Article

Mosque Pedagogy in Belgium

Betül Demirkoparan

Department Arabic and Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts, KU Leuven, 3000 Leuven, Belgium;
betul.demirkoparan@kuleuven.be

Abstract: The aim of this research is to contribute to the research field of Islamic pedagogies by providing empirical insights on the educational strategies used in two different educational settings: Diyanet mosques and mosque-based knowledge centers in Belgium. Previous research has mainly focused on 'imported', 'cyber', or 'intellectual' imams, but little attention has been paid to newly emerging local authorities which we can describe as *'native' imams, vaizes*, and *'preaching teachers'*. Both authorities are born and raised in Belgium and tend to develop a contextualized pedagogical model to meet the needs of Muslims. The analysis is based on fieldwork notes, classroom observations, and social media research. The findings demonstrate that, although similar teaching strategies are implemented in both settings, they are performed differently. It also demonstrates that education takes place through two reflective pedagogical methods that we term as *pedagogy of Muslim Identity* and *pedagogy of Commitment*. In addition, the findings show clearly how both aspects are guided by notions such as rooting, authenticity, and community building.

Keywords: mosque education; Islamic pedagogy; imam; Belgium; Diyanet

1. Introduction

1.1. Mosques as Education Space

The mosque is mostly perceived as the most visible and influential Muslim institution within the Islamic community (Müller 2023). To limit its scope to being a place of worship and religious rituals is to underestimate its role. Especially in Europe, mosques have become primary educational spaces that contribute to the moral development and religious identity among Muslims (Phalet et al. 2018). They serve as places where tradition, religion, and culture are being transmitted to the next generations (Sözeri et al. 2021). For example, Kanmaz (2007) and Shavit (2008) identify affiliation with the mosque as a religious duty among European Muslims. In connection to this, the growing number of mosques in Europe is thus a confirmation of its importance in society (Al-Refai 2020).

Mosque education differs from Islamic education in regular schools in that it provides a natural space for spiritual growth (Al-Refai 2020, p. 233; Isgandarova 2018a; Alkouatli 2018). In addition to their spiritual character, mosques also act as community hubs for resolving various legal matters through the lens of Islamic law, supporting Muslims in making decisions that align with their religious tradition in areas such as polygamy, halal slaughtering, and Islamic finance. As such, mosques play a supportive role in the process of a formal ruling (*fatwā*). This includes addressing questions that require reference to Islamic authority because they are not easily answerable via a literalist reading of primary sources (Qurʾān and sunnah). Likewise, issuing a *fatwā* requires consultation based on private conversations and the circumstances of the individual (March 2015; Afsaruddin 2015; Skovgaard-Petersen 2015, p. 2). It is commonly believed that members of the Muslim

community turn to the imam for juridical advice when faced with important life decisions (Muradin 2022).

1.2. Non-Formal Religious Education in Public and Academic Debate

Non-formal religious education is a highly discussed topic in both academic and social debates (Loobuyck and Meier 2014, p. 65; Kanmaz and Boender 2002, p. 173; Groeninck 2020, p. 28). Three main concerns underpin the basis of these discussions: *a lack of pedagogical expertise*, *hermeneutical challenges*, and *security measures*. The *first* concern deals with a lack of mosque teachers trained in pedagogy. Specifically, it is argued that imams lack in didactic and language skills to organize effective educational activities (Van de Wetering and Karagül 2013; Van San et al. 2013). On the other hand, a positive trend has been observed in mosque education. An increasing number of mosques would draw inspiration from regular schools with a view to expand didactic teaching (Sözeri et al. 2021). In this sense, Sözeri et al. point to the need for more constructive collaborative partnership between mosques and regular schools.

A second critique is related to hermeneutical challenges in pedagogy. The literature points to an increasing need to manifest Islamic educational goals into the lived practices of Muslims. For example, Sahin states that the current educational system is struggling with an 'educational crisis' (Sahin 2018, p. 1). He calls for the need of a practice-oriented 'relevant curriculum' that is driven by the theological, hermeneutical task of an Islamic worldview of education (Sahin 2018, pp. 7–8). According to Sahin, Muslim institutions fail to reformulate the essence of Islamic education and faith according to the contemporary context. The central point of his argument is that teachers are insufficient to reevaluate the theological foundations of religious education in a critical way considering the pluralistic and religiously diverse context. He also specifically argues that this failure stems from the fact that most religious institutions that were set up after the 1980s came out of a period of post-colonial trauma (Sahin 2018, p. 18). This internal pedagogical level is further raised by other authors who underline the crucial role of hermeneutic pedagogy. For instance, in a Muslim-majority context, Bin Baba et al. (2018) advocate for an 'integrated pedagogy' that stands for a teaching method that combines normative text with the 'real' living context of Muslims in Malaysia. In the context of mosque schools in Canada, Alkouatli (2018) scrutinizes the underlying facets of Islamic pedagogy that she derives from the primary sources as the Qur'ān and hadith. She identifies three pedagogical modalities in mosque school practice that she describes as Relational Pedagogies, Pedagogies of Conscious Awareness, and Relational Pedagogies.

A *third* concern is interwoven with the assumption that the educational practice of imams would not be independent from the ideological and political considerations of foreign religious institutions (Maussen 2007; Loobuyck and Meier 2014). Moreover, mosques and imams constitute a central instrument in the diaspora policies of foreign governments (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018; Bruce 2019). Within this discourse, mosque education is often seen as a threat to national security, linked to the concern that mosques might produce radicalism and authoritarianism in Europe (Bruce 2019; Hashas 2018; Vlaamse Overheid 2024).

These arguments have heightened attention to the contextualization of religious authorities and education in Europe. Leading to the emergence of a specific discourse of applying Islamic religious education in a European context. The prevailing view was that Islamic education requires a reinterpretation of Islam in accordance with the needs of Muslims and the law of European nations (Yurdakul and Yükleyen 2009). In this context, multiple policy initiatives have been taken to strengthen the academic training of imams in Europe that would contribute to the formation of theologically, socially, and pedagogically qualified religious authorities (Hashas et al. 2018, p. 34). For instance, a first critical moment

for the Belgian case was the establishment of different higher educational programs by the government (Lafrarchi 2020, p. 9). This was followed by the formation of an Islamic Theology Program at the KU Leuven University in 2015 (Vergauwen 2014). Both initiatives would contribute to the training of teachers for Islamic faith in regular schools, theologians, and imams in mosques. A second critical moment was the adoption of the controversial ban on imported imams by Belgium's Interior Ministry, adopted on 6 May 2024 (Belgisch Staatsblad 2024). A striking point is that, despite these noteworthy initiatives, they appear less successful (Null 2020; Ev 2020). What becomes clear is that, while policymakers tend to regulate Islamic education, at the same time, Muslim institutions take their own initiatives to establish their own religious and educational settings crucial for contextualizing an inherent understanding of Islamic education (De Morgen 2017; Casagrande 2017). At this point, we can easily argue that this paradoxical situation seems to provide a tension in which the Belgian government and Muslim institutions struggle with the same question: '*How to develop an ideal contextualized pedagogical model?*' In what follows, we will shed light on the educational strategies that have been adopted by two emerging authorities to achieve this educational goal. We will explore two different educational settings that we term as 'real settings' in this research, highlighting the practical realities, as opposed to the current public and academic debates. The structure of this article is, therefore, as follows: First, it gives a description of the importance and profile of two authorities that are central in this study: '*native imams* and *vaizes*' in mosques and '*preaching teachers*' in mosque-based knowledge centers. Second, it tends to situate the three concepts '*taˤlīm*', '*taʾdīb*' and '*tarbīyah*' and their importance in the research. Third, it discusses two aspects of pedagogy that play a central role in mosque education, which we describe as 'pedagogy of citizenship' and 'pedagogy of commitment'.

