. Their situation in society was fundamentally different from that of previous generations of migrants; their engagement as residents, students, and employees with a non-Islamic environment was complex and multifaceted and generated unprecedented conditions. Ethical issues and dilemmas were expressed and explored much more explicitly.[43] This has shaken up the Islamic landscape and undermined established institutional and authoritative structures

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41   As this issue falls partly outside the scope of this article, I refer to the extensive body of literature on the topic. See, e.g., Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Alexandre Caeiro, "The Power of European Fatwas: The Minority Fiqh Project and the Making of an Islamic Counterpublic", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 42:3 (2010), 435-449; Alexandre Caeiro, "Secular Governance and Islamic Law. The Globalization of the Minority Question", *Sociology of Islam*, 7:4 (2019), 323-343; Martin Van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi, *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age:. Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Masooda Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change. Evolving Debates in Muslim-Majority Countries* (Volume 1) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Masooda Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change. Evolving Debates in Muslim-Majority Countries* (Volume 2) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

42   Gary R. Bunt, *Virtually Islamic, computer-mediated communication and cyber Islamic environments* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).

43   See, e.g., Tariq Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999); Sarah Bracke, "Conjugating the Modern-Religious, Conceptualizing Female Religious Agency: Contours of a 'Post-secular' Conjuncture", Theory, *Culture and Society*, 25:6 (2008), 51-68; Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec (eds.), *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes. An Anthropology of Everyday Religion* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012); Shelina Janmohamed, *Generation M: Young Muslims, Changing Worlds* (London: IB Tauris, 2016); Daan Beekers and David Kloos, *Straying from the Straight Path: How Senses of Failure Invigorate Lived Religion* (New York: Berghahn Press, 2018); Thijl Sunier, "The making of Islamic authority in Europe", in *Imams in Western Europe: Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges*, Mohammed Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter, and Niels Valdemar Vinding (eds.) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 51-69; Hussein Kesvani, *Follow me, Akhi: The Online World of British Muslims* (London: Hurst, 2019); Daan Beekers, *Young Muslims and Christians in a Secular Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

whose status was long uncontested. The "traditional" imam was simply not equipped to handle these dilemmas adequately. The rapid growth in digital media, online preaching, and knowledge platforms has also considerably altered relations between religious leaders and Muslim communities in Europe.[44]

Digitisation and the spread of online knowledge platforms have not only tremendously increased the supply of Islamic knowledge. They have also affected the modes of engagement between preachers and audiences and challenged "traditional" imams. A crucial task for imams is to remain meaningfully connected to their communities. A common concern often expressed by young Muslims about imams working in mosques in Europe is their scant knowledge of the continuously changing Muslim population and their life-worlds. Online knowledge platforms and "cyber-imams" can only meet that need to a certain extent.

Contrary to what is often claimed, life in Europe and the growth of digital media have in no way made religious guidance obsolete for young Muslims. The so-called "individualisation thesis", which appeared in many academic publications in the late 1990s, predicted a transformation of religiosity among Muslims in Europe. This entailed the dissolution of collective and normative Islamic traditions brought by migrants to Europe and their replacement by privatised forms of religiosity. This would make authoritative guidance superfluous.[45] Current developments among young Muslims in Europe have refuted this questionable thesis.

The increase in the number of online knowledge platforms, often operating on a global scale, has brought to the fore an intriguing challenge: Where to find proper knowledge? How to be sure that preachers and teachers can be trusted and do have the right knowledge? Whom to ask? The quest of Muslims for truthful and trustworthy knowledge and guidance has become increasingly urgent. For practitioners, access to knowledgeable, qualified, and, above all, trustworthy imams and to reliable knowledge remains crucial, just as demand for "real life" imams remains strong. Recent research shows that young Muslims often use several different platforms, as well as relying on the "local" imam for guidance. In all countries in Europe, one finds young and popular imams who were born and raised there and often act as public figures and appear in the media.[46] This is

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44   Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (eds.), *New Media in the Muslim World, The emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Peter Mandaville, "Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24:2 (2007), pp. 101-105; Bryan S. Turner, "Religious authority and the New Media", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24:2 (2007), pp. 117-134; Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam, How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

