



PPN WORKING PAPER

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION AND INSTITUTIONS: ‘IMAM TRAINING’ IN EUROPE

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Executive Summary

With over 15 million Muslims now living in the EU there has been much discussion related to the emergence of *European* Muslim discourses, the challenges that Muslims living in Western Europe face and the processes of integrating Muslim communities and individuals. The role of the Imam and religious authority vis-à-vis such challenges has received a great deal of attention over recent years. There is also an important security dimension to such debates with concerns around the importance of religious leadership vis-à-vis the threat of radicalisation.

While ‘Imam-training’ has, in certain countries, become a focus for government engagement and prevent strategies, the question of religious guidance and authority and the influence they exert on Muslim communities is of course far broader than the role of Imams alone.

This paper is an attempt to lay out the issues – beyond the purely legal and organisational aspects of integrating Muslim communities into European models of relations between States and religions - that need to be better understood, clarified and addressed for legitimate and effective policy-making to be developed in this complex field. It is an attempt to supplement the mapping performed by the Spanish Justice Ministry of Imam Training provisions in Europe with the beginnings of a problem analysis and suggestions as to further areas for concrete follow-on work. It is vital that the core problems are clearly identified so that relevant responses can be elaborated. Community and wider societal needs will be assessed via an expert consultation being organised by ISD, which will feed into subsequent iterations of this working paper.

The core issues that complicate policy engagement in this sphere and that constitute the focus of this paper are summarised below:

- The term Imam is fluid. Imams are not like clergy in Christianity and often have more diffuse, varied and informal roles.
- The term ‘Imam training’ can be understood in very different ways. The extent to which the State can or should play a role depends very much on the definition employed.
- The ‘training’ of Imams can take a number of different forms, with very different goals and ends:
 - *Theological instruction* often at a seminary (i.e. the study of core subjects such as *fiqh* (law), *hadith* (teachings of Muhammad) and *tafsir* (commentary of the Qur’an)).
 - *The development of capacities for pastoral care* and community support (which might include communications training and ‘context training’ such as learning about the local culture, traditions, laws etc)
 - *Vocational training* (i.e. management, fundraising, finance, language skills)
 - *Higher theological education* including specialisations
- There is an important *difference between private and public provisions*. Some of the provisions are very informal, e.g. parental education at home, or courses run by a wide range of voluntary organisations. Mosques and seminaries offer other provisions. All of the private initiatives, where the state has no direct involvement, would mainly teach Islam from a ‘believer’s perspective’.

- The public dimension of religious instruction operates either at the school or University level, with courses that engage in the study of Islam from an academic perspective, i.e. not as a ‘truth’ but as a phenomenon to be studied.
- There are also now a small number of colleges that are Muslim led, but have tried to introduce Western academic methods into their curricula and at times occupy a halfway position between the seminary and the University. For instance, systems of accreditation have been developed for qualifications received at certain private colleges (and seminaries).
- Questions of *legitimacy and authority* remain central to any attempts by the State or non-community actors to engage in this area. When lay Muslims use the terms ‘Imam’ or ‘Sheikh’, and even the term ‘scholar’, they often refer to those that have graduated from i) a seminary, or ii) recognised University in the Muslim world, or iii) a protracted course of individual study with scholars from which an *ijaza* (certificate, license) is granted. A competent academic without such training, who may have graduated from Oxford, Cambridge or the Sorbonne may be seen to have achieved great standing in their secular training, but not to have the same ‘Islamic’ credentials.
- Muslims, like other citizens, are subject to highly complex influences from a great diversity of sources and Imams are only one of those points of influence - the importance of one agency of influence, be that family or Imams, or school needs to be placed in a broader context.
- Therefore beyond the role of the Imam, it is important to consider the way in which religious authority and the ‘consumption of knowledge’ among Muslims in Europe is being shaped by modern technology such as the Internet, satellite channels and online social networking. Indeed it is worth looking in more depth at *how technology may be re-shaping notions of authority and identity* among European Muslims. For many young people, notions of community and territory are now being re-cast in terms of their engagement within cyberspace.
- Speakers popular in the global lecture and conference arena such as Hamza Yusuf, Tariq Ramadan, Amr Khaled, Yusuf al-Qaradawi and others have taken significant steps towards creating an online and new media presence that allows them to communicate with ever-larger audiences. *How the influence and authority of local Imams compares to such popular, international figures* needs exploring in particular if policy makers are trying to engage with those that exert influence on the religious and social identity of young Muslims in Europe;

Indeed if meaningful work is to be done in this sphere, the needs of communities need to be properly understood. In terms of the *needs of young Muslims*, a recent survey by the Muslim Youth Helpline in the UK

shows that the most prevalent questions among young Muslims - areas in which they sought religious guidance - were firstly around relationships, then mental health and religion itself. Given the broadly conservative nature of the delivery of religious instruction (in terms of the style of delivery and issues addressed) by Imams either in Mosques or in less formal organisations, it seems there is a clear *disjoint between community needs, in particular the needs of 2nd or 3rd generation Muslim youth, and the type of guidance provided by Imams*, including the type of questions they are able to address. The implication is that the less Imams are able to engage on the challenges faced by their congregations, the more vulnerable certain groups are, especially the young, to the advances of extremists.

A historic perspective on Islamic religious instruction in Europe provides an explanation for this disjoint: religious leadership was originally imported from abroad - mainly from rural areas from where the majority of Muslim migrants to Europe came - due to language, cultural and traditional interests. The impact of this has persisted. However, as the settlement process began to take shape, an emerging discourse began to argue for the local development of Imams. A number of seminaries have been established within Europe that cater for men and women to be educated and trained in the Islamic sciences, and these are now producing 'home-grown' Imams. While there has been a general drive towards 'domesticising' the training of Imams in Europe, beyond the location of the training, *the crucial issue remains the curriculum* - what is being taught and how it is being taught. The Darse Nizami syllabus within the South Asian tradition is given here as an example of a key syllabus in operation within European seminaries.

While the plethora of messages, globalised virtual information and religious guidance available via the Internet offers certain opportunities of perspective, breadth and choice to Muslim communities/individuals, it also represents a number of risks. *Human contact and a trusted source of guidance in an internet age may in fact be all the more important*. This underlines the complex role that Imams would now be expected to fulfil – not only to answer simple questions, but to mediate between and provide an 'editorial' role vis-à-vis a number of possible answers that members of congregations have picked up from a variety of sources.

