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From Migrant to Citizen:
The Role of the Islamic University of Rotterdam in the Formulation of Dutch Citizenship[1]

Introduction

The establishment of Islamic educational institutions is an important way for Muslims to manifest their position as a religious minority. Although young Muslims living in Europe have expressed a clear need to gain knowledge of Islam, few Islamic educational institutions exist in European countries. At present, the vast majority of Muslim religious leaders who have completed religious training come from Muslim countries. Many imams were trained in educational institutions based in Muslim countries, and often reside in Europe only on a temporary basis. As is the case elsewhere in Europe, young Muslims in the Netherlands are searching for their religion's roots and for Islamic norms and Islamic solutions to social and individual problems in the European context (see Amiraux 2000; Lesthaeghe 2000; Roy 2000; Vertovec 1998; Waardenburg 2000).

In 1997 an interesting initiative was taken by a group of first-generation Dutch-speaking Sunni Muslims from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds: they established the Islamic University of Rotterdam (IUR). The IUR's main aims are, first, to be an academic institution that conveys and deepens knowledge of Islam to Muslims living in Europe, in particular the Netherlands, and, second, to inform non-Muslims about the religion and culture of the Islamic world on an academic level. It also offers training for imams. At present, the IUR is not formally recognized by the Dutch government as a university or as a center for training imams. The university's board is eager to have the institution obtain official status.

In defining the strategy for making their religion visible in the Dutch public sphere, the initiators of this Islamic university and its students must deal with complex political, ideological, and legal structures. As a consequence of their social empowerment, Muslim organizations increasingly fill the space

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1 This chapter forms part of my PhD research at the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM), which examines the role of imams in Turkish and Moroccan mosque communities in the Netherlands and Flanders. I would like to thank Valérie Amiraux and Frank Peter for their helpful comments, and Elena Fiddian Mendez for making corrections to this English version.

that exists between the state and its citizens: collectively, by establishing religious organizations and, individually, by enabling processes of identity-seeking. The Netherlands has a long tradition of religious pluralism on this intermediate level between the state and its citizens. However, both a strong process of secularization and an internationally fed distrust of Islam are undermining the process whereby Muslims can establish their position in civil society.

As a religious academic institution, the IUR aims to provide Dutch society at large with a clear position on subjects that lie at the core of the normative definition of national and social belonging to Dutch society. Such subjects include the nature of gender relations, the separation of religion and politics, democracy, and attitudes towards homosexuality. As the IUR navigates the process of acquiring a recognized position in the Dutch public sphere, a few questions arise: Will the IUR be accepted and recognized as an intermediate institution in civil society? Furthermore, how can the IUR obtain its recognition, both as a university and as a religious institution, and on what conditions?

To understand the IUR's position, it is important to review the twenty-five-year debate on the establishment of imam training in the Netherlands. In so doing, I show how the legal possibilities for the accreditation of Islamic educational institutions are embedded in a historical tradition of religious pluralism, and outline the social and political fields in which the IUR must maneuver. After this introductory analysis, I look more closely at the IUR and examine the motivations and needs of the students searching for answers to their questions of faith. In the fourth section, I discuss some dynamics that are central to the constitution of the IUR. At this point it becomes evident that the IUR's room for maneuvering in the public sphere is restricted.

Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal explores the ways in which the customary parameters of the European debate on the formation of an Islamic community are often defined as either a divisive and antidemocratic threat or as a positive contribution to Europe's political and cultural pluralism. "At issue," she states, "is the compatibility of Islam—its organizational culture and practice—with European categories of democratic participation and citizenship" (Soysal 1997, 509–510). In this chapter I outline the ways in which this question of compatibility results in a paradoxical situation in which the IUR can claim its right to orthodoxy in a liberal democracy, yet wishes to avoid putting itself in an alienated position, "foreign to the normative categories of European democracy" (Soysal 1997, 510).

Imam Training: The Public Debate

Imams working in European societies find themselves at the crossroads of a complex interplay between local, national, and transnational contexts in which Islamic knowledge is produced and transmitted. Their tasks in local

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mosques are more extensive than those of imams in the local mosques of countries with a Muslim majority. Historically, imams have been, together with other religious scholars, individuals who have had a certain degree of access to sacred texts. In the diaspora, however, they become both representatives of the normative Islam that is configured from such texts and the ones who form a link between diasporic communities and the cultural and sociolinguistic traditions of their countries of origin. In addition, imams are responsible for interpreting Islamic norms and values within the context of a secular, non-Islamic society. Partly because a substantial proportion of imams do not know European society from within, this process is particularly difficult and is looked upon with suspicion throughout Europe. At the same time, the second and third generations often find it difficult to understand the imam's teachings and hesitate to share their problems with the imams.

A vast majority of the estimated four-hundred salaried imams working in Dutch mosques are recruited by mosque boards in their countries of origin (Turkey, Morocco, and some other Muslim countries). For example, about one hundred and fifty Turkish imams from Diyanet mosques have been sent from Turkey as civil servants.[2] A substantial number of imams therefore have little or no proficiency in Dutch; they preach in Arabic or Turkish upon their arrival in the Netherlands. Since the 1980s, the possibility of establishing a training program for imams has been consistently raised, and as of January 2002 all alien imams entering the country have been required to complete specially designed courses that provide an introduction to the Dutch language and Dutch customs.

