



Book Review: *Imams in Western Europe: Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenges* Edited by Mohammed Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter and Niels Valdemar Vinding (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), p. 438. ISBN: 978–9462983830

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Imams in Western Europe is a collection of 21 essays, composed into two sections written by a wide-ranging mix of various academics and researchers who examine the numerous issues that continue to impact Imams, the Muslim community and the diverse states in Western Europe. The focus on Muslims in Europe and in particular Muslim institutions has started to take much interest as European governments continue to view the discourse of the respective Muslim communities from the perspective either in relation to Islamic movements and their ideas or the functioning of the institutions that facilitate Muslim activity.

The Imam as an institution of authority in particular is at times perceived within the purview of suspicion especially as his role is one of mediation who represents a unique form of authority within Muslim societies, whose roles vary from issues to do with teaching, mediating between state and society, interfaith activity, institutional building, leading prayers in mosques, conducting marriages and divorces, funerals, and dealing with matters to do with gender and minority issues. With rapidly fluctuating environments the Imams at times find that the needs of the Muslim community are going through a host of shifts and changes, as each community has its generational challenges as evolving migrant communities.

As Muslims continue to be perceived as minorities in Western Europe, there is also a

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convoluted relationship that Imams have to negotiate between the requirements of the state that continue to view Muslims as the internal ‘other’ and the Muslim community, which requires a reflection of ‘authentic’ Islam from the Imam. In many ways Muslims continue to be juxtaposed between what is understood to be ‘local Islam’ and that which is to be a part of ‘global Islam’. Both Europe and its Muslim citizens are not a homogenous block and the book attempts to address the various communities and its specific challenges, but at the same time drawing to the reader the similarities many of the different Muslims face in Western Europe. The first part examines the role of Islam in Western Europe with the second part examining Muslim Institutions – in both cases the Imam is the focus. In a voluminous collection such as this, a book review can provide very little definite answer apart from the recognition that the detailed study is as eclectic as its subject area.

The preface by Jørgen S. Nielson breaks down the role of the Imam into three main themes that are brought to our attention in which the author highlights that Imams are prayer leaders, religious authorities and male. It sets the reader to understand that these issues will be continual themes of focus of the various authors in this edition. Additionally, the next chapter of the book, which we can consider as the introduction by the editors of the volume, Mohammad Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter, and Niels Valdemar Vinding, provide a more detailed outline of the various works in this book and how they can be stitched together to make an understandable whole. The authors make the fair claim that very little has been written in English regarding Imams as much emphasis on the past has looked at the communities and the notion of ‘European Islamic thought’, thus it makes sense why the possible need for such a study has arisen. The authors also problematize the simplicity in which Imams are understood and the need for such a study then providing the reader a rationalisation of the following chapters and what to expect, in particular how this large book is broken down into two sections.

The first article written by Jasser Auda revisits the traditional notions in Islamic thought of the world being categorised into two spheres – the Land (Abode) of Islam and the Land of non-Islam. Auda attempts to make the case that these simplistic categories are wanting and that increased Muslim migration in Europe consequently leading to second and now third generation Muslim residency means that the conditions that categorise the Land of Islam do not neatly fit regarding Western Europe. He argues in the loose sense that what makes a place the Land of Islam is the ability to practice one's faith freely, have security and that the land is a place of justice all of which are provided in Western Europe. I'm under the

impression that Auda like authors such as Jørgen S. Nielson in previous works believe that integration within European nations is an indication of the 'edge' having some influence over the Muslim world which is perceived as the 'centre'.

While Auda is correct that the world no longer fits into the binary dichotomy mentioned above, nonetheless it would have been helpful to also examine and problematize the notions of what he means by security, freedom and justice, as these are indeed loaded terms, open to subjective discussion and while presented as universal ideals, vary in meaning from one society to another, including in Western Europe. Auda could have helped make his claims better if he had included some of the challenges Muslims face in his theory. He believes Muslims in Europe need to move away from attempting to integrate in society and instead become a community that contributes. But fundamentally that doesn't actually answer the question of integration and how much agency the Muslim communities should lose in order to fit in.