1.3. Importance of Mosques and Mosque-Based Knowledge Centers

Diyanet mosques and mosques-based knowledge centers constitute a theoretically and empirically relevant case study to investigate how religious education is contextualized in a non-Muslim context. We focus on these institutions for a few reasons: *First*, this research draws attention to two different religious authorities that we describe as new: ' Preaching teachers' and 'Native (Diyanet) imams and vaizes'. The first type are preachers who mainly work as Islamic teachers in regular secondary schools and establish their own knowledge center. These preachers obtain a bachelor's degree in Islamic teaching and are commonly self-educated in Islamic spiritual care. Characteristic to these preachers is that they gain massive popularity among young Muslims. Although they commonly operate in their own knowledge center, an important part of the spiritual teaching practices takes place in mosques. These preachers therefore can be related to what Beekers (2015) describes as popular 'travelling preachers'.

The second type are the religious authorities who are trained in the framework of the UIP (International Ilahiyat Project) an international imam training project of the Diyanet that aims to improve the professional skills of European based religious authorities (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2024; Ceylan 2024). A key characteristic of both authorities is that they were born and raised in Belgium, making them well-acquainted with the religious needs of local Muslims. They have been operating in Belgium since 2011 and strive for one common goal; namely, to develop a contextualized pedagogical model to meet the needs of Muslims. The emphasis in their educational practice lies on the life circumstances of Muslims. The fact that this study was conducted in Belgium is, in our opinion, particularly relevant. Belgium constitutes an exceptionally interesting case study for religious education, as it has a high number of recognized formal Islamic teachers (Lafrarchi 2020). The unusually high number, when compared with other European countries, is linked to the historical

evolution of educational policy which guarantees freedom to organize Islamic religious education in public state schools (Groeninck 2020, p. 28; Lafrarchi 2020, p. 9). Another striking fact is that Belgium constitutes the second country with the largest UIP alumni (Bruce 2019). It is, then, in our opinion, surprising that the pedagogical approaches of these 'home grown' *native imams and vaizes* and *preaching teachers* in Belgium have been neglected to date. It is noteworthy that, despite high scientific and public attention to the contested role of the Diyanet mosques and their imams in Europe, fewer studies have focused on the new native imams and vaizes and the pedagogical approaches they implement in mosques. Only the study of Bruce (2019) is somewhat relevant to this study. Bruce gives a general overview of the UIP students in the training process. Based on an online survey, he examined the main motives of the students to participate in the UIP project. He found that the UIP project is generally seen as an important opportunity for employment. As such, he points out that several graduates who were hired expressed their satisfaction about the project, while those whose application was rejected criticize the program (Bruce 2019, p. 1179). These insights may have important implications for the new dynamics in authority formation. We therefore take a step further and examine what these students really achieve in educational practice when they return to their country of residence, because this remains unknown (Bruce 2019, p. 1173). More specifically, we will focus on the way in which they manifest their theoretical baggage in the educational context. This will help us to gain insight into the long-term effects of the UIP project and the way these new authorities give shape to mosque education in Belgium.

Second, a vast majority of recent studies on mosque pedagogy mainly focuses on school-age children (Sözeri et al. 2021; Pels et al. 2006). An important part of these studies was conducted in the Netherlands and Canada. Findings of these studies suggest that the education on offer doesn't fit the requirements of a Dutch context. Furthermore, it is argued that mosque teaching is characterized by an authority-based teacher approach and less space is given to interaction (Cherti and Bradley 2011; Pels et al. 2006). Another finding, more related to the curriculum of Turkish mosques, is that the education on offer in Turkish mosques is strongly focused on the transmission of Turkish culture and nation value (Sözeri et al. 2021). In this study, the pedagogical approaches in mosques are central, but the focus lies on adult education. To our knowledge, no research has been conducted on the educational strategies in Belgian mosques. This research gap can be explained by several reasons, such as the isolationist structure of mosques as *outside* the state's control, but *inside* the European Muslim community, and the increasing mistrust for government policy among Muslim institutions (Sözeri et al. 2021). Both arguments were confirmed by some of the authorities we interviewed in this study. For instance, they emphasized they are feeling targeted by journalists and politicians who view mosques as private spaces for devotion and personal reflections. Due to the lack of trust, they would feel demotivated to participate in research with an open dialogue in research.

Third, in scholarly debate much attention has been paid to Islamic knowledge production in the digital sphere, but less has been given to local institutionalized religious settings and their didactical teachings, more specifically in the Belgian context. The strong emphasis on online Islamic knowledge production could be understood as part of a process through which Islamic authority is transformed through new media technology that opened new spaces for religious knowledge production (Mandaville 2003, p. 177). An important contribution to the field of local theologians is the influential study of Welmoet Boender (2007). In her study, Boender provides a comprehensive description of the role of imams in the Netherlands. Based on three mosques, she highlights important contrasts between the expectations on Islamic educational practice between the Dutch government and the Muslim organizations themselves. Another relevant study is the work of Daan Beekers

(2015), in which he demonstrates how preachers implement a specific type of pedagogy that he describes as 'pedagogy of persuasion'.

1.4. Fundamental Concepts: 'taᶜlīm', 'ta'dīb', and 'tarbīyah'

Islamic education is conceptualized through three fundamental principles: '*taᶜlīm*', '*ta'dīb*', '*tarbīyah*'. The first educational concept '*taᶜlīm*' points to the intellectual dimension, which include instructions and learning of a teacher (Abdullah 2018). The last two concepts '*ta'dīb*' and '*tarbīyah*' encompasses the spiritual dimension of Islamic education (Sözeri et al. 2021, p. 57). *'Ta'dīb'* refers to upbringing, while '*tarbīyah*' entails nurturing and upbringing (Abdullah 2018, p. 199; Al-Refai 2020, p. 1). Although many authors agree with the fundamental concepts of Islamic pedagogy, we could find two contrasting interpretations. For example, Al-Attas (1991) perceives *'ta'dīb'* (human moral development) as a central aspect in the holistic conception of Islamic education. He describes 'adab' as a holistic notion that entails the cognitive, social, spiritual, and physical development of humans. According to al-Attas, '*ta'dīb*' (derived from adab) is a central holistic concept that seeks to regulate man's position in this world and the hereafter. Taking a similar commitment to the relationship between Islamic pedagogy and human development, but with a somewhat different approach to make sense of the holistic nature of Islamic pedagogy, Abdullah Sahin (2013, 2018) argues that the Qur'ānic concept '*tarbīyah*', derived from '*rububiyah*' or '*rabb*', lies at the heart of the holistic interpretation of Islamic education. He defines Islamic education as a 'tarbiyatic model' that relies on the critical and reflective character of the Qur'ān, which he terms as 'Qur'ānic pedagogy'. Secondly, he calls for a transformative education system that is guided by the methodological guidelines of the holistic Islamic conception of education. Sahin highlights that offering an educational system that relies on the 'transformative framework' of the Qur'ān will contribute to an appropriate educational policy in a pluralistic and constantly changing context. In this framework, he analyses the theological notions '*islah*' and '*maslaha*' in connection to the transformative character of the Qur'ān (Sahin 2013, p. 18). As seen in the description above, the lack of a single clear conceptualization of Islamic education and the contrasting approaches on its manifestation imply that there might be a need to scrutinize what Islamic teaching entails in real practices. As such, the research question of this article is how the key concepts of Islamic educational theory are manifested in religious education centers in Belgium and how it contributes to the educational growth of Muslims.

2. Profile Description of Native Imams, Vaizes, and Preaching Teachers

In this research we focus on two educational settings: Diyanet mosques and mosque-based knowledge centers. The main difference between the two institutions lies in their relationship with the Turkish government. The Belgian branch of the Diyanet Belgium was established in 1982 and belongs indirectly to the Foreign Religious Service Department (Yurt Dışı Din Hizmetleri Müdürlüğü) of The Presidency for Religious Affairs in Ankara (Diyanet), which is considered as one of the most influential religious institutions in Europe (Van Bruinessen 2018; Sözeri et al. 2021)[1]. Characteristic of the native imams and vaizes authorities is that they do not represent the so-called imported Diyanet imams who are appointed for a period. On the contrary, they are 'native' in origin, meaning that they are born and raised in Belgium and, thus, it is expected that they are familiar with the local context and the needs of local Muslim community. These imams and vaizes are trained in the framework of the UIP project of the Diyanet. The UIP project is an initiative aiming to develop a pedagogical approach that fits the religious needs of Muslims. It could be argued that the project was developed in reaction to the above-mentioned securitization policy and the *recent* regulation to ban foreign- appointed imams (Belgisch Staatsblad 6 May 2024).

