Mapping discourses on mosque education in the Netherlands

A content analysis of the Dutch press, 2010–2016

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Mapping discourses on mosque education in the Netherlands: a content analysis of the Dutch press, 2010–2016

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the discourses on Dutch mosque education. Based on a review of the scholarly debates on mosque education in West, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles containing references to mosque education between 2010 and 2016 ($N = 45$). The data are sampled from the five largest Dutch newspapers. Most of the themes emerging from the literature are also reflected in the discourses on mosque education in the press. In line with other media analysis on representation of Muslims, the portrayal of mosque education in the Dutch press is also mainly negative. The key issues in the press portrayals included use of corporal punishment, inadequate training of imams, reinforcement of conservative gender norms, intensification of social segregation, links with religious extremism and local opposition to mosques. Fewer references concern the positive influence of mosque education on cognitive skills and identity development of the Muslim children.

Introduction

This article aims to contribute to the knowledge on media discourses on mosque education in the Netherlands. There are many studies dealing with the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in different Western media (d'Haenens & Bink, 2006; Hussain, 2000; Jackson, 2010; Kabir, 2007; Said, 1997; Schiffer, 2008; Shadid & van Koningsveld, 2002). There is, however, only one study on the media representation of mosque education in the West (Cherti, Glennie, & Bradley, 2011). Media content influences the attitudes and the beliefs of the audiences (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). Hence, a study of the portrayal of mosque education can contribute to our understanding of the polarized context within which Muslim communities are providing religious education. It can help identify the tensions between Muslim parents' rights to educate their children in accordance with their beliefs and the politicized debate on civic integration of the second- and third-generation Muslim youth. The language used in press portrayals often defines the vocabulary which policy-makers and school teachers use in their interaction with Muslim students and mosque educators.

Mosque education is defined in the literature by different terms such as Qur'an schools, madrassas or mosque schools. In this study, we adopt an inclusive definition of mosque education. It refers to all forms of non-formal religious education provided by the mosques, including Qur'an schools teaching how to read the Qur'an, *hifz* classes teaching Qur'an memorization and recitation, and more general Islamic religious education classes focusing on knowledge about the life of the prophet, Islamic lifestyle and rules of conduct. Since the educational activities of the mosques in the Netherlands fall beyond the regulatory framework of the state, their choice of curriculum, textbooks and governance regimes are entirely autonomous. Thus, it is important to differentiate them from the state-regulated and state-funded Islamic primary schools.

The central question that guides this article is: What are the major discourses on mosque education in the Dutch press? To that end, using the methodological strategy of content analysis, we examine data from the five most circulated daily newspapers in the Netherlands between 2010 and 2016. The article is structured as follows: First, we provide an overview of the scholarly debates on mosque education in Western societies. The studies about the *practice* of mosque education present a primary source of reference on which we base our analysis of the *portrayal* of mosque education in the Dutch press. By outlining the issues arising from the literature, we aim to set the stage for comparison with the media representations found in our study. Next, we briefly examine the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the Dutch press so far. Then, we analyse the press discourses on mosque education in the Netherlands, based on their coverage in the five largest Dutch newspapers in the past six years. In the conclusion, we highlight our major findings, discuss their implications and offer some suggestions for further research.

Scholarly debates on mosque education

Despite its high societal relevance and the growing interest by politicians and the general public, the existing research on mosque education in non-Muslim societies is extremely scarce (Berger, 2014; Moore, 2012; Pels, 2014). The few studies regarding the influence of mosque education on children point to two contending lines of thought: Some studies discuss the positive effects of mosque education on self-esteem, school performance and cultural intelligence, and others suggest that mosque education might undermine reading comprehension skills, civic values education and social cohesion.

