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# The theology of Islamic education from Salafi and Liberal perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the tenets of today's two contemporary traditions in Islam, neo-traditional Salafism and liberal or progressive Islam and analyzes how they cultivate a typology of Islamic religious education. The typology under study clarifies the meaning of *tarbiyya* and *ta'dib* in Islamic educational philosophy and demonstrates the place of these goals within a continuum of critical versus noncritical *talim* (teaching) in Islamic religious education. The purpose of this typology is to provide both scholars and practitioners a theoretical framework for thought and reflection about their pedagogic methods and scholarly work.

## Introduction

This article proposes a typology of Islamic religious education that takes into account the two competing traditions of interpretation in Islamic communities, neo-traditional Salafism and progressive or liberal Islam, and their possible pedagogical manifestations in the field of Islamic religious education. This typology is not only valuable for explaining Islamic education in Western, pluralistic, and democratic societies, but can also prove useful in explaining trends of Islamic education in Muslim-majority societies as well.

In addition, the terminology of Islamic philosophy of education used in this article demonstrates how the concepts of *tarbiyya*, *tadib*, and *talim* are located within a continuum of critical versus noncritical attitudes toward Islamic religious education as debated in Muslim and non-Muslim societies. Important in this context is helping educators and their students reflect on their religious identities, understanding of Islam, and teaching and learning practices. Self-reflection is indeed crucial for Muslims in negotiating their particular religious identities in the modern, democratic, diverse, and globalized world. According to Gross (2010) “the teacher’s role is to foster students’ development as independent learners who structure and ‘own’ their religious knowledge, in keeping with their individual intellectual tendencies, diverse motivations and styles of learning, and other personal traits” (267). The following section briefly explores the tenets of neo-traditional Salafism and liberal, progressive Islam. Afterward we illustrate a typology of Islamic religious education and the patterns of critique pertaining to this typology.

## NEO-traditional Salafism versus liberal, progressive Islam

The two leading and competing traditions in contemporary Islam are neo-traditional Salafism and liberal or progressive Islam (Duderija 2007, 2011; Kurzman 1998; Saada and Gross 2017). Each has its own understanding of modernity, democracy, progress, *sharia* (or Islamic law), freedom of thought, the status of women and non-Muslims, and the interpretations of the Quran<sup>1</sup> and the *Sunna*, which is the verbally transmitted record of the prophet Muhammad's teachings and deeds (Duderija 2007, 2011; Kurzman 1998).

Neo-traditional Salafism encourages Muslims to return to the pure and authentic Islam as manifested by the Prophet Muhammad and the *al-salaf al-salih*,<sup>2</sup> who are the four righteous caliphs,<sup>3</sup> and as practiced by the pious ancestors who followed them during the first century of Islam (Duderija 2007). This form of Salafism expresses the more conservative tradition of Islam supporting a literal and exclusivist interpretation of the Quran, of the *hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), and of Islamic law (Al-Jabri 1996; Leaman and Ali 2008). Neo-traditional Salafism accepts the instrumental or scientific and technological elements of modern thinking, but not its epistemological elements, such as rationality, humanism, and personal autonomy (Duderija 2007; Furman 2016; Panjwani 2012; Tibi 1995, 2012).

In essence, neo-traditional Salafism is built on a romanticized and utopian vision of the past, its Quranno-Sunnahic exponents recruiting a premodern and long-established *fiqh*, or juristic, heritage<sup>4</sup> (Duderija 2007) in order to address modern problems and issues. Neo-traditional Salafism believes that gender segregation is a necessary religious norm and that there should be minimal contact between males and females in the larger society (Duderija 2014b). It holds negative, sometimes hostile, attitudes toward Western civilization (Tibi 2012), claiming "Islamic civilization as largely—if not completely—antithetical to that of the West allowing for no civilizational cross-pollination and syncretism" (Duderija 2014b).

