Imams in Western Europe

Valdemar Vinding, Niels, Valdemar Vinding, Niels, de Ruiter, Jan Jaap, Hashas, Mohammed

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Part II
Towards a typology of imams of the West

Niels Valdemar Vinding

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Abstract

To understand the relevant and significant differences between imams of the West, this chapter suggests a typology of imams according to variations of institutional authority – that is, the significant dimensions of institutionally embedded authority available in the West – and what has been called epistemic authority, which emphasizes the primacy of knowledge-based authority in Islam. Focussing specifically on Islamic authority and providing relevant examples of imams that embody authority, the typology expresses the cross tabulation between the diverse institutional frameworks in the West and Islamic knowledge personified. This relationship between institutional authority and epistemic authority, its explanatory power and the actual imams, who exemplify them, is a telling indicator of the directions and future challenges of Islam in Europe.

Keywords: Imams in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Austria, typology of imams, chaplaincy, institutional and epistemic authority

Introduction

This chapter draws on the preliminary interviews from the research project titled ‘Imams of the West’ (2014-2017) and is an attempt at structuring and ordering the diverse types of imams in the West. The objective of the overall research project is to explore how imams are understood in the divide between Islamic authority and Muslim leadership in the West. Based on qualitative interviews of about 50 imams in Europe and North America (‘the West’), the study falls at the intersection between Islamic studies and
sociology of religion. It investigates how the Islamic religious institution of the imam changes in the challenging encounter with a global, multicultural, and post-migration ‘Western’ world.

The argument in this chapter is that one meaningful and appropriate way of organizing the diverse types of imams in the West – as well as, perhaps, in the rest of the world – is according to the relevant kinds of authority at play amongst them in the religious-organizational field (Rosenow-Williams, 2012; Vinding, 2013). Exploring authority with its associations of power, control, or legitimate rule is an especially acute concern for any study of imams that seeks to understand how and to what degree diverse types of imams have authority through delegation, and to what extent they are authorities because of certain qualities or capacities that they have as individuals. Therefore, this chapter organizes imams according to (a) variations in their institutional authority, that is, the significant dimensions of institutionally embedded authority available to them in the West, and (b) what has been called epistemic authority, which emphasizes the primacy of knowledge-based authority in Islam (Hallaq, 2001, 2009; Wilson, 1983, p. 13). Theoretically, and at this point in reporting of the project, the typology of imams is presented through these two parameters of authority. In the final reporting on the results of the ‘Imams of the West’ research project, this typological framework of authority will be discussed against the third dimension of the actual issues of Muslim leadership that are needed and demonstrated in Muslim communities in the West. The question of leadership is acute in many Muslim communities and, taking the typology presented in this chapter as a point of origin, will be the object of study in the upcoming book, *Imams of the West*.

This chapter opens with a preliminary discussion of what typologies do, what analytical contributions they can make to the ordering of empirical material in qualitative studies, and how to construct typologies. Rather than the simple categorization that just puts imams in pre-labelled boxes, this chapter builds a typology as a theoretical instrument that is both conceptualizing and classificatory, while also resonating with the empirical material drawn from the interviews so that it, in turn, describes the reality of imams’ experiences. Therefore, in constructing the typology, this chapter makes explicit the theoretical implications of the empirical findings that merited a typology in the first place.

Then the chapter explores some of the most significant instances of state-of-the-art typologies of imams in the literature, including examples of chaplaincy in the United Kingdom, and typologies of imams in Turkish
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Applying institutional and epistemic authority to the empirical material provided in the interviews, the chapter unfolds the typology and further discusses the chart, its dimensions, and its implications. The imams interviewed for the project are not everyday, average imams chosen to be proportionally representative of the many thousands of imams in the West; rather, they are key informants that reflect and critically engage in debate, and exercise in their religion not just one but many kinds of authority in an array of relations. As such, the interviews explore the depth and breadth of the field of imams, and the choice of each interviewee must be understood within the specific contexts, circumstances, and conditions that qualify the material.

Knowing this, it is important to stress that the typology created here remains ideal-typical, and that each of the imams discussed fits only to the extent that they exemplify the characteristics of the type. The contribution of the chapter remains a frame for thinking about and reflecting on imams in the West and the central aspects of being an imam. Before concluding, therefore, a number of caveats and problems with the typology are discussed and evaluated, and the chapter closes by highlighting some steps taken towards a meaningful and appropriate ordering of imams in the West.

2 Types, typology, and constructing typologies

Types and their internal relationships are constructs applied in qualitative studies, which are used to comprehend, understand, and explain complex social realities (Kluge, 2000). They offer a description of the similarities and differences in whatever is studied. As such, typologies are theories, that is, reflections on an empirical world, and not just simple categorizations or classifications of something we know to exist (Doty and Glick, 1994, p. 230). Simply put, typologies are organized systems of types that are analytically useful in the formation of theories, because they clarify concepts and create groupings based on empirical data (Collier, LaPorte, and Seawright, 2012).

At first glance, typologies look like simple categorizations and have a certain appeal as reasonable reductions of complexity. As with all categorization and ordering of empirical material, typologies come with a risk
of generative structuration (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 13; Giddens, 1984, p. 25). The danger is that, in the theorization and building of the categories, the scholar forces a foreign structure onto the data, in turn misrepresenting it by labelling it. Unless very carefully constructed, the typology will produce its subject matter as the types themselves are theorized, thereby pushing description to become prescription. The typology might very well end up glossing over much of the grey zone and ambiguous cases between the predefined boxes and theorized types – in effect, missing the whole point. In addition, the step from simple categorization to essentialization is very short, and very dangerous in the light of the essentializations that have done so much damage to a nuanced understanding of Islam (Jung, 2011; McKelvey, 1982; Said, 1979).