A broad ranging knowledge and set of skills are therefore demanded of faith leaders in a modern society, if the requirements of faith communities as well as social cohesion are to be met.

How governments engage in that process is a very sensitive and challenging question. To what extent should governments be involved in how and what variety of Islam is taught? Should they stick only to supplementary, practical areas of 'Imam training' (i.e. vocational and contextual) staying away from theological aspects? In what areas and how can government interventions be legitimate in the eyes of

communities? How do State-sponsored endeavours interact with private-community-led practices? In this context, there is an important discussion around how best to engage- i.e. via legal enforcement or self-regulated guidelines.

These are some of the issues and questions that will be raised with a group of experts, academics and community leaders at a meeting organised by ISD in order to complement our understanding of current provisions and gauge community-based perspectives, problems and needs vis-à-vis these provisions. The results of the consultation will be presented to the EPPN and also fed into subsequent revisions of this paper.

Currently the provision of religious instruction and of courses that help to develop Imams varies tremendously across the EU. Some of this is contingent on broader debates around the position of Islam within different national contexts and also on the varied relationships between States and organised religions. Recent research conducted by Juan Ferriero Galguera (unpublished) shows that the data, and indeed service provision, is patchy. EPPN countries and some of their data are shown here identifying gaps in information (and the need for further data gathering).

Two potential areas for follow-up work are suggested in this paper, one at the organisational and practical skills development level, and the other at the normative, theological level:

1. The development of *national good practices and guidelines*, based on lessons drawn from different national contexts for supplementing the skills set of Imams and religious leaders after graduation from a seminary. Member states can continue to work with and help to develop their seminaries towards national standards. An exploration of means to empower communities to self-regulate such standards is needed;
2. Member states and the EU could assist in developing an independent postgraduate centre, a *European Islamic Studies Centre* which builds on the training provided at the national level and then gives further orientation towards more contextualised Muslim thought leadership across the EU. The extent to which financial support can be divorced from outcomes and the independence of activity ensured will be vital to the legitimacy and authority of work coming out of such a centre and hence to the success of any government initiative in this sphere.

1. Introduction and Background

With over 15 million Muslims now present in the EU there has been much discussion around the emergence of *European* Muslim discourses, the challenges that Muslims living in Western Europe face and the process of integrating Muslim communities and individuals. Discussions around the development of European Muslim identities are now commonplace and the notion of ‘Contextualising’ Islam for a European environment has recently been advanced by a report from Cambridge University (Suleiman, 2009) developed and endorsed by over 20 prominent Muslim scholars and activists.¹

While the challenge of dealing with the transformation of religious traditions, continuity versus change and engagement with modernity, are clearly challenges that face all religions in the modern day, particular attention has been focused on Muslim communities, and the adaptation of religious authority therein (Van Bruinessen, 2003), due in part to their growing presence in Europe, the socio-economic challenges that many Muslim communities face and the potential in this area for enhancing positive encounters, meaningful dialogue, social cohesion and integration.

There is also an important security dimension to such debates as there has been concern around the importance of religious leadership and the threat of radicalisation. This is not only because of the few Imams (such as Hamza in the UK, Kaplan in Germany, etc) that have been identified to promote violent and jihadist discourse, but also because of the positive role that religious leaders are expected to play in protecting vulnerable groups and individuals, especially the young in this context, from extremist (and "un-Islamic") messages. The implication is that if Imams are ill equipped to communicate with the young and to deal with the challenges facing their communities, this leaves their congregations more exposed and vulnerable to the advances of extremists.

If these are the concerns to which Imam training is posited as a coherent response, it is important to further interrogate not only what the problems are in terms of the current provision of religious instruction but also what the actual needs of communities and wider society are. Religious guidance and authority and their influences on Muslim communities is far broader than the role of Imams alone. Furthermore, Imams are not

¹ The ‘Contextualising Islam in Britain’ report was a result of deliberations of over 20 Muslim scholars and activists around contemporary issues and challenges facing Muslims, specifically focused on how Muslim could meet these modern challenges and what Islamic teachings mean in the modern context in light of such challenges. The project was funded by the UK Department for Communities and Local Government and run by the Cambridge Centre of Islamic Studies.

like clergy in Christianity and often have more diffuse, varied and informal roles. To make matters more complex, a variety of roles and positions can be subsumed under the general title of ‘Imam’.²

A historical perspective of the evolution of religious instruction and Imam training in Europe provides an important insight into some of the contemporary challenges faced.

The mass migration of Muslims from various parts of the world occurred after World War II and was initially seen to be a temporary presence by most migrants, as well as ‘host nations’. The realisation of settlement began to dawn as an organic development of the Muslim presence with the growth and indigenisation of subsequent generations. Hence early pre-occupations for many Muslims were not about rooting and contextualising their presence, but rather about preserving what they had inherited and brought from their countries of origin. Religious leadership was often imported from abroad (Johansen, 2006) due to language, cultural and traditional interests. This often meant that the early Imams were trained in a rural setting (as the origins of many Muslims in Europe was rural), in developing countries with low literacy levels and were unable to deal adequately with the urban challenges faced by a population now growing up in Europe. Particularly for the second and third generations, many of whom only had access to European languages, this created an important challenge in connecting with the religious traditions and roots of their communities.

As the settlement process began to take shape, an emerging discourse began to argue for the local development of Imams often known as ‘home-grown’ Imams. A number of factors were highlighted including the importance of building institutions of religious instruction to cater to the needs of growing communities and younger generations (see for example Landman, 1999) and related to this the need for enhanced Islamic studies curricula (see for example Siddiqui, 2007) and the continuing development of European educators. In addition dynamics of change and adaptation have been noted within seminaries and institutions of training (Gilliat-Ray, 2006), including the increased use of European languages as the languages of instruction, as well as evolution in the methods of teaching and in the curricula used.