Although the precise role and influence of imams in the Netherlands remain unclear, particularly with respect to their influence through sermons to the younger generation, imams are thought to play a key role throughout the process of Muslims' integration into Dutch society. They are thought to play a key role because mosques and imams not only fulfill a religious but also a sociocultural role in the diaspora. Indeed, analogous to priests and ministers, imams were expected to be the obvious figures to assume the role of spiritual caretakers in government-provided prisons and hospitals (Boender and Kanmaz 2002; Rath et al. 1996; Shadid and Van Koningsveld 1997). However, imams did not appear to be trained for these new tasks of the pastoral caretaker. No new, strong Muslim intellectual elite (like those in France or Britain), which can authoritatively speak out on ethical matters and religious affairs in the public debate, has yet to emerge. The 1998 report of the Netherlands' integration policy on imams stressed:

"The government considers it of high importance that the leaders of the philosophical associations and organizations, including those which attract especially ethnic minorities, can communicate fluently in their Dutch surroundings and that they are well acquainted with the social structures and cultural characteristics of Dutch society. Here the government pays special attention to the social skills of imams, as

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2   The Diyanet is the Turkish Presidium for Religious Affairs.

they belong to the largest philosophical stream among the ethnic minorities. The present practice of recruiting imams from Turkey and Morocco should come to an end." ("Integratiebeleid" 1998, 17; my translation)

Dutch imam training, as promoted by the government, would be aimed at substituting the current generation of imams with a "homegrown" generation. Imams trained in the Netherlands would obtain a thorough education in the Dutch language and Dutch society, both of which would be necessary for counseling Muslims who ask an imam for advice on problems emerging in the Dutch context. Furthermore, it is argued, this change would prevent the possibility of ideological and political (state) interference by Muslim countries (e.g., Rath et al. 1996, 246) and would thereby help preclude the imam-led radicalization of Muslim youth. Indeed, it would lead to the formation of a "Dutch Islam." Time and again, imam training is proposed as a solution to the problems that arise in the formulation of citizenship of first-, second-, and third-generation Muslims, as well as a means, in essence, of making "the Other" look more like "the Self" (cf. Amir-Moazami, 2001, 324–325, for the French context).

The Legal Right to Establish Imam Training

In its efforts to establish a separation of church and state in the Netherlands, the state historically has financed the academic education of the clergy, both at public and confessional universities and at seminaries. In the "pillar system" in place between 1900 and 1960, religion was strongly integrated in the public sphere, and religious diversity was institutionalized in four pillars: Protestant, Catholic, socialist, and liberal. Each pillar had the right to establish its own schools; these schools were granted the same legal status as public schools and were also financed by the state. At present, the government must provide equally for the prerequisites of all religious groups, without interfering in those groups' internal affairs. Since the formal policy on minorities was implemented in 1983, it has been recognized that religion plays a central role in the development and reinforcement of the self-esteem of members of an ethnic group as well as a considerable role in their equality and full participation in society (Minderhedennota 1983, 110). This implies that if these prerequisites in the public sphere have not been established, the government should help to provide them (Hirsch Ballin 1988). For their part, Muslim organizations are entitled to establish imam training courses if they fulfill the legal requirements.

There are three main ways that government-financed imam training can take place. The first way is to join pre-existing institutions. The second is to have the general education of professional clergy provided by a public faculty of religion, whereas clergy-specific education is provided by the religious

organization itself.[3] The third way, which is the path chosen by the IUR, is that of allocation (aanwijzing; Adviescommissie Imamopleidingen 2003, 14–16). At present the IUR offers higher education that is not financed by the state, and it is unable to offer either recognized titles for graduates or scholarships for students (Adviescommissie Imamopleidingen 2003, 14). The IUR is not the only institution that functions in this way: the Islamic University of Europe, which split from the IUR in 2001 and is based at Schiedam, also opted for the allocation method and is organized in a similar way.[4]

Practical and Ideological Obstacles
to the Establishment of Imam Training

Despite the existence of a number of privately run initiatives,[5] a formally recognized Islamic academic institution has not yet been created in the Netherlands. On one level this is because there are clear rules for allocation, and the institutions opting for allocation have not yet fulfilled the legal requirements. There are, however, several other factors currently impeding the successful recognition of imam training. For instance, although consensus on the importance of imam training exists among Muslims, politicians, policymakers, and opinion leaders, opinions on feasibility, need, effectiveness, content, and financing differ. Practical obstacles range from a lack of qualified teachers with a Muslim background who can teach in Dutch, to the confessional heterogeneity of Muslims in the Netherlands. Indeed, if imam training in the Netherlands is to be instituted, the religiously and ethnically divided Muslim organizations will have to reach compromises. Such compromises would relate, for example, to the length and content of the training program and the separation of theological and societal subjects. If imam education is not supported by a number of Muslim mosque organizations, there is a considerable risk that graduates will not be accepted as imams in the affiliated mosques.

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3   This is called "duplex ordo" and is treated in Articles XIII and XIV of the law on higher education and scientific research.

4   Although the Islamic University of Europe acts in the same social, political, and legal spheres, a discussion of this institution and the reasons underlying the split are not within the scope of this chapter.

