Accurate Knowledge: Implications of 'lived Islamic theology' for the academic study of Islamic disciplines.

Ulrika Mårtensson and Eli-Anne Vongraven Eriksen

Abstract

The article discusses the relationship between on the one hand the academic study of Islamic disciplines within university faculties of Humanities and Theology, including Religious studies, and on the other hand 'lived Islamic theology', i.e. the diverse Islamic institutional discourses that inform individuals' religious knowledge and practices. Here 'lived Islamic theology' refers to research from the Norwegian cities Trondheim and Oslo. The analytical model is Michel de Certeau's, Pierre Bourdieu's, and Jürgen Habermas' concepts of discourse and 'capital'. We argue that the academic study of Islamic disciplines is a prerequisite for accurate public knowledge about 'lived Islamic theology'; that it potentially increases the 'cultural capital' assigned to Islamic knowledge in the public sphere, and thereby enables citizens to contribute to the common good *through Islam*; and that it can enrich the Humanities by showing how Islamic disciplines correlate with 'western' philosophical, hermeneutical, ethical, linguistic, political and historical disciplines.

Introduction

The rationale for this article is the challenges involved in the ongoing, very stimulating efforts to develop new programmes in academic Islamic theology in the Nordic countries. The envisioned programmes aim at providing an academic study of Islamic theology, along the lines but still on a much smaller scale than Protestant Faculties of Theology at state universities. The recently established Chairs in Islamic Theology and Philosophy at Uppsala University (Sweden) and the University of Oslo (Norway), both of them located in a Faculty of Theology, are two examples of how traditionally Protestant Faculties of Theology have started to accommodate Islamic theology.

As such, the academic study of Islamic theology is descriptive. As is the case with any academic study of theology, however, the subject relates to the aim to educate religious leaders, who assume normative analytical skills and authority. In the case of Islamic theology, the aim

is to develop education for the future generations of Nordic Muslim leaders. The arrangement with one professor per Protestant Faculty of Theology (Uppsala and Oslo), corresponds to an instrumental definition of Islamic theology as a subject that can foster Nordic Muslim leaders through dialogue with Christian theologians and leaders, and the surrounding society. The main inspiration appears to be the models of Islamic theology established in Germany.

We argue it is a good thing to establish academic Islamic theology at Nordic universities, and that the new positions are a good start. However, we also claim that the nature of the subject itself is such that it requires a lot more scope before it reaches a state where it actually corresponds with 'lived Islamic theology'. Such correspondence is decisive for whether academic Islamic theology can meet the aim of educating Muslim leaders who are *recognised by their communities*, and equipped to dialogue and deliberate on behalf of their communities with other religious leaders, and with society at large. The community question is, thus, decisive for the success or failure of academic Islamic theology.

The topic of what the intellectual trajectories of European Muslim communities look like is a contested research field. To give but one example, the French sociologist Olivier Roy has famously argued that globalization is reshaping both the traditional Islamic schools and local ethnic cultures, both in Muslim majority countries and in the west (2004: 10–13). A new de-ethnicized and de-territorialized 'global community' has emerged, including western Muslims, which both is distant from the Islamic scholarly traditions, and often consciously distances itself from them. The aims and values of young Muslims have more in common with general western values and forms of new religious movements than with pre-globalization forms of Islam (Roy 2004: 14–17, 158–171). In Roy's view, Salafism is a good illustration of this new globalised community, rejecting 'cultural' forms of Islam and seeking a purportedly 'original' and source-based but in reality new Islamic knowledge-based community (2004: 232–254). The Islamic studies scholar Bernard Haykel, however, rejects Roy's analysis. Salafism is not the expression of a new 'globalized community', he argues, but a modern continuation and interpretation of the Ḥanbalī school of law and its theological counterpart *Ahl al-ḥadīth*, the roots of which extend back to the early 800s and the doctrinal battles over the created or uncreated Qur'an, free will or predestination, and allegorical over contextual interpretive method, and with Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) as abiding reference point. Thus, while the European and western context of Salafism is new, its theology, exegetical methodology, ritual and ethics is not, and in Haykel's view it is theology that motivates and defines Salafism, historically and today (2009: 33, 36, 38–42).

Haykel (2009) implies that the Islamic schools of theology and law remain vital and defining for contemporary communities. The BBC journalist Innes Bowen's survey (2014) of British Muslim organisations and mosques support this view. In Britain, with its many generations of Muslim citizens, the transnational Islamic organisations and movements, which in turn are grounded in the Islamic schools of law and theology, are thriving and firmly entrenched, alongside new organisations of national or local character. Bowen treats the South Asian and Hanafi Deobandi and Barelwi schools, Jamāʿat-i Islāmī and Tablīgh-i Jamaʿat; the Salafīs; the non-law school Muslim Brotherhood; the Iranian and Iraqi Twelver Shia; and the small but well-connected Ismāʿīlī Shia who follow the India-based Agha Khan. Missing are, not least, the Shafiʿī and Sufi Somali communities, and the Afghan Hazara Twelver Shia, which Bowen intend to cover in a sequel book (2014: 8).

The same pattern is evident in Norway. Oslo, which is home to three-to-four generations of Norwegian Muslims representing well over thirty nationalities, houses all four Sunni schools of law, together with the large Deobandi and Barelwi schools, Tablīgh-i Jamaʿat, the Jamāʿat-i Islāmī, Sufi brotherhoods, the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism; alongside Twelver Shia, some small Ismāʿīlī Shiite groups, and the Aḥmadiyya. In addition, the major Turkish organisations, state and non-state, are present, as well as representation from the Bosnian mufti (Jacobsen 2009: 20–21; Leirvik 2014: 138–140). Overlapping with these global Islamic institutions and movements are civil society associations e.g. the national Islamic Council of Norway, as well as student and youth organisations, which include members from a wide range of the mosque-based schools and organisations (Jacobsen 2009: 20–21; 2011). There are also several think-tanks fronted by self-acclaimed 'liberal Muslims', e.g. the numerically small but politically influential organisation LIM (Likestilling-Integrasjon-Mangfold [Equality-Integration-Diversity]); the integration and 'anti-radicalisation' think-tanks Just Unity and Minotenk; and the think-tank 'Born Free', staffed with politicians and public intellectuals of Muslim backgrounds and aiming at forging change in a liberal direction among the country's Muslims.

