


Resilient Care of Community Spirituality. The Experience of the Muslim Young-BG Association

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Abstract

This paper presents an action-research study that investigates the spiritual experiences of young Muslims in Bergamo, Italy, particularly within the Islamic Cultural Center located beneath a busy overpass on Via Rosa. This center serves not only as a place of worship, but also as a vital site for community engagement and cultural identity formation amid the challenges posed by its unconventional location. The research explores how these young individuals navigate their spirituality and cultivate communal bonds despite the limitations of the physical space, which is often characterized as inadequate and disruptive. Through creative methodologies, including poetic expression, participants articulate their resilience and adaptability in confronting environmental adversity. The findings reveal a profound commitment to spirituality that transcends the constraints of their surroundings, highlighting the need for inclusive and supportive spaces that reflect the aesthetic and functional aspirations of the Muslim community in Italy.

Keywords

spirituality, young Muslims, resilience, care, poetic expression

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The contemporary landscape of Islamic places of worship in Italy exhibits marked diversity, characterized by the presence of Islamic cultural centers and, to a lesser extent, mosques, alongside a proliferation of prayer rooms often utilized based on ethnic and linguistic affiliations (Peta, 2016). These venues serve not only as spiritual sanctuaries, but also as communal gathering spaces for individuals with similar religious backgrounds, thereby facilitating opportunities for social interactions and the observance of religious occasions.

1. Action-research: who are you? What do you think?

This study aims to investigate the religious experiences of young Muslims who attend the mosque situated on Via Rosa in Bergamo,¹ Italy, and are affiliated with the MYBG* (Muslim Young Bergamo Generation) association.² These individuals engage in spiritual practices not only within the mosque—often characterized by a somewhat chaotic and noisy atmosphere due to its location beneath a road bridge—but also in natural environments. Consequently, we aim to determine whether the choice of these alternative venues can be seen as an effort to create spaces of spirituality in unconventional settings that are perceived as more aesthetically pleasing and less disorienting than the designated place of worship in their city.

“Crossing a bridge, traversing a river, crossing a border means leaving the intimate and familiar space, where everyone has their place, to penetrate a different horizon, an unknown and foreign space where, in confronting the other, there is a risk of discovering oneself without a proper place, without identity. Therefore, the polarity of human space is made up of an inside and an outside [...]. One knows oneself and builds oneself through contact and exchange with the other. Between the shores of the same and the other, man is a bridge” (Vernant, 2005, 169-170).

This bridge symbolizes a stark contrast between the aesthetic ideals of beauty and harmony typically associated with religious sites and those that remain unattainable in the environment frequented by these young Muslims. Bridges, designed to connect and unite, hold a unique significance in human architecture. As the Serbian

¹ Bergamo is an Italian city located in the Lombardy Region, to the northeast of Milan.

² The name “MYBG” plays on words: it is the acronym of “Muslim Young Bergamo Generation” and, at the same time, can be read as “My BG”, where BG is the code for the Province of Bergamo: <https://www.facebook.com/MuslimYoungBergamoGeneration/> (viewed on 29 October 2024).

writer and diplomat Andrić poignantly writes, they are “more important than houses, more sacred, because more useful than temple”. He further asserts that among all human constructions, nothing “is more beautiful and precious than bridges” (2001, p. 1182). This perspective invites us to reflect on the multifaceted role of bridges—not merely as physical structures, but as metaphors for connection, transcending the limitations of space and environment. In the context of the religious experiences of young Muslims, the bridge serves as a poignant reminder of their quest for spaces that foster spiritual connection and aesthetic fulfillment, thus bridging the gap between their cultural identities and the urban landscape in which they navigate.

The context

The presence of the Muslim faithful in Bergamo is part of a complex picture in the analysis of religious plurality in the territory. In the XXXII Immigration Report 2023 by *Caritas Italiana and Migrantes Foundation*, we find a national indication regarding non-Italian Muslim believers residing in Italy:

“[...] represents a 29.8% incidence as of January 1, 2023, compared to 29.5% at the beginning of last year. Counting, as every year, the religious affiliation of minors of any age as well, which is assumed to be distributed with the same proportions as those estimated for adults of the same nationality, on an absolute level as of January 1, 2023, there are a little more than one and a half million foreign Orthodox in Italy and a little less than the same figure for Muslims, followed by about 844,000 Catholics in third position. More distant in terms of quantity are all other religious affiliations.”