² The word *Imam* is a very broad term - it can refer to a person who leads prayer, a scholar, or even a head of state. In this context it is mainly the person who leads prayer in a mosque and is also expected to cater to the religious and pastoral needs of the congregation. A number of related terms include: *Shaykh* – literally meaning someone elderly, but often refers to a scholar and widely used as a term/title of respect; *Alim* – also means scholar; *Mufti* – a high-ranking scholar who is qualified to make legal pronouncements and verdicts (*fatwas*).

A number of seminaries have been established within Europe that cater for men and women to be educated and trained in the Islamic sciences, and these are producing home-grown *Imams* (see Section 3). In recent years there has also been a trend of people travelling abroad to learn Arabic and Islamic studies in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and Syria. While some of the teachings and influences derived from such foreign study may be positive, not all are, and the risk is a further alienation or detachment of teachings from domestic contexts within Europe. In addition to the *location* of instruction, the crucial issue seems to be about the *curriculum* utilised.

Beyond foreign travel and study there is another important development that is affecting how religious authority and the ‘consumption of knowledge’ among Muslims is being shaped: that is modern technology such as the Internet, satellite channels and online social networking. Access to instant global knowledge, ideas and debates begs the question: how relevant is work on pastoral care and local service delivery? It also posits opportunities in terms of reaching a far wider constituency and for cross-border, transnational work.

It is clear that the evolving needs of communities and the requirements of social cohesion demand religious leaders with a wide range of skills and experience over and above the theological frame of reference. The term ‘Imam training’ is rather narrow therefore as a description of the multiple requirements of communities and societies vis-à-vis religious guidance and instruction.

This working paper looks briefly at some of the current debates and challenges in the provision of religious instruction and identifies the needs, from both community and State perspectives. It explores some of the issues around religious authority and legitimacy in the contexts of Islamic instruction and influence, but also in the context of globalisation. It looks at some of the provisions currently in place and the different types of educational establishments in existence, providing suggestions for ways in which EPPN member states and the EU institutions might follow up and engage in this complex field.

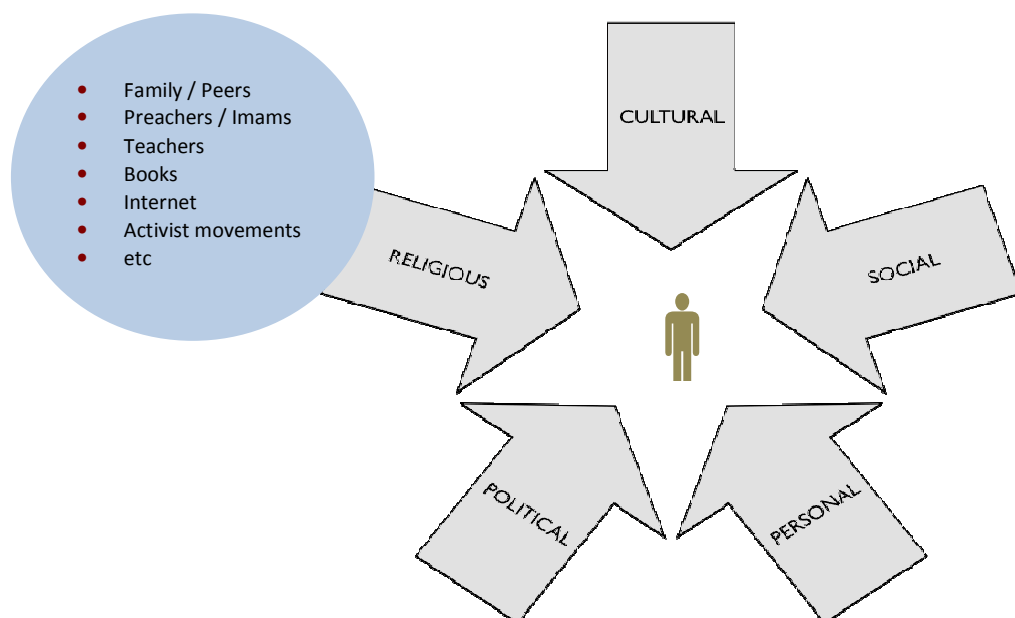
2. The Development of Religious Instruction and Institutions: Problem Analysis

With a subject as complex and sensitive as this - one that has links to so many aspects of the European Muslim presence - it is important to identify very precisely the problems we wish to address if relevant responses are to be developed.

Why should European governments have an interest in the training of Imams? Is it in order to ensure the provision of religious infrastructure for a relatively new minority in Western Europe in order to encourage settlement and integration? Is it in order to encourage social cohesion and support to citizenship education, or is to address security concerns around the radicalisation of Muslim opinion? Or is it a mixture of the above?

Furthermore when thinking of the role of Imams, is the concern with the role of Imams in Muslim communities, or about how religious narratives are constructed, even imported, and how these narratives influence Muslim populations?

If indeed the problems to which Imam training is posited as a response are multifold as suggested above, then it must be noted that Muslims, like others, are subject to highly complex influences from a great diversity of sources and Imams – even when it comes to religious guidance and instruction - are only one of those sources of influence:



Even the above pictorial representation is a gross oversimplification, but it shows that the importance of one agency of influence, be that family or Imams or school, needs to be placed in a broader context.

2.1 Muslim identity, modernity and technology

The influence of religious authority on young people has often been debated in both public and private circles, especially as faith communities in Europe grapple with the impact of new influences. While we are considering the training of religious authority in Europe, it is worth putting some emphasis on how technology may be re-shaping notions of authority and identity among European Muslims.

The starting point should perhaps be to look at Muslim identity formation in contemporary Europe. In previous writings (Hussain, 2005; Hussain, 2004) I have proposed that the most important elements that impinge on the formation of a Muslim identity relate to how Muslims conceptualise three important issues: the notion of self, the understanding of physical space and territory and the concept of community in its broadest terms that frames the context of one's human relationships.

For many young people, notions of community and territory are now being re-cast in terms of their engagement within cyberspace. While the dichotomy between Dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam, Muslim lands) and various other realms such as Dar al-Harb (abode of war) or Dar al-Kufr (abode of non-Muslims) have been questioned for some time now (Fadl, 1994; Ramadan, 1999; Hussain, 2004) globalisation at the level of cyberspace has rendered these categories irrelevant and could also be set to fundamentally change the notions of community. Islamic teachings can be found across cyberspace, ranging from critiques of religion to promotion of mystical traditions to ultra conservative and even violent strands of opinion. Bunt (2000) raises the question of whether one can be 'Islamic' and 'digital' or are these contradictory terms. What has been the impact of modernity and technology on European Muslims and has the computer effectively replaced traditional communication? If so, the role of religious influence and where it comes from has changed dramatically in recent years, and the transnational influences on young British Muslims are potentially now more fluid and have the capacity for greater influence than a decade ago.