In Trondheim, third largest Norwegian city, with mostly first generation Muslims, mosques have also been established along the lines of the traditional schools of theology and law, and transnational organisations. Here we can observe how the branching-off and multiplying of mosques are community-driven processes, where imams and communities together establish mosques based on particular law schools or transnational organisations, which overlap with ethnicity, nationality, and language (Mårtensson and Vongraven Eriksen 2014: 168). The mosques follow quite distinct methodologies for deriving 'Islamic knowledge', both at the level of the imams and the education they provide to their members. The

methodologies for deriving guidance from the sources correspond to the law schools and the modern transnational organisations, though applied in the context of Norway and Trondheim (Vongraven Eriksen, forthcoming).

In addition to her survey of the British mosques and their grounding in the transnational Islamic schools and organisations, Bowen makes an important point regarding the politics surrounding Islam. With post-9/11 security concerns and anti-radicalisation programs in mind, British governments have sought to collaborate and dialogue with 'the British Muslim community'. Failing to appreciate that 'the British Muslim community' is in fact constituted by the above described vast diversity of communities, Tony Blair's government collaborated with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), which claimed to represent both British Muslims and 'moderate Islam' for the modern era and British society. However, MCB only represented one of the numerically smallest British organisations, the Jamāʿat-i Islāmī. Hence, the government was speaking to one group, which was prepared to echo 'Islam says' in terms the government wanted to hear but which may not have corresponded with what actually went on within the organisation, let alone in the many other schools and organisations excluded from the conversation (Bowen 2014: 2). Bowen's point should alert us to the fact that 'lived Islam' is a hugely diverse religion, and that polemics is intrinsic to Islam like it is to all religions. Globalized Islam thus means, as far as western countries are concerned, that Islamic polemics enter the public sphere. The most obvious targets right now are 'Wahhabism', Salafism, and of course 'the so-called Islamic State', which have replaced the Iranian Islamic Republic as the primary Islamic villain of the 1980s and 1990s.

Without denying the reality of security concerns, international relations, or problematic concepts and practices of Islam, we argue that political and security concerns and normative 'majority' expectations on Muslim individuals and communities should not be the guiding principles for the development of academic Islamic theology. *The main question must be to what extent study programs correspond to the real diversity of Muslim communities and their intellectual legacies, and to all the communities' expectations and needs from their religious authorities*. We argue that expanding the study of the whole array of Islamic disciplines within university departments, in collaboration with the 'living' Islamic schools of law and theology, is the best way to educate future religious leaders, who can both represent their communities' interests and dialogue with the public. Viewed in this way, the onus for good public relations is not only on Muslim leaders. The public, including other religious leaders, politicians, journalists, teachers, social workers, police, etc., must also have access to accurate knowledge about Islamic communities and their traditional schools and intellectual legacies. Furthermore,

successful dialogue involves communication attained. This presupposes 'translation' between Islamic concepts and discourses, and concepts and discourses established in relevant non-Islamic disciplines. Viewed from this perspective, education of future Nordic Muslim leaders requires a basis at public universities.

Discursive communication: An analytical framework

The political philosopher Jürgen Habermas claims public discourse and deliberation are the foundation of liberal democratic legitimacy. Legitimacy is thus created and contested in the public sphere through a deliberative 'process that ensures the inclusion of all those affected and the equal consideration of all the interests at play' (Habermas 1999/2003:105). Religion's recent re-emergence as contested subject matter in public debates is a case in point. Religious citizens, and especially those of Muslim faith, are not included in public discourse on the same terms as other citizens, Habermas argues, due to the exclusive nature of their arguments and concepts, and the exclusive approach towards religion manifested by increasingly vociferous ideological secularists. The exclusion of religious citizens from public discourse on the grounds of conceptual discrepancies thus poses a new challenge to democratic legitimacy. Habermas' proposed solution is a public learning process, with the aim of enabling religious and non-religious citizens to deliberate in a democratic manner the implications of religious arguments for the common good (Habermas 2006: 16–20).

Applied to our topic, Habermas' public learning process and model of liberal democratic legitimacy implies that *all* Muslim communities must be 'known' and able to take part in public deliberation. The fact that from Habermas' perspective public deliberation between religious and non-religious citizens requires *learning* brings us back to the university. Here the discourse theory of French historian of religion Michel de Certeau (d. 1986) and his essays collected in *The Writing of History* (1988[1975]) offer another angle on the learning challenge.

According to de Certeau, knowledge is discourse. In his own research, he has focused specifically on the discursive production of historical knowledge about 'religion'. The individual historian acquires knowledge from artefacts and other material remains, including manuscripts, pertaining to a given historical time, place, institution, and person. Yet it is only by *writing down* these findings, and referring them to other historical writings about the same subject, that the historian produces 'academic knowledge about history'. This act of writing history de Certeau calls 'the historiographical operation'. The operation is conditioned by three factors: an institution of knowledge production, for example a university; a discipline within

the institution, for example history; and a subject. Subject refers to the individual historian and her relationship with a subject matter. The relationship is shaped by the particular education and training that the historian has received at a specific institution of learning, which gives its particular slant to the discipline, which in turn is processed through the historian's personal political, aesthetic, emotional etc. preferences. Viewed from this analytical perspective, discourse represents continuity through the institution and discipline involved, and change at the level of subject: each historian changes the discourse on a subject matter a fraction, through adjustments of questions, discipline-related theory, method and methodology (de Certeau 1988: ch. 1–2).

