MARTINA CRESCENTI

Education and Islamic identity in contemporary society. From Quranic precepts to everyday forms of living
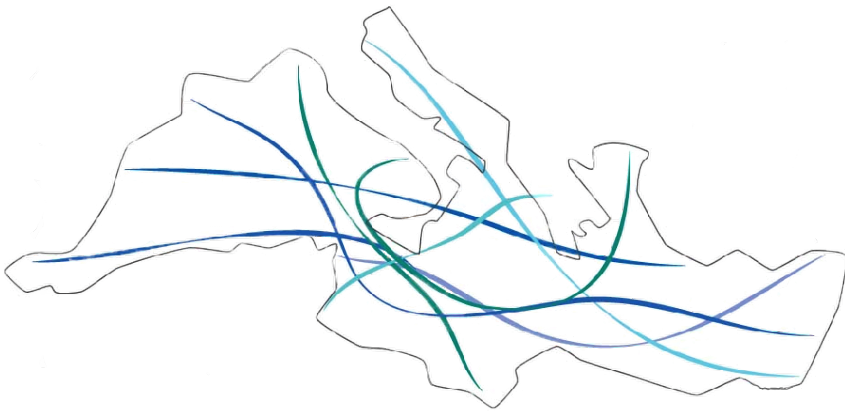
Author
Martina Crescenti, Università di Torino, martina.crescenti@unito.it

On the cover: *Routes* by ISIA Roma Design

- Peer Reviewed Journal

INDEXED IN
DOAJ

Education and Islamic identity in contemporary society. From Quranic precepts to everyday forms of living

Abstract

This essay analyzes educational and socializing modes to Islam in contemporary society, particularly focusing on two traditional socializing agencies, the family and the Quranic school, and two "innovative" agencies for Islam, namely association and social networks. Beginning with the conception of the "good Muslim" as defined in the reference texts, the Quran and the Sunna, it analyzes how the believer educates and self-socializes to Islam in a society that is highly complex, differentiated, and traversed by continuous social and cultural phenomena of destabilization. Not only do associations and social networks propose and constitute particularly flexible and multifunctional spaces of socialization, but also the most "stable and secure" agencies in the definition and construction of Muslim identity, including the family, find themselves reworking, modifying, and constructing unique and original educational processes in order to live daily according to Quranic precepts.

Keywords: Islamic education, Islamic identity, Quranic precepts, lived Islam, socializing agencies

Educación e identidad islámica en la sociedad contemporánea. De los preceptos coránicos a las formas de la vida cotidiana

Resumen

Este ensayo analiza los modos de educación y socialización al Islam en la sociedad contemporánea, centrándose en particular en dos agencias de socialización tradicionales, la familia y la escuela coránica, y en dos agencias "innovadoras" para el Islam, es decir, la asociación y las redes sociales. Partiendo del concepto de "buen musulmán", tal y como se define en los textos de referencia (el Corán y la Sunna), se analizan las maneras cómo el creyente se educa y se auto-socializa al Islam en una sociedad altamente compleja, diferenciada y atravesada por continuos fenómenos de desestabilización social y cultural. No sólo las asociaciones y las redes sociales proponen y constituyen espacios de socialización particularmente flexibles y multifuncionales, sino que también las agencias más "estables y seguras" en la definición y construcción de la identidad musulmana, incluida la familia, se encuentran reelaborando, modificando y construyendo procesos educativos únicos y originales para vivir diariamente según los preceptos coránicos.

Palabras clave: educación islámica, identidad islámica, preceptos coránicos, islam practicado, agencias de socialización

Educazione e identità islamica nella società contemporanea. Dai precetti coranici alle forme di vita quotidiana

Sinossi

Il presente saggio analizza le modalità educative e di socializzazione all'Islam nella società contemporanea, concentrandosi in particolare su due agenzie di socializzazione tradizionali, la famiglia e la scuola coranica, e su due agenzie "innovative" per l'Islam, ovvero l'associazione e le reti sociali. Partendo dalla concezione del "buon musulmano", così come definito nei testi di riferimento il Corano e la Sunna, si analizza come il credente viene educato e si autosocializza all'Islam in una società altamente complessa, differenziata e attraversata da continui fenomeni di destabilizzazione sociale e culturale. Non solo le associazioni e le reti sociali propongono e costituiscono spazi di socializzazione particolarmente flessibili e multifunzionali, ma anche le agenzie più "stabili e sicure" nella definizione e costruzione dell'identità musulmana, tra cui la famiglia, si trovano a rielaborare, modificare e costruire processi educativi unici e originali per vivere quotidianamente secondo i precetti coranici.

Parole chiave: Educazione islamica, Identità islamica, precetti coranici, Islam praticato, agenzie di socializzazione

Education and Islamic identity in contemporary society. From Quranic precepts to everyday forms of living

MARTINA CRESCENTI
Università di Torino

Introduction

In contemporary society, the educational and socialization process is a particularly relevant topic as it is intertwined with the new practices of living in an increasingly unstable and fragmented reality, as became clear during the world crisis from Sars Covid-19. In the uncertainty of a particularly chaotic, flexible and dynamic present, the security of constructing one's own identity vanishes to give way to the various cultural and communicative processes that invade individual and collective reality. Religion, which has always been a point of reference for societies, is also experienced differently, fragmented, individually and differently from one cultural context to another. Migration processes have changed the way of experiencing the private and public religious space of migrants who, in host contexts, find new and different forms of security, stability and need in faith.