Some of the scholars who claim that mosque education benefits Muslim children have found that it is linked to a greater sense of belonging, confidence and self-worth and that it influences children's learner identity development positively (Ahmed, 2012; Meer, 2009). Östberg (2000), for instance, found that Qur'anic instruction was correlated with higher cultural competencies and stronger self-reflexivity of the Pakistani children in Oslo. Similarly, Gent (2011) who conducted participant observation and interviews with students of a Qur'an class in a London mosque claims that children reported increased well-being (e.g. 'praying gives you energy', p. 12), and ability to successfully transfer the skills learnt at the mosque to their schools (such as memorization and recitation). Moreover, Maylor et al. (2010) establish positive links between attending mosque classes which provide homework assistance and the 'development of good attitudes to learning' at the mainstream schools.

On the other side of the spectrum, studies conducted by critical scholars have drawn attention to contradictions between mosque education and schools. Rosowsky (2013) who conducted research in three mosques in the UK, observed that students were taught to decode the sacred script ignoring the meaning of the words they read. He suggests that this type of instruction may have serious implications for reading in schools, 'to the extent where meaning of the words becomes incidental, and where such nonunderstanding is also not disconcerting to the young reader' (p. 76). Considering the role of proficiency in the majority language for the academic achievement of the children from immigrant background, normalizing reading without comprehension may constitute an obstacle to the development of their reading comprehension skills at school.

The pedagogical quality of mosque education has also received various criticisms. Some authors note that volunteers teaching in European mosques usually lack any pedagogical training (Khan, Husain, & Masood, 2005; Sieckelinck, Essousi, & El Madkouri, 2012) and warn against cases of maltreatment of the children at the mosque classes, among which the use of corporal punishment (Cherti & Bradley, 2011; Rajabi-Ardeshiri, 2011). Lewis (2002) points out that religious instructors who are educated in their country of origin are unable to relate the content of the lessons to European societies, and to the cultural life-worlds of the Muslim youth. Likewise, Cherti and Bradley (2011) report that 40% of the respondents in their study of British mosque education were taught by foreign imams who were not seen as capable of providing adequate support to children 'in understanding their dual British-Muslim identity' (p. 6).

Critics also question the compatibility between citizenship education and mosque education. While citizenship education aims at developing critical thinking, respect for opposing views and independence (Schuitema, ten Dam, & Veugelers, 2008; ten Dam & Volman, 2004), mosque education is said to indoctrinate students with a one-sided approach, promote acceptance of authority and inhibit learner's autonomy (Halder, 2013; Sahin, 2013). Moreover, some studies note that mosque education may be promoting traditional gender roles and sexist attitudes (Cherti & Bradley, 2011) offering 'conflicting perspectives over the issues of educational contents, dress code and segregation' of boys and girls (Bhuiyan, 2010, p. 109). Such practices may place the students in the position of constant negotiation between the allegedly contradicting values of schools and mosques, especially if they observe a sharp discrepancy between the two realms. Critics have argued that this may result in a divide between the civic and the religious identity of the children, reinforcing the differences between the two and affecting social cohesion negatively (Cherti & Bradley, 2011; Community Cohesion Independent Review Team, 2001; Ousley, 2001).

The only research focusing on Dutch mosque education is a study by Pels, Doğan, and El Madkouri (2006) and Pels, Lahri, and El Madkouri (2006a, 2006b) conducted in one Turkish and two Moroccan mosques. The researchers note that in all three mosques, the classes present a parallel world to the mainstream schools as the content of the study material makes weak connections with the realities experienced by children in Dutch society. Only in the Turkish mosque Ayasofya, social issues such as the emancipation of women and child abuse were lightly touched upon. Nevertheless, Pels and colleagues claim that they observed reformed pedagogical practices in which milder child-friendly instruction with a space for 'discussion, singing and methods of learning with

an element of play' (Pels, 2014, p. 69) replaced previous authoritarian teaching styles. This finding is suggestive of reform processes which some mosques might be undergoing.

Portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the Dutch press

The representation of mosque education is situated within a broader media portrayal of Islam and Muslims. Existing studies point out to a general tendency for negative representation of groups usually characterised as the 'others' of the mainstream society (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Erjavec, 2001; KhosraviNik, 2010). Islam and Muslim immigrants, in particular, are structurally portrayed through negative imagery in many Western media outlets (Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Kabir, 2007; Poole, 2006; Shadid & van Koningsveld, 2002). Especially after 9/11, the media discourse on Islam has been dominated by associations with terrorism and essential 'otherness' of the Muslims (Morey & Yaqin, 2011). The only study on the portrayal of mosque education in the West is from Britain (Cherti et al., 2011). The British context is peculiar because via the project 'Islam and Citizenship Education' the government has introduced a curriculum of citizenship education in more than 300 mosques. The study has found that the storylines in the British press focus on child protection and extremism prevention through citizenship education in mosques. This suggests that the debates on mosque education are embedded within a discourse on securitization of Islam. Securitization of Islam is not only portraying Islam as a source of threat, but also designing education or immigration policies based on that assumption (Cesari, 2010).

There are a few studies which analysed the representation of Islam and Muslims in the Dutch press. A pioneering study by ter Wal (2004), for instance, compared the portrayal of Islam before and after 9/11 in the quality newspaper *De Volkskrant*. It showed that before 9/11 the coverage focused more on personal experiences of religiosity by the Muslims, while after 9/11 the focus shifted towards the relation between religious fundamentalism and integration. d'Haenens and Bink (2006), on the other hand, analysed the Islam-related articles in the popular newspaper, *De Algemeene Dagblad (AD)*. Their results show that there is a significant increase in negative framing about domestic Islam after the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a radical from Dutch-Moroccan background in 2004.

More recently, van Drunen (2014) who studied the framing of Muslims in eight Dutch newspapers in an ordinary non-election period between September 2010 and March 2011, showed that the four most dominant frames with regard to Muslims are 'problematization', 'homogenization', 'otherness' and 'fear and threat'. The 'problematization' frame focuses on conflicts and problems caused by Muslims. The 'fear and threat' frame contains messages on perceived threats from Muslims. The 'homogenization' frame indicates generalizations regardless of the differences among Muslims. Lastly, the 'otherness' frame accentuates differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is expected that the unfavourable portrayal of Islam and conceptual homogenization of Muslims would be reflected also in the portrayal of mosque education by the Dutch press.

Method

The Netherlands is an interesting case-study for two reasons. First, it hosts one of the highest percentages of Muslim population in Western Europe, estimated at 6% of the

total population in 2010 (Berger, 2014). The largest Dutch Muslim communities are from Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese background. There are 475 mosques belonging to the different communities (Berger, 2014) and almost all of them offer educational programmes. Some sources claim that nearly half of all Dutch-Turkish and Dutch-Moroccan children attend mosque classes (Driessen & Merry, 2006). Second, in the past decade, the country has experienced a shift from an official policy of multiculturalism towards immigrant assimilation, in a more drastic way than other countries (Entzinger, 2003; Vasta, 2007).

To obtain our sample, we used the Lexis Nexis database. The sample consists of the five largest daily newspapers in the Netherlands: *De Telegraaf*, *AD*, *De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *Trouw* (NDP Nieuwsmedia data, 2013). Based on previous studies of the Dutch press, we categorize *De Telegraaf* and *AD* as popular (tabloid) newspapers, and *De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *Trouw* as quality press (Schafraad, 2009; Vliegenthart, 2007). Popular press is said to cover the news in a more sensational and less nuanced way than quality press, and to share the anti-establishment and anti-immigrant sentiments of the populist right-wing parties (Mazzoleni, 2003). We restricted the time frame to the last six years. Thus, the articles included in the analysis are published between the 16 March 2010 and 16 March 2016. The reason for selecting the year of 2010 as a starting point has to do with the significant rise in anti-Muslim attitudes in the Netherlands as manifested in the electoral success of the extreme right-wing party PVV (Party for Freedom) in the same year.

