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Shifting Paradigms in Islamic Higher Education in Europe: The Case Study of Leiden University

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Abstract: Islamic higher education finds itself at the cross-roads of a variety of developments: it oscillates between the 'teaching into' approach of Theology and the 'teaching about' approach of Religious Studies, between the security-driven need for a 'European Islam' and a European Muslim-driven need for a high-quality education in 'Islam in Europe', between traditional one-way knowledge dissemination and innovative two-way knowledge sharing, and between Islam as defined and discussed by scholars and Islam as defined and discussed by the public. This myriad of dynamics is challenging and a source of tensions among all parties involved, in particular between lecturers and students. In this article, a qualitative self-study research based on personal experiences with various Islamic higher education programs at Leiden University will be used to reflect on the broader developments in Islamic higher education programs in Europe. It argues that thinking about Islamic higher education is not a process of finding solutions to problems but is a process of educational opportunities and innovation.

Keywords: Islam in Western Europe; Islamic higher education; university innovation

1. Introduction

The development of Islamic higher education within Europe is a new, and rapidly developing, phenomenon.[1] Even in southeast European countries, where Islam has a centuries-old presence that includes an educational infrastructure, the communist era and the devastating wars of the 1990s have caused this education to be rebuilt from the ground up.[2] After 2001, the attacks of 9/11 prompted many Western European governments to initiate higher Islamic education at their own universities in order to create 'home grown imams'. In doing so, they hoped to prevent their Muslim nationals from being influenced with interpretations of Islam that might be considered foreign to the national European context. This development coincided with initiatives by Muslims in Europe to create their own private centers of religious learning. Despite these efforts, the standards and reputation of European Islamic education are by far not that of renowned centers of Islamic theology in the Muslim world, and most Muslims in Europe still prefer to travel abroad to pursue their studies in Islamic theology, which is a cause of concern to many European governments.[3]

The combination of European private and governmental initiatives has created an opaque landscape of Islamic higher educational learning, which is not easy to present in

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1. See the Introduction by Boender and Groeninck to this special issue.

2. For the efforts directed at primary schools, see, e.g., (Soldo et al. 2017, pp. 33–35).

3. News reporting about this phenomenon is often alarming (see, e.g., the article titled 'Gratis studeren in Medina om hier de 'ware islam' te prediken'—"*Free education in Medina to preach the 'true Islam' here*"—in the Dutch quality newspaper NRC Handelsblad of April 22, 2017). To my knowledge, no substantive research has yet been carried out into European Muslims attending Islamic higher education abroad and the effects thereof upon their return to European societies. An academic analysis about students from Indonesia, Morocco, and Nigeria attending the Islamic universities of Medina, Cairo, and Qom shows that the impact of such education on the dissemination of Islamic ideas in their home countries is a complex process that cannot be generalized (Bano and Keiko 2015).

a clear and comprehensive analysis. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that most academics who are involved in this field are themselves partakers in the initiatives, as is the case with this author. Such a situation necessitates approaches of 'situated', 'engaged', or 'auto'-anthropology.[4] That, then, is what I will endeavor to do in this article. In the following, I want to record the insights and experiences of my involvement with the Islamic higher education at Leiden University in the period from 2006 to 2019. In the year 2006, the university adopted the first Islamic Theology program in Western Europe, which was discontinued in 2014 but in that same year succeeded by an entirely different program of Islamic higher education called the Leiden Islam Academie.

This article will therefore be the insider's story of Islamic higher education in Europe, with the experiences in Leiden as a reference case. This story will be structured on the basis of what I call 'story lines' that intertwine and intersect. By following these storylines, we will identify various paradigm shifts in thinking about Islamic higher education. We will see that the field of Islamic higher education in Western Europe is quite fluid and continuously developing. As such we can discern what Deleuze has called the formation of assemblages in a space of negotiation (see for an elaboration of this theory the Introduction to this series of articles).

Methodology and Source Materials

The aims of this self-study are modest. It firstly intends to follow the development of trial and error in the Leiden experience of Islamic higher education and to contextualize this in the wider experiences of Islamic higher education in Europe. The second and perhaps more important aim is to explain and share the innovative methods applied in Islamic higher education during this process. These two aims are limited to a practical educational level, and much less so to the structural and institutional aspects of such education.

The case study spans the period from 2006 to 2019, which is split up into two phases. The first phase, from 2006 to 2014, is the period of the bachelor-master program of Islamic Theology. This program was discontinued in 2012 for reasons to be explained later, and the enrolled students were given until 2014 to graduate. This two-year interval was used to prepare for the second phase of the Islamic Academie, which formally started in 2014. Its funding ended in 2018, but it has been designed to be financially self-sufficient. The end year 2019 merely indicates the end date of this case study.

One of the distinctive differences between these two phases is their target groups. The Islamic Theology program was intra-university, meaning that it was for university students only. The Islam Academie was predominantly extra-university, meaning that it was mainly for non-university students like lifelong learners and professionals. The educational differences that come with this distinction are the focus of this case study: who should be addressed as students of Islamic higher education, what should that education entail, and how should it be taught?

This self-study looks back at what happened, what we did, what our experiences were. A methodological obstacle is that the events under scrutiny were at the time not set up in a systematic manner with the purpose to be academically researched. This study is therefore mostly of a qualitative nature, as it takes my personal experiences as frame of reference to discuss that what has happened in this recent past. As head of the program Islamic Theology, and after that as director of the Leiden Islam Academie, and as a teacher in both programs, I had a unique insight in the discussions, decisions, and developments that shaped these two education programs. In that capacity, I supervised the other teachers in these programs and followed what my peers were doing in similar programs in other European countries.

These personal experiences are grounded on written data. In the case of the Islamic Theology program, this data consists of the regular university records: the programs of

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4 Anthropological literature about this approach is abundant, see e.g.,: (Okely and Callaway 1992; Narayan 2014; Susser 2010; Ingold 2018).

the bachelor–master program during the period 2006–2014[5], the administrative records that come with them[6], and the mandatory bi-annual evaluation reports by peer-inspection committees.[7] The program of the Leiden Islam Academie was highly experimental, but we did make an effort from the outset to record our actions and experiences as much as possible, as we were keenly aware that we were moving into uncharted territory. In addition to these records, summaries of our work were made twice in the Academie's reports to the Faculty in 2015 and 2017. In an effort to make ourselves into an object of study, I appointed a post-doctoral collaborator who from 2013–2017 acted as participatory observer: her final report (in English) was submitted to the faculty in 2017 as part of the financial end-reporting that was due at the time.[8] An additional source of written data was a three-question survey that I conducted among the participants of some of my courses, and that I will explain in more detail below.

2. Developments in Islamic Higher Education

2.1. National Storylines: Similar but Different

While we see many similarities in the development of Islamic higher education in Europe, there are significant differences in the ways their programs are being organized on a national level. This is caused by the fact that each European state has its own distinct manner of dealing with religion and religious education. These manners often are so different that much space and time in European literature and conferences on these topics is spent on explaining the particularities of each national system.[9] I do not intend to elaborate on this topic, but will briefly illustrate these differences with the example of education financing.