Education in Islam, thus the construction of Muslim identity, within different social and cultural realities has also been modified by more fragmented socializing modes, but there remains, in our view, a particularly deep-rooted sense of uniformity. This cohesive force can be found in the presence of the sacred texts, the Quran and Sunna, which are read and interpreted in every Muslim group. Since the Quran is the word of God, the text and its precepts have a sacred nature and become role models for being a "good Muslim." The conception of the good Muslim is linked to family and community educational needs, since collective welfare depends on personal

conduct. However, it is "compromised" in contact with a reality that follows not only religious precepts, as contrary to this is more favorably the case in Islamic or Islamic-majority states, but trends contrary to Islamic morality. For this reason, the educational system, from the more traditional one in families and Quranic schools to the Islamically "innovative" one as in associationism and social networks, must on the one hand respect Quranic prescriptions and prohibitions and on the other hand reconcile with the everyday forms of living in a complex and differentiated society.

From this reflection, this essay investigates how the four socializing agencies mentioned above shape and lead the Muslim believer to self-socialize in a highly flexible process dependent on cultural, political, economic and relational factors.

1. Islamic education of the "good Muslim": a theoretical look

"At the heart of the Islamic concept of education lies the goal of training good Muslims who have an understanding of Islamic rules of behavior and a strong knowledge of the faith and devotion to the creed" (Halstead, 2004, p.159).

In the Arabic language, the term "education" does not correspond exactly to the terms used by Western educational philosophers, sociologists and pedagogues, but consists of a broad and complex definition that includes the acquisition of knowledge, growth toward spiritual maturity and good manners (Halstead, 2004). The term commonly used to define the concept of Islamic education is *ta'lim* coming from the root *'ilm* (from the meanings: to know, to be aware, to learn, to perceive), which denotes knowledge coming from teaching. Moreover, the Arabic language does not allow for a distinction between "education, schooling, teaching, training, instruction and upbringing" (Halstead, 2004, p.519), as is the case in the Western cultural context, where significance is shaped according to the contexts in which the term is used and according to different purposes (purely pedagogical, intellectual, didactic, and so on).

The concept of education can be difficult to understand if read from a Eurocentric point of view, as it does not take into account

the way different cultures internationally influence educational systems, for example by prioritizing one aspect of the educational process over another, the way education is conceived and educational relationships are constructed. Trying to define such a concept, the sociological and theological literature divides into two main streams: those who argue that faith education does not legitimize a person's autonomy and freedom of critique, thus opposing liberal and Islamic rationalist conceptions (Healstead, 2004), and those who instead argue for the presence of rationality in the Islamic concept of education (Bagheri & Khosravi, 2006).

For Muslim believers, the first and foremost training is contained in the fundamental sacred texts, the Quran and Sunna. The Quran repeatedly exhorts believers to acquire and share knowledge, but more importantly it invites them to use reason to verify both the information they have acquired and their own knowledge about Revelation (Douglas & Shaikh, 2004). A hadith (saying or fact of Muhammad) from the Sunna states that Muhammad advised followers to think independently without acting blindly on his pattern of behavior and thinking (Douglas & Shaikh, 2004). To understand precisely what it means to be "good Muslims," it is necessary to specify what is meant by the goodness of individuals from an Islamic perspective: "accepting the obligations imposed by the deity through his Word; striving to become wise (*hikma*) and righteous (*'adl*) as explained in Revelation; striving to grow as a person from a spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and sensitive point of view; developing all the potentialities of the "perfect human being" according to the Mohammedan model; and finally allowing oneself to be disciplined by Islamic principles and making even the most mundane and earthly act correspond to an act of devotion" (Healstead, 2004, p. 523).

In addition to declaring one's devotion in God by uttering the testimony of faith, the believer should first acquire and follow the *adab*, which is the custom or norm of conduct transmitted from generation to generation. It constitutes the set of rules of behavior in relationships, good manners, the most important principles by which to act and think "in an appropriate, dignified, elegant and magnanimous manner in all circumstances of public and private life"

(Vercellin, 2002, p. 351). The second element to be acquired is the *'ilm* translatable as knowledge. Putting a distinction between knowledge and ignorance, the Quran itself asks whether those who know and those who do not know are equal, and Muhammad answers that God will increase knowledge among his believers (Akkach, 2019, p. VI). *'ilm* is related, according to some lexicographers, to *ʿālamo* (world) meaning that the divine act is fundamentally an act of knowledge and creates the world as a product of knowledge (Akkach, 2019).

