Fahimah Ulfat

Researching non-formal religious education in Islamic contexts

Studies from Germany
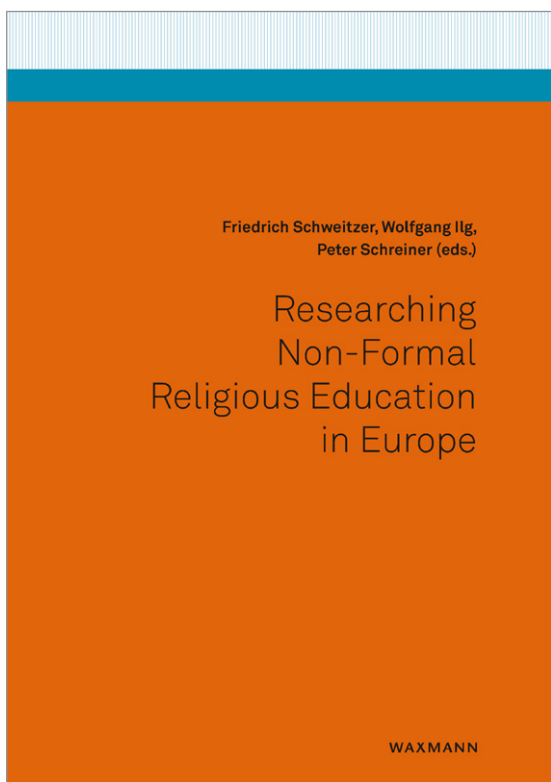
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1. Introduction

As described in the introduction of this book, the field of non-formal education, especially in the field of religious education, is a neglected field in research. This applies in particular to non-formal religious education in the Islamic context.

Especially in Western Europe and the United States there is a relatively large amount of research on Muslims, especially Muslim youths, particularly since 9/11, dealing with a wide range of topics: migration, education, integration, identity/generational orders, violence/extremism, gender roles, democratic orientation and human rights. These topics are often examined and discussed in connection with the religion and religiosity of young Muslims, whereby both formal and informal settings are examined.

It becomes clear, as Boris Geier and Nora Gaupp formulate, that young Muslims are "often the target of research work from a problematic perspective" (Geier and Gaupp 2015, 221).

In this sense Isabel Diehm draws attention to the aspect of "Muslimization" of migrants from Islamic countries in discourses: "In European immigration societies the feature of cultural difference – mostly shortened as a national culture – has played the dominant role so far, but when it came to the description of the respective social majority and minority relationships, the category religious affiliation to Islam has gained social relevance since September 2001" (Diehm 2010, 70).

Levent Tezcan also points out in his literature report that studies on Islam/Muslims in Germany are usually about the question of the relationship between Islam and Muslims and the modern era. The question of religion is mainly discussed and narrowed in the context of the integration debate. This is particularly evident in the fact that the relevance of research results is often taken as the basis for the presentation of integration solutions (cf. Tezcan 2003).

Geier and Gaup point out three research fields on young Muslims that are not clearly distinguishable:

– "Young Muslims as a specific subgroup of young people with immigrant backgrounds (migration research)"
– "Integration and radicalization (processes) of Muslims"
– "Socialization processes and life-world aspects of young people with a Muslim background" (cf. Geier and Gaupp 2015, 222).

In order to analyse research in the field of non-formal religious education, the first step was to find out which studies are to be expected in this area. This results in a problem of definition. The distinction between the three kinds of learning and education – "formal", "non-formal" and "informal" learning, is very complex and there is no generally valid definition in the German education debate. In English literature, on the other hand, there seems to be a common denominator.

Therefore, the following definition is based on the expertise of Stephanie Baumbast, Frederike Hofmann-van de Poll and Christian Lüders.

"Non-formal learning:

– takes place outside of formal educational institutions,
– is usually not certified, but may lead to certification, but this certification does not imply any further educational entitlement,
– is less structured than formal learning" (Baumbast, Hofmann-van de Poll, and Lüders 2014, 17).

In the German education debate, a distinction is also made between "educational places" and "learning worlds". Learning worlds include, for example, family, peer groups and media.