The imams and vaizes trained in the framework of this project could therefore be seen as a result of the changing educational policy of the Diyanet. We note that Diyanet no longer limits its scope to Turkish Muslims in Europe but has shifted its policy to a wider religious Muslim population, including non-Turks and Belgian converts from different parts of the world. Moreover, our fieldwork observation and current newspaper review demonstrates that the Diyanet, as a 'laik' and secular institution, seems to have developed a renewed educational policy with important emphasis on the Turkish understanding of authentic Hanafi Islam (Hürriyet Daily News 2018; Final Declaration Report European Muslims 2019, cf. section 4.0)[2]. For instance, the Diyanet started adopting a variety of practices, such as the *Muhtedi Koordinatörlügü* project (Convert Coordination Project), aiming to provide juridical guidance for new Muslims that would protect them from Salafi authorities and allow them to live according to a correct understanding of Islam. According to a representative with whom we spoke, the project was created to solve the common problem that new converts are vulnerable for Salafist authorities due to their lack of Islamic knowledge. Another important example is the influence of the Diyanet in the Cambridge Central Mosque in the UK, founded by the converted singer Cat Stevens (Yusuf Islam) and known as the first ecofriendly mosque in Europe. Since 2019, the Cambridge Mosque has received financial and personal support from the Presidium for Religious Affairs of the Diyanet.[3] However, according to the website, the mosque does not associate with a specific law school (madhab), it can still be observed that the Hanafi approach seems to have a certain influence on the educational offer. For instance, the educational practice is led by the chief imam, a theologian trained at an Ilahiyat Faculty in Turkey, appointed by the Diyanet.[4]

In contrast to native imams and vaizes in Diyanet mosques, mosque based Islamic knowledge centers have no official connection to foreign government institutions. The preachers have regularly paid jobs as Islamic teacher in regular schools in Belgium. They are young women and man who have established their own Islamic knowledge center. Their educational offer is mainly based on a combination of the Belgian educational system and the traditional teachings of Islam (Qur'ān, sunnah, ibadah). Characteristic to these preachers is that they give particular attention to interreligious dialogue and non- Muslim relations. They draw inspiration from the ILD project (Interreligious Dialogue) curriculum which they coordinate in regular schools.[5] The ILD is a project that aims to provide an additional offer for students of different faiths in regular schools to support students in developing thoughtful and clarified identifications with their diverse cultural and religious community. The teaching methods in this framework are guided by practical experience regarding active citizenship, universal human rights, and interreligious dialogue. Otherwise, these authorities could be related to the preacher typology described in the literature on revival Islam (Mahmood 2011; Jouili and Amir-Moazami 2006; Eickelman and Salvatore 2006), engaged to undertake 'da'wa' and invite people to a correct understanding of Islam. Another main difference between mosques and the centers lies in the organizational structure. While the mosque committee takes care of coordination services, such as organizing lessons and seminars or distributing invitation flyers, this task is taken up by the preachers themselves in knowledge centers, especially through teaching modules that require payment and pre-registration. Another observable difference is that preachers take a more informal and welcoming attitude. For instance, young Muslims are actively sought on social media and encouraged to register for a module on stress and depression with the catchy titles: 'Brother, sister, are you struggling with stress or depression?—Don't miss this module. This module is almost full, so hurry! Grab your calendar and "SAVE THE DATE!"'.

3. Method

This study investigated the pedagogical strategies used by religious authorities in mosques and knowledge centers by conducting a case study in mosques and mosque-based knowledge centers. In the first stage of our research, we consulted various relevant sources, such as online and print publications, journal articles, internet articles, and YouTube speeches, of the authorities who have dealt with the topic. Additionally, we included grey and policy reports. Grey literature refers to documents outside formal academic publication channels, such as reports and news articles. Our keyword search was crossed with the following: *Islamic education*, *imam*, *Diyanet*, *Belgium*. We also examined fatwa collections of different religious institutions as Dar al-Ifta, Supreme Court of Diyanet (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu) and European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR). In addition to this, we listened to recorded seminars and browsed posts of institutions that we were able to identify. These efforts shed light on both the physical and online educational activities of these institutions. After a critical review of the literature, we conducted participant observations.

Our analyses are based on in depth fieldwork in four mosques and knowledge centers in Belgium that we visited between 2018 and 2020 and in 2022. We participated in mixed and women only seminars and lessons. The seminars were variously entitled as: '*What after the dead*'? '*Legal issues and fiqh*'. '*How to deal with disappointments in life*'. Before starting the fieldwork, an invitation letter describing the purpose of the study was emailed to the centers and mosques. The participants were recruited based on several criteria. For example, the authorities were eligible for this research if she or he were working in Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia and agreed to sign the informed consent form. Additionally, they were expected to have at least two years of experience as an imam, vaize, or preacher. To preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the authorities we changed their names into numbers and anonymized the precise locations that we visited. All the authorities are between 25 and 40 years old. The majority has a Maghrebian or Turkish background.

The qualitative data obtained was analyzed using a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was functional as it helped us to acquire profound insights into the topics and enabled us to avoid our own expectation bias. The purpose of this method is to participate in the real living context of the study population (Mortelmans 2013). We analyzed the study course curricula and syllabi of the two education institutions in order to make an initial identification of modules potentially relevant to our key concept of 'Islamic teaching'. The data were obtained in three phases: *first*, we transcribed all field notes verbatim word-by-word and translated the Turkish, Arabic, and French to Dutch so that the guiding committee could check the analysis of the data. *Second*, we entered the classroom observation reports and the transcribed field notes into NVivo 11 and coded the data following a coding list developed in light of three pedagogical themes *ta'dib*, *tarbīyah*, and *ta'lim*, as described in the literature (Sahin 2013, 2018; Abdullah 2018). As such, our analysis was guided by the epistemology of Islamic philosophy, which differs from western education philosophy. The main emphasis lies in the holistic character of Islamic education that promotes both the intellectual and moral character of Muslims (Sahin 2018; Bin Baba et al. 2018). We applied these perspectives into our methodological approach by paying specific attention to self-identification and moral growth. We argue that applying these perspectives will provide a broader perspective on Islamic teaching and develop our understanding on Islamic education in mosques. Our aim is to underscore how a hermeneutical perspective is applied by the authorities and with the pedagogical strategies they use to connect with the living world of the students.

We used a standardized data procedure for collecting and analyzing data, through saturation themes and subthemes (Silverman 2010, p. 281; Richards 2009, p. 100; Corbin

and Strauss 2015). The theme was defined on the basis that it was meaningful for our research question (Clarke and Braun 2014). This process was continued by initial codes that were formed by relevant research findings (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). The main enquiries in practice that formed the major issues for our research question were, for example, '*self-identification*', '*emotions*', '*experience*', '*interreligious relations*'. Subcategories were, '*feeling home*', '*feeling persuaded*' and '*authenticity of knowledge*'. Finally, we described that the data yielded both explicit and latent themes that together form a comprehensive understanding of our key concept 'Islamic Pedagogy'.

The results presented in this article are derived from a doctoral research where we conducted participant observation. The data is based on 14 classroom observations and qualitative semi-structured interviews with 60 students and 14 authorities. Of the 14 attended seminars, 4 are analyzed in detail in this article.

4. Findings

4.1. Pedagogy of Muslim Identity and Citizenship in a Non-Muslim Context

A key focus of the educational strategies in both institutions lies on Islamic identity formation. The goal is to help the students how to navigate and balance expressions of Muslim identity within a non-Muslim context. This involves a process of fostering awareness of their own religious identity as distinct in relation to the wider majority.