Despite the enduring presence of Muslims in Italy—encompassing both the aforementioned non-Italian citizens and converts—a notable absence of mosques in Bergamo exists, a situation that contrasts sharply with other cities within Lombardy (which have limited places of worship anyway).³ This discrepancy can be attributed to the specific legal challenges faced in the Lombardy region regarding the establishment of new places of worship. Consequently, Muslim communities convene in

³ A list of places of worship is difficult to find; on the other hand, it should be noted that in 2017, the ISMU Foundation did a search trying to identify them, indicating their types and characteristics: https://www.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Cuciniello_Luoghi_di_culto_islamici_in_Italia.pdf

dedicated cultural centers, frequently operated by various associations⁴. This action research unfolds precisely within such a context: a facility in the City of Bergamo designated for use by the Bergamo Muslim Association and its youth division, MYBG (Muslim Young Bergamo Generation).

This particular space—although a place of worship—is situated in an unconventional location beneath the overpass of a bustling thoroughfare in a semi-peripheral area of the city. The visibility of this venue is almost imperceptible to those unfamiliar with its existence, save for the rhythmic flow of worshippers during scheduled prayer times and other activities organized by the Association. One respondent to the questionnaire characterized the center as “a little secret”, encapsulating its hidden yet vibrant role within the community.

Action research was conducted in collaboration with the MYBG Association, a non-profit social/youth promotion association,⁵ and its members. The initial phase involved administering an anonymous online questionnaire consisting of 27 questions, systematically categorized into four primary domains: 1) biographical information; 2) respondents' relationships with their faith; 3) their personal connections to the places of worship they attend; and 4) the interplay between their faith and experiences in alternative locations.

These questions are closely related to our research, as they aim to explore how participants experience religion in relation to a place that, due to its inherently “unconventional” nature, may influence or transform their practice. It is essential to consider that the place of worship in question is located “under a bridge”, a setting that, although lacking traditional symbols of sacredness, can represent a space for deep reflection and connection. The characteristics of a space that does not adhere to typical models of sanctity, but is instead situated within an urban, dynamic environment, may raise questions about how faith is expressed and developed in contexts that challenge conventional norms. Therefore, the research seeks to investigate whether and how this atypical space impacts practitioners' perception, the intensity of their spiritual experience, and their relationship with the faith community.

⁴ For further exploration, though without the intention of being exhaustive given the complexity of the topic, it is suggested to consult Casuscelli, G. (2015). La nuova legge regionale lombarda sull'edilizia di culto: di male in peggio. *Stato, Chiese E Pluralismo Confessionale*, 14, <https://doi.org/10.13130/1971-8543/4797>.

⁵ By clicking this link, you can find all the initiatives they offer:
https://www.facebook.com/MuslimYoungBergamoGeneration/?locale=it_IT

The participant

The research aims to engage young Muslim worshippers. A total of 22 individuals aged 16 to 30 participated, with the age distribution as follows: 13.6% aged 16-18, 13.6% aged 18-20, 31.8% aged 20-25, 9.1% aged 25-30, and 31.8% aged 30 or older. The group consisted of a diverse mix of young men and women, as reflected in the questionnaire responses: 59.1% of responses were submitted by males, while 40.9% were from females. Attendance at the community place of worship holds significant importance for all respondents.⁶

The majority of young participants had completed high school; specifically, 22.7% possessed a high school diploma as their only qualification, 59.1% had a high school diploma, and 18.2% held a college degree. Their educational and vocational backgrounds were notably diverse.

Almost all respondents and members of the association were lifelong Muslims, with only one individual indicating that he embraced Islam through a process of conversion. The experience of faith was similarly influenced by familial ties for 36.4% of respondents, by other Muslim friends and acquaintances for 40.9%, and by peers for 9.1%. Conversely, three out of the 22 respondents noted that their expression of faith differed from that of their acquaintances or peers.

One's relationship with faith

For the young individuals surveyed in this research, the relationship with faith plays a crucial role in their lives. Specifically, 77.3% of respondents deemed faith to be very important, while 9.1% considered it important, and 13.6% regarded it as somewhat important. Notably, no participant indicated that faith is of little or no importance. This finding aligns with the fact that the research predominantly engaged motivated and active young members of the association.

Faith is experienced as both a personal and communal matter, serving as a significant motivation for attending the center and participating in associated activities. Indeed, 18.2% of the 22 respondents visit the Islamic center daily, while half attend once or more times a week. The remaining participants visit rarely or only on special occasions, such as weddings, funerals, or religious holidays.