5   Some private imam training exists in the Netherlands. Organized along doctrinal lines and ethnic background, these are financed by Muslim organizations. They have not shown interest in accreditation by the government. The Jamia Madinatul-Islam of the World Islamic Mission (WIM) Netherlands instructs imams for Surinamese, Hindustani, and Pakistani mosques in the Netherlands (Karagül and Wagtendonk 1994, 22). Graduates work as imams in various Dutch WIM mosques. This traditional training focuses on the memorization of the Quran. The Ahmadiyyah federation trains "assistant imams," who can continue their education in Lahore, Pakistan. Furthermore, the Turkish Süleymanlı have their own education (see Landman 1992, 269–270).

Apart from these practical obstacles, the representation of imams in the public debate carries much weight. Three recent events which have caused a great deal of moral commotion and unrest in Dutch society illustrate this point: the so-called El-Moumni affair, about homosexuality (2001); the "Nova imams," about political enemies and domestic violence (2002); and the murder of Theo van Gogh, after a provocative film on the abuse of women (2004).[6] Each incident renewed interest in the debate on imams' roles, influence, and ideological backgrounds. In the "post-9/11 era," there has been an increasing emphasis on secularism in Dutch political culture, in the sense of *laïcité* in France, where a strong differentiation between the political and the religious is made. This interpretation of secularism is extended to the marginalization of religion to the private sphere (Casanova 1994). This tendency, however, has not prevented the state from actively interfering in the question of imam training. Since 2002, the creation of formally recognized imam training has become the spearhead of the policies espoused by the minister of alien affairs and integration.

The El-Moumni Affair

In May 2001, a Moroccan imam from a mosque in Rotterdam, Khalil El-Moumni, expressed in a television interview that "homosexuality is harmful for society" and that "if the disease spreads into Dutch multicultural society, everyone can be infected." Although his remarks caused great moral commotion in society, and charges were brought against him, the imam was cleared of the charges on the basis of freedom of religion. It was the first time that a traditional Moroccan imam had given his opinion publicly, and El-Moumni soon came to exemplify the problematic relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Dutch society, and in particular the problematic position of imams. Imam El-Moumni unintentionally paved the way for opinion-makers to state that Islam was antimodern and antidemocratic.

The El-Moumni affair provided the framework for the continuation of discussion about the relationship between the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and the limits of tolerance. Key questions were duly re-evaluated, including the questions of whether freedom of religion should still take precedence over freedom of expression and how a liberal democracy should react towards oppression in the name of a religion.

Until the end of the 1990s, the motto associated with the formal integration policy had been that citizens should be able to "integrate while preserving one's own religious and cultural identity." With El-Moumni, however, the key question became: Should the normative definition of citizenship be redefined, if it turns out that the central values of "Muslims" collide with the central, hard-won values, norms, and rights of "the Dutch"? Further, what

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6   For explanations of the image of imams in the public debate, see Shadid and Van Koningsveld, 1999, and Boender and Kanmaz, 2002.

does integration mean? Is it assimilation into the dominant culture, or participation as a citizen in all aspects of society while preserving one's (religious) identity? What should the state's role be in dealing with religious groups in general, and with Muslim communities in particular?

"Nova Imams"

The role played by imams in processes of (deviant) normative orientation again became apparent in June 2002. On the basis of secretly taped sermons that subsequently were broadcast on television, it appeared that five Salafi imams operating from Dutch mosques called for the destruction of U.S. President George Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, proclaimed that adulterous wives should be stoned, and approved of wives being slapped by their husbands. Public anxiety about these imams' influence over their audiences coincided with a strongly growing concern about the increasing radicalization of Muslim youth; recruitment for jihad in Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Chechnya; and alleged ties between al-Qaeda and mosques in the Netherlands. Through these antidemocratic and antiliberal statements, with their message derived from political Islam, these imams crossed the boundaries of the private religious sphere and propelled themselves into the center of general public debate.

Theo van Gogh

The polarization between Muslims and non-Muslims further increased following the murder of Theo van Gogh, a controversial filmmaker and publicist who spoke in crude terms against Islam as a religion and a culture. He had made a film about the abuse of women in the name of Islam. The film showed veiled women with lines from the Quran written on their bare skin. The murder suspect was a 26-year-old Muslim man of Moroccan descent, Mohammed B., who left a note on the deceased in which he threatened Europe with a war in the name of Islam. Following this murder, which took place on November 2, 2004, there were further questions posed about why and how young men like Mohammed B. feel attracted to radical and extremist views, where they acquire their knowledge, and which mosques and imams preach this form of radical thought. Moreover, the question of how other imams react to this trend towards radicalization, and what they can do to prevent its escalation, surfaced once again. What was particularly confusing for politicians, journalists, opinion-makers, and scholars, however, was that the murder suspect had grown up in the Netherlands, spoke Dutch fluently, and was not a regular visitor of any mosque in particular (although he had been spotted in one of the Salafi mosques in Amsterdam).

Political pressure to establish Dutch imam training increased when, shortly after the murder of Theo Van Gogh, a motion submitted by the Social Democrats, the Liberals, the Christian Democrats, and the Green Party was successfully adopted (Motie Bos c.s. 29 854, nt 10). In this motion, Parliament requested that the government stop issuing residence permits to imams as of 2008. In this manner mosques would be forced to recruit "homegrown" imams. A second motion urged the government to oblige imams to complete their training in the Netherlands.