Although the authorities employ similar teaching strategies, we observed differences in the way this was implemented. In mosques, *fatwā* was used as key aspect to create a sense of self-confidence in religious and social dilemmas among the students. The Islamic concepts of loyalty and citizenship served as a powerful tool to teach students how to position and define themselves within the wider society. For example, during the fiqh classes in the mosque, a student asked **Imam 1** if he was allowed to join the Belgian military service as a Muslim. The student indicated that it had always been his dream to serve in the Belgian army, but he feared that he shall be obliged to fight against Muslims in countries like Afghanistan.

> *"I would like to work for the Belgian army. Is it allowed to serve military service within the Belgian army? What if I must participate in a war with Muslims (for example Afghanistan)?"*

The imam pointed to the importance of "citizenship" and "loyalty" in his answer. He explained his opinion with the following statement:

> *"As a citizen, you have an agreement with the country in which you live. You are expected to contribute to the security of the country. Our prophet was also protected by the Christian king of Abyssinia. Muslims signed a citizenship contract and created a good relationship with them. It is a different matter of course if you must fight against Muslims. Here it is important that the war is ethical. If it goes against the ethical norms. Then, it is forbidden for you to join the military service. So, it is permissible. You must follow the rules of the country you live in. But think carefully. Listen carefully to your "widjdân"(conscience). It is important that you feel good and take care not to regret later. This choice is main".*

Noteworthy, is that a two-sided approach to loyalty can be identified in the answer of the imam: on the one hand, he reminds the student of his civic duty; on the other hand, he emphasizes the importance of considering the welfare of Muslims. Based on this account, we can state that the imam's approach is characterized by a dual approach: a dilemma where Muslims desire to comply with Islamic precepts on one hand, but simultaneously tend to fulfil the expectations of the state as a citizen. Being loyal to a non-Muslim state is,

in this regard, legitimized based the historical migration (hijra) of the prophet (Taha 2013, p. 4).

The imam's approach seems to represent a modernist vision of loyalty that seeks to redefine the classic theological distinction between the two concepts '*Dār al-Ḥarb*' (the land of war) and '*Dār al-Islām*' (homeland) based on the universality of Islam (*alamiyya)* (March 2009, p. 262). In contrast to the traditional approach, which limits his interpretation of Land of Islam to *one nation*, the imam defends the idea that different countries could be perceived as homeland. For our pedagogical model, this means that the concept 'umma' is given a broader interpretation: the conception of an Islamic state transcends any association with Islamic faith and is considered a set of legal systems (cf. Taha 2013, p. 21).[6] Put differently, according to this view, Islam could not be restricted to a certain nationality, ethnicity, culture, or tradition, but represents a way of life that encompasses all human rights and obligations (Shavit 2008, p. 20). The approach of the imam is important for our analyses as it echoes a pluralistic approach. In this regard, Muslims are advised to be loyal to a non-Islamic residential country.[7] However, and in parallel, there would be some consensus on the conditions that would legitimize a migration: *first*, the guarantee of the security, well-being, and religious freedom of Muslims; *second*, a pursuit among Muslims of spreading the universal message of Islam; and, *third*, a pursuit for harmony between Islamic and other civilizations. The latter represents the central message of *da'wa* (Al-Qaradhawi 2010; Berger 2018, p. 26).

It is important to note that the imam's approach to non-Muslims should be seen in the context of his profile as a Diyanet imam. His approach seems to stress the approach of the Supreme Court of the Diyanet (DIYK). The Diyanet makes no distinction between '*Dār al-Islām*' and '*Dār al-Ḥarb*' and represents the modernistic approach of loyalty. The underlying analogical reasoning of the Diyanet's approach, which is guided by the Hanafi–Maturidi school (madhab), is the idea that certain principles are not applicable and should be revised depending on the context of the country of residence. This approach stresses the '*taysir*' and '*al maslahat al mursalat' principles*, which stand for facilitation, applicability, and social ethics (Aydin 2015, pp. 175–79; Afsaruddin 2015, pp. 148, 150; Yakar 2021)[8]. Two examples underpin this adaptive approach: The *first* is related to Ottoman legal administration. Ottoman judges (qāḍī) who were appointed over a vast geographical area adapted their legal deliberations to the local community (March 2013, pp. 369, 370). The juridical approach of Ottoman qāḍī was guided by the idea that jurisprudence need to respond to local needs (*urf*). The *second* is related to family law. In attempting to resolve problems, the Diyanet applies a hybrid approach that combines Islamic law with Turkish state law. In drawing upon *maslaha*, it encourages Muslims to perform religious marriage (nikah) in accordance with the Turkish civil code (including dower 'mahr') (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu 2017, (nr.44) pp. 429–32, 439–44).

It is important to note that this willingness to contextualize sharia is still evident in educational strategies, particularly in comparison to countries such as Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, where the relationship between state and religion is quite different (March 2013, pp. 369–70). This approach can be seen as an important resource that reflects the encounter between Islamic law, identity, and the secular nature of the state. These key concepts reflect the necessity of one's responsibility towards the community and state and enables hybrid identities to comply with state regulations including, military, marriage, and social security, citing the legal principle of *maslaha* (Taha 2013; Yakar 2021). This fatwa clearly contrasts with the position of loyalty of '*Dār al-Iftā*' of Saudi Arabia, which bases its approach on a strict literal reading of the theological interpretation of the concepts '*Dār al-Islām*' and '*Dār al-Ḥarb*' (Shavit 2015; Taha 2013). Noteworthy, is that the *fatwā* of the imam can be seen as a clear demonstration of the impact of the historical conception of religious pluralism on the

contemporary practice of Islamic legislation (*fiqh* and *fatwā*). Otherwise, this *fatwā* points to the willingness to contextualize education.

A third confirmation was the response we received to our e-mail that we sent to the Supreme Council of *Fatwā* (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu). We received the following answer.

> *"A Muslim who reside abroad in the territory of the state of residence and have enjoyed citizenship rights, may participate in military service as a civic duty unless he provided, he does not fight against Muslims. It should not be forgotten that this permission only applies within the framework of the principle of citizenship"* (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu).[9]

An additional confirmation of this adaptive approach was found in the statement of one of the Diyanet imams we had interviewed. During our conversation, the imam stated that he takes part of a khutba (Friday sermon) commission in which he, together with other 'imam coordinators' per province, has the task to discuss what aspects to include in the weekly khutbah content. He explained that content may vary according to the needs of the Muslim community, such as *mental disorders*, *internet addiction disorders*, *Islamic marriage* and *divorce*, *Islamic nurturing*, *drug addiction*, *gambling*, *wastefulness*, and *extravagant wedding organizations*. The aim is to provide a contextualized content based on common symptoms.

Traced back to the answer of the imam, participation in the army in a non-Muslim state is perceived as a religious duty. The underlying reasoning behind this approach is the goal to spread the message of Islam. Based on the approach of the Diyanet, we can state that the educational practice of the imam is driven by the methodological guidelines that stem from the *pedagogical culture of the Maturidi–Hanafi school*. With that line of reasoning, Islamic jurisprudence '*fiqh*' becomes an important source of Muslim identification in a non-Muslim context.

This finding provides an important perspective on the content perspectives of the Diyanet. Especially when read against the background of current debates on the Diyanet, it provides remarkable insights. Although the Diyanet was perceived as one of the most moderate and acceptable religious visions, especially when compared with Salafist movements, it is nowadays attracting increasing criticism in social debates. Baser and Féron (2021), who have explored recent Turkish diaspora politics, stated that, especially since the beginning of the 2010s, European policy makers begin to be wary of the influence of Turkish politics on the Turkish diaspora. They state that various developments, such as the extension of voting rights for European Turks, that enables them to participate actively in Turkish politics, and the increase tension between the Turkish community and the PKK and Gülen movement, have strengthened the growing awareness (Baser and Féron 2021, p. 227). In contrast to its secular profile, the Diyanet has since been perceived as counterproductive for the integration process of the Turkish community. A significant conclusion that can be drawn from the previous studies is that the critique seems to be related to political and economic concerns, such as external funding of mosques and imams in order to combat Turkish authoritarianism (Öztürk and Bahar 2017). With a few exceptions about anti-LGBTQ expressions, the religious educational practices of the Diyanet do not see to trigger much reaction from European states. At this point it could be argued that the hermeneutic approach of the Diyanet is today put in a bad position in light of political issues.