Adherents of neo-traditional Salafism believe that "textual sources precede and should not be understood through reality; rather reality should be understood through the text, thereby ignoring whatever reality shaped the process of text formation" (Duderija 2007, 349). Accordingly, they hold that Muslims should not deviate from religious knowledge produced by scholars considered credible and authoritative, and Muslims must interpret modernity, with all its problems, questions, and demands, in the name of the past (Saada and Gross 2017). Together with this reliance on textual and scholarly authority, concepts such as feminism, democracy, and freedom of thought are considered *bidah* or ungodly innovations (Duderija 2014b). Applying a rigid, monolithic, literal, and dogmatic interpretation of the Quran, neo-traditional Salafism condemns the diversity of ideas about the truth and meaning of Islam (Haddad 1995). Proponents of neo-traditional Salafism can be found in Middle Eastern countries and their influence extends to Muslim communities in Western countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Duderija 2007).

Unlike the Salafist's one-dimensional, reductionist, and past-oriented understanding of Islam and its history, progressive or liberal Islam can be viewed as an "umbrella term that signifies an invitation to those who want an open and safe space to undertake a rigorous, honest, [and] potentially difficult engagement with the tradition" (Safi 2003, 16–17). Progressive Muslims reject the static, dogmatic, patriarchal, de-contextualized, and uncritical understanding

<sup>1</sup> The Quran is considered the Word of God and the "Holy Scripture of Muslims and the most important text on which Islam is based" (Saeed 2006, 8).

<sup>2</sup> It is believed that these people "are the sources of legitimate knowledge and the methodology of accessing this knowledge" (Duderija 2014a, 134).

<sup>3</sup> The first four Rashidun righteous caliphs (632–60) are Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali.

<sup>4</sup> The legal hermeneutics of the major schools of thought or *madhahib* are the Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafi'i.

of Islamic tradition, called *turath*. They challenge “the transmission oriented and rigid interpretations of Islam and seek to appreciate and to contextualize the religious claims which are compatible with ideals of reflective education, rational thinking, mutual respect, and equal citizenship” (Saada and Gross 2017, 807). They believe in the “socio-cultural embeddedness of the Quran and the Sunnah” (Duderija 2007, 357) and that the “revivification of the heritage is possible only through a creative, historical, critical comprehension of it” (Boulatta 1990, 16). According to Safi (2017), progressive Muslims strive to “realize a just and pluralistic society through critically engaging Islam, a relentless pursuit of social justice, an emphasis on gender equality as a foundation of human rights, a vision of religious and ethnic pluralism, and a methodology of non-violent resistance.”

On the epistemological level, progressive Muslims distinguish between religion and religious knowledge (Soroush 2000), believing that Islam’s primary sources, the Quran and the Sunnah,<sup>5</sup> should be interpreted considering the life conditions, experiences, and circumstances of Muslims in a given time and place. In fact, progressive Muslims “embrace the modern episteme in the realms of humanities and social sciences” (Duderija 2007, 356), utilizing a non-apologetic and critical understanding of both Islam and modernity. This entails, for example, the reinterpretation of the medieval epistemology found in the works of Muslim scholars and the adaptation of Islamic teachings to democracy and modern life.

Liberal and progressive Muslims seek to resolve dichotomies existing between Islam and modernity, Islam and democracy (Dilshod 2010; Saada and Gross 2017), and Islam and the West, viewing modernity and “its byproducts a result of transcultural and transpolitical intercivilizational process, thus demonopolizing the claim that modernity is a pure, universal, and monopolar western civilizational product” (Duderija 2007, 355). Accordingly, progressive Muslims integrate modern ideas and concepts into contemporary Muslim discourses by “exemplifying fragmentation and diffusion of intellectual authority in contemporary Muslim societies and by reflecting the multiplicity of its sources” (Taji-Farouki 2004, 5). Adherents of progressive and liberal thinking in Islam can be found in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies (Duderija 2007). It should be noted that these two traditions of Islam, Salafist and the liberal, progressive one, should not be viewed as dichotomous or mutually exclusive. In fact, they overlap and intertwine and therefore should be viewed instead “as heuristic devices which provide insight into the history of Islamic discourse” (Kurzman 1998, 5). The following section will elaborate on how these two traditions may influence the pedagogy of Islamic religious education.