The latter conception is particularly interesting in that the vital world endowed with meaning (the Islamic religion) in which individuals-believers are born and interact constitutes the only knowledge of those who belong to it. Especially, in this case, the symbolic knowledge of the world is literally created by a divine act, so the presence of only one possible reality-truth for human beings is emphasized, which consists of Islam. The last element to be acquired to become a "good Muslim" is *tarbiyah* corresponding to the moral growth of the individual: a set of ethics and knowledge that build the moral believer. Derived from the Arabic root *rbd*, meaning "to grow up," *tarbiyah* also refers to the process of socialization, growth and orientation of the child toward a state of completeness and maturity in order to lead a happy and fruitful life and to aspire to a reward of faith in the world beyond (Halstead, 2004).

In Islam, to educate means to develop personal and collective identity awareness related to one's sense of belonging to the community. There is a tendency in Islamic literature, at least at the primary stage of children's socialization, to argue that "children should be guided by deeply perceived Islamic ethical values" (Halstead, 2004, p.519), disciplined even mentally to acquire knowledge, not so much to satisfy an intellectual curiosity or to gain earthly material benefits but precisely to become rational individuals and support the moral, spiritual and physical well-being of family members (Husain & Ashraf, 1979). There is much more emphasis on the aspect of acquiring Islamic knowledge than on pure reflection and criticism. In the later stages of socialization, the need to develop a capacity for deep reflection and critique of sacred texts is affirmed in order to relate to and act responsibly toward society.

2. Family upbringing between precepts and life requirements

The characteristic feature of the Muslim family lies in resting its normative and relational roots on an ancient religious corpus originating in the Quran and Sunna, texts that are prescriptive and inalienable in nature. The importance and solidity of the family model conveyed in these texts, which refers to the Prophet Muhammad's family, is still stable and present in contemporary societies, as every indication provided in the Quran is sacred as the divine Word; while every indication provided in the Sunna and the Prophet's biography goes to constitute a legal, normative and value-based reference for the conduct of daily life, since Muhammad is the Chosen One of God who first built a Muslim family and raised children as such (El Syam, 2017; Ramadan, 2007). It is clear that the Quranic model should be analyzed by considering its elaboration within the cultural framework of the first century CE, however, over the centuries each family unit has been constructed by referring to it and diversifying itself especially depending on the context in which it found itself, in societies with an Islamic majority or in minorities that offered and demanded before as today different needs of coexistence (Bernardes, 1985).

Traditionally, in the Islamic family, both parents take an interest in the care and education of the offspring, but it is a task that falls mainly to the mother, as the father has to devote himself to maintaining the family by working in the public sphere. There are several verses in the Quran in which the parent-child relationship is defined, such as when the latter is advised to respect their parents and show gratitude to them ("Be grateful to Me and to your parents. To Me you will all return," Chebel, 2013, p.161) and to address at least one word of kindness to them ("[...] do not rebuke them, but give them words of gentleness. Tilt before them meekly the wing of submission and say -Lord, have mercy on them, as they did on me, raising me when I was a child!-Chebel, 2013, p.161). In particular, the emphasis is on the mother who cared for him from birth by nursing him: "about his parents (the mother who carried him among a thousand hardships in her bosom, and weaned him when he was two years old...) (Chebel, 2013, p.161).

At the age of seven, a turning point in socialization paths takes place: according to one *hadith* Muhammad explains to the parent to "be kind to your children for the first seven years and strict in the following" (Bargeron, 2015, p.16); also from the age of seven, the Prophet advises the family to teach the child ritual prayers, because these years are critical for discerning truth from falsehood (Younos, 2011). In fact, in various contemporary Islamic societies, around the age of seven, male children are circumcised and begin to attend the mosque regularly, while female children begin to wear the veil: the mosque and its Quranic school are the very first places where the young person begins to learn about the religion outside the family. It consists of a decisive moment for both sexes: the child symbolically enters adulthood and becomes responsible to society by acquiring a clear and defined masculine role; while the girl begins the phase of sexual development that, on the one hand, inevitably leads her to "cover" her body from the male gaze (veil, loose and opaque clothing) by changing the way she relates to her body, and on the other hand, makes her responsible as a future mother. Modesty and morality are essential elements for the conduct of both sexes, who must build their first social relationships in play and school environments.

While raising children, parents perform the task of socialization agents "as good Muslims" by respecting their own educational needs and the social expectations of acquaintances and the community as a whole (Bargeron, 2015 Eickelman, 1985; Huda & Noh 2020; Al Zbon & Smadi, 2017; Abdallah, 1996). The children are raised not only by their parents, but also by uncles, cousins, grandparents, and family members with varying degrees of kinship, and last but not least friends and acquaintances who may be involved in different ways in the socialization of the children, such as keeping them in their own homes for a period, educating them in specific subjects, accompanying them to Islamic festivals, visiting them regularly, and engaging them as domestic help. Within family relationships, adherence to Islam and how it is practiced can become an element of confrontation between parents and children. Adolescent children may want to distinguish themselves from their parents, who due to a generational cultural distance, may not understand, accept the

new ways of Islamic socialization experienced by young people. Some children's choices in the religious field, for example, not wearing the headscarf or not performing the five daily prayers, may be the cause of parental reworkings on how to be a "good practitioner." This calls into question the identity of Muslims in contemporary society, therefore of the formative ways it needs (Crescenti 2021).