In critical dialogue with the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his concepts of 'cultural capital' as reproducing the institutional order or 'habitus' that individuals live within, de Certeau defines discourse as a the 'capital' of historiography that the individual historian 'invests'. Because of the subjective level of discourse, the investment contributes towards *changing* institutional orders, by allowing the individual expression (de Certeau 1988: 13–14). From a societal viewpoint, investing in discursive production of knowledge pays off in the form of 'modes of intelligibility': 'reality' is defined within an institutional order with certain corresponding *practices*, and is made intelligible through discourse and its terms (de Certeau 1988: 21). Thus, religion is one institutional order with accompanying practices and discourses, and modern university another.

Particularly significant here are de Certeau's reflections on the emergence of modern Religious studies. De Certeau, who was Catholic and Jesuit, took a particular interest in early modern French history of religion, leading up to and beyond the Enlightenment. According to his analysis, the restructuring of academia that followed the Enlightenment entailed that 'religion' changed, from being the exclusive subject matter and identity of the Church and its academic curricula, to becoming a subject matter within new universities, with new disciplines, and methodologies. This institutional switch, from Church academia to modern university, not only generated a new 'secular' discipline for the study of religion ('Religious studies'), but also changed the Church's own discourses and mode of understanding religion. In other words, the diversification of disciplines entailed diversification of modes of and theories for making religion intelligible. Traditional Theology, de Certeau argues, included the study of Reality in the metaphysical sense, and the purpose was to demonstrate the truth of doctrine. In the modern Religious studies disciplines, religion is understood as a societal or psychological reality, i.e. as an institutional and cognitive order and practices, and ontology is studied only descriptively. In this context, de Certeau warns that historians must distinguish between ideology, i.e. an all-

encompassing theoretical explanation of society (including religion), and theory, i.e. a limited explanation selected and operationalised in a study for a given analytical purpose. Theories of religion are thus part of a discourse of 'Religious studies', and of a specific 'mode of intelligibility', which expresses the particular institutional order and practices of which it is part. What 'religion' was at a historical time and place is not the same as the contemporary theory. It was another institutional order and practices, which must however necessarily be analysed through a selected theory (de Certeau 1988: 117ff., 131ff.).

With a final twist of this argument, de Certeau claims that while modern Religious studies discourses tend to ideologically reduce religion to something 'other' than the academic study of religion, in reality modern academic discourses continue the Judeo-Christian Scriptural practise of commentary and exegesis as the primary mode of knowledge production. This implies that there are real discursive continuities between pre-modern Christian and modern Humanities disciplines, which are rendered invisible if 'religion' is relegated only to data, and not theory (de Certeau 1988: xxvii, 4, 14). Given that Islam belongs to the same Abrahamic Scriptural tradition as Judaism and Christianity, the same argument can be extended to the Islamic disciplines: while perceived as 'other' than modern Humanities disciplines, they are part of them, by virtue of shared hermeneutics and interpretive methods.[1]

De Certeau's concept of discourse and knowledge offers a theoretical analysis of the intelligibility gap between religious and non-religious citizens in the public sphere that Habermas observed, as well as that between the academic study of religion and the many different institutional orders and practices that constitute the societal reality of religion *today*, and *in the past*. Hence, to study the institutional orders and practices that constitute 'lived Islam', in such a way that it enables the learning process that Habermas perceived necessary for liberal democratic legitimacy, the academic study of Islamic theology and law must be conceived as a meeting point *between several* institutional orders with their respective disciplines and practices. There is no one Islamic institution but several, with corresponding differences in practices, institutionally as well as individually. For example, Twelver Shiites celebrate specific holidays and rituals that define their community; Sufi brotherhoods each have different cosmologies and *dhikr* rituals; etc. Within these institutional discourses and practices, individuals who affiliate with them negotiate their places. While the public would never expect a Lutheran Protestant to speak for a Roman Catholic when it comes to doctrinal matters, there

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[1] See Mårtensson (2015/2001:7–15) for application of de Certeau's analytical model to al-Tabari's historiography in *The History of the Messengers and the Kings* (*Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*); on comparisons of al-Tabari's hermeneutics with modern counterparts, see Heath (1989); Mårtensson (2008; 2009).

is little public knowledge of the doctrinal differences within Islam and their practical implications. Instead, public discourse is constructed around terms such as 'radical', 'extremist', 'fundamentalist', 'conservative' and 'moderate' Islam, i.e. terms which pertain to a popularised security-oriented discourse, not to the Islamic disciplines and their terms.