D. Harold Doty and William H. Glick argue that seeing typologies as mere categorizations misunderstands what typologies are and thus fails ‘to take full advantage of the unique form of theory building represented by the typology approach’ (1994, p. 231). Classification implies a scheme of mutual exclusion and apparently exhaustive sets (Doty and Glick, 1994, p. 232) on the basis of a predefined rule or maxim that decides which is which. By contrast, typologies do not provide clear rules for classification that assume that the constructed classes are mutually exclusive, exhaustive, or discretionary. Rather, typologies have the analytical and theoretical benefit of identifying ‘multiple ideal types, each of which represents a unique combination of the [...] attributes that are believed to determine the relevant outcome(s)’ (Doty and Glick, 1994, p. 232). Typologies reflect the variance in one or more specified dependent variables and thereby organize identified types into a scheme of the governing rationales or dimensions at play (Doty and Glick, 1994, p. 232).

The core constructs of typologies are ideal types, but there are many other kinds of types, such as real types, prototypes, extreme types, and so on. However, the ideal types constructed in the typology are exactly that – ideals – and therefore of a theoretical nature; the types are abstract, hypothetical concepts (Weber, 1978). Ideal types are theoretical products of typology building that point to the descriptive elements that are common features of most cases of the type. This is in contrast to the empirical examples, which invariably deviate in one aspect or the other from ideal-types (Doty and Glick, 1994, p. 233). These in turn are the ‘normal-types’ of the empirical material, that is, the object of a study reflecting the real world, which remains different from the ideal-types that seeks an explanation or understanding of the real world in conceptual terms (Etzkorn, 1973, p. 137).
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In specific terms, the process of constructing typologies is delicate work and must be done with academic rigor and consistency, lest it becomes a gross approximation or haphazard misrepresentation of the material. According to qualitative methodologist Susann Kluge (1999, 2000), the virtue of the typology as a four-step process of systematization is that the divisions it proposes come from the defining or meaningful properties and attributes that describe the specific empirical data. These are the dimensions of the typology that order the material and make the types distinguishable by virtue of their similarities and differences.

In the construction of a typology the types should be as internally homogeneous as possible, in addition to the internal similarity of the variable dimension. At the same time, the differences between the diverse types must be equally well defined in the external heterogeneity at the level of the typology, clearly demonstrating the variations in the empirical material (Kluge, 1999, 2000). This is what gives the dimensions their regularity. Simply put, the different boxes in the typology must reflect both distinct features and meaningful differences on a spectrum of variance, with an increasing degree of complexity in unfolding a multidimensional typology that combines the interplay of two kinds of variables in what will become a chart (see Table 1 below).

After that, a reduction of complexity might be needed. The cross-tabulation of two dimensions leads to the combination of attributes into a number of types and spaces that are theoretical by nature, but which must be empirically verified. The ideal types must correspond to normal types. If no empirical case falls into a certain ‘box’, then it is not meaningful to include that type in the typology. Finally, the constructed types should be defined through reference to both their combined attributes and the empirical world that they propose to describe (Kluge, 2000).

3 ‘Typologizing’ attempts so far in Europe

While imams in Europe remain a neglected and understudied topic of qualitative social and humanities research, the last decade or so has seen some solid pioneering steps in not just studying imams, but also in ordering and categorizing them into more or less coherent typologies. Some of these typologies are somewhat undeveloped, while others demonstrate careful, systematic attempts at establishing analytical types that cast light on the complex social realities of imams. While there may be more such typological undertakings in Europe, this section presents three of the most substantial examples so far.
3.1 Understanding Muslim chaplaincy in the United Kingdom

Sophie Gilliat-Ray, Muhammad Mansur Ali, and Stephen Pattison have studied Muslim chaplaincy in the United Kingdom in their work *Understanding Muslim Chaplaincy* (2013), which is concerned with ‘Muslim chaplains employed in British institutions [...] working full-time. Part-time and voluntary roles can be found in prisons, hospitals, educational institutions, HM courts, shopping centres and airports, while others have formal association with police forces and leisure attractions’ (Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison, 2013, p. 1). This is highly relevant for the development of a typology of imams, because it constitutes a recent development of a significant category of institutional authority amongst imams of the West.

Although Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison do not develop their profile of the chaplains as a typology, they do draw a very comprehensive portrait of the characteristics of who Muslim chaplains are, what they think, and what they do. Perhaps the most central contribution in their book is the understanding of the relationship between the religious authority, qualifications, and training of the imams and the expectations, developments, and needs of the wide sector of institutions and organizations that employ imams as chaplains. The conversation or relationship between imams and public institutions is very much developing, producing ‘a new Muslim professional religious role’ (Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison, 2013, p. 7). The relatively new involvement of Muslims in pastoral care raises significant questions with regard to the educational background, religious training, and ‘authorization of chaplains’ (Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison, 2013, p. 43). Summarizing their study, it seems that imams’ production of Islamic knowledge and successful acquisition of a reputation as a legitimate religious authority are paramount for the success of this new Muslim professional role. Simultaneously, the study shows the ability of public institutions and employers of Muslim chaplains to establish an overdue ‘pattern of institutionalized Islamic pastoral care’ while still maintaining their multi-faith and public secular norms (Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison, 2013, p. 43).