It can be seen that the community plays a particularly controlling role as if it were a "big family" (in fact, Muslims call each other brother and sister) over individuals and households, so much so that parents perceive the propriety and impropriety of decisions made in the socialization journey, which still takes place in the private sphere. This model leads to an expanded type of religious socialization over multiple parental degrees (uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews of various degrees), which includes a strong emphasis on the aspect of intergenerationality, which can be a support for family welfare on a social and economic level. This type of pattern is most prevalent where contextual conditions permit, for example, in Muslim-majority settings. Migration, for example, leads particularly large families to separate and experience transnational relationships where intergenerational and gendered needs for care, education and need are reshaped. Those who might have been cornerstones of education in the family, such as grandparents and particularly educated relatives, lose their relevance or regain it at specific times of the year, for example during summer vacations that bring families together (Crespi & Zanier, 2020).

In the socializing dynamics of everyday life, each family presents its own ways of educating its children according to the needs of the living context. Interest in children's religious education, preparation on Islamic content of parents, and time and energy available to family members are among some of the factors that affect the construction of Islamic identity of offspring. The context in which families live can also radically change the way they educate, for example, if they are part of Islamic societies where the entire social context promotes and supports religious education, or if they are part of minorities in other-religious or secular countries where the context does not favor Islamic education for various factors. In this

case, time devoted to children, precarious economic conditions, disadvantages related to citizenship rights, and the quality and number of secondary socializing agencies affect the timing and manner of family socialization. Despite the contextual differences, what is evident from the research and literature is the consistent reference to a common model of the Islamic family, the one defined in the sacred texts, and a model of upbringing that every believer is aware of and should aspire to.

3. Islamic schooling beyond education: a diverse socialization

At the community level, the most important context for the transmission of religious knowledge and socialization of believers is the Quranic school or madrasa, which is almost always established in connection with a mosque or prayer hall (Boyle, 2004). Since ancient times this has been the most widespread educational institution in Islamic civilization "due to the fact that its purpose is to preserve Islamic precepts and their symbols" (Tibi, 2001, p.168). The Quranic school has always served as a center of socialization in every Islamic minority and state regardless of internal divisions within the faith: any Sunni, Shiite or heterodox Islamic movement has its own school. In many cultural contexts, such a space constitutes the only place of education where emotional relationships, need, mutual aid and economic support are woven together for the indigent segments of the population (Noor et al., 2009), who for economic and subsistence reasons do not have the opportunity to participate in state school education.

The school is a space for transmission of the Islamic religion from the believer's earliest years to adulthood, a gathering place for those who want to deepen their faith and discuss sacred texts. Traditionally, girls and boys attend the same classes on Islam without gender separation; but after circumcision is performed around the age of 7, the male separates from his female peers and goes through special educational paths, as he is now considered a young adult male. According to some research in Morocco, Nigeria, and Yemen, Quranic schooling is perceived by parents as a suitable

space to provide valuable preparation for their children to enter public schooling and to learn a respectful and consonant attitude within multiple social situations regardless of geographic location (Boyle, 2004).

The continued presence of Quranic schools over the centuries is most likely due to the common content transmitted among schools around the world, including the teaching of the Quranic text and sacred sources and their recitation in Arabic, and also to very static and uninnovative teaching models concerning the asymmetrical teacher-pupil relationship. Only towards the end of the 19th century did these institutions undergo a major crisis due to Western educational and pedagogical influences, making them more similar in structure and curriculum to state secular schools or even indistinguishable from them (Boyle, 2004). Especially from the 20th century to the present, Islamic places of education have begun to compare themselves with modern schools and universities especially of the European type: in fact, the most important theological faculties on the *universitas litterarum* model have sprung up in the latter period (Tibi, 2001).

The most important change for *madrasas* in the Islamic world, however, involved their opening to women, who until then were almost completely excluded and received only limited domestic education for the purpose of performing daily tasks and special religious occasions. This change came about because of the globalization phenomena that allowed the transmission of cultural models that differed from Islamic ones especially in terms of values and customs. As Bano (2010) clearly explains, the global circulation of new cultural models has provoked internal discussions within individual communities to try to accommodate or curb certain cultural influences that do not conform to Islamic morals.

In Pakistan, for example, dedicated education for women in *madrasas* became a way to counter the influences of modernity, "preserving good moral character and family structure" (Bano, 2010, p.8). The same phenomenon occurred in India (Borker, 2018), Turkey and Saudi Arabia (Alsuwaida, 2016), completely different cultural, social and political contexts. In these countries, too, education in traditional Quranic schools has been opened to women

in order to make them communicators of religious knowledge, give them the positions of prayer leaders and Quranic reciters (*hafiz*), legitimizing them with the principle expressed in the *hadith* declaring that every Muslim, man or woman, should seek knowledge (Alsuwaida, 2016). In legitimizing this openness, the story of Muhammad's wife Aysha, who according to tradition discussed various issues and political matters with the prophet, is frequently cited. Such a tale is used to demonstrate, testify and validate the ability of women to be able to express and make decisions on issues crucial to the welfare of the community (Alsuwaida, 2006).