The third analytical perspective here is Pierre Bourdieu's concept of economic, social and cultural 'capital' (Bourdieu 1986). Economic capital is property, finances and other material assets; social capital is institutional networks and connections, especially those that give an individual access to 'credit'; and cultural capital, which is embodied behaviour, acquired tastes and artefacts, and education. The three forms of capital are convertible, although Bourdieu sees economic capital as the precondition for the other two forms. A recent survey (IMDi 2016) comparing Norway with the other Scandinavian countries and the EU finds that second and third generation Norwegians of migrant family backgrounds are well integrated into society, but that they are more vulnerable to economic marginalisation than their national peer groups. In line with Bourdieu's convertibility theory, earlier OECD studies have shown that young Norwegians of migrant backgrounds have weak social networks with 'ethnic' Norwegians, and that there is a degree of discrimination in the labour market (Leibig 2009). This implies that Norwegians of migrant family backgrounds acquire cultural capital to the extent that they mirror 'majority culture'. Islamic culture and education, for example, is not convertible into networks and economic goods related to the cultural majority. It may appear natural that majority culture trumps the other cultures, since access to jobs and education depends on mastering the national language and networks into majority culture groups. However, Bourdieu's convertibility perspective implies that if 'the majority' does not ascribe any cultural capital to other cultures than its own, it is a sign that 'the majority' rank the other cultural groups lower than themselves. This is brought out by a Norwegian government survey that found positive correlations between the intense and predominantly negative media discourse about 'Islam' and 'Muslims', and discrimination against Muslims, *in spite of them being well integrated in terms of work and education, suggesting a cultural-religious negative bias* (IMDi 2009: 11–12). In fact, minority religious community representatives have complained that their contributions to the common good receive no public recognition; when it concerns religion, this recognition remains the privilege of those who represent the Church of Norway (Schmidt 2011: 151). Developing the academic study of Islamic disciplines at *state universities* may therefore further not only the above mentioned learning processes for democratic deliberation and legitimacy, but also economic equality, by attributing the same cultural capital to Islamic as to Christian and Humanities disciplines.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital can also be made to address the issue of representation that we touched upon in the introduction. As mentioned, the state and educational initiatives to establish Islamic theology reflect expectations that new curricula in Islamic theology will foster new leaders who are better equipped to publicly represent Muslim communities than most current imams, who have qualifications from Islamic universities abroad and often lack 'valuable' social and economic capital in Norway or Sweden. However, there are communities that are well integrated but have chosen to practice Islam in ways the majority consider problematic, such as the Norwegian Salafi organisation Islam Net. This group is liable to limited access to civil rights, such as public meeting places and funding for grass-roots organisational activities (Berglund Steen & Sultan 2013). Other Islamic organisations too are at risk of increased public scrutiny and punishment. Currently, the Norwegian parliament is reviewing a proposed law that would withdraw the civil right to public funding for religious organisations from organisations who demonstrate 'problematic attitudes' or receive funding from countries that violate human rights (Mogen 2016). The inconsistencies are flagrant. No one would punish a Christian organisation for getting financial support from the USA, even though Guantanamo Bay is still running and torture is still practiced by US military and security staff (Feinstein 2014). Hence, Muslim communities are the foremost targets of this proposed new law, whose term 'problematic attitudes' is so vague that it opens up for arbitrary application, as human rights researcher Ingvill Thorson Plesner has pointed out (Lorentsen 2016).

The new law proposal illustrates the fact that not all Norway's Muslim leaders and communities are included in negotiations over Islamic theology programs. Even though the Salafi organisation Islam Net is one of Norway's largest youth organisations (Brandvold 2016), 'everyone of importance' wants to keep it out of influence hoping marginalisation will make its young members understand that they should turn elsewhere for Islamic guidance (Berglund Steen & Sultan 2013). While we agree that Islam Net should be challenged on human rights-related issues, we find it democratically problematic to exclude this or any other Muslim community from such an important matter as the establishment of the academic study of Islamic theology. Mårtensson suggests Islam Net's lecturers appeal to youth because they address and denounce things some youngsters struggle to cope with, both within their Islamic family cultures (forced marriages, contempt towards Muslims from other ethnic groups than one's own, emotionally distant parent-to-parent and parent-child relations, 'gangster culture'), and from 'majority society' (cartoons of the Prophet, and general prejudice against Muslims). Instead, the preachers teach that 'true Islam' (i.e. their interpretation the Qur'an and the

Prophet's *sunna*) prescribes voluntary marriage, consistent morality and obedience to the national law, warm emotional atmosphere between parents and children, and peaceful resistance and knowledge-based responses to insults and prejudice (Mårtensson 2012: 127–131). Moreover, Islam Net's main legal authority on how to apply Sharia in western context is the UK-based Shakyh Haytham al-Haddad, who pronounces that Sharia is essentially compatible with European democratic national laws (Mårtensson 2012: 126).

While Islam Net's leader and invited lecturers take up discriminatory positions regarding, for example, homosexuality, by arguing that it is not acceptable according to the Qur'an and the *sunna*, and hence is not permissible according to Islam, exclusion of the organisation from deliberation over academic Islamic theology means shutting off an important Islamic school. In theology Islam Net (like all Salafis) represents the doctrine that the Qur'an is the uncreated word of God, and that the correct hermeneutics and exegetical method is that the Qur'an's meaning depends on the context in which it was revealed, and this context is reconstructed through *hadith*, although change takes place through the exegete's context-dependent enquiry. The opposite position is the Muʿtazilite creed that the Qur'an is created, not part of the Creator, Who cannot take material form, and who define Qur'anic meaning in the first instance by reference to their dogma. These doctrinal and exegetical debates date back to the 800s and are foundational for Islamic theology. It could be tempting for developers of academic Islamic theology to favour the Muʿtazilite creed, which 'humanises' the Qur'an and thus sits quite comfortably alongside dominant Christian concepts of the Bible. However, to marginalise the Salafi creed of the divine Qur'an and its exegetical methodology would mean to silence one party to the argument, as well as a community of practice. It is also worth keeping in mind that in the 800s, it was the adherents of the uncreated Qur'an who advocated a constitutional 'separation of powers' between the judiciary and the Caliph, while the Muʿtazilite creed was employed to concentrate legislative and interpretive power in the hands of Caliph.[2] The example implies that there is no necessarily authoritarian quality to Islam Net's hermeneutics, as such; it depends on the context and issue at hand, and any doctrine can lend itself to abuse by the powers that be. What is certain is that if politicians and educators assign more cultural capital to one Islamic creed and community over another, and exclude some from participating in academic Islamic theology, universities contribute to social inequality and undermine democratic legitimacy, whether inadvertently or not. Moreover, it appears that the creed of the uncreated, divine Qur'an is the closest parallel to the Christian creed that God's

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[2] On the politics of the doctrinal and exegetical debate over the Qur'an's nature between *ahl al-ḥadīth* and Muʿtazila, see Carter (1983:68); Cooperson (2000:28–32); Vasalou (2002:25).

own word is manifest in the empirical world, albeit in the human form of Christ. Thus, it would seem that Salafi scholars are highly interesting dialogue partners for Christian theologians, should the mutual will and opportunity occur.