⁶ Remember, however, that post-COVID, the latter marked the issue of church attendance and associational participation (see Del Re & Naso, 2022)

The relationship with the Islamic cultural center in G. Rosa Street in Bergamo

For some young individuals, the connection to the Islamic Center on Via G. Rosa in Bergamo is further strengthened by their membership in the MYBG group. Notably, 45.5% of respondents have been involved for over three years, while more than half have joined within the past three years. This dynamic reflects a healthy membership turnover, indicating both an influx of new members and active engagement in various roles. Membership serves as a significant motivator for increased attendance at the center, with nearly all respondents—except for one—affirming this sentiment.

The MYBG organizes a range of activities and initiatives tailored for the Muslim youths who frequent the center. These include out-of-town trips, camping excursions, visits to other Islamic centers, competitions, lectures or discussions with experts, educational programs, community debates, public presentations to the broader citizenry, and solidarity activities. Participation rates among youth respondents are notably high, particularly for meetings with experts (95.5%), debates (77.3%), out-of-town trips (86.4%), and camping (77.3%). These two latter activities are particularly intriguing for investigating the interplay between the “nurturing of communal spirituality” and the “places” where this spirituality is cultivated, whether within or beyond the confines of Via G. Rosa.

The relationship between the premises of the Islamic cultural center on Via G. Rosa is a focal point of this research, arising from the observation of one of the most vibrant and frequented locations in Bergamo, marked by its unique setting and structure. Additionally, this topic often attracts the attention of local stakeholders who are engaged in dialogue with Bergamo’s Muslim community.

However, almost none of the young respondents expressed satisfaction with the physical structure of the center: 27.3% dislike it entirely, 40.9% find it somewhat agreeable, and 27.3% like it to a considerable extent. Only one individual reported a strong affinity for the place. Despite these sentiments, a significant portion of the youths (68.2%) actively dedicate time to enhancing the facility, striving to “improve it in every possible way”. They engage in cleaning, preparing the hall, organizing the library, and assisting with set-ups or rearrangements before and after events.

The venue is characterized by descriptors such as “small”, “forgotten”, “incongruous”, “dark”, “cold”, “stuffy”, “unsafe”, and “inadequate”, compounded by disruptive street noise. These attributes contribute to strong perceptions of the space as “marginalizing”, “offensive”, and “stressful”. Some individuals expressed a sense

of being “compelled to use it”, suggesting that the facility feels entirely “in need of renovation” because it fails to accommodate the community’s needs.

Despite acknowledging these tangible limitations, all respondents agreed that the issues stem from the physical environment rather than from the management or operational aspects of the center. Notably, the negative critiques coexist with numerous positive affirmations that highlight a warmer dynamic between the young individuals and the venue. It is often described as “welcoming”, “organized”, “well-attended”, “familiar”, “warm”, “vibrant”, and “supportive.” This stark contrast highlights the disparity between the structural conditions of the space and the lived experiences of its users—a theme clearly articulated in the responses.

We report on three metaphors used by young people in the questionnaire to describe their center. These metaphors highlight their struggle to live out their faith in this environment, as well as their resilience and strong desire for personal development.

“A beacon for people in the dark! Despite its critical location under the freeway bridge, it continues to be a landmark and meeting place for many young people who choose the straight and narrow rather than go do other bad deeds.”

This metaphor underscores the importance of the center as a point of reference in challenging contexts. Despite its peripheral and precarious location, the center remains a symbol of hope and guidance for young people—a beacon that directs those seeking a positive path. The image of the lighthouse also conveys a sense of resilience, with the light of hope persisting even in difficult conditions.

“It’s like passing through a place; you adapt to the temporary conditions and accept what’s there. You don’t feel at home, though, part of the place and the city. It feels like you have to hide, like you are doing something wrong.”

This metaphor highlights the temporality and disconnection that young people experience in relation to the space. While the center serves as a meeting point, it does not provide a complete sense of belonging. The feeling of “having to hide” suggests a struggle to fully integrate one’s faith and religious practices in a context that is not perceived as welcoming or permanent.

“The center is like a caterpillar waiting to become a butterfly. The explanation is that our center has a lot of potential because the community is very active and eager; the activities offered are really varied and for all ages. Our center could become a beautiful, colorful butterfly that spreads its wings and flies, but until we have a worthy and appropriate place for us, we will remain a poor caterpillar that has never managed to become a butterfly.”

Finally, the metaphor of transformation represents the great potential of the center, which remains incomplete without an appropriate physical space. The caterpillar, awaiting its transformation into a butterfly, symbolizes the desire for growth and development that requires a more suitable and stimulating environment. The potential of the center is evident, but it remains unexpressed until a space that fully supports it is created.