To stress personal, professional, and theological differences, Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison differentiate between the chaplains’ various sources of education and training. Among their sample of chaplains, 58 per cent were recognized religious professionals who had trained in ‘a formal programme of confessional Islamic Studies, and had acquired the title or recognised position of ‘alim or ‘alima’ (Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison, 2013, p. 46). Such formal training seems increasingly to be a requirement and part of a growing ‘professionalization’, perhaps corresponding to a growing recognition of
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this kind of Islamic religious authority by employers. Equally, the study concerned itself with the secular educational qualifications of the chaplains, which it – and many of the informants – distinguishes from traditional training. The study finds that 46 per cent had received a mainstream higher education degree, thus demonstrating that ‘the vast majority of chaplains either have a traditional religious qualification, or a more advanced mainstream educational qualification’ (Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison, 2013, p. 47). There is very little overlap between these two kinds of qualifications. The remaining category of chaplains who perform the role with no training but the relevant experience is also there, but they are very few. Many of the chaplains in the study add relevant experience to their qualifications, and many have been teachers or educators of sorts – in public institutions, the private sector, or within Muslim communities or in mosques. There is clearly a movement of professionals and chaplains from mosques to public and private sector institutions, and vice versa.

Becoming a chaplain in these institutions is increasingly formalized and standardized, with competitive salaries, compensations, employee rights, job descriptions, and transparency in the employment. This includes a rigorous selection and recruitment process with the increased use of aptitude testing and an emphasis on pastoral care skills (Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison, 2013, p. 50, 53). While most clearly seen in the HM Prison Service, where security is a significant issue, this is part of the recruitment process in other sectors as well. Chaplaincy employment caters to a specific segment and accentuates the difference between institutional employment and mosque-based, ‘traditional’ imam positions. The increasing expectations of institutional employers pose challenges to otherwise well-qualified religious scholars, the ulama whose ‘training will have largely involved the acquisition of religious knowledge and etiquette’ (Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison, 2013, p. 51). On the other hand, those who seek and get employment in institutions also express an increasing dissatisfaction with the terms and conditions of mosque-based jobs in Britain; work as a chaplain contrasts significantly with mosque positions, where the patronage of the committee and community relations are vital.

Looking at the changing expectations of Muslim professionals in more general terms, it seems clear that the opportunities and conditions of employment will be a significant factor in defining Muslim professionals in the future, essentially changing how religious authority and knowledge is produced and legitimized. The different demands of institutional employers bring into question the necessity of being a qualified ‘ālim in order to work as a chaplain, marking a shift away from the epistemic virtues
of traditional training to a growing focus on the needs of the institution. However, notwithstanding the requirements of the job and the authority the chaplains wield on behalf of institutions, Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison found that amongst their interviewees authoritative religious knowledge was essential for establishing legitimacy in their work as chaplains. A good chaplain with worth and confidence is one whose authority is also based on substantial religious knowledge.

While Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison never develop their work as a typology as such – nor they are concerned with the kind of theoretical reflection pursued here –, their portrait of Muslim chaplaincy corresponds nicely to the first row-category of what I call institutional imams and chaplains in the typology presented here (see Table 1 below), highlighting a high degree of institutionalization and a close relationship with the institutional employer.

3.2 Ceylan’s fourfold typology of imams in Germany

As a pioneer in research on imams in Germany, Rauf Ceylan constructed a typology of imams based on years of fieldwork with Turkish networks and umbrella organizations in Germany in his book *Die Prediger des Islam* (*The Preachers of Islam*; 2010). Ceylan classifies imams as theological authorities and important social and political agents (Ceylan, 2010, p. 17). He sketches the diversity of the functions and extensive use of imams in Germany, as preachers, educators, pastors, and life and marriage counsellors. Drawing on such initial observations, and on the basis of his qualitative interviews, Ceylan constructs four types of imams that are very much centred on Germany, but certainly relevant to the rest of Europe.

Ceylan’s first group of imams, ‘traditionally conservative imams,’ are often associated with bilateral networks or umbrella organizations, and connected to their dogmatic and liturgical traditions. Conservative imams are challenged by the diversity of their social tasks and responsibilities in accommodating believers who live in a completely different world culturally, linguistically, and socially (Ceylan, 2010, p. 51). Ceylan estimates that these imams make up about three-quarters of German imams.

The second group of imams is ‘traditionally defensive imams,’ who are a minority amongst German imams. They represent an unresolved, anti-intellectual Islam in which traditional nationalism, occultism, and end-of-day worldviews are central to the defence of true Islam against moral decay. This is expressed as an incoherent opposition to a ‘Germanification’ of Islam and Muslims. Based on his select, non-representative interviews, Ceylan pejoratively labels these imams ‘medicine men and exorcists’ (Ceylan, 2010, p. 79).
The third category of imams, ‘intellectual-offensive’ imams, accounts for 15 per cent of German imams, whom he describes as progressive, offensive, and rationally critical (Ceylan, 2010, p. 110). These intellectual preachers have demonstrated how imams can promote integration in a non-Muslim majority society and reinterpret Islam in the context of its diaspora existence. With both the Quran and the constitution in hand, Ceylan sees these as the imams that can fight growing extremism.