The Islamic Disciplines and 'Lived Islamic Theology'

The Islamic disciplines are normative and 'theological', in the sense that the Muslim scholars have used them in systematic manners to demonstrate Islamic truth over Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, paganism, and Greek philosophy; the truth of their particular school and doctrine over those of their rival schools and colleagues; and to derive ritual rules, ethics and law for the community. The Islamic disciplines correspond broadly to the core disciplines one finds within e.g. Uppsala University's Protestant Faculty of Theology: Bible studies with exegesis and languages (Hebrew and Greek); History of Christianity, including Church history, missiology and dogma; and Systematic theology; Ethics; Philosophy of religion. These core theological disciplines are complemented by the Sociology and Psychology of religion; and the comparative History of religions (focusing mainly on non-Christian religions). By comparison, the Islamic disciplines are:[3]

- *fiqh* (analytical method) and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (hermeneutics and legal exegetical methodology)[4]
- *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Qur'anic sciences, including *tafsīr*, i.e. Qur'an exegesis and hermeneutics)
- *ḥadīth* (the Prophetic traditions)
- *kalām* (systematic theology, including ethical theory)
- *ʿaqīda* (dogma)
- *ʿulūm al-ʿarabiyya* (Arabic linguistics, including poetry and *balāgha*, or rhetoric)
- *taṣawwuf* (moral discipline, esoteric knowledge and cosmology; 'Sufism')

Auxiliary disciplines:

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[3] For studies of the development and interconnections between the Islamic disciplines, see e.g. Makdisi (1990); van Ess (1990–1997); Jokisch (2007).

[4] A recent important study of *usul al-fiqh* as hermeneutics is David Vishanoff, *The Formation of Islamic Hermeneutics: How Sunni Legal Theorists Imagined a Revealed Law* (2011); see also Gregor Schwarb, 'Capturing the Meanings of God's Speech: The Relevance of *Usul al-Fiqh* to an Understanding of *Usul al-Tafsīr* in Jewish and Muslim *Kalam*' (2007).

- *falsafa* (philosophy, with logic)
- *akhlāq* (ethics)
- *sīra* (the Prophet's biography)
- *taʾrīkh* (the political history of Islam in the context of 'world history', including the histories of other religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, Indian religions)
- *ʾadab* (literature)
- Dream interpretation

As a grid structure resting across the disciplines, we have the schools of law:

- Sunni: Ḥanafī, Malikī, Shafiʿī, Ḥanbalī (Zahirī)
- Shiite: Jaʿfarī, Ismaʿīlī (in various branches), Zaydī

And *kalām*:

- *Jabriyya* → *Ahl al-ḥadīth*
- *Qadariyya* → Muʿtazila
- Ashʿarī
- *Khārijiyya*
- *Jahmiyya*
- *Murjiʾa*
- *Māturidiyya*
- *Karrāmiyya* (etc.)

The term 'school' implies that scholars work in a systematic manner, i.e. we should consider their works within specific sub-disciplines and literary genres, such as *fiqh* and *tafsīr*, as expressing coherent systems of hermeneutics and interpretive methods, doctrine and legal rulings (Vishanoff 2011: 268). According to Vishanoff's (2011) history of early *uṣūl al-fiqh*, al-Shāfiʿi's (d. 205/820) *bayān* methodology constituted a challenge, which resulted in the formation of the *madhāhib* (schools of law) around particular hermeneutics. The precise meaning of *bayān* is debated, but in general terms it is a rhetorical term used in *tafsīr* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, which signifies "a clear statement", or "clarification", and with a legal connotation (cf.

Larkin 1995; Stewart 2004; Lowry 2008; Belhaj 2009). Al-Shafi'i developed his *bayān* methodology in a context where the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* constituted two textual sources of law and doctrine, and the exegete was faced with the problem of how to harmonise them, given contradictions both within the two genres, and between them. The solution was *bayān*. The starting point was the polysemy of the Arabic language, a rhetorical theory according to which words can have a range of meanings depending on the context in which they occur, since meaning is defined by context.[5] The exegetes would thus proceed by translating passages from the Qur'an, and pairing them with equivalent *ḥadīth*, while using doctrinal and legal issues as the guiding principle for this kind of harmonising exercise. In concrete terms, the method consisted in harmonising Qur'an and *ḥadīth* through a legal or doctrinal issue, with translation as the main tool. Rhetoric plays a part in two senses: for identifying the relevant *context* for the passages in case; and for the *argumentation* as to the validity of the translation and harmonisation of the texts (Vishanoff 2011: 34ff.).

Al-Shāfiʿī's *bayān* methodology requires that interpretation is grounded in text: the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, although he allowed consensus (*ijmāʿ*) to form around the jurists' derived rulings. Other jurists, and subsequent schools of law, developed their own particular methodologies, with reference to *bayān*. For example, the early Ḥanafī school allowed jurists to form opinions without textual grounding and without grounding in consensus. It was often complemented by Muʿtazilite theology and its allegorical exegetical method, and the inclination of Muʿtazilite linguists towards non-foundational theories of meaning, i.e. the meaning of words depends on usage (Stewart 2004; Vishanoff 2011:210–225; cf. Shah 2011). The medieval Ḥanafī school accommodated the sources and method of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, but it also became a proponent of the legal methodology of *taqlī*, i.e. locking the meaning of the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* to the Ḥanafī school's rulings. In the Ottoman Empire, Ḥanafī methodology turned into a state school of law (Mustafa 2013: 16). A contemporary example of Ḥanafī methodology in the hands of the state would be the Turkish State Department for Religion (Diyanet), and its publication in 2008 of their project to re-interpret *ḥadīth* according to new methodologies and objectives, especially regarding gender norms (Akar 2008). While some have seen the project as representing a radically new departure, Saidazimova (2008) reports that the *methodological* approach has a long record in Islamic law, even though the gender focus is new.