In a country like Bosnia, for instance, with its legacy of the Ottoman *millet* system, recognized religious communities receive funding by the state for the salaries of their clergymen, the maintenance of their prayer houses, and their religious education.[10] That means that non-recognized communities, or dissident groups within recognized communities, are left to their own devices. This situation is similar to a country like Belgium, with its Napoleonic legacy, where the state is formally in charge of the material aspects of the religious infrastructure and leaves only the theological immaterial matters to the communities.[11] Just across the Belgian border, in The Netherlands, the system is altogether different, as the state has no involvement whatsoever in any material or immaterial aspect of religion, and that has no practice of recognition of religions or religious communities—and there is also no need to do so, as such recognition has no financial or other benefits.[12] Here, all religious communities are left to their own devices, and the salaries of the clergy and the maintenance of prayer houses is an entirely private affair. The only exception in the Dutch case is the state funding of all grammar and high schools, including the religious schools. Germany, then, takes up a position in between, as each individual pays a 'religious tax' to

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[5]　The detailed outlines of programs are still available when using the keywords 'Leiden University' and 'Islamitische Theologie' in the Leiden online Study Guide (https://studiegids.universiteitleiden.nl). Unfortunately this Study Guide only records programs as far as ten years back.

[6]　These records are not public but can be perused upon request.

[7]　The four-year inspection cycles of research evaluation and education evaluation alternated so that there was an inspection every two years. Their committees were ad hoc assembled for every inspection and consist of Dutch and foreign academic peers. The evaluation reports are for internal university use only but can possibly be accessed upon request to the Faculty.

[8]　Dr. Welmoet Boender, 'The position of the Leiden Islam Academy in the field of higher Islam education in the Netherlands and Western Europe', Leiden University and Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS), September 2017. This report has never been published, but Dr. Boender has later rewritten it into a publication: (Boender 2019).

[9]　There is a growing volume of literature that takes a comparative approach to the various national forms of higher religious education, see e.g., (Alberts 2012; Franck 2021; Jackson et al. 2014).

[10]　(Smajic 2013).

[11]　(Foblets and Overbeeke 2002).

[12]　(Berger 2014).

the state, and the state will use this money for churches and education of the particular communities.[13]

We can go on by discussing the particularities of state churches in England or Sweden, the dominant position of the Catholic Church in Spain and Italy, or a national church like the Greek Orthodox in Greece. For this, I refer to the aforementioned literature on the subject. Suffice it here to repeat that Islamic higher education is undergoing similar developments in most European countries, but that the practice thereof differs per country, in particular when it comes to state involvement and state funding.

2.2. Historical Storyline: Changes in Objects and Subjects of Knowledge

Since the nineteenth century, most Western European universities share a similar history of Islam studies. The first chairs that were established at these universities in the sixteenth century were called chairs of Arabic rather than Islamic studies. The reason was that scholarship of Islam as a religion and civilization was undertaken by means of the study of its original texts, with an emphasis on theology, philosophy, and law.[14] Until the late nineteenth century, the study of Islam therefore was mostly a philological study.[15] For that reason, this field of study was not situated in the discipline of theology—which was almost exclusively reserved for Christianity—but in the discipline of humanities, in particular the departments of Oriental and Semitic languages. Only since the second half of the twentieth century did 'Islam' become a subject in its own right at Theology departments.

In my case, I experienced both developments. I studied Arabic in the late 1980s, and I am one of the last generation of students in The Netherlands who studied Arabic in the old-fashioned philological tradition, as we spent our entire study reading texts, old and new. Almost thirty years later, I became chair of Islam and the West at the Theological Faculty of Leiden University.[16] My lack of a proper academic training in theology or religious studies makes me one of the many academic hybrids in Islamic Studies who are trained in one discipline but works in another. My appointment coincided with that of a fellow Arabist who became chair of Arabic Studies in the Middle East department, a chair that dated back to 1613. Leiden University therefore embodies the mentioned paradigm shift by running two Islam programs: the Islamic Theology program within the Theology department (chaired by me) and the Islam Studies program within the Middle East department (chaired by my colleague).

At the time I was studying Arabic, the philological approach to Islam was already being overtaken by the anthropological approach.[17] Texts were replaced by people as objects of study, and the study of Arabic was not only a goal in itself, but also a means to communicate with people. This shift was partly caused by academic motivations, namely the need to complement the textual approach with a social sciences approach, and vice versa. As a result, Arab and Islamic studies evolved into Middle Eastern Studies, whereby the new discipline of Regional Studies subsumed elements of philology, humanities, and social sciences.[18]

Another reason for this shift from philological to anthropological was of a more practical nature because the object of study—the Muslim world—had become more easily accessible: peoples or countries could be quickly visited without having to resort to the

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[13] (Goldberg 2002).

[14] In (Berger 2014), I show that Western European scholarship of Islam between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries was exclusively based on the study of written sources.

[15] J. Koren and Y.D. Nevo call this the 'traditional approach', which "confines its field of enquiry to the Muslim literary sources", as opposed to the 'revisionist approach' that dates from the 1980s and includes archaeological and other non-written sources (Koren and Nevo 1991).

[16] Shortly after my arrival in 2008, this Faculty was turned in a department of Theology and Religious Studies and became part of the Faculty of Humanities.

[17] See, e.g., (Kagan 2009; Bod 2013).

[18] Abu Lughod, herself an anthropologist, is not so optimistic about this development and warned in 1989 against the "danger of the pull of classical Orientalism with its privileging of textual over ethnographic Islam" (Abu Lughod 1989, p. 296).

extended expeditions of the past. Nowadays, summer and semester programs in the Middle East have become institutionalized in many Western European universities. One of the results of this interaction is that the student is able to study the social, religious, and political lives of Muslims in practice, and does not have to rely entirely on texts to do so.

While these developments were taking place, a third change occurred at Western European universities in the late 1990s: the arrival of the first generation of European Muslim students. Countries like England and France already had experience with exchange students from Muslim countries, but now Muslims who were born and raised in Western European societies gradually started to populate the universities. When I was a student, there were no Muslim students. Now, as a teacher, substantial portions of my classes consist of students who identify themselves as 'Muslim'. The world of Islam that Western European universities used to study as something 'out there' had become part of our world 'here'. By consequence, the Muslim presence in the academic domain and their different needs regarding Islamic theology created several paradigm shifts, as we will see below.