The present article focuses on empirical research on "non-compulsory non-school-type settings which, however, still imply some kind of institution or institutional framework as their basis" (Schweitzer 2017, 1).

The focus is on the presentation of the research designs and methods of research on "mosque catechesis", as well as their results and is primarily limited to the current literature on the situation in Germany. Most of all, presuppositions and the effects of non-formal religious education are of particular interest, which are also important for formal learning at school.

2. Empirical studies on non-formal religious education in religious communities and mosques

In the following, the work on non-formal religious education in communities and mosques by Hasan Alacacıoğlu (1999) and Rauf Ceylan (2014) are presented.[1]

The focus lies on the following questions:

– Are there any differences or developmental lines between the two studies and what challenges do they pose?
– Does the research reveal whether attitudes and orientations of Muslim youths are influenced by religious socialization in mosques?

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1 Non-formal religious education in Islamic kindergartens is addressed in another chapter of the present volume (see Rothgangel and Jäggle in this volume), with special reference to the work of Ednan Aslan (Vienna).

2.1 Hasan Alacacıoğlu 1999

Non-formal religious education in the communities in Germany began in the 1970s, triggered by the family reunion of the so-called "guest workers" (cf. Ceylan 2006, 140 ff.).

Hasan Alacacıoğlu examined the five largest Turkish-Islamic communities and their self-understanding in North Rhine-Westphalia (VIKZ, IGMG, Nurculuk movement, DITIB and the Alevite communities; cf. concerning Muslim organizations in Europe: Kreienbrink and Bodenstein 2010). Methodically, he used guideline interviews for the survey and a content analysis method for the evaluation. The interviews were conducted with representatives of the associations or umbrella organizations and their communities. DITIB plays a special role in this respect because, unlike the other associations, it is parastatal and is subject to the Turkish Ministry for Religious Affairs. His study focused on the content, aims and methods of religious instruction offered by the communities in their so-called "Qu'ran schools".

When asked about the goals of teaching, the main goals mentioned were related to social and ethical-religious fields. In the social field, the interview partners were primarily concerned with educating children and young people to become "law-abiding citizens" and accompanying their socialization processes. Alacacıoğlu notes that none of the interviewees in this area mentioned support for the integration of young people into the local society. In the field of religious goals, the focus is only on the mediation of one's own faith and one's own religion, also among the Alevis.

Alacacıoğlu also presents political goals which in his view are beyond the scope of a narrow sense of religious education:

The VIKZ, DITIB and Nurculuk Movement indicated the preservation of their own culture as a political goal of religious education. As ethical goals the VIKZ, the Nurculuk movement and the IGMG indicated the mediation of traditional values.

> "Above all, DITIB clearly promotes political propaganda within its religious education, as this political goal of religious education is clearly defined in the program published by the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs for Turkish children living abroad" (Alacacıoğlu 1999, 246).

The contents of the lessons included reading, reciting and memorising the Qur'an, as well as an introduction to the contents of the faith, rituals and duties. In addition, Islamic history, law and ethics are also included. Above all, DITIB has also quoted patriotism as a topic. Only the Nurculuk movement dealt with topics such as the comparison of religions, the relationship of the believers to their environment and society, as well as environmental protection. In addition, the Nurculuk movement also deals with the worldview of its founder and spiritual leader Said Nursi (cf. Alacacıoğlu 1999, 248).

Alacacıoğlu points out that the books of the IGMG and DITIB contain "attacks on dissidents and nationalist propaganda". In the newer textbooks of the IGMG,

these contents are omitted, but not in the textbooks of the DITIB. The Nurcu-luk movement, on the other hand, has a "curriculum" that offers "modern ideas with child-friendly language and current, problem-oriented topics" (cf. Alacacıoğlu 1999, 248–249).

Methodologically, frontal teaching and memorization dominate in most communities. Only the teaching of the Nurculuk movement and the Alevi communities prefers methods such as group work and text work, stimulates discussions, tries to use a language suitable for children and encourages the children to become independent.

The teaching language is almost exclusively Turkish. The learning groups consist of 40–70 students. Apart from the Alevi communities, boys and girls are taught separately. The teaching staff have theological but no pedagogical competences (cf. Alacacıoğlu 1999, 250). They come almost exclusively from Turkey and have limited German language skills. Decisive for the recruitment of the teaching staff at IGMG and DITIB is also the political orientation of the applicants (cf. Alacacıoğlu 1999, 252).