In February 2005, the Free University in Amsterdam received a government subsidy to start a training course on spiritual caretaking. In its prospectus, the Free University does not indicate cooperation with Muslim organizations. The applications to establish imam training presented by Leiden University, Groningen University, and the University for Humanistics at Utrecht were not granted by the minister of education and the minister of alien affairs and integration. Leiden's application was not accepted because it proposed to admit only students who had completed extensive training in Islamic sciences in the Muslim world. One of the reasons behind Groningen's rejection was its isolated location. In reaction to the rejection of these universities' proposed courses of study, the main Sunni and Shi'a umbrella organizations (Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid and Sjiietische Islamitische Raad) announced that they intend to establish their own imam training, but have not mentioned any possible cooperation with the IUR.

Young Muslims and the IUR

The University

The IUR's main aims are twofold: first, to be an academic institution that provides and deepens knowledge of Islam to Muslims living in Europe and in particular the Netherlands and, second, to inform non-Muslims about the religion and culture of the Islamic world on an academic level. The university has created an extensive study program in Islamic sciences such as Quran recitation, *tafsir*, hadith, and *fiqh*; theology; courses in sociology and comparative religion, Islam in the modern world and Islam in the Netherlands, and Christianity; and *ney* lessons (a Turkish flute). The IUR also provides intensive language courses in Arabic. There are three faculties within the IUR: the Faculty of Islamic Sciences, the Faculty of Languages and Civilizations, and the Faculty of Islamic Arts. Courses of study leading to a BA or an MA are offered. The MA consists of imam training and training for spiritual caretakers and includes a research component. The three PhD projects currently being completed are on Turkish imams in Dutch mosques and their opinions on modern religious matters; halal food; and Ottoman-Dutch historic relations. A fatwa commission has been installed, but is not yet active.

Although the university was founded by an interethnic group, after the split in 2001 from the Islamic University of Europe the IUR's orientation became decidedly Turkish, because the board consists of Turkish professors. However, the twenty-eight male teachers are in actuality quite diverse in both ethnic and "confessional" terms. As Sunni and Shi'a, they have received their training in the Muslim world at different Turkish universities, al-Azhar, the Islamic University of Medina, and Baghdad University. There are also a few non-Muslim Dutch teachers. The board never tires of stressing that "the IUR is not the spokesman of any particular Islamic religious sect or political/ideological party or any other group" and that "the IUR is truly committed not only to Islamic values and the cultural values of the Netherlands but also the principles of Dutch higher education" (Islamic University of Rotterdam [IUR] 2002, 76). In their teachings they do not follow one particular *madhhab* (Sunni law school) or one religious current. The languages of instruction are Arabic, English, and, increasingly, Dutch.

The 428-page study guide for 2003–2004, which outlines as many as 193 courses accompanied by extensive reading lists, illustrates their high ambitions. Critics argue that their ambitions are, in fact, unrealistically high. Another point of criticism is that they have called themselves a university. A number of reasons lie behind this decision: other Dutch colleges of higher education became universities in the 1970s; the IUR wishes to connect to the Dutch law on higher education; and the designation of university opens up connections in the Islamic world. Status and prestige are also key factors in their decision to call themselves a university.

There are many challenges to the university's ambitions. One is the enormous variety in the students' backgrounds and their existing qualifications. A second, very significant obstacle stems from the language deficiencies of both teachers and students. The university is "modestly satisfied with the students' linguistic and academic profile" (IUR 2002, 33). Both teachers' and students' language deficiencies in Dutch in particular, but also in Arabic, form a "weak point in the agenda of the university" (IUR 2002, 33). Other obstacles relate to the IUR's overall financial position, the teachers' salaries, and working conditions. As a private institution it has been financed thus far by subsidies (10 %), tuition fees (30 %), and donations from various private sources, most of whom are Turkish businessmen in the Netherlands, Germany, and Turkey (Tahaparij 2005).

The Students

According to the IUR, in 2005 there were 147 full-time students and 170 part-time students. In practice, there is a relatively large percentage of "drop-in, drop-out" students. There is also staggering variety in the backgrounds of the students. They vary widely in their linguistic, ethnic, and sociocultural backgrounds as well as in age; their former educational profiles and profi-

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ciency outcomes are very diverse; and they have different educational attitudes and objectives (IUR 2002, 71). The male-to-female ratio is approximately 45 to 55.

Two main motivations to study at the IUR can be identified. The first group is formed by young, postmigrant students who are searching for knowledge of Islam through a critical examination of the religious sources, independent of parents and the imam. They are guided by the Islamic prescription to learn as much as possible about one's religion during one's entire life. Mehmet, Fatma, and Emine belong to this first group.[7] Mehmet was born in the Netherlands in 1971, completed a PhD in physics at a Dutch university, and is currently unemployed. For him, study at the IUR is not only a good way to fill his time between jobs. More important, he started at the IUR after completing several years of Arabic lessons with an imam in Utrecht.