2.3. Educational Storyline: The Content of the Educational 'Space of Negotiation'

In addition to the paradigm shift in Islamic studies from philological to anthropological, another paradigm shift took place regarding the approach to the education in Islam as a religion: what was to be educated exactly, and to what purpose? In Western European societies, education of religion at school was commonly limited to what is called 'teaching into religion' (instruction in the doctrines of a religion to pupils and students who adhere to that same religion) as opposed to 'teaching about religion' (instruction in doctrines and traditions of a religion from an outsider's perspective).[19] Despite the decreasing religiosity in Western Europe, the 'teaching-into' education was maintained at the confessional (mostly private) primary schools, even if it were limited to a token celebration of several Christian feasts. But when these confessional schools experienced an increase of children of Islamic, Hindu, and other faiths, this token approach was not considered tenable.[20] Some schools decided to return to a stricter confessional 'teaching *into* religion', while others shifted to 'teaching *about* religion' with the purpose of teaching the pupils the plurality of religions and worldviews (including atheism and agnosticism) with the aim to assist them in becoming citizens in a diverse and multi-religious society.[21]

At universities, this paradigm shift was slightly different. Here, also, 'teaching into religion' used to be dominant. But even at universities that were not seminaries and that claimed objective and neutral study 'about' religion, the object and environment of study was predominantly Christian. Other religions were mostly considered illustrative of being other religions than Christianity, and even for teachers who sincerely tried to be objective and neutral about the religions they taught, Christianity retained their 'default position'.[22] Parallel to this discussion on the position of the various religions taught in the Theology department, a new approach to 'teaching about religion' announced itself with the discipline of Religious Studies. This discipline distinguished itself from the Christianity-oriented tradition of Theology by conceiving religion as a general human phenomenon that could be studied like any other, whereby individual religions and their doctrines merely serve as illustrations.[23]

So, where the academic study of Islam had first been oscillating between the philological and anthropological disciplines, it has in many Western European universities found a stronger foothold in the Theology and Religious Studies department, where it received the

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[19] These concepts were introduced by (Grimmit 2000).

[20] (Ziebertz and Riegel 2009).

[21] In Dutch society, this approach was promoted by the government to encourage 'integration' of children with migration backgrounds into Dutch society (Avest and Wingerden 2017).

[22] (Taylor 2007).

[23] Charles Taylor described this shift as "a Western condition in which belief was the default option (. . .) to a condition in which for more and more people unbelieving construals seem at first blush the only plausible ones." (Taylor 2007). See also (Fitzgerald 2003), and the magnificent (Ahmed 2016).

approach of 'teaching about religion'. However, with the arrival of Muslim students, this approach was being criticized, either because Islam was allegedly not treated as a religion in its own right but as an alien and exotic appendix to the study of Christianity, or because Islam was lacking in a 'teaching into religion' approach. Doing justice to either meant that the academic study of Islam was now oscillating between the 'teaching into religion' approach of Theology and the 'teaching about religion' approach of Religious Studies. Leiden University tried to cater to both needs by establishing two parallel programs of Islam, one 'about' Islam (Islamic Studies) and one 'in' Islam (Islamic Theology—whereby Leiden prided itself in taking a non-normative approach to Islamic theology[24]).

2.4. Personal Storyline I: Inclusivity

The other paradigm shift caused by the arrival of Muslim students at European universities has to do with the pedagogical and didactic approaches. I call this the personal storyline, because for most lecturers like myself, the presence of Muslim students created situations for which we were not prepared, and for which there were no didactic manuals available. Each one of us had had to deal with it individually. This development is not unique: it is illustrative for the Western universities' growing awareness that they need to be open to the diversity of students, teachers, and teaching methods.[25]

So, what were these situations that demanded a shifting of gears from lecturers? The overall term that is applicable here is inclusivity. For many old-school lecturers like me, who are not Muslim themselves and who are educated in an environment where Muslims and Islam were studied as foreign objects, the presence of Muslim students created a new learning environment. The conventional way of speaking about 'them', living in places 'there', did not befit this situation. Muslim students were part of 'us' and they lived 'here', and this had to be reflected in our teaching. Lecturing on Islam as a foreign religion alien to students who were raised in a Christian environment—if not in the faith then at least in its culture—is quite different from lecturing on a religion that is adhered to by some of the students present in the classroom.

The issue at hand was not what anthropologists describe as the realization of the Self and the Other. The insight that my generation of lecturers needed to acquire went beyond that. While the anthropological notion of Othering had to do with the situation of the Self engaging with the Other, we now had to realize that the Self and the Other are not isolated from each other.[26] That is a challenge that many of us lecturers are still struggling with, sometimes on the most obvious and therefore least visible of levels. The 'native' teachers had to become aware of their choice of style and words and sources, which were part of academic educational discourse that for centuries has been the European Christian default position. It was a position that could be reflected in the smallest of words. For instance, I was accustomed to speaking of Granada being 'conquered' in 1492, but perhaps I should use the word 'fall'?[27]

The predicament of the teacher is not only the choice of words, but also the translation of foreign terms.[28] Perhaps it is my Arabist background that has made me keenly aware of this, but at Western-European universities we are teaching in either English or our own native language, and that means that we need to translate the Arabic–Islamic technical terms. The meaning of a term may then easily get lost in translation. For instance, the term *shari'a* may have positive connotations with most devout Muslims, while it can have the most negative meaning for many non-Muslims.[29] In my experience, this difference in

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[24]	The Theology Faculty at Leiden University had a long-standing tradition of being 'secular', meaning that Christianity was subjected to respectful but critical academic study. The Islamic Theology program was modelled in a similar manner. See: (Ghaly 2011).

[25]	See, e.g., (Kuokkanen 2011; Mbembe 2016).

[26]	(Abu Lughod 1989, pp. 64, 270–78).

[27]	On the particularity of words, see the 'Introduction' in (Sayyid 2011).

[28]	Talal Asad addresses this particular issue in Chapters 5 and 6 of his (Asad 1993).

[29]	(Berger 2018; Dupret 2007).

emotional connotation needs to be explicitly addressed when teaching a class of mixed Muslim and non-Muslim students about *shari'a* in order to avoid confusion and mixed messages. It becomes even more complicated when the translation of Arab–Islamic terminology into the native language of the teacher is interspersed with English as the dominant academic language. An example is the term 'sectarianism', which has become common to describe religious conflicts, in particular in Muslim-majority countries.[30] First there is a discord between Arabic and English. In Arabic, the term used for sectarianism (*ta'ifiyya*) refers the term *ta'ifa*, which is typical for Sunnite literature, as it only applies to Shi'ite and non-Muslim sects, and therefore appears not to relate to Sunni Muslims. In English, however, 'sect' is a perfectly neutral term for differentiations within any religion. But when used in Dutch, for instance, yet another dissonance appears: the English term *sectarianism* is one-on-one copied by most Dutch scholars ('sektarisme'), although in Dutch the term 'sekt' does not have the objective neutrality of the English 'sect', as it stands for an isolated occult group that in English would be translated as 'cult'. One can imagine how this terminology and its translations may lead to misconceptions in a classroom of mixed Dutch Muslim and non-Muslim students using English academic literature.

