

Dr Matthijs van den Bos

Further Observations on Shiite Higher Education in Europe

Revisiting earlier work on Twelver Shiite higher education in the West, the current article expands the initial geographical scope beyond Britain to also take several German and Scandinavian cases into account, and to generalise some patterns beyond 2015. The core of the exploratory comparison remains that between two Britain-based institutions, however, Al-Mahdi Institute and The Islamic College, to investigate if they constitute cases for 'European Islam.' The exploration takes contrary trends in two fields of theorization as its point of departure: those of Islam in Europe on the one hand, and of citizenship and education on the other. In the first, authentic articulations of Islam and integrative blending have tended to be focal concerns, whereas the second has often emphasised challenges of demographic diversity in its application to Islamic cases in Europe. Each perspective can similarly be traced in the case of Shiite higher education in Europe, where this essay examines a paradox of integrative blending and foreign frames. It argues that understanding Shiite higher education in Europe requires recognition, both of its local identities and transnational ties, which appear at times contradictory, as well as the relationships between them. In order to help understand how Shiite actors have managed these disparate elements, Dumont's concept of hierarchy as 'encompassment of the contrary' is invoked, from which emerges a scale of relative differences between the institutions. The indicators of difference concern state ties, religious authority, knowledge levels, religious authorization, and the status of learning – in the heart of which is always the question of hierocratic fit.



Dr Matthijs van den Bos

Birkbeck College, University of London

Dr Van den Bos is a member of the Politics Department at Birkbeck College, University of London. He trained in Oriental studies (Utrecht) and Anthropology (Amsterdam). His research focuses on Iranian Sufism, European Shiism, and Shiite geopolitics. Among his main publications are '*Mystic Regimes. Sufism and the State in Iran, from the late Qajar era to the Islamic Republic.*' Leiden 2002: Brill; '*Shiite Patterns of Post-Migration in Europe.*' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 2020, 31 (1): 1-22; and '*The promised land of Fadak: locating religious nationalism in Shiite politics.*' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 2022, 49 (5): 769–91.