## A typology of Islamic religious education

Ashraf (1988) identifies five kinds of knowledge in Islam: spiritual, meaning the knowledge of God and His characteristics; moral, referring to the meaning of a good life and Islamic ethics; intellectual, or the knowledge produced through application of reason and logic; knowledge based on imagination; and knowledge based on the senses and experience. Scholars agree that Islamic religious education has two major purposes (Cook and Malkawī 2010; Halstead 1995; 2004; Waghid and Smeyers 2014; Waghid 2011): *tarbiyya*, meaning instilling and developing spiritual elements in students’ lives in accordance to the commands of God; and *tadib*, meaning inculcating good virtues and sound behavior in Muslim students within and the community and society at large (Halstead 2004; Cook and Malkawī 2010). The achievement of these

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<sup>5</sup> Sunnah means life experiences and narrations of the prophet Muhammad (Waghid, 2016, 3).

two purposes goes through *talim*, meaning the method of teaching applied in order to accomplish the goals of *tarbiyya* and *tadib*. Khan (1987) explains that *tarbiyya*, *tadib*, and *talim* refer to the spiritual, moral, and intellectual components of Islamic education, respectively.

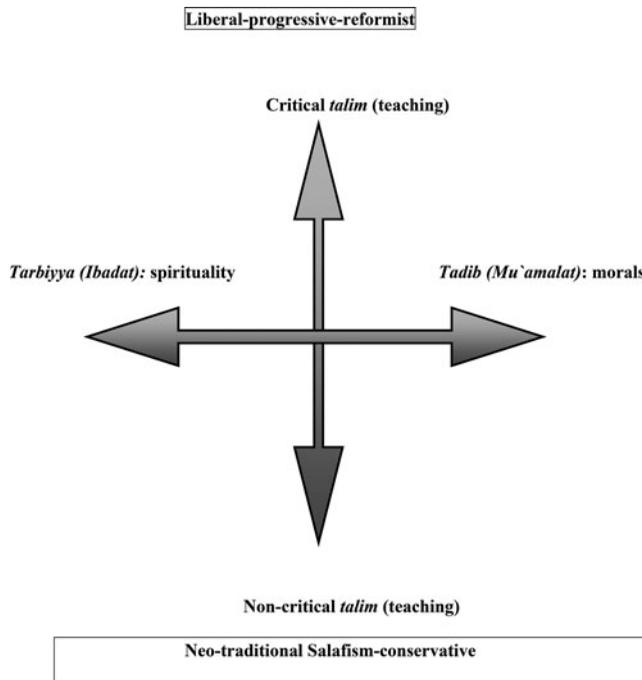
The first purpose of Islamic education is *tarbiyya*, which is an Arabic word meaning nurturing and socialization. This concept is used later to indicate the spiritual and transcendental tenets of Islam such as the believing in the “Unity of Allah Almighty, His Angels, Revealed Books, Prophets, the Last Day of Judgement, ... [and] performance of prayer” (Waghid 2014, 335). *Tarbiyya* is more concerned with the *Ibadat* or *huquq Allah*, the worship of God and man’s/woman’s obligations to God rather than with *muamalat*<sup>6</sup> or *huquq al-ibad*, which are man’s/woman’s obligations to society (Waghid 2011; Zia 2007). *Tarbiyya* focuses on instilling the tenets of faith in Muslim students, including the five pillars of Islam<sup>7</sup> and to deal with God’s attributes, names, and acts. This spiritual education helps Muslim believers feel connected to a transcendental power, which provides them answers to existential questions and the meaning of prayer, forgiveness, sacrifice, death, resurrection, and salvation, and thereby can successfully challenge the practices and public rhetoric of materialism, consumerism, and rationalism in modern life (Hussain 2004; Merry 2006). *Tarbiyya* seeks to help Muslims achieve an inner peace by “developing and refining elements of love, kindness, compassion, and selflessness” (Cook and Malkawī 2010, xxviii). It emphasizes the belief and fear of the one God (Allah) who is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent.