The articles were retrieved using the search terms *koranschool* OR *madrassa OR moskeeschool* (Qur'an school OR madrassa OR mosque school). The initial sample consisted of 163 articles which did not necessarily refer to mosque education in the Netherlands. We experimented with filtering the results by the term *nederlands** (Dutch) but this resulted in omitting relevant articles and thus we did not apply the filter. One major limitation of using Lexis Nexis is that the search terms may produce symptomatic rather than pertinent results. Therefore, we needed to eliminate manually some of the articles which did not refer to the Dutch context. Consequently, we ended up with a sample of 45 articles. The main focus of the articles was not necessarily religious instruction but they all contained references to mosque education in the Netherlands.

The methodological strategy employed to analyse the texts was qualitative content analysis which is characterised by reflexive research design allowing new concepts to emerge through constant discovery and constant comparison (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). In this regard, the codes were developed on the basis of the theoretical review of the literature on mosque education; however, new codes were added as they emerge from the texts. This resulted in a list of 22 codes with 85 coding instances in total as some news items contained more than one code. The coding was done via the software ATLAS.ti by two researchers until 'convergent validity' of the coding was achieved (see Friese, 2014, p. 134). Beside the codes, the identity of the actors was also taken into account, that is who gets to speak with regard to mosque education.

Mosque education is a rather wide-spread practice among the Muslim immigrants. However, only 45 out of 163 articles deal with mosque education in the Netherlands as opposed to 118 articles on mosque education abroad. This illustrates the relative invisibility of domestic mosque education in the Dutch press. Since the aim of this

paper is to understand the discourses with regard to the mosque education in the Netherlands, articles focusing on mosque classes in Muslim countries, for example, Senegal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Morocco were not included in the analysis. The portrayals of mosque education in the omitted news items contained mainly references to jihad-recruitment, Islamic terrorism and religious radicalism in the Middle East. This is in line with the results of previous research on Islam in the Dutch press showing that 'foreign Islam is more often associated with terrorism than Dutch Islam' (d'Haenens & Bink, 2006, p. 147). Such media representations are likely to influence the construction of negative images among Dutch public about the teaching activities of the mosques in the Netherlands as well.

Findings

Most of the discourses emerging from the literature were also reflected in the portrayal of mosque education in the press. The majority of the coding instances contain problematic associations with mosque education, the main issues being allegations of corporal punishment, restrictive gender norms, links with religious extremism and local opposition to mosques. The results also show that quality newspapers provided more balanced coverage than popular dailies by reporting also on positive aspects such as benefits of mosque education for identity formation and cognitive development. Table 1 gives an overview of the codes grouped in discursive categories and distributed by newspaper.

Table 1. Distribution of codes per newspaper.

	Telegraaf	AD	Volkskrant	NRC	Trouw	Total
Pedagogical practices						**29**
Corporal punishment	0	1	4	1	6	**12**
Cognitive benefits of Qur'an classes	0	0	1	3	4	**8**
Changing pedagogical climate	0	1	2	1	0	**4**
Rote learning	0	0	1	0	1	**2**
Negative pedagogical climate	0	0	1	0	0	**1**
Authoritarian pedagogy	0	0	1	0	0	**1**
Inadequate training of imams	0	0	0	0	1	**1**
Gender norms						**10**
Gender norms	1	1	3	1	4	**10**
Radicalization and extremism						**16**
Links with religious extremism	3	0	0	1	5	**9**
Foreign financing	2	0	1	0	1	**4**
Preaching intolerance	2	0	0	0	0	**2**
Islamization	1	0	0	0	0	**1**
Social cohesion and segregation						**16**
Local opposition	7	0	0	0	0	**7**
Social cohesion	0	0	1	2	2	**5**
Segregation	0	0	0	0	4	**4**
Links with mainstream schools						**1**
Cooperation with formal schools	1	0	0	0	0	**1**
Other codes						**13**
Islamic identity maintenance	0	0	0	3	0	**3**
Parental religiosity	0	0	1	1	1	**3**
Physical conditions	0	0	0	2	1	**3**
Authoritative parenting	0	0	2	0	0	**2**
Bad neighbourhood reputation	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
No to public financing	0	0	0	0	1	**1**
Total coding instances	**17**	**3**	**18**	**16**	**31**	**85**