Not in all contexts where Muslims reside are there actual Quranic schools located in specific public entities. It is more common for many groups often with few economic resources to organize Quranic recitation courses by means of bargain means and in entirely spontaneous ways. If one were to analyze such organizations systematically, they would not always be easily traced and would appear as submerged activities. In Kemalist Turkey (1923-1955), for example, Quranic lectures and recitation of texts for sacred events were organized clandestinely in private homes by women cantors, male imams, hafiz i.e., "Quranic memorizers" as is partly still the case today, although the majority of these activities have been restored to the public level since the 1980s (Crescenti, 2016).

A further distinction must be made between state-run *madrasas* and *madrasas* that are not legitimized by the state or the majority of the local community: when the government does not allow a pluralism of views within Islam, informal Quranic schools and assembly halls (sometimes private houses, basements, backrooms) emerge clandestinely. *Madrasas* unofficialized by the authorities are also established when minorities of Islamic groups promote them, if the number of members is sufficient to create and support the school's expenses. In contrast, state schools must contain and convey certain messages that are often openly propagandistic toward the government and maintain social order by legitimizing the power that protects and subsidizes them. At the social level, *madrasas* can also serve as focal points for the formulation of political ideas, social contestation and dissent (Boyle, 2004). In some geographic areas, Quranic schools are spaces dedicated to

training the population according to conservative political ideas and sometimes training grounds for terrorist groups (Noor et., 2009).

4. Islamic associationism: education, empowerment and citizenship

In addition to purely educational institutions, Islamic communities have organized themselves during the 20th century with the creation of associations often linked to and subsidized by political movements and parties, or with the establishment of nongovernmental associations, associations for cultural promotion, and voluntary associations, which have come to constitute new agencies of socialization to Islam, oriented either to stimulate among believers collective values or to promote the welfare of the individual believer (Harmsen, 2008). A first difference must be made about the context in which they are present, that is, whether they operate in majority Islamic contexts or within and founded by minorities. Although the types of associations are similar, they may perform different functions in the community; in those operating within minorities there are likely to be, on the one hand, objectives aimed at preserving the boundaries of cultural difference with outer space, establishing interreligious dialogue where possible and required, and on the other hand, an interest in integrating while preserving one's Islamic values (Kassimeris & Samouris, 2011). In Muslim-majority communities, this need does not emerge, but the presence of associations within the society may be due in order to empower certain social groups, including women, the elderly, and the destitute, to create social services that are precluded or nonexistent to them, or to revitalize social institutions based on a reinterpretation of Islamic sources (Latief, 2012). Often associations are unable to raise funds from the population, so they rely on noninstitutionalized philanthropy and state funds (Gwarzo, 2003).

Each association has its own structure, its own *modus operandi*, which may be highly bureaucratized like some Catholic and Jewish structures similar to those of true nonreligious organizations, otherwise it may be without an articulated structure and without members to whom specific expertise can be entrusted (Marchisio,

2000). Within some Islamic states, such as Jordan, it has been found that several associations focused on Islamic education seek to "socialize children in order to create collective harmony through a discourse related to duty and responsibility" that individuals have toward other believers, in the family and within other public contexts (Harmsen, 2008,p.351). Associations seek to "work on empowerment and agency-building in both children and parents," "socializing them in order to build a godly lifestyle" (Harmsen, 2008, p. 351). In this way, according to Harmsen (2008), the child's empowerment also changes the relationship with parents by developing his or her own autonomy. Associations are also concerned with building together with believers the change of society while maintaining an Islamic sense of ethics. However, socialization is not only aimed at the family context; it extends to other social spheres with the establishment and management of hospitals, orphanages, schools, charitable services and the organization of important sacred celebrations. It seems that in some countries, such as Indonesia, such associational bodies emulate the work of Christian missions (van Bruinessen, 2013).

Multiple currents of thought can be identified within associationism on which as many collective socializing activities are built to create cohesion on specific values. A difference is proposed by van Bruinessen (2013) between traditionalist and reformist/modernist associations in their approach to faith: in the former this is more rigorous and rigid with respect to practices and ways of opposing the new social and relational forms of modernity, while in reformist associations the approach is more flexible and innovative in trend with social changes. Although this separation officially remains, it tends to become increasingly blurred (particularly in cities versus rural areas) as Muslim society faces the influences of modernity to adapt to the new needs of the population. In this case, associations are financed by political parties and become functional to the latter in order to gather the most support. Under such conditions, the associations themselves mobilize the population and proselytize to move by peaceful or violent means in favor of certain rights (Fox, 2013). This is the case with several Nigerian Islamist organizations that have been

instrumental in the state decision-making to adopt sharia law for some areas in the north of the country (Anyia, 2017). In associations, members then implement pathways of political socialization by promoting certain types of public identity. Sometimes they also fight for their religious rights and to oppose Western-style reformed laws that leave little room for the exercise of faith in local contexts (Jonckers, 2011).