Contrary to the jurisprudential teaching approach, as was the case of imam 1 in the mosque, the educational practice of the preacher is based on the pedagogy of '*speaking together*'. Dialogue sessions were created to make sensitive issues discussable. The aim of the authorities was to help students in their relations to the wider non-Muslim community by providing perspectives regarding the nature of relations with non-Muslims and promoting responsible citizenship. For instance, one of the preachers showed two different news fragments to the students. One fragment was about an Islamophobic attack on a mosque and the other about a terrorist attack motivated by Islam. The preacher

encouraged the students to compare the fragments and interpret them in a correct way. The students discussed the differences between political ideology and religion and reflected on the negative influence of misinterpretation of religious text. At the end of the lesson, they shared their thoughts about the importance of tolerance and interreligious dialogue in a pluralistic context.

In another center, **Preacher 2** provides the students with rhetorical guidelines on how they could underpin their arguments *on* difficult questions about their Muslims identity. The preacher begins his lecture with probing questions, such as "*what if they ask you why you're wearing a headscarf*" or "*what should you do if your employer asks you should refrain from fasting in Ramadan*". The objective is to equip students with the skills necessary to engage in clear and meaningful dialogue with non-Muslims. The following excerpt illustrates a conversation between the authority and the student.

The preacher asks the following:

"How will you react if your colleagues invite you for drinks for the Christmas celebration?
"What if you say no? (Preacher) The students raise their hand:

Yes sister, tell me:

"I am a convert and do not attend my parents' Christmas celebrations". (Student)

He responds as follows:

"This looks like if you feel better, as if you don't want to be with them. Personally, I think you should be there. You should go with them. Be there but leave early. Ignoring them is not a solution. Go! Join them, but don't stay too long, because if they are drinking and getting drunk and you are there . . . that is reprehensible".

As the above conversation indicates, the preacher tries to encourage openness with other believers. The only problem seems to be the consumption of alcohol. The imam doesn't perceive participation in Christmas celebrations as a religious action, but emphasizes the importance of dialogue, which he sees as an inherent part of religious duty. Important for our analysis is that his approach is not characterized by a concern of da'wa, inspired by Salafi interpretations of Islam, but implies rather a respectful participation than an active presence.[10] This becomes even more apparent as we consider his following words *'Go, otherwise it seems you feel better than them'*. His approach is therefore analogous to the inclusivist approach to interfaith dialogue. Otherwise, these words can be interpreted as an expression corresponding to *maslaha*, a principle of Islamic law that prioritizes social well-being. Noteworthy, when compared with *Dār al-Iftā*, this approach demonstrates a clear contrast with the fatwa of *Dār al-Iftā*, which prohibits Muslims to congratulate Christians with their festive occasions and interprets attendance at celebrations as a sin (General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta '*Ruling on celebration Birthdays*', Part. 4: 286). This approach relies on the idea that unbelief (ascribing partners and sons to God) cannot be honored and tolerated. For instance, according to a Salafi inspired website sponsored by Qatar Ministry Islamweb, it is forbidden to celebrate the feasts of non-Muslims, such as Christmas (Islamweb.net 2009).

We observed that the preacher creates a didactic communication style to make the student feel comfortable. The preacher suggests topics, lessons, or workplans where students can participate in different ways. By having discussions on issues at school the students were introduced in their living context. Based on our observations, we would argue that both institutions (mosques and knowledge centers) contribute to the development of citizenship and relations with non-Muslims. However, we observed an important difference: while mosques made citizenship part of their educational program to promote Hanafi schools as the core of the identity tool, by stressing the importance of a

context depended *meaning-making process* that would help to understand normative Islam in a proper way, and apply its message to a daily context; the approach of the preacher was driven by the aim to build a repertoire of resistance to the negative image of Islam and the ideal relationship with non-Muslims. They were learned about awareness on citizenship through a process which is described in the literature on minority jurisprudence (*Fiqh al-aqalliyyāt*) as *rationalization of permanent residence* in a non-Islamic context (see Taha 2013, pp. 3, 4).

As such, specific norms, such as '*citizenship*', '*umma*', and '*daᶜwā*', were worked out in current situations driven by a rational interpretation of Muslim identity. In this line, this teaching practice can be considered as a pedagogy of Muslim Identity and Citizenship. This approach contributes to the fundamental concept of Islamic pedagogy '*taᶜlīm*'. This hermeneutic approach is closely related to the view of Sahin (2018, 2013, 2021), suggesting the creation of an educational system that is focused on the task where the teacher's role is given special importance to a pluralistic understanding of the learning process.

In both cases, the authorities depart from the students' own experience and employ a communicative and interpretative didactic approach. The educational content is designed to address the specific needs arising from the changing context within the individual's life. For our study, this implies that the educational offer only becomes relevant if the students respond to the urgent demands of the new context, rather than adhering to a fixed tradition and standardized form of mosque practices. From a pedagogical point of view, the approach of these authorities can be interpreted as hermeneutic: The students were taught to interpret historical components of normative Islam as passed from generation in context of reality. This is what Didier Pollefeyt calls *hermeneutical learning* in religious education (Pollefeyt 2020). This way encouraged students to find their own unique identity in an interpretative way. Such an interpretative approach opens a new hermeneutical perspective within the learner through evaluation, communication, and self-formation, which is part of the generally accepted goal of religious education in educational theory (Roebben 2008, p. 1). The educational content is, in this sense, designed to address the specific needs arising from the changing context within the individual's life. This strategy can therefore be described as a *pedagogy of citizenship*: a process of breaking open, uncovering indifference, questioning, and positioning in a non-Muslim society.

4.2. Pedagogy of Commitment

Another important aspect that we observed was *commitment to God*. Commitment played a central role in the effort to spend time and energy for something or someone to reach God's grace. Several methods were used to highlight self-consciousness in actions. The strategic aims were to teach the students to make sense of their difficult emotions and mental relapses and to deal with it. The students were taught to seek God's peace to make sense of their difficult emotions, to accept and cope with it through devotion and dedication to God.

Praying together was one of the main methods that was helpful in dealing with stress. **Vaize 2** organized a 'khatm' prayer session with her student group at the mosque. The khatm entails a ritual in which the Qur'ān is read from the beginning to the end by the students. The khatm ended with a dua (supplication) made by the vaize. It was observed that this form of 'communal worship' had a positive impact on the relationship between students and the religious authority. The goal of the khatm was to give comfort and support to the relatives of the students in the group who deal with illness or who have passed away. It was perceived as an act to obtain God's approval by helping each other. This practice of 'praying together' can be placed in line with the iḥsān principle, which stands for a high collective consciousness or community spirit. Literally, the concept 'iḥsān' represents the

perfection of human development through common goodness (Al-Attas 1991). It implies that every member of the Muslim community has an obligation to contribute to social well-being and order. For example, during our discussion, the vaize mentioned that mosque members outside the student group joined the khatm session to enhance the effectiveness of the prayer circle. Another striking aspect was that each mosque has its own WhatsApp group. These groups were useful to create a more interactive dialogue between authority and students. This example of communal praying '*iḥsān*' is parallel with the pedagogy of bonding.

Another significant aspect of the pedagogy of commitment was ruqya. **Imam 2** performed the ruqya al-shar'iyya, a ritual performed by reciting specific Qur'ān verses in a glass of water or sugar cube. It was mainly used as mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques. The main purpose of this practice of ruqya is to heal and protect the individual from mental illness (Rassool 2015). It allows the students to become more aware about their behavioral disorder and encourages them to connect to God through acceptance and supplication (Skinner 2010).