The second purpose of Islamic education, *tadib* (goodness and just action) broadly speaking, refers to the process of disciplining the body, mind, and soul so that human beings recognize and acknowledge “one’s proper place in relation to one’s physical, intellectual, and spiritual capacities and potentials” (Al-Attas 1991, 22–23). It refers to that aspect of Islamic philosophy requiring Muslim students to be familiar with the moral teachings of Islam and its ethical code, based primarily on the Quran, prophetic traditions known as *ahadith* and jurisprudence, known as the *fiqh*. The word *tadib* is derived from the word *adab*, which “has a connotation of good breeding, courtesy, and urbanity, in the later sense of civility, etiquette, and correct behavior in both social and political contexts” (Lewis 1988, 27). Educating students to become good Muslims means teaching them to follow the divine law, Quranic exegesis, and the contribution of authoritative Muslim scholars known as *ulama* (Zia 2007). For example, students study what Islam determines as right or wrong behavior and learn how to apply the approved Islamic behavior in everyday life. Halstead (1995) explains that divine law in Islam “integrates political, social, and economic life as well as individual life into a single religious worldview” (29). Indeed, Islam provides considerable moral instructions on issues such as marriage and divorce, sexual relationships, trade, governance, and treatment of the needy. In effect, *tadib* focuses more on the *muamalat*, or civil rather than spiritual transactions as well as on Muslim duties toward fellow humans, society, and the environment (Johnston 2004; Niyozov and Memon 2011). *Tadib* involves conveying the civic responsibilities of Muslims toward believers of other religions, nonbelievers, and people from different cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, political, and ethnic backgrounds.

If *tarbiyya* and *tadib* reflect the content of Islamic education, *talim* is the process or the pedagogical methods of transmitting Islamic religious content and knowledge (Halstead 1995). Halstead (1995) explains that in Islam “the teachers were accountable to the community

<sup>6</sup> There are fewer verses, only 200, about personal matters and moral teachings, than the 500 verses concerned with forms of worship and ritual (Saeed 2006).

<sup>7</sup> The five pillars of Islam are: the performance of prayer five times a day; fasting in the month of *Ramadan*; *zakat*, or giving alms to the poor; belief in the one God Allah and that the Prophet Muhammad was his messenger; and performing the *hajj* or pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca once in a lifetime (Waghid, 2011).



**Figure 1.** A typology of Islamic religious education.

not only for transmitting knowledge and for developing their students' potential as rational beings, but also for initiating them into the moral, religious, and spiritual values which their community cherished" (31). Although rote learning, memorization, and frontal teaching are very common in the Islamic world (Niyozov and Memon 2011; Ramadan 2017; Sahin 2013) some philosophers of Islam, such as Ibn Khaldun, criticize these methods of teaching and recommend nurturing skills of reasoning and critical thinking (Halstead 1995).

In fact, the last decade has witnessed a growing critique of the prevailing rigid, monolithic understanding of Islamic ideals and an increased demand to adapt Islamic teachings to the values of modern and democratic life (Kurzman 1998; Ramadan 2004; Saada and Gross 2017; Safi 2003; Selcuk 2012; Tan 2011; Wilkinson 2013, 2015; Waghid and Smeyers 2014). Selcuk (2012) argues that "theology must be suitable to improve individual intellect and appropriate for the democratization process of society" (224). She adds that the *sharia*, which is Islamic law and jurisprudence, must be understood from a historical perspective allowing Muslims to contextualize Islamic instructions based on their current needs and the progress of their societies. Also, Selcuk (2012) and Wilkinson (2013) criticize the blind imitation of the interpretations of previous religious scholars, the literal interpretation of the Quran and the uncritical acceptance of Islamic cultural heritage. Waghid (2011) links Islamic education to the achievement of truth and justice and Waghid and Smeyers (2014) suggest an adaptation of the meanings of *tarbiyya*, *tadib*, and *talim* to the demands of cosmopolitan and democratic citizenship.

The following typology (Figure 1) summarizes the two goals of Islamic education (*tarbiyya*, *tadib*) as they are located within a continuum of critical versus noncritical *talim* (pedagogy) in Islamic religious education. It also illustrates how the two goals fit within the continuum between the liberal, progressive approach and the neo-traditional Salafist, conservative communities of interpretation.

This typology of Islamic religious education provides teachers and educational practitioners a framework for cultivating the spiritual, moral, and intellectual faculties of their students. The typology illustrates that Islamic educators may offer their students learning experiences that highlight two levels<sup>8</sup> of *talim* (critical and noncritical) in their teaching of the spiritual (*tarbiyya*) and ethical (*tadib*) components of Islam. As mentioned earlier and as noted in the work of Waghid (2011) and McLaughlin (1992), Islamic educators exhibited different levels of critical stances toward Islamic tradition in terms of their willingness to allow their students to question religious ideas, stories, myths, and concepts; to reconsider the contributions of religious authorities and scholars; and to reflect on their faith and develop their own religious identities.