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[5] On the rhetorical character of Arabic according to the «founding father» of classical linguistics, Sibawayhi, see Marogy (2010); Baalbaki (2007); Carter (2007). This rhetorical theory of language is also reflected in the exegetical genres *wujuh* and *ashbah*; see Rippin (1988); Mårtensson (2016b).

'Lived Islamic theology' in Trondheim

The significance of the school-based methodologies for 'lived Islam' has been observed through fieldwork in Trondheim (2010–2014), a Norwegian city with two generations of Muslim immigrants and a sizeable population of Muslim international students. The schools of law and the established transnational organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood are significant organising principles when mosques are established, and when individuals choose which mosque to attend and which imam to consult. The earliest mosque had a Muslim Brotherhood-inspired 'pan-Islamic' profile, but once the Turks and Kurds from Turkey had become a large enough community, they formed their own Ḥanafī mosque, which today is directed by Diyanet. Some years later the 'pan-Islamic' mosque went through internal disputes, and a Somali imam with Shāfiʿī training left and established his own mosque with mainly Somali followers who belong to the Shāfiʿī school of law. However, this mosque is not exclusively Somali, as it also attracted followers with other nationalities, for instance some of the Indonesian Muslims in Trondheim, who belong to the Shāfiʿī school of law as well. The tension between the imams in the 'pan-Islamic' mosque was thus of both organisational and methodological nature (Mårtensson & Vongraven Eriksen 2014).

Eli-Anne Vongraven Eriksen's research with young women in Trondheim's Ḥanafī, Shāfiʿī, Jaʿfarī (Twelver Shiite), and Brotherhood-inspired mosques, and Salafi-inspired study circles, shows that for those women who actively seek knowledge about Islam the law schools provide distinct methodologies, which define the women's ways to acquire knowledge about Islam through its scriptural sources and scholars. This group of women want detailed knowledge about the Islamic creed and its implications for Islamic rituals and rules of conduct, including ethical principles for developing themselves as virtuous, good and happy persons (Vongraven Eriksen, forthcoming). Regarding this group of young women who choose to become, in their words, 'practicing Muslims', 'lived Islamic theology' in Trondheim means 'their personal and subjective engagement with, understanding, and practice of the living Islamic schools and their methodologies'. Thus, academic Islamic theology must produce knowledge that corresponds to this institutional and practical reality.

Islamic Disciplines and the Humanities

As mentioned above, the Islamic disciplines and schools are 'theological', in the sense that they produce normative and prescriptive interpretations, doctrine, law and ethics, with reference to

the scripture and Prophetic *sunna*. Yet they also evince correspondences with the Humanities, as de Certeau's discourse theory suggests. The Islamic disciplines that emerged around *fiqh* in the 700s CE in the context of producing an Islamic imperial law have made important contributions to the Humanistic ideal of knowledge and knowledge production, which was later re-actualised in modern western European Humanism.[6] Thus, the study of the Islamic disciplines at universities has the potential to change the dominant public understanding of Islam and 'the west' as intellectually opposite entities. In the academic context, this could help challenge the claim that it is only now in the modern context that Muslim intellectuals are developing hermeneutics, via Europe's philosophical and humanistic traditions of critical thinking and analysis of power-relations. Academics and intellectuals who represent this discourse include the Egyptian professor of literature Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010), the Algerian-French professor of literature and Arabic philology Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010), the Iranian philosopher of science Abdolkarim Soroush, and the Tunisian professor of Islamic thought and civilisation Abdelmajid Charfi. In different ways and terms, they argue that contemporary Muslims must for the sake of political, social and academic progress, re-conceptualise the Islamic truth claims and Scripture, which reflect the vested and political power and interests of the religious scholarly authorities. Such critical analytical approaches require contextualising Scripture as a specific historical address, and to the extent that the Islamic disciplines have anything to offer, it is identified as the early Islamic rationalist school of Muʿtazila (Abu Zayd) or Sufism (Soroush).[7]

This approach of course is attractive to some European and Scandinavian Muslims, but since it is a *specific* view of the Islamic disciplines, it is too narrow to serve as a starting point for academic Islamic theology if it is to reflect the diverse 'lived theology'. Moreover, the claim that the Islamic disciplines did not develop hermeneutics is a simplification: they did, though it was framed within the idiom of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *tafsīr*, rather than modern literary criticism (see Vishanoff 2011; Ali 2000). The premise of the rhetorical linguistics that underpinned early *tafsīr* is that meaning is context dependent; this is not a new modern or western idea but intrinsic both to the Qur'an and the early Arabic linguistics (Abdel Haleem 1993: 72–74). Comparative studies of variants within Islamic medieval hermeneutics suggest that they converge with variants within modern 'western' hermeneutics, because the underlying epistemologies are

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[6] On the emergence of Islamic Humanism and imperial law in the reign of the ʿAbbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809), and in a relationship with Byzantine and Carolingian legal and scholarly culture, with the Islamic contribution at least as constructively contributing as the others, if not more, see Jokisch (2007:67–71).

[7] Abu Zayd (2004, 2006); Arkoun (1988, 1994, 2002, 2006); Charfi (2004); Soroush (2000); on Soroush's hermeneutics, see also Amirpour (2011).

continuous. For example, Mårtensson (2008, 2009; cf. Heath 1989) shows that al-Ṭabarī's contextualising hermeneutics is comparable with the modern historical methodology of E.D. Hirsch, Jr., while the Ismāʿīlites' normatively framed rationalism compares with Gadamer's equally normative hermeneutics, with its grounding in German idealism (Gadamer 1960). In the later medieval context, Muhammed Yunis Ali (2000) has analysed the Salafis' 'founding father' Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 729/1328) linguistics and hermeneutics in terms of modern pragmatics, i.e. the position that concepts do not have fixed, foundational meanings but that meaning depends on the context in which the concept is used. In fact, Ibn Taymiyya and the Ḥanafī school as described above share the same hermeneutics and linguistic theory, except that the Ḥanafī school locked meaning to the law school's rulings (*taqlīd*), whereas Ibn Taymiyya applied *ijtihād*, or 'individual interpretation' unhindered by *taqlīd*. Hence, if focus is on epistemology, hermeneutics and linguistic *theory*, it becomes evident that the medieval Islamic law schools share philosophical frameworks with modern hermeneutics, albeit employing a distinct terminology.