Islamic associationism can, moreover, be formed by groups or sectors of society and designed only for a certain type of users. This is the case, for example, with women's associationism in Muslim-majority and minority countries scattered around the world, which includes numerous types of activism: academic activism, activism related to welfare practices, exclusively religious activism, political activism, and state and global activism (Pruzan-Jørgensen, 2012). In Islamic states, movements/associations formed by women can form and train others for the purpose of re-evaluating the position of women in society, whose rights are denied based on patriarchal Islamic interpretations. Having always lived under the protective umbrella of the man, husband and father of the family, activist Muslim women organize to emancipate their subordinate status and actively participate in the society in which they live (Badran, 2002). What is interesting about this type of association is that the claim is implemented on the interpretation of religious principles in the sacred sources: by rereading and educating themselves on the Quran and Sunna, women confirm their function as mothers and wives, but they also claim an active and recognized social position in the public sphere on par with the aforementioned wives of Muhammad, Aysha and Khadija (Mir-Hosseini, 2011) .

Young Muslims are also among the main social actors in movements, Islamic organizations both in majority Islamic countries and within minorities. Over the years they have slowly begun to take part in political life, feeling that they were taken in by a public opinion that decried them as "identical to their fathers," "potential dangers," "second-class citizens" (Jonker & Amiraux, 2006). With new languages, more similar to Western ones, young Muslims alone and in groups, try to redefine at the associational level their belonging to Islam by negotiating between the demands of faith and

those necessary to live in societies . The various organizations constitute new political-religious subjects straddling the demands of past generations and those of new ones. At the same time they build preconditions for social and political negotiation with the public sphere. Moreover, associations represent a new way of approaching faith by facing an internal negotiation among members in order to find common lines on which they can agree in order to be active participants and all-round citizens (Jonker & Amiraux, 2006).

5. Navigating the e-umma: risks and identity needs

If Islamic associations play a particularly active role in the socialization and dissemination of religious knowledge, even in a structured manner, social media have the potential to become spaces of lived religion (McGuire, 2008) where believers can autonomously and potentially anonymously experiment with their faith practice and experience. The very wide use of social networks is due, as is generally the case, in part to the low cost of the network, the low commitment to managing online activities, and the speed of communications, which encourage the easy formation of groups gathered for religious purposes and politically active groups seeking a "viral effect" of their information and content.

Among the various global media, particularly significant is the very high usage among Muslims of social networks, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Youtube, which have a major impact on the transmission of new behavior patterns and ethical codes, rules and values of the umma especially in contexts characterized by strong conservatism and traditionalism (Harvey, 2014). Blogs on the various platforms also have the characteristic of enhancing any aspect of religious practices and beliefs precisely because they allow for immediate and direct representations of personal experiences in the public sphere (Evolvi, 2017).

These ways of sharing and transmitting the religious have led to heated discussions among theologians, imams, and jurists who oppose the use of social media, believing them to be sources of lies, immorality, and attacks on the well-being and stability of Islamic

family and social relations. It can be dangerous, in their view, to use these means because of the possibility of ending up in contact with subjects and experiences contrary to Islamic morality, for example from pornography to gambling. Even online religious spaces themselves, built and managed by imams and worship centers, can be potentially dangerous due to the lack of verified and real control. However, there are also those among religious experts who consider these media and spaces powerful tools for proselytizing and disseminating religious ideas.

For many religious authorities, "social media have become the ideal platform, the new mosque or madrasa for the dissemination of Islamic beliefs" (Harvey, 2014, p. 737): over the years, platforms equivalent to Western ones but halal, i.e., lawful according to Islamic Law (fiqh), have been created online, such as MillatFacebook and Salam World (Bunt, 2018). In fact, the very wide use of them by believers today is a sign of an inescapable trend of adaptation to the demands of modernity. Even adherents of mystical movements traditionally seeking spirituality and inner calm, despite their disinterest in such chaotic spaces, have begun to use the digital world to perform collective spiritual practices (Bunt, 2009). What used to be carried out in the reality of the everyday has partly transferred or emulated in the *e-umma* (*virtual umma*, *online umma*), a transnational digital community organized into prayer spaces, chat rooms for exchanging opinions on religious topics, blogs honoring imams and muftis, pages and sites commemorating Islamic events (Mandaville, 2003).

There are actual Islamic academies and private online Quranic schools that issue certificates and attendance certificates to become Quranic reciters, imams, experts in Islamic law and finance. Multiple digital public Islamic realities are constructed within the e-umma according to the needs of individual groups (Cunningham et al., 2000). Not only can these spaces be effective for training and proselytizing in any place where there is network access, but also for defending against criticism from outside the community and for proposing *halal* alternatives, such as websites and social platforms whose content is "approved by the authorities" (Harvey, 2014). In addition, as Mandaville (2001) explains, socials also have the

characteristic of often being used by intellectual opponents to the policies of government and religious authorities being spaces not subject to the control of political powers.