Educators following the neo-traditional Salafism (the third and fourth quadrants of the conceptual model) represent the noncritical approaches in Islamic education. They prefer teaching the “what” and “how” of Islam (Waghid, 2011). This kind of education is described in the literature of religious education as learning into religion (Byrne 2014; Saada 2015) or teaching for commitment (Tan 2008). The noncritical *talim* (*teaching*) of *tarbiyya* and *tadib* encourages the teaching of the Islamic ethical code and spirituality in a confessional manner. Al-Attas’s (1991) previous definition of Islamic education is located within the neo-traditional Salafism because it excludes the existence of alternative and non-Islamic perceptions of truth and reality; it is limited to preparing good persons and not good citizens;<sup>9</sup> and, by “disciplining the mind,” it paves the way to uncritical examination of religious authorities who enjoy the monopoly on deciding the meaning and possible implications of the Quran and the Sunnah.

Noncritical Islamic education entails imparting a past-oriented understanding of modernity that relies on the contributions of medieval exegetical scholars;<sup>10</sup> a binary view of the relationship between Islam and the Western civilization; a limited understanding of diversity, human rights, and pluralistic values in society; and an emphasis on a strictly textual and exclusionist rather than on a rational or context-related exegesis of the Quran, the *hadith* and Islamic law (Al-Jabri 1996; Ali and Leaman 2008; Saeed 2006; Saada and Gross 2017). Scholars who believe in the Islamization<sup>11</sup> of knowledge such as Al-Attas (1991) and al-Faruqi (1982) support the noncritical paradigm of Islamic *talim* (*teaching*). *Talim* is manifested, in this regard, through traditional and non-reflective pedagogical methods, such as memorizing the Quran and the *hadith*, rote learning, frontal instruction, role modeling, and the development of apologetic discourse of Islamic education.

On the contrary, critical educators who represent the reformist outlook in the typology (the first and second quadrants) engage their students with the “why” in Islamic instruction. They seek to make Islam more adaptable to democratic, open, and pluralistic societies (Al-Jabri 2009; Kamrava 2009; Kurzman 1998; Wright 1996; Wilkinson 2015). *Talim* is manifested here through critical and independent reasoning, the seeking of justice through *ijtihad*<sup>12</sup> in comprehending the Islamic teachings (Waghid 2104) and critical self-reflection.

<sup>8</sup> The focus on *tarbiyya* and *tadib* is not mutually exclusive and that teachers may apply maximal and minimal doses of *tarbiyya* and *tadib* in the same classroom based on their religious orientations, the schools’ curriculum, and the larger community.

<sup>9</sup> This perception is convincingly clarified and criticized in the work by Westheimer and Kahne (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Such as Imam Shafi’i, Abu Hanifa, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, and Imam Malik.

<sup>11</sup> Islamization of knowledge means “to subject all rationale and religious sciences to an epistemology consistent with principles of Islam” (Waghid 2016) or recasting all existing forms of knowledge within an Islamic paradigm.

<sup>12</sup> *Ijtihad* refers to interpreting the Islamic law as revealed in the Quran and the Sunnah in such a way that they reflect the intellectual, political, economic, legal technological, and moral developments of society (Tan 2014, 333). It is a methodological tool used by Muslim scholars to respond to the challenges and questions of present time.

In summation, four types of Islamic religious educators can be identified: those who advance critical skills and values regarding both *tarbiyya* and *tadib* (the first and second quadrants); those who are critical about *tarbiyya* and noncritical about *tadib* (the second and third quadrants); those who are critical regarding *tadib* but not regarding *tarbiyya* (the first and fourth quadrants); and those who are noncritical toward both *tarbiyya* and *tadib* (the third and fourth quadrants). The following sections explore the meaning of critical Islamic education, the kinds of questions educators and students may ask in the context of such education, and why such education provides a far more appropriate preparation for life in democratic and multicultural and multifaith societies.