"The reason I came here was that I just wanted to learn the source of Islam better. I wanted to know why we do things the way we do them. So, to learn the real source, to be able to hold on better to the faith. Because I am a practicing Muslim. So much is said in society, by Muslims. And so much is based on false information. Thus, I thought this might be a good opportunity to get things clear, to list all the points." (Mehmet)

This personal search for knowledge about "real Islam," aimed mostly at the enrichment of personal knowledge, was also a priority for Fatma (born in Turkey in 1969, migrated in 1970) and Emine (born in Turkey in 1960, migrated in 1986). They are both inspired by the teachings of Said Nursi, and both followed a few years of Islamic high school, *imam-hatip-lisesi,* in Turkey.

Not only at the IUR, but in Dutch society as a whole, young believing Muslims express a great need to acquire a substantial knowledge of their religion. With this knowledge they try to legitimate, in a religious manner, their particular way of living. Apart from searching for the spiritual values of Islam, they are eager to find information about Islamic norms, about what is halal and *haram* and everything in between. In their interethnic meetings in non-Islamic, secular society, they are confronted with the singularities of their parents' religious practices. In providing answers about such practices, they differentiate between what they call "real Islam" and "cultural Islam." As Emine explained, "the problem is that Muslims are different here. They say 'this is Islam,' but it is not Islam. Their behavior is a result of their culture, not Islam. […] The university must provide information and be very active."

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7   In order to ensure confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms for the students. The interviews referred to throughout this chapter took place in September and October of 2003 as part of my PhD research. I visited the IUR approximately fifteen times between September 2003 and November 2004, attending seminars and openings of the academic year, and speaking with the rector, the vice rector, the secretary general, and several teachers.

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This stress on defining what is "real Islam" helps to dispel interethnic differences in the interpretation of Islam. By emphasizing "real Islam," Muslim youth also hope to clear the barriers that exist between their parents' world and their own.

"Our parents were satisfied with a brief explanation about how something should be done. We, the youngsters, are educated at school to ask questions like, 'Why or why not?' We are more curious. And we have learned to think in a certain manner. I used to ask my mother about the reason behind something like, 'Why can't we see God?' And then she reacted with 'Oh, you should not even ask that!' But I was always looking for reasons. That was the beginning of a search for my own identity, while I was already Muslim. With us it is: From birth you are Muslim and after that as well, but you only learn from your own initiative what Islam means exactly. One's parents think: We have taught them enough, as we have sent them to the mosque. But that is not enough. For me, that has been the reason to study here at the IUR." (Fatma)

At school, young people have learned to critically discuss the material and subjects that are taught. They thus treat religion differently than their parents do. This difference is also evident in the changing attitude towards imams in the local mosque. Language is not the only barrier that exists, for the way in which an imam communicates his views to the young is clearly also important. Young people want to know the background to certain norms. They regard such knowledge as a modern way of explaining Islam. A recurring criticism of imams and other classical authorities is that they only speak of what is allowed or forbidden, without explaining the reasons behind these norms and rules.

However, throughout this process, which is visible in other European countries as well, the second and third generations are left to find their own resources. Indeed, those resources are very limited, because they often do not possess the key to the sources of Islam: a knowledge of Arabic. The youngsters often have strikingly limited tools and insight into the historical traditions of interpretation and religious currents. For many, the Internet has become a major source of information. As a Muslim initiative, the IUR can be regarded as a response to young people's needs.[8] Not surprisingly, many students are still at a preliminary stage of training. These students are very eager to learn Arabic, a language that enables them to study the sources for themselves. As Fatma pointed out, "the teacher must communicate the contents of the Quran and hadith to me. However, he should not interpret it himself. I'll do that. I'll find it out myself."

In this quotation we see how Fatma aspires to obtain intellectual autonomy in moral and spiritual matters. Furthermore, through knowledge of "real Islam," young Muslims can defend their religion in a seemingly hostile environment. "It is not Islam that is wrong, it is just that Muslims sometimes give the wrong image," is an oft-heard explanation given by young believing

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8   Other Muslim responses to this need are the aforementioned Islamic University of Europe and Dar-al-Ilm, which provides short courses on Islam in Dutch.

Muslims. For Emine, this is one of the reasons she studies at the IUR: "I would like to see the Dutch and the Muslim communities cooperate, reaching out for each other's hands. I want to change the ideas of people who equate Islam with terrorism. I would really like to change that idea."

The second of the two groups consists of students who migrated at a later age, due to circumstances of family formation and reunion or because they were asylum seekers. Members of this group see it as a logical, and often as the only possible, step to continue the education that they began in their Islamic country of origin. Hawa (born in Syria in 1958) studied at Damascus University and worked as an English teacher in Syria. She greatly regrets that her work experience is not valued in the Netherlands. Since her arrival in the Netherlands, she has undertaken voluntary work in a Dutch home for the elderly, but was unable to continue there due to language barriers. She has now found part-time work at the mail distribution office and also teaches Arabic to Dutch individuals. "I have time; I have no full-time job," she explains. "I can study here and perhaps get a job in the future. That is my objective. And besides that, there are some people, not all, who think, 'Islam equals the headscarf.' But Islam is more, Islam is deeper than that."

Mohammed, born in Morocco in 1975, migrated in 2001 and is now in his final year of studies. Having studied theology at Qarawiyyin, Tétouan, Mohammed was able to skip several years of study upon his enrollment at the IUR. Although he speaks Dutch reasonably well, study at the IUR presented him with a good opportunity to receive a higher education. He hopes it will enable him to pursue an MA at a Dutch university. For students like Mohammed and Hawa, who have a language deficiency in Dutch and sometimes in English as well, the IUR may provide the only opportunity to receive a higher education, although the university's policy is to focus increasingly on becoming a Dutch-speaking institution.