In the real dynamics of everyday life, believers on social networks possess their own religious knowledge that is modified, fed and contradicted through online interactions. Social neworks also allow believers to display both visually and textually their adherence to Islam, including new forms of pietistic expression, and to experiment with new forms of Islamic sociality and practice (Sláma, 2017). To give just one example, the use of tweets (Twitter posts), photos, and clips that users send to family members and acquaintances during the experience of religious events, such as the pilgrimage to Mecca, allows the "absentees in presence" to experience at a distance a particularly emotional moment from a symbolic-religious point of view: this also fosters mutual cohesion and solidarity. These digital moments become true spaces of religious identity formation.

In addition, digital spaces, such as Facebook and Twitter, have proven to be the appropriate context for political socialization, the construction of a politicized individual and collective identity, which is then manifested in the organization and participation in meetings, protests, and online and in-person protests (Zia, 2012). This is the case, for example, with groups of Muslim women residing in Islamic and non-Islamic countries actively participating on social media (hashtag activism) to gain recognition from society. According to Lövheim (2012), women often create these "ethical" digital spaces in order to discuss cultural and social norms pertaining to both the private and public dimensions of their lives. Engaging in the virtual public forum means expanding the boundaries of their identities as Muslim women by negotiating with the public and political sphere (Goehring, 2019). Again, this is a form of socialization in which the religious dimension of one's identity is intertwined with the public dimension of being a citizen: being Muslim is an aspect of one's person that leads women, and people more generally, to seek a balance, a reconciliation between faith and social coexistence.

Conclusions

After briefly explaining the concept of the "good Muslim," a role model for every believer, this essay analyzed how the family, Islamic school, associationism and social networks constitute spaces for religious socialization to Islam. As noted, there are precepts, norms, and guidelines to be able to define Islamic identity most closely adhering to Quranic canons, but in daily life believers encounter individual and collective needs to which they must adapt.

In this way, sacred norms are shaped to the new needs of the individual and the group, for example, in different cultural contexts of life. The Muslim living in an Islamic or Islamic-majority state will have more opportunities to form and live the faith on a daily basis, starting with the different places of worship scattered throughout the territory and the organization of time in relation to daily prayers. In contrast, the Muslim living within a minority will have less chance to form in established places, as they are absent or disorganized, and perhaps more chance to experience their formation in the digital world. The latter in turn, consisting of an "innovation" in Islam, is widely used by Muslims, but can be space for ethical pitfalls that conflict with the "good Muslim" model, as many religious leaders point out. So too in associationism, training in Islam can be one of the purposes of the organization, but it can also consist of different modalities that still form the Muslim identity. For example, there may be socializing needs intertwined with the need for empowerment of a particular social group or agency building in relation to citizenship rights.

Thus there are individual needs, new to those who, for example, migrate from one country to another or from one generation to another, and internal to the family which for multiple political, economic, and relational reasons modifies and elaborates its own way of socializing its children to Islam. Although there are predetermined roles in the Quran between parents, the couple's actual commitments and conditions could lead to a total reversal of roles. As we have shown in the essay, the educational and socialization dynamics and processes within Islamic communities are multifaceted and follow the different factors of contemporary times

always finding the interpretation of the Quran and Sunna as a point of reference and comparison.

References

Abdallah, Q. (1996). *The educational role of the family in light of Islamic education* [M.A. thesis, Yarmouk University].

Akkach, S. (2019). *'Ilm Science, Religion and Art in Islam.* University of Adelaide Press.

Al Zbon, A. M.. O., & Smadi, S. M. (2017). The role of the family in the emotional growth of the adolescent in light of the Islamic education. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 22(1), 78-92.

Alsuwaida, N. (2016). *Women's Education* in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of International Education Research*, 12 (4),111-118.

Anyia, A. (2017). Muslim Organisation and the Mobilisations for Sharia Law in Northern Nigeria: The JNI and the NSCIA. *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* 52(1), 82-102.

Badran, M. (2002). *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences.* Oneworld.

Bagheri, N. K., & Khosravi, Z. (2006). The Islamic Concept of Education Reconsidered. *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (AJISS), 23(4), 88.

Bano, M. (2010). *Female madrasas in Pakistan: a response to modernity.* University of Birmingham.

Bargeron, C. (2015). The continuing vitality of the tradition: a classical muslim paradigm of children and family. *Intus-Legere Historia*, 9(2), 5-22.

Bernardes, J. (1985). Do We Really Know What 'The Family' Is? In P. Close, & R. Collins, *Family and Economy in Modern Society* (pp. 192-211). MacMillian.

Borker, H. (2018). *Madrasas and the Making of Islamic Womanhood*. Oxford University Press.

Boyle, H. (Cur.). (2004). *Quranic Schools: Agents of Preservation and Change*. RoutledgeFalmer.

Bunt, G. R. (2009) *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*. University of North Carolina Press.

Bunt, G. R. (2018). *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. University of North Carolina Press.

Chebel, M. (2013). *Dizionario Enciclopedico del Corano*. Argo.