### Internal and external critique in Islamic religious education

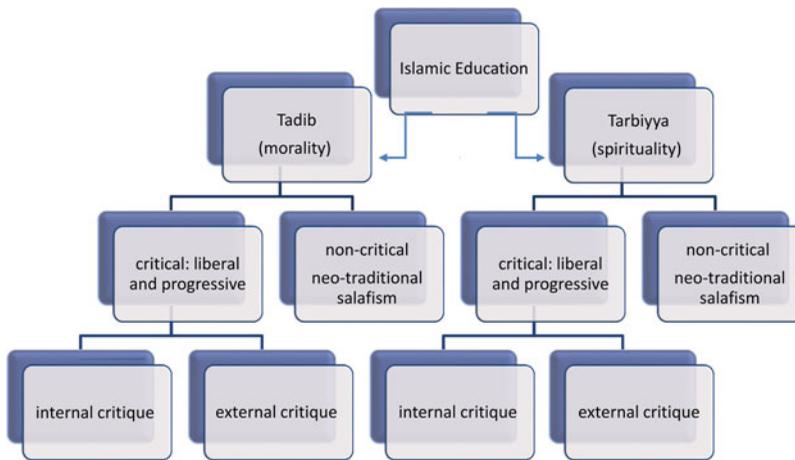
Critical teaching of Islam or critical *talim* in the typology appreciates students' questioning of religious morals and spiritual ideals and rejects "the monopoly over religious hermeneutics or the literal interpretations of Islamic texts" (Saada and Gross 2017, 808). Critical *talim* assumes that "no scholar has absolute jurisdiction over what counts as legitimate or not, but rather that meanings are shared, experienced, and deliberated upon on the understanding that something new or other might still emanate" (Waghid 2011, 4). It encourages Muslim students to question the underlying assumptions of their beliefs and practices and to recognize the possible controversies and tensions in Islamic history, theology, and politics (Zia 2007).

Critical *talim* can be described as learning from religion (Saada 2015) or teaching from commitment (Tan 2008). It adheres to the assumption that "an authentic faith is an autonomous faith" (Laura and Leahy 1989, 259), and tries to balance respect for tradition with openness in Islamic religious education (Tan 2008). In other words, "students are introduced to [Islam] from within the religious system while developing the adolescent reflective thinking and rational autonomy" (Tan 2008, 72). In addition, teachers are expected to

ask questions and be willing to respond to the questioning honestly and in a way that respects the adolescent's cognitive and emotional maturity ... [to] make the adolescent aware that religion is a matter of faith rather than universally, publicly agreed belief ... [that] morality is not exclusively dependent upon religion ... [and to] encourage attitudes of tolerance and understanding in relation to religious disagreement. (Tan 2008, 73)

Critical *talim* is also more appropriate for students at the high school level, assuming that they have established a basic understanding of their primary culture or religious belonging (Saada 2015; Tan 2008; Thiesen 2012) and have developed the basic cognitive skills of critical thinking and argumentative capabilities. Two basic modes of critique can be introduced to students for developing their capacities of critical thinking about the moral (*tadib*) and spiritual (*tarbiyya*) issues of Islam. These are critique from within, or criticism internal to a tradition, and critique from the outside, or criticism external to a tradition (Alexander 2007, 2015; Leirvik 1999; Runzo 1989). Internal critique can be considered as education for weak rationality and the latter is education for strong rationality<sup>13</sup> (Tan 2014). According to Leganger-Krogstad (2003) "religions need to be approached both from the 'insider' as living sources for faith, morals and life orientation—and from the 'outsider,' as objects for critical investigation" (179). Both perspectives assume that there is no objective, context-free rationality: "terms such as justification,' 'evidence,' 'critical thinking,' 'liberty' and 'personal choices' are not context-less and ideology-free; rather they are dependent on historically concrete languages and practices, and take place in specific settings" (Tan 2014, 329). This means that the

<sup>13</sup> "The ability and willingness to justify one's beliefs based on internal as well as external questions" (Tan 2014, 330).



**Figure 2.** Types of Islamic education.

practices of rationality and independent thinking are basically embodied within convictional communities (Alexander 2007; Jonathan 1995; Laura and Leahy 1989). Figure 1 summarizes the types of Islamic education explained so far.