In addition to Qur'ān healing, we could also notice that *Fatwā* was implemented as a technique for stress and oppression reduction or as a mindfulness tool. **Imam 1**, for example, applied the 'acting as if' rule of the Hanafi school as a coping strategy. When a student states that she is struggling with obsessions during prayer, the imam suggests that she should ignore and pretend the ablution was performed correctly. He emphasized that, according to the Hanafi law school, it is prohibited to break from a fard (obligatory) prayer caused by false thought and that she will sin if she cannot concentrate during prayer. He advises the student to 'ignore the negative thoughts' and pretend that she performed the ritual washing correctly (acting as if'). In this regard, unfounded beliefs and religiously contradictory thoughts are considered invalid (Abu-Raiya and Pargament 2015, p. 243).

Compared with *Imam 1* and *2*, **preacher 4** did not make use of fatwa or Qur'ānic interventions. Rather, he focused mainly on emotions such as guilt, shame, and regret.[11] His educational practice is based on a clear distinction between this world and the hereafter, and the good and bad choices that a person can make in life. The preacher tends to support the students who struggle with a sinful past by creating an ethical awareness that they have the possibility to do better and compensate for their sin. For instance, the preacher gave a sermon which was entitled as follows: *How do I react when I'm confronted with my past, for example, when seeing someone of my past?* After the seminar, the preacher holds a private spiritual guiding session with the students who had made an appointment. These guiding sessions took place in his office next to the seminar room.

We also noticed that conversion storytelling anecdotes or narratives were used as important tools to influence the inner world of the students. To illustrate this, in one of his lessons, a Muslim convert rapper was invited as a guest speaker to share his conversion story. The preacher started his seminar with a PowerPoint slide entitled: '*How can I leave my sinful life behind and start living a pure life?*'. We observed that the real-life story on his previous life as rapper made the students feel emotional. This was confirmed by the preacher who emphasized the following: "*Seminars like these 'When I was an atheist, I thought the* Qur'ān *was a violent book' are always fully booked*". Another confirmation were the conversion books we found in the library of the knowledge centers. For instance, we found the book 'Afvallige' (Apostate) in almost all the centers we visited. The book tells the conversion story of the Dutch ex-politician Joram van Klaveren, known as the former 'right-hand' of the extreme right-wing politician Geert Wilders.

The teaching practice as described above demonstrates that the preacher tends to create an ethical awareness by the students and encourages them to make a conscious difference of a 'before' and an 'after' in life. The central aim of the authority was to support students

who struggle with a sinful past by remembering them to the attribute of 'tawwab' of God. The students learn to accept their sin, to give the past away, and turn to the *rahma* of God. This strategy corresponds to the Qur'ān concept of '*muhasaba*' (self-reflection). By doing so, the teacher created a pedagogical setting where the students were remembered to their responsibility towards God to take control over their own actions and ask for repentance for their sin (*tawbah*). Based on this, we could state that the preacher's teaching was driven by the perception that God will dominate his '*rububiyah*', 'divine love' or nurturing if man succeeds in overcoming negative emotions and placing trust in God (Sahin 2018).[12] This didactic approach departs from the Qur'ān doctrine that every human is born innocent and has the cognitive ability (*irāda*) to distinguish good from evil (Isgandarova 2018b). It is, in other words, a perfect devotion to God where, in contrast to Christianity, there is no mediator between God and the individual but, contrarily, every human is regarded as responsible for his acts (*mukallaf*) and should constantly deliberate between his 'free will' (*irāda*) and 'aql' (intellect) (Düzgüner 2022, p. 71). This strategy corresponds with the Qur'ān concept of *Takwa*, which entails the idea that human nature (fitrah, nafs) is not naturally bad, but is driven by '*irāda*' (own free will) and responsibility (Düzgüner 2022).

We also notice that 'empathy' was used as a didactical tool to strengthen the *rububiyat* attribute of God. Empathy is a vital quality in fostering a successful 'imam–student' relationship and helps create a sense among students that their problems can be solved and that they can make progress. In addition, this empathetic approach ensured that students feel comfortable and motivated to participate in class. **Preacher 1** seemed successful in convincing his students. The preacher encourages students to share their experiences and begins his lecture with the following question:

Preacher:

"Who has had waswasa so far? Put your hand up. It also happened to me during prayer. (Everyone laughs).

(The participants raise their hands).
Preacher:

Yes sister! Would you like to share your experience with us? Let me first tell my experience: There was a man who suffered from waswasa during prayer; every time he prayed; all kinds of thoughts came to his mind. One day the man says: Bro, I solved my waswasa problem. His friend asks him: how did you succeed in this? He answers: 'I have stopped praying. I haven't prayed since then' (everyone laughs). Ok now seriously, let's start... Waswasa can lead to serious diseases, and it can increase the distance between you and Allah. If you work 8 h at work you have nothing, the moment you pray it will come".

Based on this answer we conclude that this empathetic approach is characterized by two aspects: 'normalization' and 'sympathy'. For instance, the preacher encourages the students to accept the behavior and makes it discussable by stating that many people struggle with similar issues. With the words, '*It happens even to me last week*', he normalizes the conflict. This technique encourages students to consider the problems or difficulties they experience as normal. This creates the feeling that problems are soluble and that they can make progress. This fact is also supported in the literature on mental health. Research on motivational interviewing reveals that an empathetic approach has a positive influence on the patient's willingness to accept feedback (Miller and Rollnick 2002). Another effective therapeutic tool beside *normalization* was *sympathy*. This was used to increase student's attention to build trust and shows vulnerability that makes students feel connected.

The above conversation clearly demonstrates that religious guiding constitutes an important aspect in the mediating role of the authority. For instance, we observed that students who experienced religion-related symptoms were most disturbed as they feel

that they have disrupted their relationship with God and fear not to be able to fulfil God's demands. We also find support for this reality in the literature. Several authors have argued that religious advice seems to have a healing effect on clients and emphasized the importance of adapting an Islamic spiritual perspective to mental illness. They rely on the fact that individuals who struggle with religion-related obsessions can be unaware of the specific content of their underlying thoughts and point to the need for Islamic spiritual care on mental illness that would assist in handling difficult emotions and allow clients to become conscious of the underlying misconceptions of their behavior (Isgandarova 2018b, 2015, p. 88; Düzgüner 2022).[13]

The fact that an important part of the practice of the *preaching teachers* takes place in mosques can be seen as another confirmation for the healing effect of religion. An explanation given by one of the preachers was that the spiritual atmosphere in the mosque has a positive effect on the mental status of the student and the relationship of trust between the student and the religious authority. These findings support and reflect the finding that feelings like bonding and trust can foster the learning process of students (Sözeri et al. 2021).

To conclude, the reflective practices as described above seem to reflect a pedagogical technique of commitment to God: The students were introduced to Qur'ānic notions as *ihsan*, *takwa*, *tawbah*, learned to accept their sin and to turn to the *rahma* of God. This approach can be interpreted as an educational strategy that contributes to the fundamental concept of Islamic pedagogy '*tarbīyah*'. An important conclusion that could be derived from the foregoing material is that besides its educational capacities as human flourishing and moral character (Sahin 2021), the concepts '*ta'dīb*' and '*tarbīyah*' also highlight a therapeutic dimension of moral behavior that contribute to the mental health of students.

5. Conclusions/Discussion

The core objective of this study was to examine the pedagogical approaches employed by two distinct authorities. Our focus lies not on pedagogy, per se, but rather on highlighting some aspects that are significant for the interpretation of Islamic education and its translation within a non-Muslim context. This study helps to gain better understanding of practice-oriented pedagogy and the way it is challenged in current mosque context. *What entails religious pedagogies? How does one speak theologically about religious practices*? These questions concern the hermeneutic role of knowledge production in a rapidly changing context. A main finding is, for instance, that '*citizenship*' and '*commitment*' provide a theoretical and conceptual tool to understand the different modalities of mosque teaching in the Belgian context.