2.2 Needs of young people and women

A recent survey by the Muslim Youth Helpline in the UK shows that the most prevalent questions among young Muslims were firstly around relationships, then mental health and religion (Muslim Youth Helpline, 2008). The helpline deals with around 5,000 queries every year mostly by telephone, email and via the Internet. Though about a third of all the users of the helpline are between the ages of 16 and 19, the age range is wide with a variance from 11-30. With discussion around relationships, sexuality and sexual health still taboo within Muslim communities, it may be possible that young people are finding it easier to take these discussions into cyberspace where some anonymity can be adopted. Will this sense of liberation through cyberspace create new modes of theological expression to compete with traditional styles of Islamic scholarship and delivery of religious instruction via Imams preaching at mosques?

Kort (2005) asks how a traditionally marginalised audience – women, may have new opportunities to engage in the process of receiving and imparting religious material via the internet. In particular Qur’anic interpretations are a key area. The traditional interpretations of some verses relating to gender issues have been questioned by female scholars such as Asma Barlas (2002) and Amina Wadud (1994) in print. Francis Robinson (Mandaville, 2007) remarked that the printed word meant that “...any Ahmad, Mahmud or Muhammad could claim to speak for Islam”, Kort (2005) extends this further by saying “Perhaps the age of the Internet will be the time for Aisha, Fatima and Khadija to consult and speak for Islam.” As well as this Muslim women may feel able to contribute to online debates with less fear that their comments will be regarded as less significant because of their gender. This may be more appealing to the younger generation of female Muslims who, when faced with discriminatory undertones of conversation on both religion and society, may be more confident in understanding and even addressing such challenges. However, Mazrui (2001) points out the risk of creating a “computerized hijab” for women, as “women can more easily stay at home, while continuing to participate in a computerized workplace...the computer can, in fact, enhance isolation” and for young people may create an increased dependency on virtual relationships than those in their real lives, particularly during difficult teenage years.

2.3 Shifting trends in religious authority: cyberspace and the emergence of religious guidance beyond the Imam

Scholars popular on the global lecture and conference arena such as Hamza Yusuf, Tariq Ramadan, Amr Khaled, Yusuf al-Qaradawi and others have taken significant steps towards creating an online presence that allows them to communicate with their audience. While such scholars don't function as Imams in the sense that they do not lead local congregations in prayer, they are involved in providing religious guidance, in cyberspace and the real world, that bring them into contact with large audiences. In their off-line gatherings these scholars commonly attract thousands at large conferences. Online, they have also developed a significant presence, for example Hamza Yusuf and Tariq Ramadan have around 20,000 'fans' on their facebook pages. Their *fatawa* and sermons touch on a wide range of issues from gender challenges to organ donation and Muslim / non-Muslim relations in the West. The apparently heavy investment into their websites reflects the increasing importance such scholars give to 'going digital' as a fundamental mode of communication.

Mp3 players have paved the way for information that was only available to a computer station to now become a mobile resource which can be accessed anywhere at anytime as a download or podcast. This means young people, who are most likely to download, can share this with their friends and family with ease, creating a domino effect across their social networks (discussed below). This means a Friday sermon may be delivered in Pakistan or the US and heard within hours in the UK via online resources such as IslamicTube, YouTube and You Tube Islam as well as sites dedicated to this subject such as www.fridaykhutbah.com which campaigned in the US to raise awareness of issues such as domestic violence within the Muslim community. Such sermons are no longer restricted to a physical presence in the congregation; they can now be accessed around the world. The growing presence of Satellite TV channels is also adding to this mix of globalised religious authority as European Muslim communities now frequently connect with debates from Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and various Arab countries.

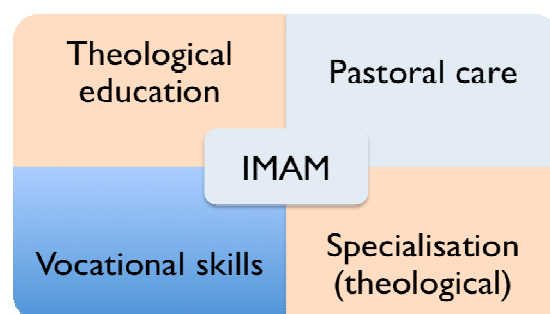
The use of direct language seems important and websites studied by Kort (2005) also showed that the most popular used plain language. This also shows the very eclectic nature of the way that young Muslims now seem to be accessing knowledge – perhaps in an attempt to move away from the factionalism of ideological orientations, and furthermore because of the nature of the transmission of knowledge in electronic format being less formal, less driven by personal affiliation – they seem comfortable in accessing a variety of different, even contrasting and contradictory, sources and 'picking and choosing' from among them. We have seen, for example, young people who may belong to an organisation of revivalist / Islamist heritage also

passionately follow the discourses of Hamza Yusuf or other Sufi preachers. This may also represent a nascent separation of roles of social activism and personal piety. This is a trend that can be seen in wider religious circles too – Grace Davie’s work on *Believing Without Belonging* shows how religious observance and affiliation in Christianity have become more complex with people picking and choosing their modes of religious expression, their notion of congregation, and individualising their attitudes much more.

2.4 The Imam: training courses and education providers

So what of the role of the humble ‘local Imam’? The undeniable cyber-influence need not undermine this role. On the contrary, it may be that with the plethora of messages and globalised virtual information available via the Internet, human contact and a trusted source of guidance becomes even more important. While the impact of cyberspace no doubt complicates discussions around the growth of modern Muslim identities and gives us vital issues to consider, traditional figures of Imams and the methods of their training remain important, even if they need some re-casting in light of such developments . But more importantly, this also shows the complex roles that Imams would now be expected to fulfil – not only to answer simple questions, but to mediate between a variety of possible answers, to some extent providing an ‘editorial function’ and refine what members of the congregation have picked up from a variety of sources and to provide a sense of perspective, balance and both religious and local context.