The fourth category is the ‘neo-Salafi imams,’ who seek to reconstruct a mental framework of an original Islam of the first, pious Muslim generations. This is a product of much later modern interpretations and customs and promotes a fundamentalist, extremist, and revolutionary Islam. This category is distinguished from the second group by its willingness to use violence and its uncompromising view of the West. Ceylan stresses that they have acquired their theological knowledge auto-didactically and that they maintain contact with violent jihadi groups, who ultimately seek to leave Germany to immigrate to a ‘proper Islamic State.’

Ceylon’s typology is more a portrait of the imams that he knows from his own context and experience than a systematically constructed typology that follows the rigid demands of typology construction. In the typology developed in this chapter (see Table 1, below), the imams at umbrella organizations and networks in Germany studied by Ceylan correspond in principle to what I call ‘ambassador or network imams’ in the second row: imams who are employed by national, bilateral, or larger international networks of mosques, associations, or ministerial departments. There is, however, a substantial overlap into other types in the typology, mostly due to the lack of a clear methodological selection by Rauf Ceylan.

3.3 Typology of Austrian imams

As part of the Wiener Beiträge zur Islamforschung (the Vienna Contributions to Islam research), Ednan Aslan, Evrim Ersan-Akkılıç, and Jonas Kolb (2015) explore Imame und Integration (Imams and Integration) in Austria. The object of this very thorough study is to explore what contribution the imams from mosque communities could make to integration in a plural society, so that Islam might no longer be seen as foreign, but rather as part of the social reality of Austria.

In all, 43 mosques were chosen with a solid ethno-religious and geographical spread, and imams were interviewed following a methodologically solid and well-designed semi-structured guide. Aslan, Ersan-Akkılıç, and Kolb carefully follow Kluge (1999) in grouping their cases according to the
principles of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Aslan, Ersan-Akkılıç, and Kolb, 2015, p. 89). Following Kluge's analytical framework, Aslan, Ersan-Akkılıç, and Kolb first mapped biographical backgrounds, structural conditions, the work of the imams, theological questions, and positions on integration and strategies in integration policy. From that, the researchers grouped concrete cases together and analysed the extent to which these could be ordered, and what kind of variations and regularities there were amongst the imams. Then the differences and commonalities were explored, leading to an appropriate reduction into the relevant categories and characteristics that made sense to the objectives of the study, which was concerned with the question of integration.

From these preliminary exercises a coherent, fourfold typology was distilled. Their typology of imams in Austria comprises (1) imams with *iṣlah*-missions (reform-missions); (2) imams as bridge builders; (3) imams as guardians of religious identities and traditions; and (4) imams with limited manoeuvrability. In their study, Aslan, Ersan-Akkılıç, and Kolb illustrate the substance of these types by investigating just a few named imams as concrete cases of the types.

The first type is imams with *iṣlah*-missions, who seek to reform their mosques and communities by bringing about new, critical interpretations of the Islamic sources in light of the new contexts and conditions of Muslim life. In general, these imams consider the communities in Austria to be religiously ignorant and misled. They consider it their duty to guide Muslims on the right path and to bring them back to a true Islam (Aslan, Ersan-Akkılıç, and Kolb, 2015, p. 94).

The second type is imams who work as bridge builders in their mosques. These imams promote both integration into the Austrian context and connections with the countries of origin, building bridges between the two. Bridge-builder imams are attentive to the questions and problems of integration that are often accompanied by conflicts in the everyday life of Muslims in a migration context. A great number of activities take place with their mosques that are open to the wider Muslim public, which includes education, consultation, and social work for women, children, and newcomers to the Muslim community. Such activities of bridge-builder imams enable the members of the community to integrate themselves into the wider Austrian society (Aslan, Ersan-Akkılıç, and Kolb, 2015, p. 152).

The third type is the imam as a guardian of religious identity and tradition. Significant to this kind of imam is that they consider mosques and their facilities the heart of a protected Islamic identity. Within a protective framework, these imams defend their ethnic, cultural, and religious identities and the traditions
connected thereto. Religion does not take priority, but remains part of a heritage to be preserved. Patriotic or national identities are found in this context, and these imams play the role of transmitting a traditional understanding of religion to the next generation (Aslan, Ersan-Akkılıç, and Kolb, 2015, p. 213).

The final type in this typology is imams with limited manoeuvrability. The key characteristics of these imams are that the integration of the members of their communities has very little to do with their functions as imams. For these imams, none of the relevant dimensions of integration – on cognitive, identifiable, social-interactive, or structural levels – are addressed in the mosque community (Aslan, Ersan-Akkılıç, and Kolb, 2015, pp. 270-271). The core assignments of these imams are the conduct of the communal prayers, the *khuṭba*, and the teaching of the Quran. Activities related to issues of integration are not part of their area of responsibility.

In light of the study's concerns, this typology very much reflects the specific societal problem of integration. As such, it speaks mainly, if not only, to aspects of the integration work of imams associated with mosques. In the typology developed in this chapter (see Table 1 below), the imams from mosque communities as studied by Aslan, Ersan-Akkılıç, and Kolb correspond in principle to what in the third row is called imams with local mosques, associations, or organizations, separately or organized into smaller networks. There is, however, an overlap with other subtypes in the typology.

4 Theorizing institutional and epistemic authority

The typology presented in this chapter is multidimensional and captures the meaningful interplay between institutional authority, on the one hand, and epistemic authority, on the other. These are the two overall rationales that distinguish and differentiate imams in the West in a meaningful way.