Pedagogical practices

Corporal punishment is the most dominant theme. It was present in four of the five newspapers referring to cases of child abuse in Moroccan mosques. For example, *Trouw* (2013) wrote about a legal complaint filed by the mayor of Tilburg against the local Salafi mosque regarding five cases of child abuse which were investigated by the GGD (Municipal Health Service). The voices of the children, parents or the mosque representatives are noticeably absent in this account.

An interview with the Dutch-Moroccan writer Mano Bouzamour provides a first-hand account about his own experience in mosque classes in Amsterdam which he attended between the ages 4 and 13. Here we can trace both the issues of child abuse and the unfavourable physical conditions of the classroom in the mosque:

> … a concrete, damp cellar with no windows and no ventilation, lit with fluorescent tubes, where it often was talked about the fire of the hell, seventy times hotter than the fire on the earth. If you had not learned the Qur'anic verses, you were beaten on your palms with a bamboo stick. (*NRC Handelsblad*, 2013)

Samira Bouchibti, a Dutch-Moroccan politician and writer, also reflects on corporal punishment: 'Children are still sent to Qur'an schools on Sundays. To a not so pleasant environment where sometimes they are beaten' (*De Volkskrant*, 2012). Considering the scarcity of available official information about the physical conditions and pedagogical practices in the mosques, accounts like these become a main source of reference for the Dutch public. Although the accounts are published in quality newspapers, the balanced nature of the portrayal is arguable as the realities are constructed only by powerful public figures rather than ordinary Muslims.

Other references to the pedagogy of the mosque also portray a negative climate, including a fear-based, authoritarian approach among instructors, emphasis on indoctrination and rote learning and inadequate pedagogical training of imams and volunteer teachers. These accounts suggest that due to their lack of familiarity with the Dutch culture and language, imams are not able to offer adequate support to the children:

> There is radicalization, the imams don't have a good idea what is going on among the youth, they either speak no Dutch or don't speak it well enough, and they are not capable of translating theology to the practicalities of everyday life. (*Trouw*, 2016)

There are, however, also reports pointing towards positive changes in the pedagogical climate of mosques. Critical Muslims such as the Dutch-Moroccan writer Abdelkader Benali who attended mosque education in the past comments that 'a lot has changed in between' (*De Volkskrant*, 2011). Likewise, Muslim adolescents in their early twenties are able to observe reformed practices as well:

> When I was a child, almost no girls were coming to the mosque. This has changed. Boys and girls sit in the same classroom for a Qur'an class or Arabic lesson. (*NRC Handelsblad*, 2011)

Moreover, as already mentioned, all of the quality newspapers contained also references to the benefits of mosque education. Differently than the articles on corporal punishment, these articles made space for the agency of the students attending mosque classes and the accounts were mostly presented via their voices. The students claimed that the mosque classes had a disciplining effect on them and helped them perform

better at school (*NRC Handelsblad*, 2014). Some claimed that despite memorization and repetition techniques, mosque classes helped them to learn Arabic (*Trouw*, 2013; *Trouw*, 2015) and even develop a taste for poetry (*De Volkskrant*, 2013; *Trouw*, 2014).

Gender norms

Reference to gender norms was present in all newspapers and encompassed a diversity of issues related to the rules of conduct for Muslim girls. The dailies portrayed the mosque education mainly as something which enforces inequality between Muslim girls and boys. The references described the compulsory segregation between sexes in the mosques (*De Volkskrant*, 2012), restrictions on dress code ('you cannot wear short skirt or tights', *Trouw*, 2013) and the forbidden handshaking between men and women observed by imams (*AD*, 2013). Moreover, traditional expectations in terms of gender roles were cited, according to which the girls are not allowed to move away from parents for their studies (*Trouw*, 2014), and are described as child-bearers and the primary caretakers at home (*NRC Handelsblad*, 2011). Among all articles containing a code on gender norms, only one presented a critical stance against the 'feminist' presumption that a headscarf symbolizes the oppression of the Muslim girls (*Trouw*, 2015).