One might object that even if there are hermeneutical continuities between the Islamic schools and modern western literature studies and philosophy, the Muslims worked within 'God-centric' paradigms, which did not enable critical and analytical approaches to 'religion'. However, the medieval scholars did actually operate with 'secular' modes of explaining divine revelation, through the sub-disciplines history, linguistics, and philosophy. Within *tafsīr*, already from the late 600s onwards linguistics *implicitly* shaped the modes of exegesis (Shah 2003a-b; 2004; cf. Versteegh 1993), and from the 800s onwards the Qur'an was *explicitly* conceptualised in linguistic terms, as divine rhetoric (Shah 2013). One example from the late 800s is al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) linguistic and rhetorical definitions of the Qur'anic concepts *sūra* and *ʾāya*. *Sūra* he defined as a thematic speech-unit, or the rhetorical *topos* of the speech, and *ʾāya* as a narrative (*qiṣṣa*) and a symbolical sign (*ʿalāma*), by which God persuades the community of a general contractual ethics, as exemplified with reference to previous prophets and messengers (Mårtensson 2008; 2016a). Al-Ṭabarī also argued that prophecy is essentially a linguistic function, by which God communicates with humans, referring to the Qur'an, 14 (*Ibrāhīm*): 4:

We have never sent a messenger except in the language of his people so that he can make clear distinctions for them.

Expounding this linguistic principle in the context of defining his hermeneutics, al-Ṭabarī explained that since God spoke to a given people with the intention to convey a specific message to them, He chose the idiom spoken by the people in question:

"If the addressee who receives the message does not understand the address and the message directed to him, he will remain in the same state as before he received the address and the message, since he will not have benefitted in the least from the address. […] But God […] is elevated above delivering an address or sending a message that does not benefit the one who receives the address or message".[8]

Like human speech, the divine rhetorical address depends on linguistic expression and understanding for the attainment of communication.

In al-Ṭabarī's famous *History of the Messengers and the Kings*, he portrayed the Prophet Muḥammad and Islam as a political continuation of the administrative system associated with the Persian Sassanid Empire, and as a religious continuation of the Biblical prophecy (Khalidi 1994: 78–79). Regarding prophecy, al-Ṭabarī defined it more precisely as 'Abrahamic election' consisting in the reception of writings sent down by God (*kutub munzala*), which confer on their recipients *persuasive* wise rulings (*ḥikam bāligha*). The emphasis on persuasion suggests that al-Ṭabarī perceived prophecy as both a linguistic and a rhetorical function (Mårtensson 2016: 38–39). Regarding the political strand of the *History*, al-Ṭabarī's discourse constitutes a historical and economic analysis of the factors that made an empire strong, focusing on effects of different tax systems, and on whether the ruler ruled by law or arbitrarily. In this discourse, he employed God as a narrative tool to indicate which tax system and ruler was good, often by stating something like 'because of this ruler's justice God let his kingdom last'. The narrative technique can be understood as signifying that al-Ṭabarī believed God to be in charge of everything that occurs, and hence as an expression of a 'God-centric' view of history (cf. Robinson 2003: 129–132). However, since al-Ṭabarī was concerned to distinguish between just and unjust policy and practice, his use of 'God' can be understood as a narrative tool to draw the reader's attention to his analysis and its conclusions, with God representing specific principles (Mårtensson 2005: 324–330). Al-Ṭabarī also showed a keen

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[8] Arabic *la-inna al-mukhāṭab wa'l-mursal ilayhi in lam yafham mā khūṭiba bihi wa-ursila bihi ilayhi fa-ḥāluhu qabla al-khiṭāb wa-qabla majīʾ al-risāla ilayhi wa-baʿdahu siwāʾ idh lam yafidhu al-khiṭāb shayʾan […] wa-Allāhu julla dhikruhu yataʿāla ʿan an yukhāṭiba khiṭāban aw yursila risālatan lā tūjabu fāʾidatan li-man khūṭabu aw ursalu ilayhi*; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 18–19; cf. Mårtensson, 'al-Ṭabarī's Concept of the Qur'an', p. 19.

historical interest in the different social classes and their conflicting material needs and motivations, suggesting that 'power relations' was analytically important to him (Mårtensson 2011).

Al-Ṭabarī's works thus illustrate how a medieval scholar analysed the Qur'an and Islamic history in simultaneously linguistic, rhetorical, historical and societal terms, which suggests that critical, analytical approaches to religion and power are not new to modern academia.