This research reveals several insights: *First*, mosque pedagogy is characterized by a *reflective* process of learning: The starting point of education is the 'living faith' of students. The above cases clearly demonstrate that, in both settings (mosques and knowledge centers), pedagogy is produced in a particular context, influenced by the motivations, expectation, and theological approach of each institution. We observed that although the authorities in both cases share the same Sunni tradition (follow the Qur'ān and the sunnah), they differ in their strategies. While the *imams and vaizes* refer to the Supreme Court of Diyanet (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu), which is led by the Hanafi madhab, the preaching teachers draw inspiration of the main educational goals of the ILD project in regular schools. An important implication was therefore that the process of recontextualization of faith, as passed from tradition, becomes one of the major tasks in mosques. Learning is, in this sense, not a simple process of transmitting a fixed tradition, but rather a reflective changeable process through a redefinition of the relevance of Islamic standards in everyday life (Asad

2003). This hermeneutical character explains why mosque education in Europe differs from that of countries, like Turkey and Morocco (see also Sözeri et al. 2021; Hashas et al. 2018).

Second, mosque education is characterized by a *holistic* interpretation: The practices described above demonstrate that the religious authorities are looking for innovative ways to support productive learning in harmony with the Islamic worldview. In contrast to the traditional form of mosque education, new strategies are used, such as interactive seminars, workshops, contextualized Friday speaking and psychological counseling. We would observe that the students, *on the one hand* were encouraged to *rationalize the universal understanding of Islamic ethics*. For instance, specific norms as '*citizenship*', '*umma*', '*da'wa*' were worked out in current situations driven by a rational interpretation of Muslim identity (*cf 3.1*). Based on these findings, it can be considered that the educational practices contribute to the formation of invisible loyalties that shape and provide the basis of identity (Pollefeyt 2020). Identity is in this regard not static, but dynamic. As suggested by social constructivist theory, identity embodies a dynamic process that changes through revision and renegotiation and is largely shaped by contextual aspects, such as challenges to the experience of men, educational settings that men participate in, or authorities that men engage with. This is an important finding especially considering the sample of the students in this study. The students are adults who participate autonomously in a variety of learning activities and lessons of their choice in order to solve their religious challenges and their experience. In contrast to children, their choices seem not to be influenced by extern factors such as parents or other family members. It can therefore be stated that the educational approach may benefit identity construction. Especially in the light of previous social and academic debates on mosque education expressing concerns about the negative influence of mosque education on the integration process of children, it gives different insights (Halstead 2004). In this sense, our findings contribute further insights to the conclusions of previous studies on mosque education (Sözeri et al. 2021; Kortmann 2014) who state that mosque education takes an active role in constructing identity.

On the other hand, the students were encouraged to *spiritualize their mind*. For instance, they were introduced to Qur'ānic concepts regarding the educational quality of God '*rahma, rububiyah*' (mercy). Moreover, we could notice that these concepts were given a therapeutic interpretation in a mosque context. The didactical teaching was driven by Qur'ān concepts, such as '*ihsan*', '*takwa*', and '*tawbah*' that served as a helpful 'guide' to encourage the students to take steps towards behavioral change *(cf 3.2)*. Our findings demonstrate that Islamic education entails not only knowledge transmitting, but provides fundamental insights for moral development. This situation is parallel with previous findings showing that new forms of knowledge production are influenced by a certain degree of emotional devotion. For example, Jouili (2015) points out that the process of engagement with religious authorities is largely coupled with an aim to cultivate new forms of spiritual development. Our findings provide insight on this process showing how spiritual teaching practices can reinforce the formation of this pious inner. Thus, it can therefore be stated that engagement with religious authority and the practice of devotional theology they produce could be crucially important to solve challenges Muslims deal with, such as identity crisis or pathological forms of extremism. As described in the cases, our findings give implications on other forms of Islamic nurturing, such as pastoral care, spiritual healing, and preaching. Therefore, our findings can contribute to the debate in the literature on the potential impact of religion on mental health of Muslims. In relation to this, it can therefore be emphasized that a cooperation between health care institutions and religious authorities could be instrumental in reinforcing Islamic education practices to respond to spiritual and mental challenges students experience.

When turned back to the two reflective processes that we describe as pedagogy of *citizenship* and pedagogy of *commitment*, it could be stated that the first process entails an educational strategy that contributes to the rational dimension of Islamic pedagogy 'taʿlīm', while the second seems to correspond with the spiritual interpretation 'ta'dib' and 'tarbīyah'. **As such**, mosque education reflects a double-faced character which could be described as an interwoven process of *rationalization of spirit and spiritualization of ratio.* The efforts to contextualize mosque pedagogy shows clear indications with a return to the holistic vision of Islamic education. Mosque education could therefore be interpreted as an ongoing process of identity and spiritual construction (Alkouatli 2018; Sahin 2018). These indications seem to correspond with several authors (Jacobsen et al. 2023, p. 188) who perceive mosques as 'lived institutions'.

Third, another strength of this study is that our insights contribute to the debates on the Islamic religious authority in Belgium. The certain forms of pedagogy give implications about how authority is gained, who decides the interpretations, and who speaks for Islam. For example, concerning legitimacy, Masooda Bano (2022) stated in her article that authorities who are able to relate their knowledge to western legal debates appear to be more successful in gaining legitimacy among students. Additionally, the practice of vaizes can also be seen as a confirmation of the feminization of Islamic authority (see Bano and Kalmbach 2011). Especially in the case of the Diyanet, it is stated that 70 percent of graduates of international theology programs are female (Yasar 2022, p. 21). It is important to consider that these developments, as described above, will give rise to new challenges of Islamic religious authority in Belgium.

On the other hand, it is important to note that our findings cannot be generalized to all Islamic knowledge centers and the Diyanet mosques in Belgium. For example, several authors are concerned about the negative influence of political state propaganda hindering integration. Although this is an important aspect of Islamic education diplomacy, the design of our study and the limited number of participants do not allow us to make claims in that regard. We only participated in the educational practices of a limited number of native imams, vaizes, and preaching teachers who were born and raised in Belgium. Therefore, we were not able to gain insight in the whole practices of these educational settings. Though we tried to make the sample as representative as possible the analyses of the cases gives us only a glimpse of what is happening in the field.

Furthermore, this study brings in light the importance of the need to debate and investigate the role of the imam in diasporic context. The authorities not only take a role as educationalist (*mu'allim*), but as a spiritual counselor (*murabbi*). Another striking characteristic to mosque education is that the mosque institution is mainly perceived as part of a 'waqf' system and has therefore no hierarchy (Schmid et al. 2022). In contrast to Catholic church hierarchy, the contemporary mosque structure is rather characterized by a community-based governance model that stems from the history and is passed from generation to generation. The waqf and its community-based structure plays an important role in the institutionalization process of Islam in contemporary context. A clear example can be found in the work of Selim Argun who unraveled the ʿulamāʾ-waqf relation in Ottoman tradition (1789–1839) through a historical–sociological lens (Argun 2022). The mosque constitutes therefore an autonomous organization that is gaining more importance in a European context.[14] In this sense we argue that the qualifications of the imams such as community building, charisma, expertise ('know-how') and professional training are of increasing importance.