Another issue that may arise in such educational circumstances is that of 'collective memory.'[31] Certain historical references I made appeared not familiar to the Muslim students, many of whom are of foreign origin. Even though they had graduated from the same schools as their fellow students, they were heritage students with a frame of reference that was often different due to a different collective memory.[32] For instance, when I mention the siege of Vienna, my Muslim students have questioning looks while the other Dutch students nod eagerly, and when I mention the battle of Hittin, the reaction is reverse. Interestingly, neither of these two events are being taught at the schools where they had all gone to. So somehow, these events have been stored in their respective collective memories, and since I as a teacher share only one of these collective memories, the challenge is now not to use that as a default position of a self-evident repertoire.

I admit that these impressionist experiences do not necessarily hold quantitatively (I hear from lecturers of similar experiences, but how many are they?) or qualitatively (is it just me, or an entire generation of lecturers?), but the fact remains that inclusive teaching—i.e., teaching in terms of a diverse 'us' rather than a singular 'us'—remains a challenge in Western European environments of Islamic education.

2.5. Personal Story II: Credibility

The other dimension of the paradigm shift due to the presence of Muslim students in Islamic higher education in Western Europe is the authority of the lecturer. With this I do not mean the authority of "dogma, strictness, and coercion, [. . .] that gives the impression that someone instructs and another simply passively absorbs."[33] Neither do I mean the authority that an imam, rabbi, or priest needs to convincingly convey the message of God, or the theologian to instruct his pupils in that message.[34] No, I mean the basic authority of the lecturer that makes students accept what he or she tells them. In teaching environments where the lecturer and students share the same religious default position and the same collective memory, and the topic of teaching Islam belongs to neither, the lecturer's authority usually goes unchallenged. If the parameters in this equation change, however, for instance because some students are Muslim, or because the lecturer is Muslim while most students are not, then this authority may be called into question.

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30 For critical studies on this use of terminology, see: (Hashemi and Postel 2017; Haddad 2017).

31 See, e.g., (Assman 1988; Confino 1997).

32 Talal Assad describes this same phenomenon in terms of shifts in 'discursive grammars' (Assad 2003); Wittgenstein in terms of 'shared grammars' (Wittgenstein [1953] 2001); Alisdair MacIntyre speaks of 'multiple traditions' (MacIntyre 1988).

33 (Kitchen 2014).

34 As is elaborately described by Robert Pazmino in (Pazmino 2002).

We have seen that Leiden University had two Islam programs (Islam Studies and Islamic Theology), and due to an increasing presence of Dutch Muslim students in both programs, the religious affiliation of the lecturer became a topic of discussion among the staff. Should the lecturers be Muslim, even devout Muslim, or can courses in such programs also be taught by non-Muslims? This became a pressing question, because both programs were set up by non-Muslim professors of Islam.

I was one of those professors. When I came to Leiden University in 2008, I inherited the Islamic Theology program that was set up in 2006, in which two Muslims and one non-Muslim were already teaching. This small staff of four lecturers looked eye-to-eye in our approach to teaching Islamic theology. However, students were not always comfortable with the mixed staff. Muslim students would double check the things I had said in class with my Muslim colleagues, and the few non-Muslim students would check remarks of my Muslim colleagues with me. It was not only the students—even some colleagues at other departments expressed a mild concern that my two Muslim colleagues, as believing Muslims, might perhaps be too biased to teach Islam. A remarkable concern given the fact that it was not expressed towards the teachers in the Christian Theology program who were all devout or non-practicing Christians (moreover, I know of no teachers of non-Christian creed or background who teach Christianity in any of the Theology departments in Europe).

I contend that the issue here is not authority, but credibility. Or, to put it into Weberian terms: the issue is not the authority the lecturer holds by merely being the professor (traditional authority) or by his or her position (formal authority), but by the capacity to convince (charismatic authority). In my experience, if the lecturer is Muslim, then this definitely raises his or her credibility among Muslim students, just as being non-Muslim often gives more credibility to speak about Islam to non-Muslims: in the first instance, the credibility of the lecturer is based on an assumption of positive bias (as a believer, the lecturer is assumed to know what he or she is talking about), whereas in the second instance, the assumption of non-bias proves more credible.

However, sometimes it works out better to be a non-Muslim lecturer with Muslim students, in particular when teaching sensitive topics. For instance, my Muslim colleagues could be heavily criticized by Muslim students for teaching viewpoints that exist in Islam but that these students considered heretical: these students were shocked that Muslim lecturers could teach topics that they, being Muslims themselves, were expected to denounce as non-Islamic. If *I* were to teach those topics or viewpoints, on the other hand, the students would feel much less affronted (although we should also consider the possibility that this lenience towards me could be the result of a general attitude towards me as 'he doesn't know better').

In my case, I noticed that my possible lack of credibility as a non-Muslim among the Muslim students was being compensated with a number of other qualities: hands-on experience (I had lived in the Middle East for a long time), and Arab speaking (most Dutch Muslims do not speak Arabic[35]), knowledge of the academic field. But my credibility among Muslims was also helped at times by being a non-Muslim native Dutch, which gave me the position of a 'cultural translator' between the Muslim students and Dutch society, between 'us' and 'them'. This is diametrically opposed to the 'cultural translation' of Talal Asad. He uses this term to indicate how Western academic discourse subconsciously uses its own cultural context and symbols to describe other cultures.[36] With 'cultural translation' I mean a consciousness of the different meanings that two cultural environments may give to concepts and terminology, and the ability to point out and possibly explain that difference.

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[35] Arabic is not the native language of most Dutch Muslims who are largely made up of Moroccans (36 percent) and Turks (37 percent), with Surinamese, Afghans, and Iraqis coming second with 3–4 percent each (Central Bureau of Statistics 2019).

[36] (Asad 1993, 2008), in particular in the Introduction in 2008 version.

The lecturer of Islam today in Europe therefore faces interesting challenges. The old-school approach of texts and Muslims 'out there' needs to be replaced by an inclusive approach, and teachers can and will be challenged on their knowledge and authority by Muslim students. But the story of paradigm shifts in Islamic higher education does not end there.

2.6. Security Storyline: Contamination through Securitization

The considerations of higher education in Islam were intersected by a new storyline, which introduced yet another paradigm: the issue of security. Starting with the attacks of 9/11 in 2001, Western European governments augmented their integration policies with a keen interest in security. It was argued that, to counter radicalization among European Muslims and to improve further integration in their respective European societies, domestic education programs of Islamic theology were needed. Governments turned to universities to develop such programs, for which significant funds were made available. Therefore, in addition to the wish of quite some Muslim students for Islamic theology programs to be more normative ('teaching in religion'), governments now expressed the wish—backed up by finances—for Islamic theology programs to be normative in the sense that they instructed in a form of Islam that was considered conducive to de-radicalization and to integration in Europe (often referred to with terms like 'liberal' or 'moderate' Islam). These two needs, although at first glance upholding the same goals of teaching 'in' religion, proved to be quite different, as we will see below.