Inspiration is drawn from Bruce Lincoln's work *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* (1994), which understands authority as a capacity to perform (p. 2) with a desired effect in a ‘frame’ or on a ‘stage’ dependent on time and place (p. 5). Lincoln elegantly presents an understanding of authority as both performance and effect, that combines the understanding of being ‘in authority,’ as a wielder of a delegated authority, and of being ‘an authority,’ as a wielder of an internalized authority (pp. 3-4). Simply put, the effect that is authority is the product of the relationship between position and qualifications. This in turn demonstrates one of Lincoln's key points, namely that the discursive nature of authority rests between its performance or application and its effect or perception (p. 10).
This works very well as a prerequisite for the following typology of imams, which uses the dimensions of institutional authority and epistemic authority as the appropriate and significant variable identifiers of imams in the West. Most imams wield both kinds of authority, but in very different ways and to greatly varying degrees. This typology develops the complex confluence between these two kinds of authority. Although discussions of authority very much lead to questions of actual leadership, such a perspective is beyond the present chapter; it will, however, be the topic of future reporting on ‘Imams of the West.’

4.1 Institutional authority

By ‘institutional authority’ is understood the institutional power of the employer, organization, or network that engages the imam and therefore delegates unto and authorizes the imam in his conduct and business as an imam. This kind of institutional authority is qualified in degrees of institutionalization, ranging from deep institutional embeddedness within a state or national framework such as in hospitals, prisons, armed forces, and universities, at one end, to having no relation with any governing or organizing structures, at the other – accentuating the individual, informal, non-institutionalized, and commonplace practices of imams that have ‘no relation with any governing or organizing structures.’

Institutionalization is characterized by convention and congruence with existing social patterns and stability in the ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of certain social facts or aspects of social life (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Applied to the context of imams, institutionalization speaks to the relative strength of the employing organization or institution to frame the work and function of imams relative to the wider surrounding society. Institutional authority is delegated authority that is socially approved and accepted as legitimate by the wider society, drawing explicitly on the ethos, conditions, and purpose of the employer institution. Patrick Wilson makes clear that ‘the point of a formal organisation is to give authority to offices that do not depend exclusively on the characteristics of the individuals occupying their offices’ (Wilson, 1983, p. 81). As such, the authority of imams in institutions stems from the fact that society as a whole accepts that those very institutions have a legitimate right to such authority, including when it is delegated to the imams.

4.2 Epistemic authority

In contrast to institutional authority, ‘epistemic authority’ is the kind of training (formal or informal), accumulation of knowledge, or recognition
of merit that demonstrate that the qualities of an individual are sufficient for him to conduct the business of an imam, regardless of what kind of employment or function as imam or chaplain he might have. By ‘epistemic’ I mean ‘pertaining to or related to knowledge or knowing,’ particularly in relation to acquiring, producing, or disseminating Islamic knowledge. Authority and knowledge are profoundly linked in Islam, to the extent that in his The Prophet’s Pulpit Patrick D. Gaffney notes that ‘the one notion that probably summarizes the predominant ideal associated with Islamic authority would be the concept of ‘ilm, or knowledge’ (1994, p. 34). Concerning the concept of knowledge in Islam, Franz Rosenthal writes:

There is no branch of Muslim intellectual life, of Muslim religious and political life, and of the daily life of the average Muslim that remained untouched by the all-pervasive attitude toward ‘knowledge’ as something of supreme value for Muslim being. ‘Ilm (knowledge) is Islam, even if the theologians have been hesitant to accept the technical correctness of this equation. (1970, p. 2)

Obviously, there are multiple and concurrent kinds of knowledge in Islam with numerous definitions that draw on the divine and secondary sources of knowledge in Islam, on the didactics and epistemology of the different schools of Islamic thought and mystic circles of learning, and even on the modernist, traditionalist, fundamentalist, and secularist views of each of these. Equally, there are many strategies for obtaining, producing, and applying Islamic knowledge as teaching, counselling, interpreting, and preaching, but – akin to Bruce Lincoln – Gaffney stresses the efficacy of knowledge itself as a distinct sort of authority:

For knowledge to be socially effective, it must be converted into authority and for authority to be established it must be projected as knowledge. Thus a preacher’s influence in a local context depends fundamentally on the concepts of knowing that are found there and on how these qualities are understood to be portrayed. (Gaffney, 1994, p. 35)

It is fair to hold that ‘ilm as Islamic knowledge is one of the most important sources of Islamic authority for the imam. In qualifying the credentials, merits, and capacity to perform as an imam, training becomes central to appropriating this Islamic knowledge, which is specified as Islamic epistemic authority.
Wael B. Hallaq is concerned with understanding the genealogical origins of Islamic law, including the question of why and how the different doctrinal schools of law, the *madhhabs*, came into being in the first place (Hallaq, 2001, 2009). His explanation is that the law and legal authority were constructed through *ijtihād* – that is, as knowledge production – and not contingent on political, social, or religious circumstances. Legal authority in Islam is therefore epistemic authority. He even goes so far as to say that ‘epistemic authority is the defining feature of Islamic law [...] masterly knowledge of the law was the sole criterion in deciding where legal authority resided’ (Hallaq, 2009, p. 35).

In contrast to institutional authority, epistemic authority is a personal authority that is not delegated by some external power. It is of course very likely to be dependent on the merits of a number of external factors and institutions, but it shows itself as a kind of capacity. Simply put, epistemic authority expresses the degree to which imams have expert knowledge and how aptly it is applied in their work.