The nurturing of spirituality within Bergamo's Muslim community is intricately linked to the relationship with their place of worship, particularly its unique location "under a bridge". Approximately 22.7% of young respondents acknowledged the adverse effects of this setting, noting that it detracts not only from the religious experience—"it is not a place that fosters the tranquility and serenity essential for spiritual contemplation"—but also from the facility's image within the urban landscape. One individual remarked, "I practice my religion independent of the place. It feels somewhat incongruous to invite a non-believer to such a location, especially when churches, parishes, and oratories in Italy are aesthetically pleasing and welcoming."

Nonetheless, the responses indicate a strong conviction that faith resides in the heart and transcends physical space—a sentiment that underscores the resilience of their religious practice. Despite the challenges posed by their environment—"Often, while we pray, heavy vehicles pass overhead on the bridge, causing the structure to tremble"—the essence of their spirituality remains unaffected. This observation is indeed striking, as it serves not only as a literal description, but also as a powerful metaphor. The image of the bridge shaking under the weight of passing vehicles symbolizes the external challenges that threaten to destabilize or disrupt spiritual practices. Yet, the fact that the essence of their spirituality remains "unchanged" despite these disturbances reflects a profound resilience. It suggests that their faith is not dependent on external circumstances, but rather rooted in an inner strength that transcends the physical realm. This resilience underscores the ability to maintain spiritual integrity and focus, even when confronted with a world that may appear unstable or overwhelming.

The response that best summarizes the widespread feeling among MYBG youths is:

"Religious practice is an internal matter that finds its place in the heart. It is, therefore, not influenced by outward aspects. However, if the outward appearance is suitable, it can help increase the quality of it."

What would an ideal environment for spirituality and community engagement look like for young Muslims in Bergamo? The responses reveal a collective desire for effective leadership, along with a space that is welcoming, representative of the community, safe, and equipped with appropriate facilities. Such a venue should foster a sense of calm and serenity, aligning closely with the environments that Bergamo's citizens typically frequent—schools, sports centers, offices, and so forth.

Central to their vision is the emphasis on practice and the intrinsic values of faith, highlighting the importance of interpersonal relationships within the community. This underscores a holistic approach to spiritual care, where the physical setting complements the spiritual and social dimensions of life.

Relationship with other places

Despite the structural inadequacies of the center and its location, it remains well attended by its community. The association offers various activities beyond the confines of the center, including outings into nature and visits to other Islamic places of worship throughout Italy. For half of the respondents, these experiences are deemed “very much” or “very” important for their personal religious practice. Additionally, 36.4% consider them quite important, while only 22% view them as not very significant. Notably, the perceived value of these experiences in fostering community connections and promoting spiritual growth is high, with merely 9.1% indicating that they are “not very important”.

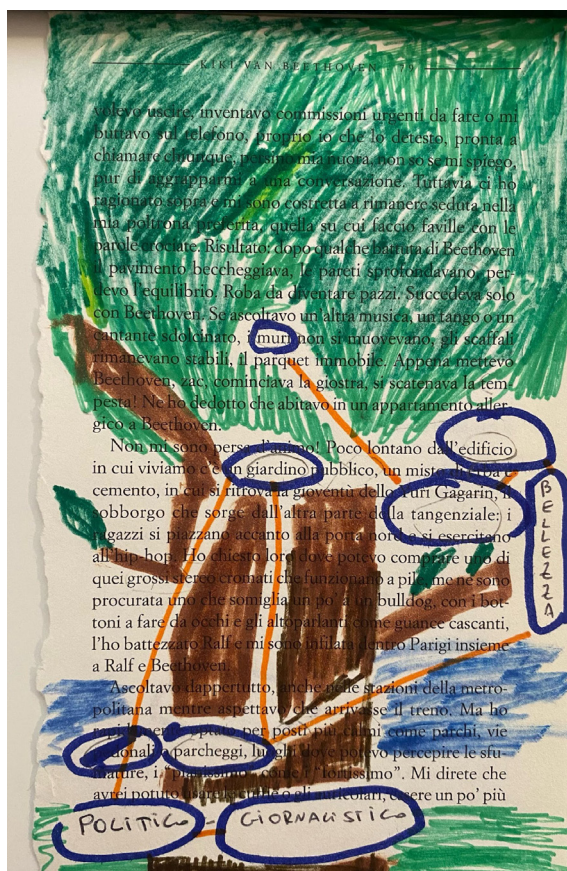
These outings are recognized as educational and regenerative experiences, with 59.1% of respondents categorizing them as “necessary” for community cohesion.