I contend that the security storyline has seriously contaminated the historical and educational storylines. Security concerns generated extra funds for universities to develop Islamic higher education programs, but the purpose of these programs was not entirely clear: was it to study Islam, or were they intended to educate Muslim students in 'moderate' or 'European' or otherwise non-radical form Islam? In my experience, Muslim students were very sensitive to this. For instance, in the case of Leiden, Muslim students were aware that the Islamic Theology program was funded with money from anti-radicalization funds (even though it was channeled through the Ministry of Education), and they smirked that they were not studying Islam but were being programmed into a certain kind of Islam or 'Muslimness'. The students were not alone in this observation: quite some scholars have warned for the 'securitization' of religion in general, and of Islam in particular.[37] What happened with the establishment of new, state-funded Islamic theology programs was therefore, to use Deleuze's terminology, that governmental and security forces 'territorialized' these programs while the Muslim students were being 'deterritorialized' from it.[38] As a lecturer, I had mixed feelings about this situation: on the one hand I was grateful to receive financial support for the hemorrhaging program, on the other hand I had misgivings about the government's agenda. And even though I had quite some freedom in organizing the program, its credibility was tainted by its source of finance.

On the other hand, the financial possibilities in Western Europe to establish Islamic theology programs played into the need among Muslims for exactly such education: we have seen how there is a growing demand among Muslims for Islamic theology according to the 'teaching into religion' method. However, there was both criticism and strong suspicion among European Muslim communities of the initiatives taken for such Islamic theology programs. The criticism was directed at the content of those programs: most did not have the quality, intensity, and standing as Islamic theology programs in the Muslim world. The suspicion was aimed at the universities' motivation (are they to teach Islam or are they the executive branch of the security services?), as well as their take on religion (the secular position of Leiden University, for instance, was often perceived by Muslim students as anti-religious rather than a-religious).

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[37] (Cesari 2009).

[38] See the Introduction for an elaboration of these terms.

Regardless of all these considerations, we can say that the Islamic theology programs that were established in Western European universities were welcomed by all parties involved as a first step to establishing Islamic higher education, albeit for very different reasons: by the Muslims for theological motives, by the government for security motives, and by the universities for financial and educational motives. This lack of unity in motive is what causes continuous debate and friction within the Western European Islamic higher education programs.

2.7. Societal Storyline: Lifelong Learners

So far, we have discussed higher education within the confines of universities. However, with regard to Islam, we can observe that there is an enormous interest throughout society. In the case of Leiden, we had a high-quality Islamic theology program, but only a handful of students were willing to spend four full years on that, while throughout Dutch society, the interest in 'Islam' was enormous. People were very interested in Islamic issues, whether for personal or professional reasons, or out of general curiosity, but none of these people had the time or willingness to enroll in a full university course.

This situation is not typical for Islamic higher education. It is one of the characteristics of today's developments in Western universities called 'lifelong learning'. No longer do people confine their higher education to four years of study in a university, but many want to continue forms of education throughout their lives, mostly on issues tailor-made to their needs.[39] In the case of Islam, we can observe the mushrooming of private centers that teach evening and weekend courses on Islam on all levels, and which attract massive numbers of Muslim students. This development has not been researched yet, but I have gained a general impression from my informal conversations with lecturers of these courses and some of my students at Leiden who attended them. From the students I understood that they were interested in the normative 'teaching-into' religion that is being practiced there as opposed as the 'teaching-about' at university. The lecturers told me that they can barely manage the large numbers of interested students. They offer these lectures in various cities throughout The Netherlands, visiting another city every evening in the week, and each lecture reaching attendance levels of hundred to four hundred participants. The fees asked from these participants were sufficient to bear all the costs. The Islamic centers with these programs were the true competition to our university programs of Islamic higher education.

I would argue that this situation of out-of-university interest in all kinds of higher education is—or should be—causing a new paradigm shift in the position of universities in society. We have taken up this challenge at Leiden with regard to Islamic higher education, as I will explain below.

3. Assembling New Forms of Islamic Higher Education: The Next Step

All the aforementioned storylines were reflected in the Leiden University start-up of the bachelor and master Islamic Theology in 2006, parallel to the already existing program of Islamic Studies. In 2014, the Islamic Theology program was ended, and the Islamic Studies program was converted into an Islamic Studies 'track' in Middle Eastern Studies and a minor Islam in the Faculty of Humanities. At the same time, I was put in charge of the restart of an altogether different Islam Academie program. In the following paragraphs, I want to discuss the insights that led to the rethinking of Islamic higher education, and our experimenting therewith in the Islam Academie program. But first we need to briefly address the reasons for the cancellation of the Leiden Islamic Theology program.

The main reason for the discontinuation of the bachelor–master program Islamic Theology was financial: Dutch universities get paid by the Ministry of Education on the basis of the number of students, and there were too few students in this program to merit continuation. The reason for this low number was not a lack of quality—to the contrary,

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[39] John Fields explores this emerging interest in lifelong education in (Fields 2000).

the program, with Arabic, theology, and societal components, was evaluated consistently as very good by the bi-annual peer-inspection committees. The program nevertheless did not attract sufficient numbers of students. The main reason for their reluctance was that the program did not meet their expectations.[40] First and foremost, the study program was not comparable to that of renown Islam centers in the Muslim world. Additionally, the program was still found to be too much 'teaching about' than 'teaching into' religion.

However, there were also considerations of a much more practical nature. For one, the Muslim students—who often were the first generation of students in their family— preferred studies with status, such as law, medicine, and business administration. Even those students who had ambitions in Islamic theology (some were already preaching or teaching Islam in local mosques) preferred an education with the promise of job security, for the simple reason that in the Netherlands the salary of imams is to be furnished by the mosque congregation and is by consequence very low.[41] Hence the lack of sufficient numbers of students and the resulting decision to cancel the Islamic Theology program and to confine the study of Islam at Leiden University to a minor Islam (which promptly filled up with large numbers of mostly non-Muslim students) and a so-called 'Islam track' in Middle Eastern studies.

3.1. A New Start: Two Premises

At the same time that it was decided to end the existing structures of Islamic higher education at Leiden, the Faculty also decreed that for a period of five years (2014–2018) new forms of such education should be explored. I was entrusted with the task to explore the possibilities for a program that also included participants from outside university, like professionals and life-long learners. In doing so, we used two premises.

First, we should not endeavor 'teaching into' Islamic theology, because as a Dutch university, we would simply never have the authoritative standing to do so. Of course, Leiden had a profound knowledge of certain aspects of Islamic theology, but not the kind that would make up a curriculum the equivalent of al-Azhar in Cairo (Egypt)[42], Qarawiyyin in Fez (Morocco)[43], or Medina in Saudi-Arabia[44].

The second premise was that the topic of 'Islam' is not something to be studied as a phenomenon 'out there', but is a topic that is to be addressed as 'in here'. For a European audience, 'Islam' is a topic that engages everyone, Muslim or not, from the devout Muslim to the concerned citizen, from the politician to the policeman, from the teacher to the parent. 'Islam' has become a hotbed of emotions, societal dynamics, and politics that are fed by the history, theology, and sociology of Islam as a religion and civilization.[45] The old-fashioned teaching about Islam, which takes the student audience through the chronological development of Islam as a religion and civilization, does not suffice anymore. Our premise therefore was to address the study of Islam as a dynamic and diachronic phenomenon that is being played out right here, right now, with and within all of us.