5 Applying institutional and epistemic authority to the typology

This typology is based on interviews with almost 50 imams as part of the qualitative sociological study ‘Imams of the West.’ The interviewees were drawn from a long list developed since 2014 that includes over 300 imams in Europe and North America, each of whom has contexts and insights that are relevant to the objective of the study. From this list, the imams actually interviewed were those who had previously reflected publicly and systematically on what it means to be an imam, so that the interview for this study would be able to go into much greater detail and invite the interviewee to a deeper reflection on being an imam and the challenges that come with a global, multicultural, and post-migration ‘Western’ world. As mentioned, sociological questions of leadership amongst Muslims remains a continuous third perspective, but at present the typology is only concerned with the cross-tabulation of authority.

Institutional and epistemic authority are the dimensions depicted in the rows and columns of the typological chart in Table 1 below. As such, these depict degrees of institutionalization and categories of qualified knowledge. Each dimension of variables has then an interval that locates the positions of the chart, giving way to both poles as well as intermediate types. At the poles of each is the highest and lowest degree of institutionalization or kind of training from formal to informal, with the possibility – in theory – of the extreme of
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no institutionalization and no training. These are not in any way meant as absolutes for either institutional or epistemic authority: newer, more extreme positions may develop or the chart may be in need of further elaboration or nuance. For each, an example is given from the empirical interview data to illustrate the characteristics and approximations to the ideal-types.

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<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Typology of 'Imams of the West'</th>
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<tr>
<td>Epistemic Authority/Institutional Authority</td>
<td>Formal training or education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional imams and chaplains, employed in hospitals, prisons, universities, armed forces, etc.</td>
<td>Institutionally aligned imams Western, secular education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legitimized institutional imams Asim Hafiz, United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-taught imams Western-trained ambassador imams Ramil Balyaev, Tatars, Finland</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditionally trained ambassador imams Senad Kusur, Austria</td>
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<td>Self-taught network imam Ani Zonneveld, United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambassador or Network imams, employed by bilateral or larger international networks</td>
<td>Imams with local mosques, associations or organizations, either separate or organized into smaller networks</td>
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<td>Western-trained local mosque imam Brahim Laytous, Belgium</td>
<td>Western-trained independent imam Halima Krausen, Germany</td>
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<td>Traditionally trained local mosque imam Muhammad Muslim Eneborg, Sweden</td>
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<td>Self-taught mosque imam Tareq Oubrou, France</td>
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<td>Self-taught independent imam Salahuddin Barakat, Sweden</td>
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<td>Self-taught independent imam Abdul Wahid Petersen, Denmark</td>
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From the spread of the chart, it becomes clear that, from the top left corner to the bottom right, we see a shift from highly institutionalized and well-trained imams with close proximity to formal structures to imams who are distanced from such structures because they are independent or have informal qualifications, or both.
From the dimension of institutional authority, the imams whose authority is most contingent on their employment are the chaplains and Muslim professionals employed in hospitals, prisons, universities, armed forces, and elsewhere. While they bring different educational backgrounds and different sources of epistemic authority into their work to varying degrees, they are nonetheless legitimate in their position of authority because what they do is publically accepted, including that they align themselves with the ethos, conditions, and purpose of their employer institutions. As mentioned above, Gilliat-Ray, Ali, and Pattison (2013) explore this much further in *Understanding Muslim Chaplaincy*. One example of such an imam or chaplain is Monawar Hussain from the UK, who is Muslim chaplain and advisor with Oxford University Hospitals and the NHS Foundation Trust as well as a Muslim tutor at Eton College¹. He has vast organizational experience in both business and local affairs. Equally, his epistemic merits and authority are derived from the University of Oxford, where he received a Bachelor of Theology with a focus on Islam and the West. On paper, he is an example of an institutionally aligned imam, although the interview revealed that he was also closely connected to Zaki Badawi, who was the principal of the Muslim College in London, suggesting an additional albeit less formal source of legitimacy (interview with Monawar Hussain, 16 December 2015). Another example is Asim Hafiz, who is a chaplain at the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom; he was trained at the Darul Uloom al-Arabiya al-Islamiya seminary in North Manchester, but supplemented his traditional training with a Master’s in Islamic Studies (interview with Asim Hafiz, 15 December 2015). One of the few self-trained institutional imams is Tanvir Ahmed, an engineer who was a chaplain with the HM Prison Service, with which he has been working since the early 1990s, first as a volunteer and then as an employee. Until recently, he was the chair of the Muslim Chaplains Association, and has supplemented his career with further qualifications in Islamic Studies (Ahmed, 2012). These imams have influence in the system and structures they work in, but are also challenged by the fact that they must follow the institutional line in a number of cases that might conflict with more traditional Islamic interpretations. Asim Hafiz, for example, is charged with the difficult task of explaining how and why it is legitimate for Muslim soldiers and servicemen and -women to join the British efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