45   See, e.g., Jocelyne Cesari, "Muslim Minorities in Europe, The Silent Revolution.", in *Modernizing Islam, Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*, John L. Esposito and François Burgat (eds.) (London: Hurst and Company, 2003), pp. 251-269; Jocelyne Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy Meet. Muslims in Europe and in the United States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

46   See, e.g., Ellen van de Bovenkamp, *La popularité de Tariq Ramadan au Maroc* (VU Amsterdam, Doctoral Dissertation, 2017); Welmoet Boender and Jan Jaap de Ruiter, "The imam as an organic public intellectual", pp. 165-185.

indicative of new emergent modalities of user practice and the new ethics of usage and forms of interaction.

Religious guidance thus continues to be important, which makes the training of imams all the more urgent and topical, and not just for practitioners. As we have seen, European governments consider the training of imams for the domestic market a crucial tool for monitoring developments in Muslim communities. Involvement in developing educational infrastructure is a logical strategy. Muslim stakeholders have their particular motives for staying involved and providing themselves with a more extensive and sophisticated supply. For established Muslim organisations, well-trained imams and religious teachers are a crucial means of influencing quickly transforming Muslim communities in Europe. On the other hand, "traditional" providers of Islamic knowledge, like *al-Azhar*, *Diyanet, the Muslim Brotherhood,* and *Deobandis,* have stepped up their efforts to cater to growing global demand and new platforms have emerged.[47] Whatever the motives and interests of all these stakeholders, the net effect has been one of "stretching" the role and function of the imam and of adapting to evolving desires, sensibilities, and circumstances. In policy documents, the imam is being "reinvented" as theological expert, spiritual and ethical guide, community leader and, after the model of the municipal civil servant, as instrumental in fostering integration with the host society.[48]

Since 9/11, preventing radicalisation among young Muslims in Europe and countering extremism have become priority issues for European governments. Imams are a prime tool used by European governments in their fight against radicalisation.[49] According to Birt, in the eyes of British policy makers, the post-9/11 "good imam" embodies "civic virtues, interfaith tolerance, professional managerial and pastoral skills, possibly becom[ing] involved in inner city regeneration, work[ing] as an agent of national integration (most importantly on behalf of his young unruly flock), and wag[ing] a jihad against extremism."[50]

47 See, e.g., Betina Gräf and Jakob Skovgard-Petersen (eds.), *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī* (London: Hurst, 2009); Martin Van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi, *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011); Roel Meijer and Edwin Bakker, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe* (London: Hurst, 2012); *Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Masooda Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change. Evolving Debates in Muslim-Majority Countries* (Volume 1) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Masooda Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change. Evolving Debates in Muslim-Majority Countries* (Volume 2) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018). Bano explores these developments and argues that instead of a decrease in the number of centres of knowledge production, we are seeing a tremendous increase and diversification.

48 Solenne Jouanneau, "The reinvented role of imams in French society", in *Imams in Western Europe, Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges*, Mohammed Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter, and Niels Valdemar Vinding (eds.) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Schmid, Hansjörg, "'I'm just an Imam, not Superman' Imams in Switzerland, Between Stakeholder Objects and Self-Interpretation", *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 9:1 (2020).

49 Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Michael J. Balz, "Taming the Imams. European Governments and Islamic Preachers since 9/11". *Islam and Christian-Muslim relations*, 9:2 (2008), pp. 215-235.

50 Jonathan Birt, "Good Imam, Bad Imam: Civic Religion and National Integration in Britain post-9/11", *The Muslim World*, 96:4 (2006), p. 688.