From these two premises, we developed a new program that we experimented with under the name of the Leiden Islam Academy. This program, however, required a completely new approach both in educational and in organizational terms. These approaches will be elaborated below.

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[40] See my own blog (Berger 2013), and the report (Advies 2019).

[41] As opposed, for instance, to neighbouring Belgium, where the clergy of recognized religions are being paid by the state (which creates an entirely different dynamic in state-religion relations, see (Foblets and Overbeeke 2002)).

[42] The curriculum is available on the Arab version of the website (www.azhar.edu.eg) and shows the degree of specialization of the various theology studies, with at least four different faculties on the Cairo city campus: the Faculty of Preaching (*Kulliyat Da'wa*), the Faculty of Religion (*Kulliyat Din*), the Faculty of Islamic studies (*Kulliyat Dirasat Islamiyya*), and the Faculty of Sharia and Law (*Kulliyat Shari'a wa Qanun*). Other Azhar campuses have additional faculties with yet more specialized subjects of Islamic theology.

[43] The website of Al-Qarawiyyin University is available in various languages (http://uaq.ma) but at the time of writing, the site could not be navigated.

[44] The website of the Islamic University of Medina is available on https://enweb.iu.edu.sa, but at the time of writing, its contents were blocked.

[45] This amalgamation of topics that make up Islam has been pointed out by numerous scholars, whereby I find (Ahmed 2016; Abu Lughod 1989) most insightful.

3.2. Motives

First, we had to be clear *why* we wanted to develop this program. One of our first practical steps was to gauge the needs of the Dutch Muslim communities with regard to Islamic higher education.[46] In addition we talked to a number of societal stakeholders, taking stock of what their needs were in this respect. However, we realized that the important decisions had to be taken by ourselves: why did we, as a university, wanted to do this in the first place? Was it the money available in the ample government funds aimed at deradicalization and combatting terrorism? Or was it the urgent requests from the government to develop programs for the education of 'home-grown' imams? Should we listen to the needs of Muslims, or to the ambition to educate the masses? We decided that our point of departure was both the university's societal and academic responsibility.

Academic responsibility needs little clarification: academics are responsible for research and the production of knowledge. However, we held that a university, in addition to its responsibility to academia, also has a responsibility to society. This may seem a self-evidence to which most academics will consent, just like research funds have made 'relevance' of research to society one of the prerequisites to obtain funding. However, academic practice shows differently. Compared to other sciences, Social Sciences and especially the Humanities have a poor record in social impact, let alone cooperation with societal partners. While there is an increasing volume of literature defending the impact of humanities in particular,[47] they still do not offer an explanation why the direct interaction with society and cooperation with societal partners is so minimal compared to other sciences. One of the reasons offered is that the current impact indicators are not suitable to do justice to the role that these sciences play to society.[48]

Whatever the reasons, we had not much to navigate on in terms of impact, so we developed our own parameters for societal responsibility as academics. These parameters were based on three motivations to start a project like the Leiden Islam Academie.

3.3. First Motive: Knowledge Sharing

The first motivation is the sharing of knowledge regarding Islam-related issues. With that we do not mean the so-called outreach programs (that often have an agenda of promoting the positive side of Islam), nor the dissemination of knowledge through public lectures. We prefer a two-way discussion and information exchange rather than a one-way lecture. We hold that sharing of knowledge is indeed what it says: sharing. Furthermore, in our view it is not the university's responsibility to dissuade people from entertaining certain views about Islam, but to educate all students in the breadth and depth of Islam as it has manifested itself throughout fourteen centuries, and as it is doing now.

As a consequence of this view, and building on our premise that Islam is a topic 'in here', we invited the audience to share their visions, experiences, and opinions of Islam. These could range from a strict conservative version of Islam to a secular nationalist position against Islam. All this input proved valuable contributions to the lecture. It also oftentimes showed us, lecturers, how little the participants in these teaching sessions knew about the rich heritage of Islamic civilization in terms of theology, philosophy, history, and legal sciences. This was the case with both Muslims and non-Muslims. Making up for that lack of knowledge would be our main contribution as lecturers in such sessions, in addition to managing the audience's exchange of viewpoints and experiences.

This approach implies that the lecturer needs to take a different role than the traditional one: in addition to sending information to an audience (the dissemination of knowledge),

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[46] In the year leading up to the start of the Leiden Islam Academie, we conducted three different surveys among Muslims in The Netherlands about their wishes regarding Islamic education: (a) a quantitative survey conducted by the marketing bureau Motivaction, (b) a focus group reflecting on the outcomes of this survey, and (c) a focus group reflecting on the initial plan of the Leiden Islam Academie (reports, records, and minutes are in the archives of the Leiden Islam Academie).

[47] See, e.g., (Nussbaum 2016; Roth 2015).

[48] (Collini 2012).

he or she also needs to be able to engage with that audience. This engagement goes beyond the classroom discussion: it implies that the audience—regular students, but also professionals, imams, judges, Muslims, parents, concerned citizens, and journalists—has something to contribute from experience. This contribution, then, needs to be moderated by the lecturer in classroom discussions, but also to be further explored and mined. This is easier said than done, as it requires special skills from the lecturer, skills that are not learned in the regular academic training.

One of those skills should be the recognition that an academic lecturer and her audience use different grammars and have different questions because they pursue different goals. For instance, academics are usually not working on solving practical societal issues, as they are more interested in underlying processes and structures. Their guiding questions usually are 'What is going on?' and 'Why is this happening?'. The audiences we were targeting, however, the Muslims as well as the professionals, are mainly preoccupied with the question 'What do we need to do?'. Establishing an ongoing discussion with the aim to moderate and explore the audience's knowledge and experiences therefore requires from the lecturer the ability to bridge the worlds of academics and society. Where before we spoke of the need to 'translate' the discursive grammars of Islam, Christendom, and secularism,[49] we now add the need to 'translate' between the worlds of academia and society. As one can see, the lecturer's skill set required in this new form of Islamic higher education is only expanding beyond what is normally expected from him or her.[50]

3.4. Second Motive: Knowledge Production

The second motive to start a project like the Leiden Islam Academie is to contribute to the field of knowledge production. This is the twin sister of the aforementioned knowledge sharing: whereas knowledge sharing is focused on education, knowledge production wants to expand a particular domain of research—in our case that is Islam. There is nothing new about this, as it is the standard motive that any academic researcher will put in a funding request. However, in our case, we decided that the knowledge was present in the audience itself. We see education not as something that is separate from research in time and effort. To us, education provides opportunities for research. The way we had set up our education by means of knowledge sharing provided the perfect setting for research-through-education.[51]

Two opportunities present themselves here. The first is that these audiences can be 'mined' to obtain information about the nature of their opinions, anxieties, and experiences. Granted, an outcome reflecting that of society at large should not be expected given the fact that higher education lectures will attract only a limited audience. But in my experience, everyone in such an audience knows someone who represents views that are not present in that audience: the Muslim graduate who just started as a lawyer may have a family member who went to ISIL in Syria, or she can share her experiences with controversies at her mosque, and the policeman may know of right-wing opinions voiced in the force and share his experiences of confrontations with what he calls 'radical' Muslim youth. These are just two examples of personal encounters I had in lectures, and they barely scratch the surface of experiences with 'Islam' in today's Dutch society.