It thus helps that in the next few articles such questions are addressed. Thiji Sunier explains some of the challenges Muslims face and that Muslim communities and their Imams are contributing to life in Europe, nonetheless, Muslims continue to still be scrutinised. The diverse communities have their own eclectic interests and along with ethnic, and social-political differences, there are now emerging generational differences too. Sunier rightly explains that the conditions are never static and that new media tools have to some degree democratised knowledge as a result authority, as norms are being lived and practiced differently. While the likes of Dr Tariq Ramadan had argued in the past that European Islam requires its own indigenous process, devoid of outside Muslim cultural influences, to some degree Sunier explains as in the case of Germany and Turkey, outside assistance is often sought as local institutions are still at their infancy. Sunier points out that Turkey had signed agreements with various European governments as European governments felt more comfortable with the support of states like Turkey and Morocco than allowing institutions falling under the control of Muslim movements, which were far harder to negotiate with. However, more and more calls have been made for more 'local Islamic' projects and institution separate from outside Muslim forces.

In the next chapter, Mohammad Hashas explains how the localisation of religious authority still has issues as Imams in Europe on the one hand need to adhere to the local requirements of the respective European nation-states that they live in, however still needing to sought religious knowledge in Muslim countries as 'authentic' Islam is demanded. Hashas provides examples of how Morocco has

helped shape the institutions in France where state surveillance has become a factor. Both Sunier and Hashas' studies to some degree challenge Auda's assumption of freedom to practice faith in Europe as much institutional development regarding Muslim authority falls under great pressure from governments who continue to coerce Muslim leadership to fit within the nation-state frameworks. While I'm not assuming it was Hashas' intention to challenge Auda, what we see is that the notion of Muslim integration is still a convoluted one.

In the next article Farid El Asri, continues to add to the theme of how a more vocal presence of Muslims in Europe has meant that the role of the Imam is changing in which the challenges of developing and training Imams continue to frustrate in an environment which are continuously fluctuating. Göran Larsson continues to highlight the complexity of training Imams in the Swedish case but unlike the previous authors, who examined government influence upon Muslim institutions, Larsson examines how it is challenging to teach Islamic theology in a Western University, in the case of Larsson it was Sweden. Once again like the previous authors Larsson explains how state intervention in training Imams has taken place, where in 2009 the Swedish Ministry of Education established programmes to train Imams in state universities. However, Larsson demonstrates that while Muslims are willing to attain training on matters to do with more 'secular' subject areas, when it came to Islamic theology, they continued to choose taking those matters from Muslim institutions and forms of learning. Larsson explains that Imams often continue to obtain their religious knowledge from Muslim countries still. What is consistent in the first part of the chapters reviewed so far is that there are many uniformities regarding how states attempt to influence religious learning and how Muslims continue to choose to want their Imams to be educated in more traditional centres of learning, thus suggesting that while European states still continue to view Muslims with some level of suspicion, the Muslim communities view the states in the same way. Of course this is changing as some countries like the UK are trying to facilitate more homegrown Imams for the new needs of British society. But Islam's authenticity is still taken from the fact that it is taught in Muslim institutions not what is perceived as being Western.

The next article written by Solenne Jounneau tries to categorise Imams in France into typologies. Jounneau established that Imams have found a way of being the main religious authority for Muslims in France in which from the colonial period and in particular World War I Imams within the French context have been operating under the dual impetus of Muslim communities and the state authorities. What all the articles so far have shown is that Muslim communities represent a decentralised community that the respective European states continue

to monitor as they are pushed to either integrate or assimilate, suggesting that what Muslims bring to Europe in regards to Islam is somewhat foreign that can only be accepted if Islam was domesticated. Jounneau has shown that as Muslim societies evolved over time in France, so did the Imams adapt to the changing circumstances. What didn't change however, irrespective of state monitoring was the influence the Imams continued to wield. Thus under the pretext of *laïcité* the French authorities have used three main tactics to discipline Imams into being subservient to the French modal. The article stresses on the issues that Europe still has regarding the tropes of Imams and radicalisation and thus the need for their visas to be conditional, further scrutiny and state sponsored training as was seen in the case of Larsson's article regarding Sweden. In particular the mosque as a space used by the Imam has taken much attention in France and Sweden.