Looking at the roles played by Imams at a local level, a number of dimensions can be identified in their overall skills and knowledge requirements.



These four dimensions of the knowledge and skill requirements: i) theological education (e.g. *fiqh* (law), *hadith* (teachings of Muhammad), *tafsir* (commentary of the Qur'an)), ii) pastoral care experience and skills, iii) other vocational skills such as language, communication, management, and iv) higher theological education and expertise, can all be identified within the broad training of many classical Imams where the processes were often much less formal and were more individualised – allowing for trainee scholars to travel and gain elements of knowledge from different sectors and quarters. Often living with a teacher in a religious community was emphasised, allowing for attitudes, knowledge, skills and personal qualities, far beyond the academic to be imbibed through experiential means. But in the context of contemporary Europe and modern Islamic educational syllabi such comprehensive provisions are not usually available under one systematic course.

In reality therefore, a variety of different ‘providers’ supply religious education at various levels, *some* of which Imams benefit from.

Religious Education Providers (and courses)								
Home / Cultural inheritance	State school (very basic level)	Mosque / Madrasa	Dar ul-Ulum/ Seminary	College (certificates and degrees)	University (degrees and higher)	Religious / Voluntary Organisation	Ad hoc course / online course	Private study with a Scholar: 'ijaza'
Informal	Wide variance Public	Evening classes	Full time / board	Various	Public	Informal	Informal	Intensive various lengths

Some of these provisions are very informal (green), and would include parental education at home, or study groups run by a wide range of voluntary organisations. More structured courses in the summer holidays and on weekends have a significant presence and operate at various levels – for example, one currently popular course (closely aligned with *salafi* scholars) advertises a degree that can be gained by attending weekend courses on a modular basis (www.alkauthar.org), though no mention is made of where the accreditation for the degree comes from. Other provisions (in pink) are offered by mosques and seminaries – madrasa evening classes for youngsters at a very wide level and seminaries that provide the core education for those who want to be Imams, across Europe. All of these initiatives mentioned so far are private initiatives where the state has no direct involvement. They would also mainly teach Islam from a ‘believers perspective’, i.e. not as a detached, external body of knowledge.

The public dimension of education (blue) operates either at the school level (though not in every EU country), where publicly agreed curricula are used to teach general information on religions, usually at a very basic level. Furthermore, at the University level, courses that engage in the study of Islam from an academic perspective, i.e. not as a ‘truth’ but as a phenomenon to be studied and scrutinised, are probably the mostly widely known in terms of ‘courses on Islam’. Such courses are operated by various faculties within Universities - theology, religious studies, sociology, political science, history, etc. – and each would have their own academic ethos and methodology vis-à-vis the study of the subject. There are also now a small number of colleges (light blue) that are Muslim led, but have tried to bring in Western academic methods into their curricula and have also developed partnerships with other faiths, mainly Christian, in imparting courses for example on chaplaincy skills. These colleges usually aim for academic accreditation with a national University and at times occupy a halfway position between the seminary and the University.

2.4.2 Legitimacy and authority

Looking at the range of courses automatically raises the question of where legitimacy lies in the eyes of Muslim constituents. Johansen (2006) has raised a number of important concerns around religious authority and legitimacy and how Muslim publics may view graduates of different institutions. We have also seen above how the nature and dynamics of religious authority is changing. The situation is therefore very complex without any easy answers. However when lay Muslims use the terms Imam or Sheikh, and even the term ‘scholar’, they often refer to those that have graduated from i) a seminary, or ii) recognised University in the Muslim world, such as Azhar or Qom, or iii) a protracted course of individual study with scholars from which an *ijaza* (certificate, literally meaning permission or license) is granted. In the Sufi tradition, particular emphasis is placed on teacher-student relationship and the lineage of such scholarship – if it reaches back to the Prophet Muhammad or one of his close companions, then this is viewed as bestowing great merit.

A competent academic without such training, who may have graduated from Oxford, Cambridge or the Sorbonne may be seen to have achieved great standing in their secular training, but not to have the same ‘Islamic’ credentials. As mentioned this is not always a simple matter, individuals can and do win (or lose) respect based on factors such as moral integrity, spirituality, activism, message, articulation, charisma and rapport. But it is also important to remember that there is no single constituency. The dynamics of opinion

formation among Muslims is highly diversified. Among some there may also be scepticism of the quality of training attained by a graduate of a seminary and this may lead some Muslims to look for alternative markers of respect. For example many popular leaders and preachers can claim huge followings not only based on scholarship but also on charisma, rational appeal, neutrality and worldly success.

2.4.3 Employability

Another key issue is that of employability. Those who do graduate from a seminary - whether domestically or from abroad – may often struggle to find well-paid teaching positions within Muslim communities. Anecdotally it is known that many such graduates end up working in completely unrelated areas of employment. The reasons for this appear to be mainly twofold: i) Simply that the job market is small. While the quest for home-grown Imams seems to be a drive both in Muslim communities as well as their wider societies, the numbers of mosques in Europe are actually quite limited and don't offer regular job opportunities – for example in the UK there are around 2,000 mosques – while the number of graduates from seminaries are close to a hundred every year. Positions are not vacated quickly and so graduates are left in surplus. ii) Secondly, the pay is very low. Partly due to the perceived surplus of Imams, and also because a 'religious calling' is not deemed to be a profitable career.

This means that young Imams often teach for a few hours in a madrasa (supplementary school), or a mosque and then also claim state benefits if they are formally unemployed, or work in an unrelated area such in a shop or drive a taxi. The Mosques and Imams national Advisory Board (MINAB) in the UK³ aside from its other contributions, could play an important role in setting standards, minimum pay and bettering the working conditions of Imams. Similar umbrella bodies might be useful in other European countries especially in those where the government requires a coherent representative structure in order to engage with the religion on the same terms as more long-term established religions.