The second opportunity is that, depending on the composition of the audience, the educational setting of a lecture can be used to consider such audience as a source of research. This can work two ways: the audience can be the actor of research, or the target group. If the lecture is part of a series that leads towards some kind of diploma or certificate, and therefore requires a final paper, then these students can be deployed to contribute to a research project that the lecturer is supervising. In my case, I was teaching an online master

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[49]   (Asad 1993).

[50]   In 2020–2021 we started a project at Leiden to develop these skills by means of a 'toolkit' for lecturers to conduct discussions on controversial issues in classroom settings.

[51]   This paragraph is based on personal experiences in the domain of Islam, but also draws from literature like (Schubotz 2019).

course on Sharia in Europe, whereby the students—who were from different countries in Europe—were provided with specific research questions and methods and were asked to conduct a small research project in their own country. Through them I amassed information that I would otherwise not be able to gather, either because I do not speak the language of that country, or because I lack the funds and time to go there. The other way of deploying an audience for research is to address them as the target of research, for instance to use them as a resource or focus group. Here, the use of online surveys has proven very successful. Of course, the transparency required by academic research demands that the lecturer is clear about this approach, but I contend from my own experience that such openness may even increase the willingness of the audience to contribute, because the prospect of participation in knowledge-production appears quite attractive.

We have experimented with several of such research-through-education settings, mostly by means of online education. An example is an online course I had developed for diplomats. Each course would take on twenty to thirty diplomats who were participating from their postings everywhere in the Muslim world. Through online discussions and assignments, I invited them to share their insights and experiences. They all did so gladly, and I amassed an unexpected richness of facts, anecdotes, and insights. As an added value, some of these diplomats maintained contact with each other and effectively created a knowledge network within their own working environment, and some would stay in touch with me, approaching me with questions or invitations, and I could do the same to them.

This model was also applied by colleagues. One colleague taught a course on medical Islamic ethics, teaching separately to nursing home staff, general practitioners, or hospital doctors. Each course provided the lecturer with interesting information and data, which she collected by means of questionnaires and study cases. Another colleague used a similar approach in a course for teachers at primary schools with a substantial Muslim population, and yet another colleague did the same with imams. In all instances, small networks were created that would prove beneficial to both sides.

Sometimes such courses benefited more from a physical setting as workshops, as was the case with more-days intensive courses I conducted with a group of young imams, and with several Muslim youth organizations. However, in terms of research, the online course proved more valuable to research as it opened the possibility to get access to a much larger audience, and to collect more personal as well as big data. This kind of research is still in its infancy, but already has proven to be very promising.

3.5. Third Motive: Contributing to a Better Society

The third motive for assuming a societal responsibility by academics is the intention to contribute to improving society.[52] This is where the subject-matter of Islam becomes distinctly different from many other topics that one may want to address for the public good, because 'Islam' is a source of continuous tensions in Western European society. In The Netherlands, for instance, the term 'polarization' has been coined for this phenomenon, and the combat of that polarization has been part of official government policy ever since 2007.[53] If knowledge from academia can contribute to understanding and the alleviation of tensions, then that is definitely something we feel obliged to do.

3.6. Intra- and Extra-University Education

The first years of the Academie were mostly spent on designing the courses. This did not mean that we were developing entirely new courses—to the contrary, much of the materials could be used from existing university courses—but that we had to tailor-make them to fit the needs and wishes of the target groups. Much time was therefore spent on contacting potential target groups, whereby we ultimately worked with 10 different

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[52] See the aforementioned (Susser 2010).

[53] (van Binnenlandse Zaken 2007). This policy document has since then been followed by various policy initiatives, all focusing on depolarization.'

professional groups: diplomats, lawyers (including judges), military, journalists, imams, teachers (primary and secondary schools), medical staff (doctors and nursing staff), mediators, police, and civil servants (both a ministerial and municipal level). Another category of participants was mixed audiences, whereby our coordination partners were mostly student and youth organizations. The key to our success, we quickly realized, was not the availability of interesting courses, but the fact that they had been designed as a coordinated effort.

The co-ownership of such coordination also guaranteed that the target groups would attend in large numbers, and here we saw a significant difference with the regular Islamic Theology and Islam Studies programs at our university. In the period 2006–2014, these two programs had an average of 10 students per year, whereby certain courses like the Introduction to Islam and Politics of Islam enjoyed higher numbers (to a maximum of 60 and 30, respectively). After 2014, the concentration of Islam-related courses in a minor and an Islam-track yielded higher numbers. If I take myself as example, I was annually teaching six Islam courses at Leiden University (with each course consisting of 12 lectures) and several guest lectures at other universities (Figure 1).

Courses taught in university (2014-2019):

	Courses:	# Taught:	Participants:		Courses:	# Taught:	Participants:
Leiden University (each course is 12 lectures):				*Guest lectures:*			
BA Introduction Islam	5	620		Islamic law (Amsterdam University)	5	150	
BA Islam and Minorities	4	100		Islam in Europe (Tilburg University)	2	80	
BA Islam in Europe	3	125		Islam and the West (Rotterdam University)	1	65	
BA Modern Trends and Thinkers in Islam	5	210		Islam and minorities (Maastricht University)	3	240	
BA Honours Islam in Netherlands	4	120		Contemporary Islam (Leuven University)	1x 12	46	
MA Sharia in the West	5	67		Islam in Europe (Brussels University)	1	80	
6	**26**	**1.242**			**6**	**13**	**661**

Figure 1. Courses taught in university (2014–2019).

With the start of the Leiden Islam Academie in 2014, however, the volume of extra-university Islam education increased significantly with 24 new courses in the period 2014–2019 (Figure 2), and even with the irregular and tentative approach taken when offering these new courses, their participant intake was more than double than that of the regular university student intake in the same period. Most of the out-of-university courses were taught more than once, resulting in a total of 85 courses taught, whereby some courses consisted of three to five lectures given on separate days.

Courses outside university (2014-2019):

	Courses:	# Taught:	Participants:		Courses:	# Taught:	Participants:
Courses for professionals:				*Courses for mixed audiences (general public):*			
Diplomats (Netherlands)	3	9	595	Islam in the West	1	7	387
Diplomats (European)	2	3	61	Political Islam	2	4	415
Lawyers, judges	2	4	455	Minorities and Islam	1	3	106
Military	1	11	550		**4**	**14**	**908**
Journalists	1	2	63				
Imams	2	4	65				
Teachers	2	9	465				
Medical staff	1	6	106				
Mediators	1	3	56				
Police	1	12	456				
Civil servants (ministries)	2	3	89				
Civil servants (municipalities)	2	5	513				
20	**71**	**3.474**					

Figure 2. Courses outside university (2014–2019).