2.2 Rauf Ceylan 2014

Rauf Ceylan elaborates in his empirical study the connections between secularization, migration, "mosque catechesis" and attitudes towards Islamic religious education.

He first developed theoretical search and evaluation categories and then carried out expert interviews on their basis. He evaluated these with the qualitative content analysis in order to get "a detailed outlining of the mosque catechesis of the communities in Lower Saxony (goals, contents, structures, etc.)" (Ceylan 2014, 323). The main focus of interest was the information received from the Muslim representatives, officials and the religious support staff of the DITIB and the Shura[2] about the social contexts, internal processes and structures in the communities (cf. Ceylan, 2014, 234–235).

Ceylan describes processes of individualization among Muslim youths, which is shown inter alia in their self-confidence in dealing with religious authorities and religion. The young people want to deal consciously with their religion and do not want to simply follow authorities without first reflecting. This causes uncertainties in the communities (cf. Ceylan 2014, 276).

The mosque communities are also aware of the changed living conditions and lifestyles of the young people. Ceylan explains that, although the young people want to live in an autonomous manner, they do not give up their ties/bond to

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2 Muslims in Lower Saxony are organized in the two large regional associations Schura Nieder-sachsen e. V. and DITIB, which are both contact partners for politics.

the community, which he believes is related to the migration context: "The migration context is crucial, as young people tend towards self-ethnicization and self-muslimization by societal attributions, so that the – if only in their symbolic function – ethnic-religious identity and mosque communities as socio-cultural retreats do not lose their meaning, even if these young people with their lifestyles do not correspond to the image of a practicing Muslim from the point of view of the communities" (Ceylan 2014, 425).

By *ethnicization* he means that young people at school are stylised as experts on political developments in their parents' home countries. By *Muslimization* he means that young people, especially since 9/11, tend to be regarded as theological experts. Such external attributions lead to the fact that they inevitably have to deal more strongly with their religion in order to be able to explain, for example, religiously motivated terrorist attacks. Ceylan, however, notes restrictively: "Muslimization and ethnicization processes" can lead to a stronger identification with the home countries of the parents and grandparents. But they can also lead to "disengagement from their old cultural orientations as well as ethnic identity markers" or to the formation of new "syncretistic identities" with elements from the identity of origin and from the surrounding majority society (cf. Ceylan 2014, 282).

Social change and the pluralization of adolescent lifestyles are discussed controversially by experts in mosque communities. However, Ceylan describes the reaction of the experts as an "act of desperation" as they try to make the mosque attractive to young people through "material-oriented solutions", for instance through "more kicker and billiard tables". The public space is rated by them as "risky". They want to keep the youths away from the public space to protect the "Islamic identity" (Ceylan 2014, 320).

The "Mosque catechesis" takes place mainly on weekends in the communities. Children are usually registered in courses when they start school. Usually, adolescents stop attending "Mosque Catechesis" at the start of puberty. According to Ceylan, however, there are no figures on the number of participants or the scope of the lessons. The response of the parents to these courses is very positive according to Ceylan, so that there are even waiting lists for participation. One does not have to be a mosque member to register one's child for class (cf. Ceylan 2014, 345–347).

The "Mosque catechesis" is intended to "impart religious content and ethnic-cultural content", to be "identity-forming", to strengthen the "bond to the community" and thus also to attract "trainees for volunteer roles and functions", which, according to Ceylan, is a kind of "hidden curriculum" (Ceylan 2014, 350).

The profile of the teachers is as follows: Besides the active imams, many of the teachers are pensioners or graduates of religious high schools. Regarding their qualifications, they are almost always autodidactic (cf. Ceylan 2014, 351).