This study is a unique contribution in two distinct ways. First, it helps to employ a further elaborated conceptualization of adequate theoretical reflections on the meaning of Islamic education. In addition to demonstrating the important role of spiritual and

juridical tradition in mosque education, this study also shows how Islamic jurisprudence and doctrine gain an 'epistemic weight' in the production of Islamic knowledge. We argue that mosque education is in constant transformation based on the methodologic and conceptual challenges it is facing today. Given their importance and their independent status mosques now receive growing attention from decision makers around the world. Despite increased recognition of its importance, there are no existing studies who examine the role of Islamic juridical and spiritual tradition in mosques education. Noteworthy is that, even in Muslim majority countries, mosque pedagogy seems to be an understudied field. We would therefore propose to focus more on the educational dynamics of mosque education. We argue that restricting the analytical lens to deradicalization policy measures in Islamic education research would result in a situation wherein new familiarities to religious discourse and different styles of Islamic hermeneutic argumentation through generational and geographical differences remain unexplored. This observation has already been made by other authors in the field of Islamic knowledge production. From a theological perspective, Sahin (2018, p. 6) and Ucar (2011) point to a need for more insight into lived practices including faith, theology, and psychology in educational research in order to respond to challenges regarding faith formations of ordinary Muslims. A similar statement is echoed from an anthropological perspective by Sunier (2012, 2023) and Groeninck and Boender (2020) who emphasize the impact of apt description in Muslim ethical life and the formation of professional teacher training (Groeninck and Boender 2020, pp. 1, 4). See also Fadil (2019, pp. 14, 17) who propose a different (anthropological) reading of knowledge production on Islam in Europe with a particular focus on its epistemological challenges.

Notes

[1] In Belgium, 74 mosques fall under the network of the Belgian branch of Diyanet. Here we use the word 'indirectly' as we refer to the '*native imams*' and '*vaizes*' who are trained in the framework of the UIP program of Diyanet. Otherwise, in one of our conversations with a representative of Diyanet, the Belgian branch of Diyanet was described as an independent organization. (Interview with DIB representative 10 November 2019).

[2] Here we refer to the final report that was declared at the end of the symposium on European Muslims organized by Diyanet on 4 January 2019. The symposium was organized in collaboration with the German branch DITIB and brought together Muslim leaders and Islamic NGO from all over the world. The global consensus reflects on strengthen welfare among European Muslims, such as developing adaptation strategies in Islamic knowledge production in a minority context (*Fiqh* al-*aqalliyyāt*, providing authentic Islamic knowledge, and fight against the spread on Islamophobia and violent Islamic movements in Europe (Final Declaration of European Muslims Symposium 2019 'Avrupa Muslumanlari Sonuc Bildirgesi 2019').

[3] The opening ceremony in April 2019 therefore took place in the presence of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and the President of the Presidency for Religious Affairs (Ankara) Ali Erbas (see news item bbc.com: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-50666385) (accessed on 1 December 2020).

[4] Additionally, one of the guest speakers of the Cambridge Mosque, Imam Dr. Suleyman van Ael (a well-known Belgian preacher of Antwerp descent (and ex-Salafist)) explains during his lecture how he converted to the Hanafi madhab after a long 'rational'

search for authentic Islam (see sermon 'My Journey' Shaykh Dr. Sulayman Van Ael: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqJOzmbTfxs) (accessed on 1 December 2020).

5   The 'Interreligieuze Dialoog' project was created after the terrorist attacks and aims to contribute to a collaborative support between among philosophical courses in the third grade of Belgian secondary schools: see https://pro.g-o.be/themas/beleid-en-standpunten/interlevensbeschouwelijke-dialoog-ild/ (accessed on 5 October 2020).

6   Theological discourse is based on two contrasting approaches: a traditional or 'exclusive' and a modern or 'inclusive' approach. The difference between the two approaches is based on the classic theological distinction between

'*Dār al-Ḥarb*' (the land of war) and '*Dār al-Islām*' (Land of Islam)' (March 2009, p. 262). The starting point of the debate is the religious status of a Muslim in a minority position. For example, based on a strict distinction between the two concepts the exclusive vision defends the idea that Muslims could not be loyal to a Non-Muslim state (Shavit 2015; Taha 2013). The main rational behind this approach is related to (1) the Qur'ānic verse (Al-Nisā 97) that makes a strict distinction between '*Dār al-Ḥarb*' (the land of war) and '*Dār al-Islām*' (Land of Islam) and (2) the prophetic sunnah. Relying on the forced migration (*hijra*) of Muslims and the constitution of Medina it is argued that one cannot be socially loyal to a non-Islamic country. Contrary to the traditional approach, modernists strive for a rational relationship between experience and doctrine (text). They call for an interwovenness between Islam and the West. This approach departs from the principle of *alamiyya* (universality of Islam) rather than *hakimiyya* (fixed, unchangeable principles) and is characterized by the idea that the divine text and contemporary dynamics do not conflict with each other. On the contrary, any contextual reading of Islamic text should reflect the universal quality of Islam (Berger 2006, p. 341). In this context Qaradawi speaks of a civil home state rather than a religious home state.

7   A similar fatwa was released by the European Council for Fatwa and Research, Qaradawi, "Duties of Muslims Living in the West". Qaradawi's position is based on the idea that the Muslim nation (umma) is not limited to a particular community or state but is blind to borders (Shadid and van Koningsveld 2002; Shavit 2008, p. 20; Al-Qaradhawi 2001). This theory represents the disciplines 'fiqh or Balances' and 'fiqh or priorities' (*darura*).

8   '*Maslaha*' and '*taysīr*' are legal principles that are part of *fiqh al aqalliyyat* (minority jurisprudence). These principles could be used in juridical deliberations if no answer can be found within one school of law (madhab). The '*maslaha*' principle, more specifically '*istislah*' stands for balancing the public interest (Afsaruddin 2015, p. 150). '*Taysīr*' al fiqh stands for "facilitation" and is an important legal principle that relies on "urf" (local conditions or context). The concept comes from the word (ya-sa-ra) which stands for facilitation or leniency. A common example of '*taysīr*' is the "*hybridization of madhāhib*", a method that enables to refer to another madhab if it puts the individual in a more advantageous position (Taha 2013, p. 12).

9   The original response is as follows: "*Yabanci bir devlette yasayan ve o ulkenin vatandasi olan bir Musluman, Muslumanlarin zararina savasmamasi kaydiyla orada bir vatandaslik gorevi olarak askerlik vazifesini yerine getirebilir. ancak bur durulumun vatandas olmanin getirdigi bir zorunlulukta alakali oldugu unutulmamalidir*". This response was received on 22 September 2023.

10 However, the term *da'wa* was mainly associated with opposition movements earlier in the century, particular the Muslim Brotherhood, it later became the conceptual site wherein virtue activist Muslims act to promote ethical practices that constitute Islamic modes of piety (Hirschkind 2001, p. 11).

11 These preaching teachers used catchy and emotionally charged titles as instrument to reach a wide public. For instance, important parts of the teaching modules were entitled: "How do I let go of my past?", "Brings heartbreak closer to Allah?", "How to deal with stress?", "Is depression haram?", "Learn to accept your past"," How to handle waswasa during the COVID-19 pandemic?", "Brings heartbreak closer to God" and "How to deal with disappointments and setbacks in life".

12 The term rahma is derived from the word 'rhm' that states for mother womb. Just like a mother shows mercy to her child, God will also show rahma to his servant if he is upright and takes responsibility (mercy) to his sin (Düzgüner 2022).

13 During our fieldwork we find some confirmations for the importance of a juridical lens to mental illness. For instance, during one of the lectures in a mosque, the following questions were asked: "*I cut a piece of hair from my deceased mother. My family members said that I have sinned and that my deceased mother would be angry with me for disturbing the funeral ritual. Will Allah forgive me? I am concerned and cannot sleep because of this concern*".

In addition, in one of my interviews, the imam stated the following: "*Especially here in Brussels it happens that men can claim that they have been chosen as mehdi (messias: One night a man knocked on my door. It was three in the night. I opened the window of my bedroom. The man joyfully claimed that he, in his dream, had received the good news that he was chosen as Mahdi. He said he was ordered to spread the truth among Muslims. I said the following: Don't worry. If there is anyone who deserves this status, I am. Am I not the most educated among you? I am the imam, right? The man agreed and returned home*". (He laughs).

14 The waqf ensured the training and education of Ottoman alim, respected by king, caliph or sultan through gifts by waqf (financial support) (Bruce 2019). This charity system is also seen as alternative for western capital system (Muna 2023).

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