¹ All interviewees were given ample information about the purpose of the research, confidential treatment of private information, the intended use of the results, and the consequences of participation in the research project. They consented to participation freely, knowingly, and without coercion. Also, it was agreed that the interviewees would confirm any explicit quotes or citations.
It is a short step from the first category to the second, ambassador or network imams, as they too are in a sense affiliated or employed, except through bilateral relations between the established religious authority of a country of origin (e.g. Turkey, Morocco, Bosnia-Herzegovina) and the country of residence. These are visiting, semi-permanent, or permanent residents who have an obligation to lead both the prayer and the community in a pastoral sense, in agreement with the national office and the international agency that sends these expatriate imams. The Diyanet of Turkey provides an excellent example of these ambassador-imams and the soft power they resume in the international relations of Turkey (Ceylan, 2010; Gözaydın, 2010). However, the Diyanet imams are far from the only examples. The ‘Imams of the West’ research project includes several Bosnian imams who follow a similar post-Ottoman organization of pastoral service to international communities around the world. There is also one example of also a Tatar imam, Ramil Balyaev, from the Tatar Community in Helsinki in Finland, who was trained in Moscow (see Martikainen and Latvio, in Part II on Tatars in Finland). In 2006, he was sent to Helsinki by his chief-mufti as an official delegate (interview with Ramil Balyaev, 18 August 2016). Similarly, Senad Kusur in Austria is an imam with the Verband der Bosniakischen Islamischen Vereine in Österreich. He trained as an Islamic theologian in Sarajevo, with a significant emphasis on traditional training – an important part of the educational structure of Bosnian imams (interview with Senad Kusur, 8 April 2016). I also count Ani Zonneveld, a female imam of Malaysian-American origins from Los Angeles amongst these imams. She is the president and founder of Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV), a faith-based, grass-roots human rights organization that embodies and advocates for the values of social justice and equality for all as they find them in the Quran, for the twenty-first century. The foundation has affiliates in Canada, Europe, Chile, Australia, and Malaysia. Zonneveld studied economics and political science in college, but she is also a professional Grammy Award-winning singer and songwriter and works as an imam in the local community around the MPV (interview with Ani Zonneveld, 7 July 2016).

In the third row are the imams at local mosques and associations. These are locally organized and part of a local Muslim community in the West, which is usually defined by one distinguishing set of features: ethnic, national, or ‘Western’ for converts or native speaking communities. An example here is Brahim Laytous, who is imam and the director of a local Mosque in Ghent in Belgium. He is a PhD student at the University of Antwerp and

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2 Muslims for Progressive Values, ‘Who are we?’ http://www.mpvusa.org/who-we-are/ (accessed 1 December 2017)
is writing about radicalization. He very much bridges the local mosque community with the local political and media environment, nimbly keeping conservative elements in the mosque in check by opening the mosque to the public (interview with Brahim Laytous, 12 November 2015). Another example is the Swedish convert Muhammed Muslim Eneborg, who is an imam at the smaller Masjid Aysha in Stockholm. He converted in 1980, is trained at Islamic colleges in England, learned Arabic, Urdu, and Islamic Sciences, and is qualified as an *ālim*. He is also a Sufi. Eneborg holds progressive opinions; he advocates for Islamic training for Muslim women and argues that the unionization of imams will improve their integration into the structures of society (interview with Muhammad Muslim Eneborg, 23 October 2015).

The example of a self-taught mosque imam is a highly interesting case. Tareq Oubrou is an autodidact imam of Moroccan origin at the mosque in Bourdeux, France; he has proven himself to be brilliant Muslim thinker and intellectual. He is trained in biology and medicine, and describes himself as a product of secularization. He feels lucky that he did not inherit any theological biases as part of a specific religious education and that with his Western thinking he can critically interrogate and revise his Islamic religion (interview with Tareq Oubrou, 22 April 2015). The product of this rethinking and his intellectual work has had a significant impact (see Baylocq, Part II, and Hashas, Part I).

In the fourth row are the independent imams, who are either loosely or not at all associated with any kind of institutional authority and are therefore autonomous in their work as imams. These are hard cases that are difficult to pin down, and imams with this kind of loose institutional authority represent a residual category to some extent. An example of a Western trained, independent imam is the German imama Halima Krausen from Hamburg. She is an early convert from a Christian upbringing and studied Arabic and Islamic Studies through extensive travels. She graduated in Islamic Studies, Islamic Law and Theology, and is considered a Muslim scholar with the title sheikha. In 1983, she was one of the founders of the Inter-Religious Dialogue Center at the Department of Theology at Hamburg University, where she was later employed as a research associate, working on interreligious dialogue and Quran exegesis. She also works as the imama of the Congregation of German-Speaking Muslims, and has been called ‘Europe’s Leading Muslim Woman Scholar’ by the Radical Middle Way and An-Nisa Society (Spielhaus, 2012, p. 443). In this typology, Krausen is a hard fit and her profile is ambiguous: a clear indicator of the limits of theoretical typologizing when looking at the empirical realities. She draws institutional authority from a number of contexts but remains employed as an academic, and is equally authoritative through both her Western academic merit and Islamic religious knowledge and studies (interview with Halima Krausen, 8 April 2016).
An example of a traditionally trained, independent imam is sheikh Salahuddin Barakat, a Swedish imam of Lebanese origin who grew up in Malmö in southern Sweden. He has travelled in Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, Mauretania, and Yemen, and his formal merits are from Dar al-Mustafa and Ribat in the Hadramaut Governorate in Yemen. Barakat lists a number of important teachers; he has his ḵājiya and is therefore authorized by a higher authority to transmit Islamic knowledge. Barakat actively teaches in a number of different mosques, associations, and high schools in both Sweden and Denmark, and he works for a number of councils and religious projects. In 2013, he founded Islamakademin, a rapidly growing Islamic school with a vision of becoming the foremost traditional Islamic school in Sweden. Again, Barakat is associated with a number of institutions and organizations, but he is not delegated an office or ministry from them; rather, it is his Islamic epistemic authority that these institutions seek.