Crescenti, M. (2016). Le cerimonie del mevlid a Bursa e Gemlik. Rito, ruolo, identità. *Ethnorêma*, 12,1-20.

Crescenti, M. (2021). Giovani musulmani italiani: appartenenza religiosa, socializzazione e agenzie socializzative, *Culture e Studi sul sociale*, 6 (1), 35-50.

Crespi, I., & Zanier M. L. (2020). *Migrazioni, processi educativi e percorsi di cittadinanza*. Mimesis Edizioni

Cunningham, S. G., Hawkins, A., Yue, T., &   Nguyen, J. S. (2000).   Multicultural

Broadcasting and Diasporic Video as Public Sphericules. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43 (9), 1533–1547.

Douglas, S. L., & Shaikh, M. A. (2004). Defining Islamic Education: Differentiation and Applications. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 7(1), 5-18.

Eickelmann, D. F. (1985). The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 20(4), 485-516.

El Syam, S. (2017). Prophetic Leadership: The Leadership Model of Prophet Muhammad in Political Relation of Social Ummah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 6(2), 371-396.

Evolvi, G. (2017). Hybrid Muslim identities in digital space: The Italian blog Yalla. *Social Compass*, https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768617697911.

Fox, J. (2013). *An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice.* Routledge.

Goehring, D. L. (2019). Muslim Women on the Internet: Social Media as Sites of Identity Formation. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(3), 20-34.

Gwarzo T. G. (2003). Activities of Islamic Civic Associations in the Northwest of Nigeria: With Particular Reference to Kano State. *Africa Spectrum,* 38(3), 289-318.

Halstead, J. M. (2004). An Islamic concept of education. *Comparative Education*, 40 (4), 517-529.

Harmsen, E. (2008). *Islam, Civil Society and Social Work, Muslim Voluntary Welfare Associations in Jordan between Patronage and Empowerment.* Amsterdam University Press.

Harvey, K. (Cur.). (2014). *Encyclopedia of social media and politics*. Sage.

Huda, M., & Noh, M. A. C. (2020). Understanding the Quran resources ads main principle for family institution in islamic education. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(2), 688-692.

Husain, S. S., Ashraf, S. A. (1979). *Crisis in Muslim Education*. King Abdulaziz University Press.

Jonckers, D. (2011). Associations islamiques et democratie participative en Mali. In A. Bozzo, & P.-J. Luizard, *Les sociétés civiles dans le monde musulman* (pp. 227-248). La Decouverte.

Jonker, G., & Amiraux, V. (Cur.). (2006). *Politics of Visibility: Young Muslims in European Public Spaces*. Transcript Verlag.

Kassimeris, G., & Samouris, A. (2011). Examining Islamic Associations of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Immigrants in Greece. *Religion, State and Society*, 40(2), 174-191.

Lacey, J. (2014). Turkish Islam' as 'Good Islam': How the Gülen Movement Exploits Discursive Opportunities in a Post-9/11 Milieu. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs,* 34 (2), 95–110.

Latief, H. (2012). *Islamic Charities and Social Activism: Welfare, Dakwah and Politics in Indonesia*. Utrecht University.

Lövheim, M. (2012). Religious socialization in a media age. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 25(2), 151–168.

Mandaville, P. (2003). Communication and Diasporic Islam: A Virtual Ummah? In K. H. Karim, *The Media of Diaspora* (pp.135–147). Routledge.

Marchisio, R. (2000). *Sociologia delle forme religiose. Organizzazioni e culture dalle teorie classiche alle ricerche contemporanee*. Carocci.

McGuire, M. (2008). *Lived religion: Faith and practice in everyday life*. Oxford University Press.

Mir-Hosseini, Z. (2011). Beyond 'Islam' vs. 'Feminism'. *International Development, 42*(1), 67-77.

Noor, F. A., Sikand, Y., & van Bruinessen, M. (2009). *The madrasa in Asia. Political Activism and Transnational Linkages*. Amsterdam University Press.

Pruzan-Jørgensen, J. E. (2012). Islamic women's activism in the Arab world potentials and challenges for external actors. *Danish Institute for International Studies*, 2, 5-75.

Ramadan, T. (2007). *The meanings of life of Muhammad*. Penguin.

Slama, M. (2017). Hearth to hearth on social media. Affective aspects of Islamic practice. In M. Slama & C. Jones, *Piety, Celebrity, Sociality: a Forum on Islam and social media in Southeast Asia*, American Ethnologist https://americanethnologist.org/features/collections/piety-celebrity-sociality/heart-to-heart-on-social-media

Tibi, B. (*2001*). *Islam between Culture and Politics*. Palgrave.

Van Bruinessen, M. (Cur.). (2013). *Contemporary developments in Indonesian Islam: explaining the 'conservative turn'*. ISEAS.

Vercellin, G. (2002). *Istituzioni del mondo islamico*. Einaudi.

Younos, F. (2011). *Principles of islamic sociology*. Author House.

Zia, A. (2012). Social Media Politics in Pakistan. *Economic and Political Weekly, 47*(7), 16-18.