New Religious Discourse

In his 1996 book, Felice Dassetto predicted that the leadership of the Muslim community would be transferred from first-generation Muslims to the second generation, newcomers, and converts. Furthermore, he foresaw a passage of leadership from the local to the national level, to which we can now add, as a further step, the transnational level (Roy 2003). Dassetto was forced to leave open the question of whether the new Islamic centers—which "a bit pompously call themselves 'universities'"—would be among those to produce these new leaders (1996, 158). His question can now be directed to the IUR, but cannot yet be answered. The ambition to contribute to the building of an elite is indeed expressed by the IUR's board. Concrete examples of contributions to the Dutch public debate are the seminars and lectures organized by the IUR over the past years. Topics covered during these seminars and lectures include interreligious dialogue, honor killings, female circumcision,

and Islam and democracy. IUR professors outlined the different points of view in relation to these issues from the perspective of various schools of law (including the Shi'a Jafari school). These seminars were attended not only by IUR students but also by Dutch representatives from social organizations. Referring to the conference on female circumcision held in December 2003, Edien Bartels remarked that

"this conference at the Islamic University of Rotterdam was particularly significant. Muslims in the Netherlands that fall under Islamic schools of religious law in which circumcision of girls is not addressed—and who have actually never been involved in circumcising girls and reject the practice—are nevertheless trying to be clear about the rejection of this custom from the Islamic point of view. In so doing, they are taking responsibility for each other. Discussion is now underway about the development of a 'Dutch' Islam." (Bartels 2004, 397)

Through these seminars, the IUR provides normative information about the compatibility of Islam and the West.

The IUR's students take up a modest position: they regard their knowledge as still rather limited and not authoritative. Male and female students often are active in small, local discussion groups, women's associations, and peer groups, and they spread their knowledge through these groups. Some provide lessons for children and teenagers, with male students concentrating on communicating with other males, females with females, and both genders with younger children. One of the few Dutch-speaking Muslim lecturers, a young man of Pakistani origin who speaks at debates on Islam organized by Muslim student associations, also followed the lectures at the IUR.

Although their influence is mostly limited, the formation of a group of educated individuals with a strong Muslim identity will have an impact on the strengthening of Muslim identity at the community level. According to the interviewees, this process of strengthening religious identity and engagement as a citizen should take place not only start in the university but also in the family, in local Muslim organizations, and in mosques. But the university, as Mehmet points out, can play a special role in this process: "What I see is an estrangement from Islam. And I am pessimistic if that increases, for the Netherlands, for Islam. Little by little, people move away from Islam. Maybe the university can play a role in changing that process, I don't know." According to Mehmet, a reinforcement of identity promoted by the IUR might help to stop the secularization process taking place among young people who are loosening their ties to their original home countries and thus losing their religious and moral "nourishment."

Hawa, on the other hand, describes how she sees the Islamic university fitting into modern life, maintaining that it is important precisely because it offers the individual believer the opportunity to choose between options. "I think that the Islamic university fits well into modern life. It is not conservative. It accepts all people. It does not look at what is the *madhhab*, what is

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Sunni, what is Shi'a. Many teachers here are Sh'ia and many are Sunni …
That is good: choose what you like."

Could we consequently say that the IUR is an educational institution that
strengthens individualization by offering a place for students to gain intellec-
tual and spiritual autonomy? Or does it offer a counterweight against the
individualization and strong bricolage of believing youngsters' religious
practices? It does both. As I have shown, the main motivations to study at the
IUR fit with the tendency towards individualization in the former sense. But
the IUR also offers a counterweight against individual bricolage, since it
stimulates its students to study the *usul al-fiqh*, the sources of Islamic law,
instead of being satisfied with a "copy-paste Islam," individually constructed
from the Internet and (translated) books.

In response to a question about his understanding of the role played by the
IUR, Mohammed answered:

"If someone comes here who is bad, but wants to find the way back to Allah, he does
not go to this university. He goes to people who are a bit extremist or radical. They
provide other things to him, things which are not in Islam, you see. And then he and
they become more evil. But if it is someone who wants to know Islam well, he
comes to this university, where there is an academic level and where people analyze
things, who proceed with time and know what is correct and what is not. If they
come here, they learn the right Islam and they can help other people outside. Then
they can get good jobs, such as spiritual caretaking." (Mohammed)

Mohammed has distinguished for himself between "true" and "false" Islam,
and it is clear that he believes the IUR provides him with access to greater
knowledge about the former.

Conflicting Expectations

On the one hand, the IUR tries to make use of the legal remnants of the pillar
system referred to above, as well as the importance placed in the constitution
on the equality of religious and philosophical groups. It should be noted that I
am not arguing that this emancipatory process is similar to that experienced
by the Catholics and the Protestants as they negotiated the Dutch pillar system
of the twentieth century. The ethnic and religious backgrounds of the Muslim
communities are heterogeneous, and consequently the internal power dynam-
ics are characterized by division and struggle. The economic, social, and
political position of Muslims is weak, and the support from Muslim organiza-
tions of the IUR is in essence extremely limited. Some of the Turkish teachers
and students are inspired by the teachings of Said Nursi, and the perception of
being Nurcu, or Fethullah Gülen, is a considerable hindrance to becoming
accepted as an authority by other Muslim organizations, whether of Turkish
or non-Turkish origin. In addition to these factors, the split giving birth to two
separate Islamic universities (the IUR and the Islamic University of Europe)

further complicates the situation. The relevant question is whether IUR graduates will be accepted as imams if the IUR is not supported by the umbrella organizations and the individual mosque boards.