Recently there has been a gradual trend of Imams moving into state-funded chaplaincy roles such as in the prison service or in hospitals. This appears to be an attractive option for Imams, though additional skills and

³ The Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) is an independent body that was launched on 27th June 2006. It is developing a code of standards for mosques and Imams following a national consultation on issues such as the accreditation of Imams, better governance of mosques and interfaith activity. MINAB was originally set up, with financial support from the UK government, by four founding organisations: Al-Khoei Foundation, British Muslim Forum, Muslim Association of Britain and Muslim Council of Britain. Its website is: www.minab.org.uk.

qualifications may be required. The Markfield Institute of Higher Education in the UK has been running a chaplaincy training course for over 5 years, devised with the support of the local Anglican Diocese in order to tap into the expertise within the Christian community.

While it has been mentioned above that the job market for Imams is small, the general feeling of youth organisations, community groups, the State and some Imams themselves, seems to be that improvements can be brought about and Imams can be trained in more skills and with more contextual knowledge. Such skills may exert an important dynamic on the job market over time. The more public sector jobs that emerge (i.e. prison and hospital chaplaincies), for which a certain level and type of qualifications are in demand, the more attractive the training required for such positions may become, given the higher levels of pay for such jobs.

3. Mapping existing practice

The provision of religious instruction and of courses that help to develop Imams varies tremendously across the EU. Some of this is contingent on broader debates around the position of Islam within different national contexts and also on the varied relationships between states and religions. For example Austria inherited laws dating back to the 19th Century that recognised some aspects of Muslim family law. In 1878 Bosnia-Herzegovina was occupied and this was the first time that large numbers of Muslims lived within Austrian territory. In order to cater for the Muslims there the Hapsburg Empire allowed the application of Islamic family law in the courts, necessitating the translation into German of Hanafi family law codes in 1883. In 1912 an older law was expanded to recognise the Hanafi school and those who followed it as a religious group. This law of 1912 became known as the Islam Act (*Islamgesetz*) and later in the 1970s the law was revived to cover newer Muslim communities and their needs – partly around education and religious instruction. In the case of Spain, in 1992 the King of Spain signed official agreements with Protestants, Jews and Muslims (represented by the *Spanish Islamic Commission*) officially recognising these religious communities. The appendix to the agreement with Muslims lists a preamble stating the purpose behind the agreement and then 14 articles that deal with some of the social and spiritual needs of Muslims living in Spain. In other contexts such as the UK, there is the Church of England and no significant discourse of formal recognition of other faiths, but *de facto* working arrangements with bodies such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Office of the Chief Rabbi and various Muslim organisations.

Recent research conducted by Ferreiro Galguera (unpublished), one of the few attempts at mapping institutions across the EU shows that the data, and indeed service provision, is quite patchy. Selected countries and some of their data are shown here:

Country	Type of Institution / Position		
	Seminary	University	Chaplaincy
Austria	0	University of Vienna diploma (2009)	38 chaplains
Belgium	N/A	University of Louvain course (2007)	18 prison chaplains
Denmark	0	University of Aarhus course (2008)	3 prison chaplains, 1 hospital
France	6	Catholic Institute of Paris university diploma (2009)	105 chaplains in prison
Germany	5+	The University of Münster course (2005) Bayreuth University course (2006) Osnabrück University Masters programme (2008)	N/A

		Frankfurt University course University of Erlangen- Nürnberg chair for Islamic studies	
Spain	2	National University of Distance Learning course (2009) University of Camilo José Cela course	12 prison chaplains
Sweden	0	N/A	55 Imam positions, some of which act as prison chaplains
Netherlands	N/A	3 Public Universities / 1 private	62 prison chaplains
United Kingdom	25+	6+ further education / higher education institutions	203 prison chaplains

(Ferreiro Galguera (unpublished))

3.1 Imam training curricula

Due to the importance of tradition within Islamic discourse, many of the seminaries established within Europe tend to follow the inherited traditions of their founders. A wide variety of curricula are available here in Europe – including the ones established by the Diyanet originating in Turkey), the Milli Gorus (also originating in Turkey), and those broadly based on the *Darse Nizami* (originating from the Indian subcontinent). Some information is presented here on the Darse Nizami, for this working document, with a view to expanding this for other traditions in subsequent revisions of the paper.

3.1.1 Case study: Darse Nizami

Christine Fair in her book *The Madrasah Challenge, Military and Religious Education in Pakistan* touches on the history of the Darse Nizami mentioning that it originated from India under the guidance of Mulla Nizamuddin from the Firangi Mahal . Jamal Malik in *Colonisation of Islam, Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan*, discusses the religious educational system in Pakistan and describes the process that the system has gone through over the years. Furthermore, Yoginder Sikand in *Bastions of Believers, Madrasas and Islamic Education in India* has written extensively on the emergence of madrasas in Asia, also touching on the history of Darse Nizami:

“Mullah Nizamuddin is credited with having prepared a syllabus of studies based on a set of carefully selected texts for the students of Firangi Mahal. Named after him as the Dars-e-Nizami, it was heavily skewed in favour of the ‘rational’ sciences, providing students with the sort of education they needed for a job in government service.” (Sikand: 2005, 46)

Sikand also mentions possible links to other parts of the Muslim world:

“Some believe that the honour goes to the Madrasa Nizamiya in the Iranian town of Nishapur, founded in the eleventh century. However, it seems that some madrasas existed even prior to that...the nizamiya madrasa at Nishapur, one of the earliest state-sponsored madrasas in the Muslim world, is regarded as the model that many later madrasas elsewhere followed. The madrasa was named after its founder, Khawaja Abu ‘Ali Hasan, more popularly known as Nizam ul-Mulk Tusi (1018-1092).” (Sikand: 2005, 26)

Style of teaching

The style of teaching remains pretty much the same as it was in the past. The medium of instruction in most cases remains Urdu, even in Bangladesh this was ostensibly the case, and it is still taught this way, although, since independence the medium of instruction has been changed to Bengali.

In the UK, the Deobandi inclined seminaries have remained almost unchanged, and it seems that the trend of teaching in Urdu will remain for some time. Changes have come into the Berelvi & Jamat-i-Islami inclined seminaries where some teaching now occurs in English. Many graduates who are now teaching use English as the language of instruction.

In terms of the environment of teaching, some seminaries still hold classes in an open space i.e. the Mosque hall. The seating is arranged in a square shape which runs along the lines of the walls with groups of students sitting on the floor and teachers leaning against the wall facing the students. Other seminaries have lessons in modern classrooms though this is often seen as a breakaway from the traditional method of running classes.