The emphasis on preventing radicalisation has also increased the political urgency of governments getting involved in supplying and training imams. Initiatives developed by Muslim organisations in Europe and especially those instigated or supported (including financially) by countries-of-origin and other countries in the Islamic world have been increasingly met with suspicion by European politicians, as effective potential channels of radical influence on Muslims in Europe.[51] As such, they might complicate and even impede government goals. For their part, many Muslim organisations have expressed worry over the increasing interference of European governments in religious affairs, not least when not restricted to a merely facilitating or supervisory role or when governments seem intent on interfering in the content of the religious sources, given their focus on the curriculum. Hardly surprisingly, this is an extremely sensitive issue.[52]

The politics of imam training

The developments sketched above constitute the background of current controversies, discussions, negotiations, and struggle over the question of who is in charge of the production, dissemination, and teaching of Islamic knowledge and of the training of imams for the European market. As indicated, it can seem as though this were primarily a "supply side" issue, when looking at literature and policy agendas. This is, however, a rather one-sided approach. The position of imams in Europe is inextricably linked with the fundamental question of who is entitled to produce, transmit, and teach Islamic knowledge to Muslims with a migrant background in Europe. This entitlement is not simply a matter of good training, qualified teachers, and the right religious sources, or of traditional authority, for that matter. The crucial question is whether or not an imam is accepted by the community he is to serve. As I have already indicated, the relevance of legitimacy is recognised by scholars but has hardly resulted in new research agendas.

This also raises the question of what we mean by Islamic knowledge. As Van Bruinessen argues, not only do Muslims disagree as to what proper Islamic knowledge is, but Islamic knowledge is itself broader and more encompassing than the

51   Enes Bayrakli and Fareed Hafez (eds.), *The state of Islamophobia in Europe* (Vienna: European Islamophobia Report (EIR), 2017).

52   There is an abundance of academic literature on liberalism, state neutrality, and religious freedom in Western countries. Most works take a politico-philosophical approach and deal with constitutional principles. Only a few authors address the actual policy dilemmas created by the contradiction between neutrality as a principle of non-intervention and active intervention to guarantee religious freedom. (See, e.g., Jereon Temperman, "State Neutrality in Public School Education", *Human Rights Quarterly*, 32 [2010], 866-898).

generally accepted standards of orthodoxy.[53] Following Talal Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition, he contends that Islamic knowledge is co-constituted by contextual, historical, cultural, and political circumstances. This discursive tradition follows a continuously evolving and transforming dynamic. Islamic knowledge is not just the inculcation of normative doctrinal canons into ordinary believers. It is also bottom-up critical reflection of established authoritative canons. In this way, Islamic knowledge includes the religious reasoning, social critique, and critical reflection of Muslims who are not religious experts. As Bano argues, discussion of Islamic knowledge production is discussion of the status of religious knowledge and of the institutions that produce that knowledge, the "Islamic authority platforms." Scholarly knowledge remains lofty and aloof, so long as scholars cannot engage with the realities of the time.[54] Many of the contemporary practices and initiatives of young Muslims involve reflection on the meaning of Islamic sources in novel ways that nonetheless retains reference to the past.[55]

In short, Islamic knowledge production is the result of what Lambek calls a "political economy of knowledge": "How are we to characterize the order to which people submit? Where is the locus of power?"[56] Authority-making is by definition embedded in specific historical, political, and social power configurations that generate religious truth-claims that cannot be traced back solely to normative doctrinal standards.

Islamic authority cannot be taken for granted as a quality unto itself and vested in professionals; it must be conferred continuously and stretches far beyond the limited confines of Islamic scholarly circles, doctrinal reflections, or debate. The legitimacy of religious professionals speaking authoritatively about Islam is based on much more than their command of "proper" Islamic sources or qualified training. As Mandaville[57] argues, religious authority is the result of the interaction between text, discursive method, and personified knowledge. This has always been the central discursive methodology in Islam, albeit in different modalities.

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53   Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi (eds.), *Producing Islamic Knowledge, Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe* (London-New York: Routledge, 2011).

54   Daan Beekers and David Kloos (eds.), *Straying from the straight Path: How Senses of Failure invigorate lived Religion* (New York: Berghahn Press, 2018).