On the other hand, the IUR makes use of the opportunities that arise in the debates on the creation of imam training, presenting itself as in the race to be an appointed provider of imam training both to the ministries of education and of alien affairs and integration and to the relevant Muslim umbrella organizations. Although imam training as such is not its central focus, it is in the IUR's interest to emphasize that it can provide the imam training currently in demand. Indeed, it has applied for a "starters' subsidy" in order to expand its present imam training facilities.

This potential opportunity created by demand raises the question of whether the IUR should focus primarily on the study of Islam or on imam training. The students' descriptions of their main motivations to study at the IUR make clear that the institution answers their need for the study of Islam. The IUR is a place where people can learn to develop their knowledge autonomously, independent of the imam. According to my research, there are only a handful of students following the imam training course specifically. Women are not interested in imam training, as this is a male domain.[9] Mehmet and Mohammed were not interested in obtaining a position as formal imams at a Dutch mosque, and provided several reasons for this decision. First, they do not believe that imams are best positioned to change society. Second, they do not want to be cornered between the mosque board and the believers who come to the imam, twenty-four hours a day, with their personal problems. Third, the financial standing of an imam is very low, given that the mosque community is responsible for raising the funds to cover his salary. In addition to these points, Mehmet and Mohammed do not consider the mosque to be the only location from which one can change things and reach people. Not only among the respondents, but also among higher educated Muslim youth in general, I have failed to detect much enthusiasm for the profession of imam. It is possible, however, that individuals did not consider it appropriate to indicate that they do in fact wish to become an imam, as such a claim could be perceived as awarding themselves religious authority in advance.

Many of the IUR's problems are related to the fact that the university is not yet recognized and thus not financed by the state. The students hope that the institution will soon acquire a recognized status, and this hope is often connected to their financial position, as Fatma explains: "Since it is not recognized, there are not many students. Everyone must work: how could you otherwise afford it?"

The students also expect that if the IUR is recognized, they will be taken seriously as Muslims, and be able, Mohammed pointed out, "to contribute to the position of Muslims in the Netherlands." According to Mehmet, this will be possible "because people will be able to find a job which has to do with

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9 This fact seems to be inadequately taken into account in the public debate on imam training.

Islam, like spiritual caretaker, teacher, or imam." "If we are recognized," Mohammed explained, "people will have to take our opinions into account. They must look at our theses, at what subjects we studied, at who we are. Then we can show that the university brings something that does not yet exist: imams." Their position as citizens would change, leading to their inclusion in the normative framework of Dutch citizenship.

Limited Elbowroom

Despite the aforementioned successful public seminars held over the past years, the IUR's elbowroom in the Dutch sociopolitical context seems to be rather limited. This became clear when the newly appointed rector, Professor Ahmed Akgündüz, explained in a newspaper interview that the prescriptions of the Quran and Sunna will remain valid forever. In the interview, he gave the following examples: a Muslim woman is not permitted to marry a non-Muslim man; a Muslim daughter receives half of the inheritance that a son receives; and a Muslim husband is allowed to slap his wife—provided that the woman is responsible for the marital conflict, that the man is unable to make her see reason in other ways, and that slapping will not physically harm her (Trouw, November 7, 2000). The headline "Rector IUR: You May Hit Your Wife, but not Regularly" caused moral commotion. Reactions came from all directions, including Parliament; some Muslim organizations, which took the opportunity to express their distrust towards the IUR; and the IUR itself. The former rector, Süleyman Damra, who is familiar with the Dutch language and Dutch sensitivities, tried to make the best of it by ensuring that the "alma mater advocates an Islam that fits into liberal Holland" (Trouw, November 8, 2000). Several specialists on Islam stated that the declaration of the un-changeability of the Quran and Sunna showed the rector's conservative, orthodox attitude, and would alienate him from the generation of young Muslims who are looking for flexible and liberal outlooks on Islam (e.g., Leila Jordens in Trouw, November 9, 2000).

Since this incident, the IUR has been reluctant to comment on "hot" social issues when there is a conflict between Dutch and Islamic norms and values.[10]

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10 This does not mean that they do not give any public reactions. They have issued press releases on the following: Ayaan Hirsi Ali (January 27, 2003); the an-nouncement of the vision and mission book (June 19, 2002); Dutch Islamic schools and relations with fundamentalist movements (February 25, 2002); in-formation on Id al-Adha (February 22, 2002; in English); statements made by Pim Fortuyn (February 11, 2002); information on Ramadan (November 16, 2001; in English); the announcement of the project "Imams: Conditions and Functions" (November 5, 2001; in English); "A Terrorist Cannot Be a Muslim, Nor Can a True Muslim Be a Terrorist" (September 13, 2001; in English); the opening of the fourth academic year and announcement of the new board (September 3, 2001). See the university's Web site: www.islamicuniversity.nl (January 2004).