Ceylan concludes that "mosque catechesis" has a low efficiency because

– "there are no uniform standards or curricula,
– no well-qualified (religious) educational staff is available,

– it is still predominantly taught according to classical content and methods,
– due to the language problems of the imams and their poor knowledge about the living conditions of the children and adolescents, there is no positive teaching-learning relationship,
– no educational materials are available, but only traditional ones,
– no evaluation of the learning outcomes takes place,
– there are no adequate spaces that could guarantee a pleasant learning atmosphere,
– only sparsely furnished classrooms exist, so the pupils have to kneel on the floor,
– due to the high number of pupils a high burden for the imams is recorded,
– the children and adolescents come to the mosques with very different learning backgrounds and thus there is a great learning gap,
– there is no widespread introduction of a class system and thus larger units with different learning levels and different age groups arise,
– individual support is more or less excluded" (Ceylan 2014, 428–429).

According to Ceylan the presented problem constellations are not problematised in the communities. However, the functionaries see a special opportunity for themselves in the attempt to also influence Islamic Religious Education in schools as it is introduced on the basis of the German constitution. This influence would give them "an official status in order to be actively involved in the conception of teaching and the selection of religious teachers on the basis of the teaching permission (iǧāza ruling)" (Ceylan 2014, 430). However, such participation can lead to significant problems, as community leaders often lack professionalism in the field, and thus can not constructively support the development of Islamic Religious Education in schools.

According to the conviction of the community representatives, the "mosque catechesis" is intended to convey Muslim foundations which serve "to be socialised to become a practicing Muslim" (Ceylan 2014, 348). The identity-forming objective does not focus on an overall societal context, but is closely linked to the development of an awareness "as part of the Muslim world community", even though Ceylan rightly notes that this goal is in contrast to the more ethnically compounded and oriented communities (cf. Ceylan 2014, 349). In addition to the content-related goals, there are also "community-political goals" such as "strengthening the community-bind", "motivating young people, assuming honorary duties", "qualifying new trainees" and "winning new members" (cf. Ceylan 2014, 349–350).

3. Which challenges can be identified?

The results presented by Alacacıoğlu (1999) and Ceylan (2014) on non-formal religious education in mosque communities show that this non-formal religious education is problematic in many ways. A limiting factor in comparing the two studies is that, despite their methodological similarities, they focus on different content priorities. Nevertheless, there are considerable similarities:

- In the foreground of non-formal religious education is a static concept of religion. "Mosque catechesis" is limited to teaching children and young people texts, rituals and rules without reflection. In such a way, Islam can not be regarded as a life enriching resource, but as a collection of commandments and prohibitions that make life difficult, especially in a context in which these rules and limits are critically questioned by the majority society.
- A crucial issue is addressed in the study by Ceylan, namely the changing living conditions and lifestyles of young people. Since the static concept of religion in the communities continues to dominate, it is not surprising that the communities are trying to engage young people by becoming more attractive through better leisure time opportunities.
- "Mosque catechesis" still continues to focus on creating a kind of defensive identity preservation through Islamic knowledge, rather than creating a mobility of thought that also involves critical thinking. If this were the case, it would strengthen the individual and not isolate him or her from the supposed "risky" environment. The preservation or strengthening of an "Islamic identity" which is understood as static, is visibly in the foreground for the communities in both investigations. However, it is not quite clear what the community representatives actually understand by this. This static identity-forming objective is problematic, above all, because it is intended to be exclusive and does not pave the way for young people to become Muslims and pluralistic in a globalized world.
- In the "mosque catechesis" traditionalism, the collective and community ideology are in the foreground and not the situations of the children and adolescents, their individual thinking and life worlds and their subject autonomy. This is hardly to be expected because the teachers come almost exclusively from Turkey, they barely speak the German language and do not know the socio-political context in which the young people live.
- A detailed criticism of methodology could be formulated. However, it would overshoot the target, since "mosque catechesis" is not conceptually framed and shows no professionalism in religious education. Therefore, to be fair, it cannot be compared and measured in relation to Religious Education at public schools.
- Interreligious components are missing completely.
- A major problem is the political propaganda in the classroom, which, however, is no longer a subject of discussion in Ceylan's investigation.

4. Does the research show an influence of the religious socialization in mosques?

The question arises whether the attitudes and orientations of Muslim youths are influenced by religious socialization in the mosques.

The public and scientific interest in "mosque catechesis" regularly focuses on concerns about possible fundamentalist influences from the teaching staff on those participating in their lessons.