### Internal critique

A critique from within (internal critique in *tarbiyya* and *tadib* in figure 2) occurs when students are exposed to different interpretations of the religious text and its historical and contextual implications. Students explore issues within the ethical and spiritual domains of Islam such as the meaning of *shura*, or consultation in Islam and its co-optation by the *Jabris*<sup>14</sup> doctrine during the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. In addition, critique from within encourages students to compare and contrast the *fatwas*, or religious edicts, offered by contemporary *ulama* (clergy) and, if they are interested in doing so, to seek more convincing, stronger arguments. Students can also question the meaning of some controversial words in Islam such as *jihad*,<sup>15</sup> *caliphate*,<sup>16</sup> *kufur*,<sup>17</sup> *hakimiyya*,<sup>18</sup> and *hikmah*<sup>19</sup> rethinking the limits and ramifications of the explanations of medieval scholars. A critique from within encourages students to reflect on the exegesis of early and modern scholars and how they may reflect male-oriented implications or even biases in interpreting the Quran and the Sunnah (Barlas 2002). Internal criticism permits Muslims to question the ethico-legal authority<sup>20</sup> of the prophetic sayings or the *ahadith* and how the *hadith*-based *tafsir* or interpretation of the Quran may restrict<sup>21</sup> the universal message of the Quran (Saeed 2006). According to this approach, students may ask

<sup>14</sup> *Jabris* is a political philosophy in Islam that holds that human beings do not have control over their actions, as they are all predetermined by God (Saeed 2006, 8).

<sup>15</sup> *Jihad* means to struggle or exert oneself and the Quran often uses the phrase exerting oneself in the path of God (Leaman and Ali 2008, 65).

<sup>16</sup> The caliph is a successor to the Prophet Muhammad in governing the Muslim community (Leaman and Ali 2008, 18).

<sup>17</sup> *Kufur* means disbelief or unbelief—it is one of the most important concepts in the Quran (Leaman and Ali 2008, 71).

<sup>18</sup> *Hakimiyya* is a term used by Salafi Muslims in order to justify the necessity of Islamic caliphate and the implementation of Islamic law (Belkeziz 2009).

<sup>19</sup> *Hikmah* means wisdom and it refers to understanding the world that God has created (Leaman and Ali 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Some scholars view the *hadith*, or the prophet's sayings, as unrecited revelation and therefore consider it as valid and binding as the Quran. According to such scholars, the *hadith* must be followed regardless of time, place, and circumstances (Saeed 2006).

<sup>21</sup> It is argued that this kind of interpretation reflects the social and historical conditions of people who lived in seventh-century Hijaz.

questions such as to what extent Muslims may accept the authenticity and historical reliability of the *ahadith* (Saeed 2006; Shahrur 1990) and to what extent individual Muslims are allowed to contemplate and interpret the Quran based on their abilities and skills.<sup>22</sup>

Some contemporary progressive, liberal scholars who apply the internal critique in Islamic studies cultivate a creative and innovative understanding of Islam and the religious scripture. Such work includes: the writings of Wadud (2009) and Mernissi (1998) about the struggle for women's rights in Islam; Shahrur's (1990) linguistic analysis of the Quran and his rethinking of the law and the principles of jurisprudence; Abu Zaid's critical hermeneutics of the Quran and the dialectical relationship between the text and the context (Kermani 2006); Rahman's (1982) historicism in exploring the relationship between Islam and modernity and his thematic and social justice-oriented analysis of the Quran (Rahman 1980); Ramadan's (2009) and Duderija's (2014a) input about *maslaha*, the common good and *maqasid al sharia*, and the purposes of the Islamic law; the writings of Soroush (2000), Al-Jabri (1996), Kadivar (2009) and Khan (2006) on reason, freedom, and democracy in Islam; Hassan's (2013) exploration of *fiqh al-aqalliyat*<sup>23</sup> and Wilkinson's (2015) recent work about Islamic education in a multifaith and multicultural society.

Internal criticism in teaching Islam is crucial for legitimizing *ikhtilaf* (differences and disagreement) within Islamic culture and therefore to challenge the fundamentalist groups'<sup>24</sup> perceptions of Islam and of being a good Muslim. Internal criticism in Islamic education doubts the intimate relationship between Islam and the authoritarian state in Arab and Muslim countries, as well as the conflation of rebellion against the state as rebellion against Islam (Waghid 2016). Teachers and students may apply the above scholars' methods of critique in order to learn about and to recognize the diversity within Islam, its intellectual heritage, and to develop their own religious reasoning on controversial and contemporary issues.

### External critique

Similarly, a critique from the outsider perspective (external critique in both *tarbiyya* and *tadib* in figure 2) is important for living in a diverse and multifaith society. Wilkinson (2013) clarifies that

in a multi-faith, rational, educated democracy, it is not good enough to just to say that Islam is the truest faith because God says so. Believers ... need to be able to justify why, in a democracy, when all human beings are (in theory at least) morally equivalent to one another, it is still possible to select and be committed to one tradition of faith as opposed to another (439).