Interfaith perspective

The early and medieval sources are also of utmost interest for contemporary interfaith dialogue and academic collaborations between theologians of different faiths. Al-Ṭabarī, again, contextualised the Prophet's mission as a return to the true Abrahamic religion, and argued that in the Prophet's early days, he sided with the Christian Byzantines in their battles against the polytheist Persian Sassanids, who were the allies of his own polytheist tribe Quraysh who was attacking him and his followers. Thus, al-Ṭabarī wrote the history of Islam and the Prophet's religious message as continuity with the other Abrahamic religions, and as politically close to Christianity even though Christian Trinitarianism doctrinally was one of the targets for the Qur'anic message about divine One-ness.[9] Indeed, like the other early histories, al-Ṭabarī's whole history follows the Biblical thematic structure of "Covenant – Betrayal of Covenant – Renewal of Covenant" (Humphreys 1989). The model is established already in the biography of the Prophet, written by the historian Muḥammad b. Hishām (d. *ca*. 215/830) on the basis of reports from Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (d. 150/767). Here the Prophet is provided with the Abrahamic genealogy and is portrayed as the restorer of the Abrahamic religion (*dīn)*. Ibn Hishām's biography also pays special attention to the Monophysite Christology as representing an erroneous doctrine on Jesus' nature. Ibn Hishām contextualised verses from the Christological Qur'anic *sura*s Q. 3, 5, 19, and 112 in the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum with its Monophysite church, where some of the Prophet's Companions had sought refuge from persecution by the Meccan polytheists. The Companions refer to these *sūra*s to persuade the Ethiopian king that the Monophysite doctrine is wrong, and that Jesus was the human son of Mary, albeit conceived through a divine miraculous intervention. Nevertheless, the political

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[9] Mårtensson, "Ibn Ishaq's and al-Tabari's Historical Contexts for the Qur'an: Implications for Contemporary Research", forthcoming in Sebastian Günther (ed.), *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam* (Leiden, Brill, 2018).

relationship between the Ethiopian king and the Muslims was good, suggesting that the doctrinal conflict was not in itself a cause of political conflict: persecution was.[10] Regarding Jews, the biography's famous Medina Constitution, which is the Prophet's written social contract (*kitāb*) with the tribes of Medina, states that "the faithful" (the Muslims) and the Jews are "one community from among the people" (*umma wāḥida min dūni-'l-nās*), even though they each have their own religion (*dīn*). The Jews and "the faithful" are also equal parties in *jihād*, with equal rights to war booty, and they are obliged to protect each other against external enemies. Later conflicts between the Jews and the Prophet occurred between Jewish tribes who were not party to the contract, or were members of the Jewish contractual tribes but broke the contract and aided the Prophet's enemies (Guillaume 1995: 231–245). Again, it is the political relationship that matters, not the doctrinal one. Hence, the biography's discourse suggests that an important political dimension of the religion of Islam is a social contract theory, signified by the concept *kitāb*, referring to the legally binding and contractual nature of 'writing'.[11] Given that the Qur'an frequently refers to itself as *kitāb*, and that the term *ahl al-kitāb* ('the people of writing') constituted a Qur'anic reference for the Islamic legal administration of Jews and Christians as *ahl al-dhimma*, the biography's social contract theory appears anchored in the Qur'an (cf. Mårtensson 2008: 369, 2016: 42; Radscheit 1996: 118).

These brief examples show that the medieval exegetes and historians constructed Islam's historical relationship with Judaism and Christianity as a direct continuation of the divine Covenant, also described in the Bible. The medieval works are thus highly relevant sources for how the early Muslim historians defined their religion in relation to the existing ones, and they can be read as theorising the relationship in the terms of social contract (cf. Mårtensson 2018: 97–103). Moreover, they show that the early sources treat conflicts in societal and political terms, not religious and doctrinal. That is an important contribution to the study of religion, power and conflict.

Institutional places and collaborations

If the study of the Islamic disciplines developed at Scandinavian universities, it could remedy the fact that History of Ideas, Philosophy, Law, Political Science, and History still overwhelmingly concern themselves with the west. Exploring the methodologies and epistemologies that underpin the Islamic disciplines reveals the connections between Islamic

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[10] Ibid.; cf. Guillaume (1995: 146ff.)
[11] Mårtensson, forthcoming, in Günther (ed.).

and western academic thought, as well as between the 'Abrahamic religions', and as such would contribute towards a broadened Humanities curriculum, suited to the societal realities of culturally diverse societies, and towards a widened public perspective of what constitutes 'religion'.

While ideally based at Humanities Faculties or Faculties of Theology, the study of the Islamic disciplines should not be perceived as an alternative to Religious studies. Religious studies approaches to Islam are shaped by the concepts, theories and methods pertaining to Religious studies as a discipline, and treat Islam as one of many religions, whereas the Islamic disciplines have their own concepts, theories, and methods focusing exclusively on Islam. Thus, while there are natural overlaps and 'translations' between Religious studies and the study of the Islamic disciplines, as disciplines they are and should remain distinct.

Regarding the study of the Islamic disciplines, size is decisive: all disciplines and schools must be covered. If that is impossible for practical and financial reasons, it must be transparent exactly what disciplines and schools that are being taught. For example, if what is on offer is a Ḥanafī-Turkish curriculum, or a Muslim Brotherhood-inspired 'pan-Islamic' one, or a Soroush-inspired one, it should be developed, staffed, advertised, and evaluated in such terms. Discipline- and school-orientation is the only way to set objective academic standards for Islamic educational programs. Innovations in the discipline and school will then be clearly identifiable and incorporated into the curriculum, and failed new approaches will also become documented. If *the starting point* is a new formulation of Islamic theology that lacks systematic connection with the disciplines it is not clear how developments actually contribute to the existing disciplines. Such an approach would be unthinkable in Christian academic theology, where broad and in-depth knowledge of dogma and church history is an absolute requirement, and includes all the historical rival formulations. Consequently, collaboration with the international Islamic universities and seminaries would be required, i.e. al-Azhar, Qom, Medina, Fez, Zaytuna, Ankara, and others, as well as public university departments for the study of Islamic disciplines in Muslim majority countries. In addition, the national Muslim communities are important collaborators, in order to design curricula relevant for local religious leaders.

It is evident that developing such ambitious study programmes requires extensive human and financial resources. Yet we have argued that if Scandinavian societies are to gain adequate knowledge about lived Islamic theology and Muslim communities are to enhance their 'capital', it is a public good to invest in the systematic academic study of the Islamic disciplines.

The investment could even breathe new life into the Humanities and Social sciences, especially if the argument is extended to include also the other non-western religions and civilisations.

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