Regarding this area of attitudes and orientations of Muslim youths, there are relevant studies which give a differentiated picture, for instance the study of Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Joachim Müller and Helmut Schröder (cf. Heitmeyer, Müller and Schröder 1997) or of Katrin Brettfeld and Peter Wetzels (cf. Brettfeld and Wetzels 2007), furthermore of Yasemin Karakasoğlu (cf. Karakaşoğlu-Aydın 2000), Nikola Tietze (cf. Tietze 2001) or Michael Tressat (cf. Tressat 2011).

However, Wensierski makes clear that these studies "do not give any information about the origin, the development and the biographical process of social attitudes and biographical behavior patterns" (Wensierski 2013, 58). The vast majority of studies dealing with the attitudes of Muslim youths are methodically working with open interview forms in which the biography and attitudes of young people are surveyed directly in conversation with them. This procedure is not able to identify the origin of the attitudes and orientations. This means that it is *not* possible to establish a connection between the attitudes and orientations of young people and non-formal religious education, which is assumed to be the factor behind the attitudes.

Even if empirical findings show that there are Muslim, predominantly male, adolescents who are strictly religious and have anti-democratic orientations, it is by no means possible to say clearly where these orientations come from. The character of previous empirical findings does not allow such a conclusion (cf. Wensierski 2013, 59).

In order to give the reader an insight into the current attitudes and orientations of Muslim youths, a study by Stephan Weyers will be considered as an example.

In his study, he interviews religiously engaged youths from the mosque communities of Ditib and Milli Görüs. Catholic youths from the youth organization BDKJ (Federation of Catholic Youths) and KHG (Catholic University Communities) were interviewed for comparison. The survey was conducted in the Rhine-Main area in 2006 and 2007 (cf. Weyers 2011, 124).

In the interviews, the interviewees were asked to evaluate actions, norms and conflicts with justification (cf. Weyers 2011, 134). Through the analysis, a "typology of religious-normative thought" was created (Weyers 2011, 135). Weyers focused on the question of the relationship between religious commandments, moral norms and private matters.

Weyers sums up that "there are significant differences between young Christians and Muslims in the evaluation of norm conflicts. The latter have more traditional moral concepts and evaluate potential norm violations much more negatively. The

biggest difference is in the area of sexual morality, which is evaluated completely in the opposite direction. Especially in the case of homosexuality, the evaluations of many Muslims are in conflict with secular legal norms and human rights. Issues of sexual morality and actions such as theft, abortion, suicide and religious change are interpreted by almost all Muslim youth as violations of religious commandments, but only by a few Catholics. Not a single Muslim, but two-thirds of Catholic youths judge secularly in the interviews without any recourse to religious norms. For Muslims, religion is a central foundation of normative orientation, but this seems to apply only to a few Catholics. These rarely judge religiously and contradict mostly the church doctrine. Although Muslims interpreted many norm violations religiously and understand the Qur'an as God's direct word, the interviews show a great diversity of interpretations" (Weyers 2011, 166).

However, this study also does not make it clear which influences are coming directly from religious teachers of the mosque and which from family members, peers or other agents of socialization.

5. Conclusion

For further research, the question arises which effects "mosque catechism" has on the attitudes and orientations of Muslim youths and also in formal Religious Education. As shown, this question can not be answered by reconstructing the attitudes and orientations of the adolescents. So far, research has been unable to establish any systematic correlations.

Alacacıoğlu and Ceylan illustrated the discourses in the mosques, analysed teaching materials and conducted interviews with the teaching staff. In addition, it would be interesting to conduct teaching research (work shadowing). However, even this does not answer the question, how much of the teaching content of the "mosque catechesis" is adopted by the young people and which of the taught contents will be relevant to their actions in what way. Even through these research settings, no complete causal chains can be depicted.

In order to examine the effects of "mosque catechesis" on young people, a three-step process has to be carried out, which firstly researches what the young people learn in the "mosque catechesis", secondly, how they assimilate what they have learned and thirdly, in what way what they have learned becomes relevant for their actions.

The study of the impact and effects of non-formal religious education thus requires not only the study of "mosque catechesis" or the study of attitudes and orientations of active youth in mosque communities. Rather, a differentiated reception research design is needed which focuses on the entire field of discourse.

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