In the Netherlands however, Welmoet Boenders and Jan Jaap de Ruiter's article proposes an alternative view regarding the Imam and the mosque space. Rather than focusing simply on Imams as functional figures that lead prayers or provide services related to mosque activities they have engaged with the idea of the Imam as a thinker or intellectual that attempts to reach out to the youth, thus coining the phrase 'Imam of the young'. In particular their joint piece is on Yassin Elfourkani, born in Amsterdam to Moroccan migrant parents. Elfourkani came into the spotlight just like most of the Muslim community in the Netherlands after the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Just like the Imams mentioned in the previous articles Elfourkani took his traditional Islamic training from the country of his origin and then Cairo. Imams like Elfourkani continue to be presented within the simple depictions of how the Dutch state views what Islam is and ought to be and yet the article attempts to show that Elfourkani's appeal is based on a host of complicated and never static but changing social and political situations. His appeal in particular is his appeal to the youth. The article attempts to show that Elfourkani as a new type of Imam in Holland who is attempting to adhere to both sceptical Dutch society but at the same time address the more 'radical' Salafist aspects too. Like Jesser Auda and Tariq Ramadan, Elfourkani has attempted to encourage the youth to be more active within European society. Elfourkani is perceived as an 'organic' public intellectual but the article points out how Jan-Peter Hartung makes the claim that a Muslim being an intellectual in the conventional European 'Enlightenment' sense may be impossible if not difficult. What is also worth of note is that Elfourkani still is viewed with an eye of suspicion by the Dutch state.

The final two articles in the first part are based on female religious authority, as Neilson had pointed to in the preface that Imams are notably men. Claudia

Carvalho who writes about the digital world points to how to some degree the Internet has democratised the space facilitating more female activity, at least online and Sara Borrillo writes about a gender-based reform of Morocco's Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs has created space for female authorities in Europe, what both articles attempt to explain is how female religious authorities are not an alternative space but simply a complimentary one. Both authors examine women from Moroccan origins with Carvlaho examining women in Spain and Borrillo examining the impact of women trained in Morocco on Europe in general. Carvalho explains how Facebook was used as a tool for what she calls i-jihad, in which women were able to recruit for jihad on what she called an online mimbar, where virtual networks provided a cyber environment space for women. There is a lot to challenge in Carvalho's study, but nonetheless the article is worth reading in engaging with the debate. Barillo's article examines how women and Islam continue to be portrayed within a secular-liberal space, in the sense that on the one hand there is an increase of women participants that are challenging male dominance regarding religious authority on the one hand, thus challenging traditional patriarchy, but still not resembling their European counterparts meaning European countries like France are conflicted in how they feel about women and authority. It is welcomed that the two articles while drawing from different issues attempt to place women within the larger meta-debate of religious authority. These are the only two articles on women in the collection, and no doubt more study is required. It can be argued that unlike in US scholarship, there continues to be an under representation on women and authority in European works. Maybe an additional study is needed.

The second section of the book is mainly concerned with the institutionalisation of Islam in Western Europe as seen from the viewpoint of Imams. The second part has another ten chapters that examine how Imams deal with everyday issues such as education, teaching and life by and large. The host of writers explain the challenges from different Western European countries which once again draws on the point that this is indeed a challenging aspect to make sense of, as the diversity of each country, its communities of Muslims and relationships are not a homogeneous whole, something this book concedes.

Niels Valdemar Vinding attempts to make the claim of the need for a typology of Imams in the West. This article could be linked with Solenne Jounneau article on Imams in France, with Vinding however using case studies of the United Kingdom, Germany and Austria to represent the West as a whole. The theme of typologies runs through the book, as many authors point to this. This is one of the few articles that is a comparative piece not restricted within a single nation-state experience.

With another article on the French case Romain Sèze explains about the ‘visible’ Imam. He starts his article asking that in France there is a need to come to terms with how much Islam within French society is acceptable. As a result the Imam is once again stuck between needing to critique the activities of state policies towards the Muslims but also curtail Muslims who feel the need to be accessibly visible. The practice of Muslim worship in France continues to create concerns in which an attempt to fashion a ‘French Islam’ continues. For some nationalists within French society Islam is not seen as a problem but its outward visibility by Muslims is the issue thus the fight for Muslim rights as a minority by the Imams makes them by default minority leaders.