The self-taught, independent imam in this typology is exemplified by Abdul Wahid Petersen, who functions as an imam in Nørrebro, a popular Muslim area of Copenhagen. He runs a bookshop, is the general secretary of Danish Muslim Aid, and is very much a provocateur and free intellectual (Vinding and Christoffersen, 2012). He was born into a non-religious, Danish-Finnish, working class, socialist family in the countryside of north-eastern Jutland and was baptized and confirmed in the Church of Denmark, but chose to become a Muslim at the age of 28 in 1982. While he has no formal education, Petersen is associated with a number of mosque associations, including the Danish Islamic Centre, which caters to converts and a Danish-speaking congregation. Here he calls himself an imam by popular election and considers himself a ‘Hillbilly’ Muslim convert. He insists that ‘islam is not different. And therefore for me, being a Dane and being a Muslim is just expressing Islam in a Danish way of living.’

6 Caveats and problems with the typology

After exploring some of the specifics of the typological chart of imams in the West, it becomes clear that there are certain limits to the explanatory power of this kind of typology. It concerns itself with the authority of imams

3 Dansk Islamisk Center, http://dicenter.dk/, (accessed 1 December 2017)

and is an appropriate analytical tool for discussing the interplay of Islamic epistemic authority within a religious-organizational setting in the West. The typology does not, however, look at the functions and tasks of imams, which would be an entirely suitable basis to differentiate imams, especially with a view to leadership. Do they work pastorally? Do they teach? How is the imam recognized as a legitimate authority by Muslim congregations? Additional relevant perspectives to be included are the age, ethnicity, and gender of the imams in question. As this research project is a qualitative study, the interviewees all reflect their own specific stories and contexts, which call for much deeper discussions about the history, geography, current events, and political and media trends that inform the circumstances of imams in the West.

The question of conversion has not come into play in this chapter, although it very much seems to be a factor in the distribution across the different types. Nor have I included information about how imams see their work in terms of activism, production of knowledge, or other forms of active leadership. Neither do theological positions feed into the typology. A relevant and productive alternative typology of imams could discuss whether they are they are modernist, traditionalist, fundamentalist, and so on. Such distinctions have much wider applications, and are not just limited to imams, but also to the Muslim communities in the West of which imams might be seen as indicative.

Fundamentally problematic to the dimensions of the typology is that the imams plotted in them are very likely to change or migrate across the types across time. An imam may accept another position or resign from his work to become more independent. Also, he is likely to pursue further education, perhaps a ījāza or a master’s degree or Ph.D. at a Western University. Equally, an imam may be employed part time with a local mosque and part time as a chaplain, which makes it impossible to fit him into a single category. These perspectives and problems – and many more – will be discussed in the much more detailed and comprehensive monograph that will be the result of the research project.

7 Conclusions

This typology is work in progress and an invitation for further discussion on how, and according to which parameters, to systematize the study of diverse types of imams in the West. The applicability of a typology like this one depends on its ability to make meaningful distinctions in the often-blurry
field of imams. The typology presented here is an attempt at a meaningful and appropriate ordering of imams in the West, based on the significant dimensions of institutionally embedded authority available in the West and what has been called epistemic authority, which emphasizes the primacy of knowledge-based authority in Islam.

In deciding to focus on these two expressions of religious authority, and arguing for their centrality to the legitimacy of imams in their work, this typology expresses a cross tabulation between diverse institutional frameworks in the West and Islamic knowledge personified. This relationship, its compatibility, and the concrete imams who exemplify the types, are telling indicators of the directions of Islam in Europe.

Analytically, this typology opens highly relevant distinctions for navigating the study of imams of the West. With an understanding of the institutional context of imams as well as the kind of epistemic authority they bring with them, it becomes apparent how much distance there is between institutionally aligned imams with secular training and well-paying jobs in the context of the modern Western state and self-taught, independent imams, who find another basis for the leadership they seek to present to the Muslim communities.

Many people and organizations have a vested interest in Islam in the West, and therefore also in imams and Muslim leadership. There are diverse expectations for imams in different institutional settings in the West, which lead to a significant competition of various kinds of authority. Looking at the changing expectations of the Muslim professionals in more general terms, it seems clear that the opportunities and conditions of employment will be a significant factor in defining Muslim professionals in the future, essentially changing how religious authority and knowledge is produced and legitimized. The different demands of institutional employers bring into question the necessity of being a qualified ʿālim(a) to work as a chaplain, marking a shift away from the epistemic virtues of traditional training to a growing focus on the needs of the institution. Equally, the chaplains themselves highlight the importance of their religious knowledge, and many seek to not only demonstrate this in their work, but also to convince their institutional employer of the strong convergence between the two kinds of authority.

This typology is relevant not just for analysing who authorizes imams and what kind of authorities they are, but also for the wider discussion of legitimate authority in Islam in the West. Institutional authority as context-contingent delegation and epistemic authority as the qualified capacity to speak or perform is not just about the authority of imams in their leadership challenges, but also about the very future of Islam in the West. Simply said,
if authority derives from authorship, then the key questions become to whom, by whom, and how is the authorship of Islam in the West delegated, and what kinds of freedom, responsibility, and limitations come with such delegation? What kind of leadership will arise based on these issues of authority? Resolving these central questions of legitimate authority will be essential for any kind of future leadership of Islam in the West.

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About the author

Niels Valdemar Vinding is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen, with a specific focus on Islam in Europe and European Muslim institutions. His current research, ‘Imams of the West’, is funded from 2014 to 2017 by the Carlsberg Research Foundation. His Ph.D. (2013) was on *Muslim Positions in the Religio-Organisational Fields of Denmark, Germany and England*. 