The lessons are largely taught or delivered in the traditional way, with the teacher teaching verbally without visual aids or handouts. Furthermore, there is usually no room to interrogate or challenge teachers on any particular issue. The reason behind this is that teachers are revered and questioning them would be a sign of disrespect. Reverence for teachers is an integral part of the culture that becomes established in such institutions. Some seminaries may function as boarding schools and teachers can take on a pseudo-parenting role. The learning model still seems to be one of passive learning, with quite onerous memorisation targets from key texts. This is seen in more traditional Darul ‘Ulooms though this trend is beginning to change in some of the UK institutions.

Duration of the course

In most cases a student in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan would normally complete the Darse Nizami in ten to eleven years with this another two or three years can be added if someone wishes to become a specialist in any area. The areas are Fiqh, Hadith, and Tafseer, after which one will become a Mufti, Muhaddith or Mufassir. In the UK, however, some Darul ‘Ulooms have reduced the basic course to six years, for others eight years, in which all the major subjects are taught and it is therefore more intensive. Some subjects such as Philosophy, Logic, and Poetry may have been taken out of the syllabi completely.

Some seminaries, in addition to the core subjects, have mainstream sciences included in the syllabus, including Maths, Political Science, English, and History. In addition to these subjects there are other topics relating to etiquette and manners, which are also included although they do not form a formal subject but are included within subsidiary teaching. In total a student will have studied a minimum of sixty to seventy books throughout the duration of the course.

Funding

In most cases the seminaries are independently funded (through fees) and extra support would come from donations from the locality. The majority of the seminaries in the Indian subcontinent would be free seminaries therefore students would depend on the institution for support, and one of the reasons why students would choose to attend such places is precisely because of this free education.

Curriculum

It is interesting that despite the wide ranging theological difference between the strands of Indian Islam, they still largely follow the same syllabus, the Darse Nizami. The key elements of a typical Darse Nizami syllabus would include:

- Sarf / Nahu – Arabic Grammar
- Adab – Arabic Literature
- Arabic Language
- Urdu Language
- Farsi Language
- Farsi Grammar
- Farsi Poetry
- Mantiq - Logic
- Falsafa - Philosophy
- Aqaid - Creed
- Faraid – Legal obligations
- Ilm Munazira/Ilm Kalam - Theology
- Tareekh - History
- Usul ul-Tafsir – Principle of commentary of the Qur'an
- Ilm Mani – Interpretation
- Tajwid – Recitation of the Qur'an
- Tafsir - Commentary of the Qur'an
- Usul ul-Hadith – Principles of hadith
- Hadith – Traditions of the Prophet
- Usul ul-Fiqh – Principles of jurisprudence
- Fiqh – Islamic law
- Ilmul Balagah – Art of rhetoric

Once an individual has covered all these areas at a degree level, one is awarded the qualification of Alim(scholar) and is recognised as a professional Imam.

3.2 Top-up measures

As it can be seen from the table above (Ferreiro Galguera), in a number of countries Universities have began to offer courses that can supplement the education of graduates of seminaries. Colleges are also offering certificates in chaplaincy skills and other aspects of vocational training as has been mentioned.

One new type of measure involving government support in the UK context is the facilitation of academic working relationships between the Cambridge Centre of Islamic Studies, Cairo's Azhar University and some seminaries in the UK. The project (currently in pilot stage) aims to help graduates of UK seminaries to undertake further studies at Azhar and Cambridge to supplement their learning and also be exposed to a broader range of educational and vocational skills. It is hoped that such an arrangement allows for the graduates of UK seminaries to gain access to a credible, international Muslim institution, and also marry that with the reputation of Cambridge. Furthermore, while facilitated by the UK government, the initiative is led by the academic partners who decide upon the curriculum of study.

4. Consultation exercise

In order to complement our understanding of current provisions and to assess needs from different perspectives we have organised a consultation exercise that should allow us to look at needs from a comparative framework across Europe and to draw on various European experiences so that good practices can be identified with the aim of upgrading support and pastoral care to communities, especially for the next generation in such a way that is consistent with the requirements of social cohesion. This consultation exercise will bring together a small but diverse group of scholars, educators, practitioners and academics working in this area, from a variety of European contexts, to explore some of these ideas further, consider experiences and best practices from a number of countries and work towards mapping out needs in the area of religious instruction.

The meeting will explore the following questions from a communities perspective:

- Are there gaps in the current training and education of religious leaders and Imams in Europe?
- How can educators and institutions (Mosques, seminaries and possibly schools) be supported to better deal with new generations of Muslim youth?
- What are the broad needs of Muslims communities in Europe vis-à-vis religious leaders and Imams?
- What role can religious institutions of the Muslim faith play in building social cohesion? Are there gaps in the skills and knowledge required to fulfil such roles?
- Is there a role for non-governmental agencies or institutions (i.e. schools, universities, NGOs) outside of the Muslim community to play in this area?
- Is there a role for national governments or the European Union to play in supporting developments in this area?

Building upon existing work within the academic, policy and community domains, the consultation will address both the practical-operational level – and support that could be provided at that level (i.e. management of institutions, innovative means of delivering pastoral care and instruction) – as well as the evolving theological normative frame of reference, including the added value of a possibility for exchange of views across the various Muslim traditions located across Europe as well as holding the debate at a European level, out of specific national contexts.

The results of the consultation will be presented to the EPPN and also fed into subsequent revisions of this paper.

5. Ways forward

Within the Muslim narratives of the Imams of old it is common to hear of great men who were traders, who were proficient in art and literature. Who were great mathematicians or accomplished poets or logicians. We see people that lived in this world. The integration of *this* worldly and *other* worldly knowledge is a feature of the Islamic tradition of knowledge and is one that is a helpful starting point for the argument for more contextual scholarship. In our European contexts today this may involve *Imams* being taught the salient features of modern western knowledge - grappling with the complexities of modernity, learning about European philosophy, art, culture and heritage, studying Shakespeare and Goethe in addition to Ghazali and ibn Khaldun! We hear of Imam Shafi'i, a great 9th Century scholar, re-writing his book of *fiqh* when moving to a new region, yet that spirit of contextualisation is, on the whole, missing from the education process today.