55   See also see Sarah Bracke, "Conjugating the Modern-Religious, Conceptualizing Female Religious Agency: Contours of a 'Post-secular' Conjuncture", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 25:6 (2008), 51-68; Annelies Moors, "'Islamic fashion' in Europe: religious conviction, aesthetic style, and creative consumption", *Encounters*, 1:1 (2009), 175-201; David Kloos, *Becoming Better Muslims: Religious Authority and Ethical Improvement in Aceh, Indonesia* (Amsterdam: VU University [doctoral dissertation], 2013); Daan Beekers, "A Moment of Persuasion. Travelling Preachers and Islamic Pedagogy in the Netherlands", *Culture and Religion*, 16:2 (2015), 193-214; David Kloos and Mirjam Künkler, "Studying Female Islamic Authority: From Top-Down to Bottom-Up Modes of Certification", *Asian Studies Review*, 40:4 (2016), 479–490.

56   Michael Lambek, "Certain Knowledge, Contestable Authority: Power and Practice on the Islamic Periphery". *American Ethnologist*, 17:1 (1990), 28.

57   Peter Mandaville, "Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge", pp. 101-105.

Valdemar Vinding distinguishes two types of authority vested in imams in Europe: (1) institutional, denoting the authority vested in imams within a certain institutional structure, and (2) epistemic, denoting knowledge-based authority. He argues that the articulation of these two types of authority takes on specific forms against the background of the imam's position within a given Muslim community.[58] While I go along with this typology, the position of the imam produces another type of authority that is more difficult to grasp but is essential for understanding that position. This modality of authority centres on two qualities: trust and "local knowledge." Neither knowledge of the society in which they operate nor the fact of having been born and raised in the country are in themselves enough to secure an imam the status of trustworthiness within the community. Even if his theological and didactic qualities are uncontested by the community, they do not automatically generate legitimate status. Imams must also be trustworthy local leaders. Their pastoral skills ultimately rest on this trustworthiness; they must have "urban charisma". According to Blom Hansen and Verkaaik, effective urban leaders

> …emerge on the basis of their capacity to interpret, manage and master the opacity of the city. The specificity of the urban can neither be understood through the city's functions nor the dynamics of its social networks. The urban is also a way of being in the world and must be understood as a dense and complex cultural repertoire of imagination, fear and desire. We propose to understand the urban and its charismatic potential through three registers: the sensory regimes of the city; the specific forms of urban knowledge and intelligibility; and the specific forms of power, connectivity and possibility which we call urban infra-power.[59]

Charisma here is understood in a broader sense than the very specific but extraordinary qualities of individuals described by Weber.[60] The type of charisma posited here rests on special forms of knowledge, networks, connectedness, courage, and daring that enable certain individuals to assume leadership.[61] I argue that "urban charisma" is a crucial aspect of the authoritative status of an imam, particularly in circumstances of societal change. In situations of relative stability, Muslims abide by

58   Niels Valdemar Vinding, "Towards a typology of imams of the West", in *Imams in Western Europe, Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges*, Mohammed Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter, and Niels Valdemar Vinding (eds.) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

59   Blom Hansen, Thomas and Oskar Verkaaik, "Introduction—Urban Charisma: On Everyday Mythologies in the City", *Critique of Anthropology*, 29:1 (2009), p. 5.

60   Martin Riesebrodt, "Charisma in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion", *Religion*, 29:1 (1999), pp. 1-14.

61   Thomas Blom Hansen and Oskar Verkaaik, "Introduction—Urban Charisma: On Everyday Mythologies in the City", *Critique of Anthropology*, 29:1 (2009), pp. 5-26.

prevailing normative and authoritative frames. In such instances, the two types of authority that Valdemar Vinding distinguishes may suffice to engage effectively with a local community.

It is, however, precisely when Muslims find themselves under changing social conditions but still wish to live pious lives in accordance with established traditions, as in the case of Muslims with a migrant background, that frictions, ambiguities, and dilemmas emerge and Islamic authority becomes a subject of discussion and reflection. In these circumstances the imam, as trustworthy and reliable local community leader, becomes very important. It should be kept in mind that this type of authority cannot be claimed simply on the basis of acquiring certain skills. It develops, as it were, organically over a longer period of time.