Radicalization and religious extremism

Framed in a more negative light than the gender norms are the references to links with radicalization and religious extremism. The references to links between mosque education and religious extremism include accusations of mosques about preaching intolerance, or calling on jihad against democracy. Similar to the academic discourse on radicalization, Salafi mosques are highlighted for being associated with controversial imams who 'incite children against the society' (*De Telegraaf*, 2016), or who allegedly have links with 'jihadist groups in his homeland Syria' (*Trouw*, 2013). Although the number of Salafi mosques in the Netherlands is limited, the discourse on religious extremism results in a general securitization of mosque education. This leads to the creation of defensive rhetoric by moderate Muslims. For example, a Dutch-Moroccan community who constructed a new mosque explicitly distances itself from assumptions about foreign donors who are likely to lend not only their financial resources, but also their radical religious ideas (*Trouw*, 2014).

Social cohesion and segregation

The discourses on segregation and social cohesion are closely related. While the articles on social cohesion accentuate religious diversity either in a neutral or a positive light, all articles on segregation are framed negatively and stress the decreased opportunity for contact between Muslim children attending mosque education and their non-Muslim peers. There are concerns that participation in mosque classes limits children's exposure to the Dutch language and culture (*Trouw*, 2011). One of the articles explicitly refers to the report of Lodewijk Asscher, Dutch minister of Social Affairs and Employment, on the isolationist tendencies within the Dutch-Turkish community suggesting that mosque education creates 'parallel societies' and is counteractive to successful integration (*Trouw*,

2014). Mosque education is portrayed as a factor which deepens societal segregation without providing information on possible socio-economic reasons behind it. The exclusionary reactions (or 'othering') of the non-Muslim majority are illustrated by the resistance of the local community to the construction of new mosques with Qur'an schools.

Bridges with schools

The topic of cooperation between schools and mosques is covered only once. In an opinion piece in *De Telegraaf* (2016), the Dutch Romanian journalist Nausicaa Marbe is critical against calls from pedagogue Mirte Loeffen for more collaboration between mosques and schools. Loeffen, who organizes training for schools on dealing with radicalization among students, has suggested increasing teachers' knowledge about Islam for a better connection with the Muslim students. This proposition seems unacceptable for the journalist of *De Telegraaf*. She questions the role of the mosque in educating Dutch Muslim children and portrays mosques and schools as incompatible 'others'.

To contrast, *De Volkskrant* (2012) makes space for the voice and agency of Muslims themselves and presents the example of the recently constructed Dutch-Surinamese mosque Taqwah mosque in Amsterdam. The mosque is an illustration of an attempt by the local Muslim community to bridge the gap with schools by offering homework assistance in mixed-gender lessons in Dutch.

References on extending citizenship education to mosque education are absent from the press discourses. There are, however, some critical opinion pieces which focus on the incompatibility of civic values and mosque education. *NRC Handelsblad* (2011), for instance, quoted Mike Huckabee, a former Republican presidential candidate in the US, referring to madrassas as something which do not belong to the West and as such, incompatible with liberal citizenship. Similarly, the historian Simon Schama was quoted for stating that the mosques can be tolerated in the Netherlands as long as they do not preach about jihad against democracy (*NRC Handelsblad*, 2011). Both cases exemplify boundary drawing in defining the values of the nation.

Incidentally, it is pointed out that mosque classes can play a role in Muslim children's identity development. 'Almost every Moroccan boy goes through an identity crisis', one of them says, and those who attended mosque classes appreciate the positive recognition of their identity in mosques: 'Only in the mosque you are not *that* Moroccan. You feel recognized' (*NRC Handelsblad*, 2011). This statement suggests lack of recognition in other spheres of social life, and problematizes the role of the schools in inclusive identity building.