In addition to enhancing cultural awareness of the environment, the method of training also deserves attention such that there is synergy with a European learning environment, especially given that they will, firstly, need to relate to younger people schooled through European educational systems and, secondly, may be expected to engage in public discourse, in the media or in interfaith forums, for example.

5.1 Suggestions

Although most of the large EU countries are now increasingly dealing with 2nd and 3rd generations of Muslims, these communities are still significantly influenced by their countries of origin. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way they train their faith leaders. As inadequate as such training may be, these communities would be concerned to see these systems replaced or undermined for two reasons. Firstly, owing to a sense of historical pride and authenticity with regards to the existing system, and secondly, due to suspicion with regards to anything proposed from outside the community. In order to move forward there is an important discussion as to where roles and responsibilities lie. A number of stakeholders are involved in the subject matter at hand, including: Imams and religious leaders, Muslim communities, other religious communities, wider civil society, national governments and states acting at the European level. The expert consultation will explore some of the debate around what the role of each of these stakeholders could be. In view of the above sensitivities, what is proposed is two-fold:

1. Perhaps the most important starting point for member states at a European level is to think of ways of **Sharing good practice**:

- a. From different national contexts and for learning about common frameworks for supplementing the skills set of Imams and religious leaders after graduation from a seminary. A wide range of skills including pastoral skills, management skills, communications skills and knowledge of national and European culture have been mentioned above. Chaplaincy provision and enhanced employment opportunities seem to be one clear way in which the needs of Imams can be addressed and capacities developed.
 - b. Further to this, Member states can continue to work with and help to develop their seminaries towards **national standards** – as to be found in some of the institutions in the more established faith communities and similar institutions in mainstream secondary and tertiary education sectors in those member states. Given national specificities in these areas, these are probably best done at a national level with sharing of information and good practice at the European level.
 - c. There is an important discussion around how to best do this, should this be based on state legislation or by establishing self-regulatory guidelines? The MINAB model in the UK allows for a community-led model that has the potential for introducing a system of self-regulation without direct state intervention on a legal basis.
2. The member states and the EU assist in developing a postgraduate centre of excellence, or a **European Institute for Islamic Studies**, which builds on the training provided at the national level and then gives further orientation towards more contextualised Muslim thought leadership across the EU. Although an ambitious project, this would enable thinking about the long-term needs of Muslim communities and how space can be created for contextual European reflection on Islam to evolve.

A European Institute for Islamic Studies

Benefits of a European approach

There are many reasons why such a postgraduate centre is more easily and better achieved at the European level:

1. More cost effective than developing equivalent national centres.
2. Greater access to all EU member states – otherwise such centres may be possible for larger member states or those with large Muslim populations – but there will still be little access to Muslims in other member states.
3. Capacity – there are possibly enough scholars and teachers in Europe for one such centre of excellence but not many, and it will be better to have one well resourced centre of excellence than many centres that are poorly resourced.

4. The different Muslim communities in Europe bring different experiences, expertise and qualities to the table. Pooling these together – e.g., French/North African intellectual tradition, contextualising experience and perception of authenticity (due to usage of the Arabic language); German/Turkish modernist, creative and exciting approaches; British/South Asia practical pragmatism, etc. – allows the possibility of creating a new dynamic European interpretation of Islam and one that will also visibly and powerfully remind students of such an institute of the diversity of Islam.

5. A Europe-wide initiative, partly because of the above mentioned diversity, but also partly because of its continental span, could harness better a prestigious reputation and could be more easily accepted in the Muslim world. In turn, this would also give it greater credibility amongst the Muslim grassroots in Europe.

Possible Role and Tasks

The tasks of the centre could be as follows:

1. To contribute to the new European meta-narrative – how do we make Europe a home for all its citizens.

2. To contribute to contextualising Islam in Europe – given the dominant European narratives on, for example, state and citizenship, how do we best interpret and live Islam in the European context and contribute to training the thought leadership amongst European Muslim leaders.

3. To be an intellectual space for Islam in Europe that, in the long term, can match the institutions such as Madinah, Azhar, Qom and Deoband.

4. As the centre would focus on the post-graduate level, it would cater for graduates of institutions such as seminaries, raising their standards and allowing routes to higher education for the best qualified. As a centre of excellence, it would thus create new opportunities and horizons for the best qualified, while at the same time avoiding debates around the basic level of theological instruction that would remain at a seminary level.

The centre could run with a small admin and teaching staff and the intellectual and educational work undertaken through a sophisticated senior fellowship programme targeting scholars from across Europe, the West and the Muslim world. The centre will be set up to have a multiplier impact on minimal costs. To be truly effective, it will need some seed capital – but the project must ultimately be led by European Muslim communities and the academic sector (for example following the Contextualising Islam in Britain project model).

Such a centre could be established in a number of ways: for example the foundation of a wholly new centre (though this would involve significant investment and take time to develop momentum) or by tapping into the existing expertise in a few centres of excellence from across Europe, creating an academic network for the development of the centre. These ideas would be explored further at the consultation and also in the meeting of the EPPN and feedback will be brought back into the next iteration of this paper.

6. Conclusion

This paper looked at the issue of Imam training in Europe and identified various stakeholders in the discussion. We looked at some of the reasons behind the importance of Imam training, but also crucially why a narrow focus on Imam training itself does not necessarily resolve the problems and anxieties in question. There is therefore a need to think more broadly about the development of Muslim communities, the process of integration and social cohesion and the role that religious instruction and guidance plays within this context, also bearing in mind the limitations of local religious leadership, especially with the rising impact of internet communication.

The paper also looked at the different types of educational provisions and the courses that Imams would typically study on route to qualification, including the example of the Darse Nizami syllabus within the South Asian tradition.

It looked at our existing knowledge of provision for religious instruction and identifies gaps (and the need for further research). Finally, two clear suggestions are made for follow-up: i) sharing of good practice at a European level and ii) the development of a postgraduate centre of excellence to deal with the longer term needs of Muslim communities' religious thought leadership.

Europe has a very proud secular tradition of neutrality of the state that allows for religious communities to operate within the civic and private spheres. While there are clear concerns around social cohesion and security, there is a need to calibrate the interventions in such a way that the principle of neutrality is not undermined and that exceptional treatment is not afforded to one community or group over others.

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