Concluding remarks

In this article I have addressed the multifaceted process of producing and transmitting Islamic knowledge and the status of imams as key figures within Muslim communities in Europe. Many countries in Europe have put considerable effort into monitoring, facilitating, and even initiating programmes for training mams. Surveying those efforts, we can hardly avoid concluding that they have not been particularly successful to date. There are, in my view, two main reasons for this. The first is that the existing training facilities and arrangements, provided by established and often powerful private Muslim stakeholders, remain effective and, in most situations, adequate. Secondly, and more importantly, European governments seem to misjudge the characteristics and potential of the rapidly transforming Muslim communities in Europe. They seem obsessed with their own policy priorities and efforts to gain control. Clearly, this is not the way to go.

I have argued that it is ultimately a question of who is entitled to produce, transmit, and teach Islamic knowledge to Muslims with a migrant background in Europe and who those Muslim communities accept. The "politics of imam training" is a contentious and evolving field with a wide array of actors and stakeholders.[62] The

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[62] I borrow the concept of "field" from the work of Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly (*Dynamics of Contention,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and more recently of Manlio Cinali ("Fields of Contentious Politics: Migration and Ethnic Relations", in *Social Movement Studies in Europe: State of the Art*, Olivier Fillieule and Guya Accornero (eds.) (New York: Berghahn, 2016, pp. 86-102) to denote a realm of power-laden activity with a range of political actors, specific stakes, and conflicting definitions of interests and problems. See also Marcos Ancelovici, "Bourdieu in movement: toward a field theory of contentious politics", *Social Movement Studies*, 20:2 (2021.), pp. 155-173. Tarrow McAdam and Tilly distinguish two categories of contentious politics, viz., contained and transgressive. In the first category, only established actors participate and outcomes are more predictable and follow scripts. In the second, actors and stakes are much less prefabricated and outcomes less predictable (*Dynamics of Contention*, 7). I consider the politics of imam training exemplary of transgressive contentious politics.

relevant actors in this field are not confined to (foreign and domestic) governments with policy agendas or established (foreign and domestic) Muslim organisations with vested interests and positions. To fully grasp the field dynamics, we must take into account existing power configurations and mechanisms at work in the politics of imam training, the requirements and prospects for continuous transformation of Muslim communities in Europe, and the new (online and offline) preachers and producers of Islamic knowledge who challenge established organisations and institutions, as well as any other stakeholders.

The position of the imam in Europe is thus ultimately a product of the dynamics of a contentious field that shapes the evolving Islamic landscapes in Europe to a large extent. How this evolves and what courses it may take are unpredictable and contingent on many different factors. It is my contention here that the manifold reflections in the literature on the idea of a "European Islam" or any future prospects it may have are often shots in the dark.

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Proizvodnja i prenošenje islamskog znanja u Evropi: autoritet, etika i metodologija u politici obuke imama

Sažetak

Ovaj članak bavi se obukom imama za rad u evropskim muslimanskim zajednicama migrantskog porijekla. Imami se smatraju prvim faktorom u prenošenju islamskog znanja, pa je obuka ovih nominalnih vođa ključno pitanje sa mnogim značenjima. Obuka imama je poseban aspekt šireg, višestranog procesa koji obuhvata proizvodnju, prenošenje, usvajanje i tumačenje islamskog znanja. Obuka imama je, stoga, dio mnogo šireg pitanja pozicioniranja islama i muslimana u Evropi, posebno s obzirom na namjeru evropskih vlada da uzmu aktivniju ulogu. Ona se mora analizirati u ovom širem političkom i historijskom kontekstu. "Politika obuke imama", kako nazivam aktuelne debate, pregovore i inicijative koji uključuju različite učesnike, podrazumijeva više od obične obrazovne logistike. U središtu su pitanja autoriteta i legitimnosti, a u konačnici pitanja ko ima pravo da proizvodi i prenosi islamsko znanje i, naravno, poučava ga, te koga muslimanske zajednice prihvataju. Ovaj aspekt istraživači nisu šire obrađivali.

Ključne riječi: islamsko znanje, obuka imama, muslimani u Evropi, islamski autoritet, islamsko upravljanje