The only article dealing with the separation of mosque and state advocates that no public funding should be made available for mosque education (*Trouw*, 2016). This raises the dilemma of whether mosque education should belong to the private or public realm. Situating mosque education inside the public realm would affirm mosques as legitimate actors in children's educational lives. Situating it outside of the public realm, however, tends to limit mosques' role in designing solutions to educational and social problems of Muslim youth. Furthermore, it undermines state's capacity in ensuring that no isolationist tendencies are cultivated by the 'imported imams' of the so-called parallel communities.

Discussion and conclusion

This article provided an analysis of discourses on mosque education as discussed in the most circulated Dutch newspapers between 2010 and 2016. The leading issues with regard to the *pedagogical practices* in the mosques are illustrated by reports on child abuse and the inadequate pedagogical training of religious instructors. With regard to *gender norms* at the mosque education, the press tends to accentuate differences with the mainstream Dutch society based on the separation of sexes, while differences between religious communities are disregarded. The representations contain associations between mosque education and *radicalization*: mosque classes are said to teach the children intolerance towards democratic values. Also, mosque education is said to decrease children's exposure to Dutch culture and language resulting in isolated communities and stimulating *segregation* rather than *social cohesion*. Lastly, *cooperation* with mainstream schools is only once touched upon, and is represented as undesirable due to the essential 'otherness' of the two types of education.

The main issues discussed in the Dutch press resonate with the portrayals of mosque education in British media (Cherti et al., 2011). Mosque education in the Netherlands, just like in Britain, is frequently mentioned in relation to child protection and religious extremism. Different from the British press, there is no coverage on mosques' role in the civic values education of Muslim children in the Netherlands. Rather, mosque education is placed in a position to prove that the Islamic values they teach are compatible with democratic citizenship. This may be related to the absence of Dutch initiatives similar to the British projects for citizenship education in the mosques which have attracted attention in the British press.

As pointed out earlier, the press discourses on mosque education are embedded within a more general media portrayal of Islam and Muslims. Taking into account, the predominantly negative coverage on Islam and Muslims in the West, it could be expected that the representation of mosque education is overall negative as well. This phenomenon can be partially explained by the discourse on securitization of Islam after terrorist attacks claimed by Muslim groups. Moreover, some scholars have drawn attention to the fact that even before 9/11, the 'othering' of Muslims based on the idea of the superiority of the West has been a prominent line in the Orientalist knowledge production of the European and the US media for a long time (Richardson, 2004; Said, 1997). Others like Ottosen (1995) suggest that 'the enemy image of Islam has roots centuries back and must be analysed in the context of Christian-Muslim rivalry' (p. 98). As such, the media portrayal of mosque education is part of a long trend of a dual representation of the world, of an Occidental identity construction in which 'they' (the Arabs, the Muslims) have been viewed as 'different' and 'threatening' to 'us' (the Westerners, the Christians).

In this case, portraying mosque education as threatening, problematic and essentially different reinforces a homogenized image of mosque education. This raises some concerns because media representations may have real implications for policy-making and practice. Increased dialogue and partnership between schools and mosques are important steps in bridging the gap between the two realms. The prevalence of unfavourable portrayal disguising the differences between and within religious communities, however, might make partnerships between mosques and schools unlikely. The polarized debate may also affect negatively the decisions of municipalities to cooperate with mosques.

As portrayal and actual practice of mosque education are likely to be different, we need rigorous and unbiased research on the pedagogy, content and structure of mosque education in various religious communities. The analysis also shows that the space for the voices of Muslim students and parents are very limited in the press. Both policy-makers and educators can gain from better understanding the role of mosques in the educational lives of young Dutch Muslims. This requires more empirical knowledge about the experiences of Muslim students, parents and mosque teachers as well.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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