This then leads up to another article on the French Imam by Cédric Bayloq who examines the French Imam of Moroccan origins Tareq Oubrou, who was also discussed in Sèze’s article. Both authors point to the idea that Oubrou is accredited to being one of the thinkers who is attributed to ‘French Islam’. While Oubrou is presented as what some Muslims in France believe him to be a ‘corrupted Imam of the West’, Bayloq provides details how Oubrou went from being a conservative Imam to making a progressive shift in the attempts at ‘secularising’ Islam in France. In particular Oubrou’s idea of the ‘Shariah of minority’ is similar to that presented by Jessar Auda.

Moving away from France Mansur Ali and Alyaa Ebbiary both examine the roles of Imams in Britain with Ali examining the Muslim chaplaincy as a modal and Ebbiary re-examining the often assumed trope of the decline of the Imam narrative. Both examine in particular the role of the widespread Darul Uloom schools which emerged from the Asian Sub-Continent and have become a major facilitator for traditional Deobandi Islamic learning in Britain. Ali’s chapter, which is a critical piece, attempts to explain that Imamship requires a remodelling to facilitate the changing conditions of the United Kingdom. He thus proposes the chaplaincy modal, one that is used in the USA as a way forward for the Imam to be able to adjust to the new demands of British Muslims. Where Ali’s article is different from most of the other articles in this book is that he attempts to provide solutions of how Imams can benefit much regarding their relationship with their congregation and wider community if they evolved from simply being prayer leaders in mosques and provide more chaplaincy style interaction. What is clear in most of the articles is the demands on the Imams to be able to deal with the multiple needs of the communities, one of which ample training is not always available. It could be that some of these roles would organically need delegating to other spheres within the Muslim community, as it is only a matter of time that Imams will not be able to cope. It is clear that Ali feels that there are many

shortcomings regarding the Darul Uloom and that a more US style approach may be suitable. However, chaplaincy in the US has come from a unique genealogy that may not be as simple to implement in the UK, and possible challenges to the questions of the chaplaincy modal might have been helpful.

Alyaa Ebbiary's article thus kicks on from the problem areas of the Darul Uloom and how Cambridge Muslim College (CMC) in England attempted to provide a more contextual style of teaching over the traditional text based learning method. CMC modelled on the example of Cambridge University colleges emerged to bridge the gap for the Darul Uloom trained students so that they can better function in the UK. CMC as a new supplementary modal to train Imams has gained respect from both state and conservative Muslim society and from Ebbiary's article one will have to continue to wait and see how this institution as a modal stands the test of time.

Moving away from the UK and further South to Spain Juan Ferreiro Galguera examines the need for Imams to be trained in Spain due to the dearth of any real institution, as it is becoming required with an increasing population of Muslims migrating to especially the South of Spain. In this article the author attempts to explain the possible opportunities available for Muslims under the law and constitution of Spain to be able to establish Muslim theological departments of learning, which Muslims continue to ignore instead studying in their own seminaries. A descriptive piece regarding the situation in Spain at the end the author attempts to provide some recommendations by suggesting that a European Institute of Islamic studies be set up similar to that of the Al Azhar in Egypt that can better facilitate for Muslims in Europe. While the idea may seem like a novel one, as of yet other European experiences where there are schools and centres of study with a larger Muslim base have yet to show the type of example the author is visualising in Spain. Maybe the Spanish case is different but if this book has shown anything is that how would Spain be any different from the way it perceives its Muslims as minorities that require state surveillance.

The next three articles are on Imams in Italy in which Fanscesco Alicino explains the challenges for Imams and the Italian legal system in particular the article explains how the institutionalisation of Islam has a special relationship in Italy due to its relationship with the Vatican. He thus focuses on the mosque as an institution that represents Muslims activity and organisation. Mohammed Khalid Rhazzali's article discusses what he called the profile territory of the Italian Imam around the mosque, which is a good follow up to Alicino's article with the next article by Yahya Pallavicin focusing on the training of Imams in Italy. Of the three

articles Rhazzali's deserve special interest, as he is an Imam himself thus his article provides much insight about the life of the Imam in Italy from one who is in the field. Once again it was another article based on the typologies of Imams where he focuses on how the Muslim community is in search of an identity. This is very much felt in all the articles written on Muslims in Italy. Rhazzali explains how the migrant communities in Italy are a lot less homogeneous than other parts of Western Europe and that migration has taken place over a shorter space of time in Italy.