In their reactions to the El-Moumni affair (e.g., in a television interview by a group of older male students; Nova, May 17, 2001), they condemned homosexual *deeds* as being against Islam. However, the IUR's board realized that a condemnation of homosexuality itself would cause a great deal of resistance from society at large and would only further discredit the university's position as a liberal Islamic institution. Since the El-Moumni affair, an individual's position on the issue of homosexuality has become a symbolic criterion for one's integration as a Muslim. An official IUR statement on homosexuality would only have gained acceptance in wider society if it contained some form of disagreement with El-Moumni's statements and a permission of both homosexuality and homosexual deeds on Islamic grounds.

"Real" Islam or "Dutch" Islam?

In the public debate on Islam and on imam training, some people seriously question whether Islam can function as an emancipatory force in the context of present-day Dutch society.[11] According to this view, Islamic culture is backward, antidemocratic, and nourished by the political ideologies of Muslim countries, particularly by Wahhabi Islam. This construction of the Muslim as "the other," which began in colonial times, intensified in the 1990s and became even stronger after 9/11. As elsewhere in Europe, in the Netherlands "questions increasingly concentrate on issues regarding 'real' and 'good' Islam as opposed to supposedly less constructive readings of Islam" (Douwes 2003, 4).

The students interviewed in the course of my research appear to be aware of this tension and discuss relevant issues accordingly. What should the rector have done, in their opinion? Hold firm to his explanations and beliefs, or change his opinion under pressure from dominant society? "If he had done the latter, I would consider that weak of him," Fatma stressed. "But you must show society that the values are similar, but that the norms can be different sometimes. That is dialogue, isn't it, that we recognize that."

Mehmet referred to the IUR's task of bringing back Muslims who have strayed too far from the sources. According to him, some Muslim spokesmen are too flexible in their interpretations of Islam. He doubts "if the IUR can say that formally, I don't know, because you can burn your fingers on it," and continued by mentioning the incident with the rector's statement and the commotion that it evoked. He stressed, however, that while Muslims must live according to Dutch laws, a Muslim cannot ignore or modify the shari'a itself, even if the two are conflicting.

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11 In 1991, the liberal politician Frits Bolkestein was one of the first politicians to express his doubts about the compatibility of Islam and the West (see Douwes, De Koning, and Boender 2005).

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"One must think, we live in a non-Islamic country. And Islam is what it is. You must accept it the way it is. Being Muslim, you cannot adopt the Islamic shari'a in the Netherlands. But you should not say that the shari'a is different from what it is. You must take it as it is. And then you must just live according to the laws in the Netherlands. But whatever conflicts with the Dutch, or Western culture, those things are being treated as primitive. I think that is a bit nasty. Then you cannot have an open discussion and people won't say what they really think. Then you do not have transparency. That is a bit what is happening now."

This excerpt shows that Mehmet realizes that when one acknowledges this constraint, one cannot easily enter the public debate. The way Islam really is should not be changed under pressure from the outside. He summarized his concerns as follows:

"I think that the Dutch government wants Islam to adapt to the norms and values of Dutch society. And if the IUR is recognized, it will only be in that sense, I think. Only if the university fully adapts itself, only then it will be recognized, I think. No sooner than that. And then it won't be totally independent, I reckon."

If they enter the public debate and adapt to the Dutch context, they may be obliged to make concessions on what they consider to be "real Islam." It appears that the IUR "is caught in the dilemma of being recognised as a legitimate minority culture, while escaping the predicament of being a minority to watch and monitor, continuously needing to prove its loyalty" (Salvatore 2004, 1027).

Concluding Remarks

The IUR is involved in a process of acquiring autonomous religious space for both socioreligious life and participation in the normative affairs of wider society. This process is contentious (Salvatore 2004). Much can be said about the opportunities and obstacles it has met on the "road to coexistence," a path that rector Akgündüz describes as "something of a minefield."[12] Through collective action, the IUR has attempted to use existing legal and constitutional opportunities granting equal rights to every religious group. As part of a religious minority, it wishes to manifest itself in a certain way in society. In this process, it claims a right to establish an educational institution as a means to practice its right to religious expression. At the same time, emancipation also means that one is entitled to claim one's religious identity, in confrontation with the dominant society, in order to acquire a place in the public realm.

It has been my intention to show the connection between the establishment of the IUR and the public debate on imam training. The government is searching for Muslim representatives and is focusing in this process on the

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12 From Rector Akgündüz's speech at the opening of the academic year in September 2003.

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building of a new generation of homegrown imams. For the IUR, this quest for new imams is a way to access the public realm. However, the imam training debate is structured by the government's expectations of what a Dutch imam should be and do. These expectations appear to be difficult to fulfill. Through my interviews with several male and female students, I have identified the main constraints at present. First, the students, particularly the women, do not seem to be interested in becoming imams in a local mosque, and, second, the students have constructed a clear picture of what they regard as "real" or "authentic" Islam. However, they are aware that what they say in public affects the way in which Muslims are perceived in the public sphere. To be fully recognized as contributors in the normative debate on Dutch citizenship, the IUR must not only fulfill certain objective legal criteria but also convince society at large that "their Islam" can be "trusted."

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