Applying an external critique enables teachers and students to discuss issues such as the unity (*tawhid*) and justice of God, the meaning of salvation and post-death survival (Khalidi 1985), and how Islamic morals are similar or different from other religions' and nonreligious ethical systems. They are also free to ask fundamental questions: Can human beings live decently while not following the Islamic morals? Why does God want Muslims to worship Him? How does belief in the predestined life explain humans' free will and their responsibility for their deeds and the meaning of punishment or reward in the hereafter? What should be the place of Islam in multicultural and multifaith society? To what extent may Muslims use the epistemological foundations and findings of modern sciences<sup>25</sup> in order to investigate

<sup>22</sup> Not relying on *alim*, the authoritative religion scholars, for interpretation is considered the democratizing of understanding the Scripture (Saeed 2006).

<sup>23</sup> The meaning and nature of Islamic law (*sharia*) as it is applies to Muslims living in liberal secular democracies (Hassan 2013, xii).

<sup>24</sup> Such as Al Qaeda (the base) and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria).

<sup>25</sup> This approach requires educators and students to go beyond the grammatical, linguistic, and legal strategies in interpreting the Quran.

the ethical–legal content of the Quran? To what extent are Islamic interpretations compatible with democratic values such as human rights, freedom of conscience, and equal citizenship? (Saada and Gross 2017; Wright 1996)

Theologically, the two modes of critique in teaching the moral and spiritual components of Islam place more value on the use of *aql* or rational thinking rather than on *naql* or transmitted knowledge and appreciate the liberal approaches of *ijtihad* (religious reasoning) rather than *taqlid*<sup>26</sup> for rationalizing and historicizing religious truth claims and interpretations.

## Conclusion

The discussion of typology does not purport to suggest a recipe for right or wrong Islamic education but to provide a theoretical framework for educators to reflect on their practices and pedagogical orientations. Ultimately, each educator is free to choose what works best for him or her based on his or her personal background and theological training as well as the needs of the students and the school community.

Without exaggeration in endorsing the liberal and progressive paradigm of Islamic education, we are inclined to agree with those scholars who find that noncritical strategies of religious education are very limited in terms of developing the Muslim students' democratic character, their reflective capacities, and their moral agency (Alexander 2000; Panjwani 2014; Saada 2017; Saada and Gross 2017; Selcuk 2012; Tan 2008, 2011; Waghid 2011; Waghid and Smeyers 2014).

Teaching Islam through internal and external critique is more convincing in developing students' moral agency. It requires citizens who are intelligent, free, and fallible: "Intelligent people have the capacity to inquire, free agents can be held accountable for their actions, and fallible citizen can be mistaken, so that intelligence and freedom can be employed in charting a new course" (Alexander 2000, 309). It is important in our globalizing, postmodern, and diverse societies to allow students exercise their moral agency so that they know how to live peacefully and productively with people holding differing views about the meaning of a righteous and spiritual life (Alexander 2015; Wilkinson 2015).

Critical Islamic education in both *tarbiyya* and *tadib* could be effective in addressing the "unhappy Muslim consciousness" (Wilkinson 2015, 33) in Western societies,<sup>27</sup> because it recognizes and respects the diversity of knowledge within<sup>28</sup> and outside Islam, the value of rationality and independent thinking, and the significance of political and democratic deliberation.

## Notes on contributor

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<sup>26</sup> *Taqlid* refers to the imitation and blind following of early scholars, the medieval Sunni jurists, and their juridical theology (Leaman and Ali 2008).

<sup>27</sup> It is argued that Muslims in the West are either attracted by discourses of defensive faith (such as the dichotomized constructions of Islam versus the West, science versus religion, Islam versus modernity, and Islam versus democracy). Or they abandon their faith, arguing that there is a "mismatch between the practice of [Muslims'] professional lives in nonreligious contexts and the articulation of their religious beliefs" (Wilkinson 2015, 34).

<sup>28</sup> This may include, for instance, learning about the theological schools of Asha'riya, Maturidis, Sufism, Shi'i, and Mu'tazila as well as the legal contributions of the four mainstream *madhahib*.

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