3.7. Choice of Teaching Topics

I already indicated that when one teaches Islam in a Western European environment, one enters an arena of heated debates, opinions, and tempers. Islam in a Western European university is not a topic that is tabula rasa anymore, as it perhaps was until the 1990s. Nowadays, everyone has dealings with Islam, whether personal or through media, many people have notions of some aspects of Islam, and everyone is opinionated. This creates two didactic issues that need closer consideration.

The first issue is that of topics. A diverse audience of students in a lecture on Islam also means a diverse variety of interests. During the period 2014–2019, I made it standard practice in several of my courses to survey the interests of the students before the course started. In some of these courses I made use of anonymous online surveys, in others (the course for the military and the police, in particular), I presented the survey orally at the start of the course. The advantage of an anonymous survey is that the respondents feel freer to speak their minds. This is in particular the case with non-homogeneous groups, like students. An oral discussion of a survey is more advantageous in small settings of professionals who already know each other, because it creates an atmosphere of willingness to frankly discuss issues that the participants clearly do not all agree upon. Surveys were conducted in approximately half of all the courses I taught in this period, both within and without university, and an estimated one fourth of the participants responded to them.[54]

The surveys yielded interesting results. They always contained the same three questions: 1. What do you want to know about Islam/Muslims? 2. Is there something that concerns you about Islam/Muslims? 3. What is your interaction with Islam/Muslims? In the answers to these three questions, one could discern a differentiation between Muslim and non-Muslim respondents.[55] With regard to the first question, the outcomes of the survey show that the Muslim respondents generally wanted to know more about Sufism, Islamic manifestations of sustainability, and the practice of Islamic rituals in Western society. Most non-Muslims, on the other hand, generally wanted to know more about terrorism, radicalization, the position of women, and sharia. On the other hand, the two groups of respondents were more or less in agreement with the second question (concerns about Islam and Muslims): they were all concerned about growing tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in Dutch society. Muslims often added that they were concerned about the negative image of Islam in Dutch society, and some non-Muslim expressed concern with Islam as a religion that, according to them, is expansionist and aggressive. Finally, the answers to third question (interaction with Islam/Muslims) showed that there is very little interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. It appeared therefore that the interests of non-Muslims (question 1) were not triggered by their interaction with Muslims, but by the images and information that they receive through news media and public and political discourse.

The surveys conducted orally in classrooms with non-Muslim professionals yielded yet another interesting feature. These professionals mostly expressed an interest in negative topics of Islam—the position of Islam with regard to violence, world domination, women, and non-Muslims—because they assume these might explain the issues and problems they have in their work with 'Muslims' as patients, criminals, parents of school children, and students. After further discussion, however, it appeared that these issues and problems most of the time had little to do with Islam as a religion, but were more of a personal or cultural nature. As a consequence, quite a few of these teaching sessions were often focused on what was *not* Islam rather than what *was*.

This mixture of interests and their backgrounds confronts the lecturer with the challenge to decide what to teach. As a university lecturer, one may have ideas on how to approach a basic introduction into the Islamic tradition. But this may be—and in my experience often is—out of tune with the myriad of topics that the diverse audience is interested in. This poses the lecturer with a dilemma: if she teaches what she as an academic thinks needs to be taught without consideration for the audience interests, then she may lose that audience; if, on the other hand, she only teaches what the audience wants to hear, then that audience may be devoid of knowledge that may be actually of more interest and relevance than they would assume to be the case. To navigate this conundrum, the lecturer must try

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54 Based on the numbers presented in Figures 1 and 2, this amounts to approximately 700 respondents, of which I have 285 written responses, the others all being surveyed orally in the classrooms (and there written down on large boards so that they could be discussed).

55 The survey results as I conveyed them back to the participants were anonymous; I can see, however, the individual answers as well as the names of those who sent them in, and from that I can make a general deduction who are Muslim.

to do both: engage with the concerns and questions of the audience, but at the same time situate these concerns and questions in an educational framework that does justice to an academic level of teaching of Islam. This means that the lecturer needs to make the effort of understanding the audience, and a simple way to do so might be to indeed make an inventory of the concerns and questions before the class actually commences.

That brings me to the second didactic issue: what, exactly, is a lecture framework that 'does justice to an academic level of teaching of Islam'? For a long time, most of my teaching about Islam was spent on countering misconceptions and prejudices. This 'correctionary' approach is based either on the presumption that there is a correct form of Islam that can be used as the measure stick, or that everything that is being said about Islam is to be measured by objective evidence and facts. I have noticed, however, that such an approach runs the risk of becoming apologetic, or that it causes the audience to lose interest. I have therefore adopted the approach to conceptualize Islam as a dynamic combination of facts, beliefs, opinions, and controversies that all need to be addressed. My approach to teaching has since then become more 'inventorial', that is to take stock of, and contextualize, all these opinions, experiences, and emotions.[56]

4. Conclusions

Islamic higher education finds itself on the cross-roads of a variety of developments: it oscillates between the 'teaching into' approach of Theology and the 'teaching about' approach of Religious studies, between the security-driven need for a 'European Islam' and a Europa Muslim driven need for a high-quality education in 'Islam in Europe', between traditional one-way knowledge dissemination and innovative two-way knowledge sharing, and between Islam as defined and discussed by scholars and Islam as defined and discussed by the public. Many of these overlapping and cross-cutting 'zones of theory'[57] also apply to other domains of study, or to university at large. However, Islamic higher education has an added dimension that makes it more vibrant in the educational debates: the presence of an increasing Muslim university population. They bring with them different needs and another discursive grammar, collective memory, and default position regarding religion in general and Islam in particular.

This myriad of dynamics is challenging and will surely cause tensions between lecturers and students. However, they also pose opportunities. If, like I believe, the university educational system is in need of revision, then the discussion on Islamic higher education provides us with the ideas and concepts that may prove beneficial to that project. To me, thinking about Islamic higher education is not a process of finding solutions to problems, but is a process of educational innovation. In doing so, the development of the program as described in this article was quite intuitive, and only later did we realize how it coincided with the findings of academic commentaries of which some have been mentioned. However, one of the differences I find between our approach and most of these commentaries is that we are less contentious. We have not set out to 'decolonize' a university system or to 'radically transform' academic studies. In our case, we were a diverse group of lecturers and researchers—diverse in gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and heritage origins—who came to the conclusion that certain methods did not work and needed revising and reconsideration, and that is what we did.

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[56]　This is not entirely the same as, but is close to the notion of Foucault's 'problematization', which explains how certain practices are turned into a matter of concern and debate (Foucault [1961] 1988).

[57]　Abu Lughod introduced this term to describe the various overlapping approaches in the anthropology study of the Arab world (she mentions three 'zones': segmentation or tribalism, gender, and Islam—see Abu Lughod's abovementioned, 'Zones of Theory').

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