The article continues that the mosque as a centre seems to explain the difficulties that Muslims face. The north of Italy seems to have far more willing initiatives to engage with Muslim communities where as parts like Veneto are far more unwelcoming. Rome has a unique status and so does Sicily, where historically Islam had a presence and so Muslims are far better tolerated. With mosques by design sporadically spread away from each other, Muslim communities find it ever harder to form a sense of unity in which they can come together to share a commonality of interests. Thus the attempts to create an 'Italian Islam' which the state prefers is still sought with challenges as Muslims are somewhat divided, some by circumstance, others by design where their experiences tend to be rather local to where they reside.

Additionally the author mentions the different types of Imams and their functions and how their roles came into existence. Rhazzali explains that there are four types of Imams the first being the Imam of the mosque, who has the main responsibility of being the leader of prayers and the community by and large. The 'travelling Imam' who is a freelancer that provides sermons from time to time and other religious services. The seasonal Imam who attempts to fulfil particular religious requirements during special times like Ramadan where there may be a shortage of Imams. These Imams usually come from abroad. Finally, the religious assistant who facilitates marriages, funerals and other ceremonies. It is evident that in the Italian context the Imam's role is central to safeguarding the interests of the community. Rhazzali also points to the idea that there continues to be mistrust between 'immigrant' Muslims and the 'host' nation added to the fact that the communities are also starting to be drawn into ethno-linguistic lines as the communities struggle to integrate with one another let alone the wider Italian community.

The final paper is on Finland, the only time mentioned in this work. A joint effort by Tuomas Martkainen and Rütta Latvio, the article explains efforts to establish an Imam-training programme in Finland. Muslim presence in Finland

has existed since the 1870's with a Tatar community. However after the 1960's and then 1990's a new type of migrant Muslim community has started to move to Finland. The Tatar community by and large has organised itself without much assistance regarding training Imams from the Finnish state. However newer Muslim communities have started to display different requirements in which active support has been sought. The article shows that very few Imams had a problem with attaining support from the Finnish authorities as it was hoped that a training programme would help empower the Muslim community. The initiative has looked at neighbouring countries such as Sweden, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom as well as Muslim majority countries. However, as of yet the Finnish government's response has not been equally reciprocal, with much support coming from civil society. The community is still small, and it would be worth seeing how both state and society alike could also learn from the challenges Imams have faced in other parts of Europe as the article explains that many of the Imams surveyed in the article had worked in other parts of Western Europe. With emerging Muslim communities it is worth asking how Finland attempts to learn from the challenges Muslim have faced in other countries.

Overall this is a comprehensive book on the role of Imams in Western Europe. I'm under the impression that Western Europe as a term was used to differentiate between Muslims in the Balkans and Russia who have had a presence of Islam and its institutions for a longer period over what are seemed secular-liberal democracies. However it could be argued that those countries should have been included as Muslims in Europe do not simply reside within the boundaries of Western Europe and their networks extend to the neighbouring region, as was the case in Finland with the Tatar Muslims and Bosnians in Sweden and Albanians in Italy. Although this is indeed a minor gripe as it is evident that many more studies are needed.

The articles have to some degree avoided the question of whether Islam can be European, as there are a host of works attempting such, instead focusing on the actions and behaviours of Imams as a way of looking at 'real' activity on the ground rather than the intellectual activity of Islamic thinkers in Europe. In that sense this is indeed a welcomed addition, as after reading this book, question arise about what the future may look like for the respective Muslim communities in Western Europe regarding roles of leadership. These questions are often viewed from the works of thinkers and intellectuals, so it is welcomed that it can be viewed from the role of the Imam as an integral authority for Muslim communities.

All the articles were confined to a particular European nation-state. It would be interesting to see if Imams crossed over and networked with their fellow counterparts in other countries, as much joining of the dots is required for the reader. An example could be made that some Imams just like thinkers have a reach beyond the nations they live in. Additionally further works on how outside states such as Morocco and Turkey to name a few use different policies in different European countries and whether outside intervention restricts local European integration both within the different ethno-linguistic communities and the respective nation states people reside in. A common theme however was the issue of security and surveillance that the Western European nation-states practice over Imams in which stresses to appease both the Muslim community and governments proves to be challenging. Another point that may be of interest is the question of converts who are Imams, and whether this is a phenomena in Western Europe. Some may argue that gender representation of female Muslim authority was low in this book, and Shites were also ignored. Nonetheless, having considered this, there is a lot of information in this book, one that should be important to researchers and general readers alike.