Following the initial data collection, the action research progressed with a voluntary invitation for association members to participate in a session of artistic and educational reworking. The activity was announced at the end of the questionnaire and supported by individual invitations sent via email and WhatsApp. The session, lasting an hour and a half, took place on a Saturday morning at the association's center. The primary objective was to stimulate participants' creativity, encouraging them to explore the “hidden poetry” within their religious practices and the places of worship they attend. The activity was structured in three distinct phases. Initially, participants were introduced to the *Caviardage* technique, which involves creating poetry from an existing text by removing certain words to allow those that resonate most with the reader's experience to emerge. Each participant was provided with a page from an old book from which they had to select words. The second phase,

which constituted the core of the activity, saw participants choose 20 significant words from the pages and reflect on their place of worship. They then reduced the text to ten words, removing the remaining ones using colors of their choice. In the final phase, participants created their own poems, which were then shared during a circle-time session. In this space, they received feedback on their work and discussed how the poems reflected their spiritual and religious experiences, with a focus on the connection between their faith practices and the physical context of their places of worship.

2. The poetic practice

*Mura Sotto
tangenziale edificio senza
bellezza Parcheggio
Giardino
Problema politico!
o giornalistico?
(A.I.)⁷*



⁷ Under the bypass | a building without beauty | Parking lots | Garden | Political issue! | or journalistic?

Practicing one's religion “under a bridge” evokes a range of reflections that merit careful consideration. This unconventional setting, as emphasized in the first lines of this account, highlights the resilience and adaptability of young Muslims in Bergamo as they navigate the challenges of their spiritual practice. Our aim is to gather and articulate their experiences, giving voice to the complexities of faith in this context. Through narration and poetic expression, we seek to illuminate how individuals nurture their spirituality amidst difficulties. This practice not only underscores their determination to maintain their religious identity, but also fosters a sense of community. Despite the limitations of their environment, they actively contribute to the preservation of their cultural and spiritual heritage, demonstrating that faith transcends physical space. In this way, the act of gathering “under a bridge” becomes a powerful metaphor for connection—linking individuals to both their faith and to one another, reinforcing the communal bonds that sustain them in their spiritual journeys.



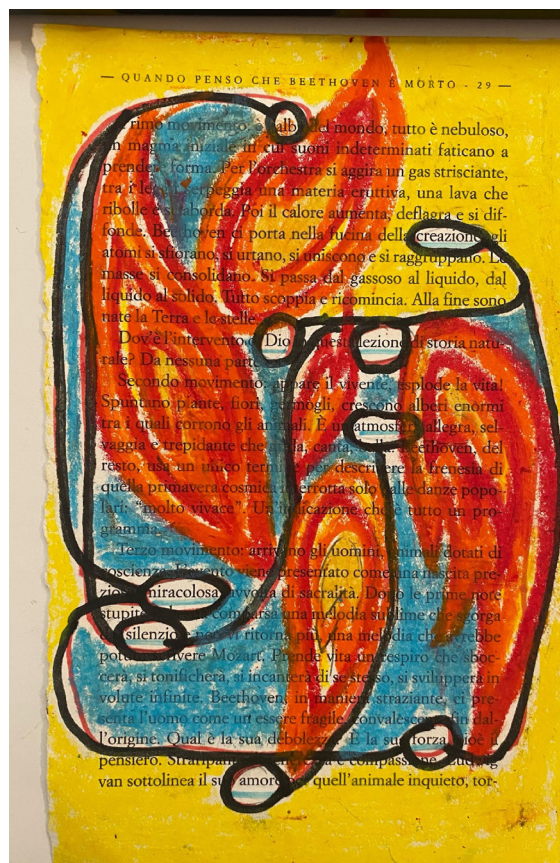
Con نامي ال
(*al-iman/credo, fede*)
il fratello cura
riconoscente
con gioia, saggezza e pienezza
il cervello e il cuore.
(N.I.)⁸

⁸ With *al-iman* (faith) | the brother heals | grateful, with joy, wisdom, and fullness | both mind and heart.

In this regard, we were inspired by the *Caviardage*® technique of Tina Festa (2019),⁹ who states that “the world is full of poetry waiting to be discovered. Poetry made of sounds, images, colors, smells, and matter. We are surrounded by so much beauty and poetry, but we live without realizing it” (p. 13). Respecting its methodology, well described in the book *Trovare la poesia nascosta* (Finding the Hidden Poetry) (Festa, 2019), we convened the members of the MYBG Association on a Saturday morning at their place of worship. The idea of prompting them to reflect on their resilient practice of spirituality, precisely in the place where we would poetically evoke the issues, seemed necessary for the purposes of action research. Eight members attended the meeting—four boys and four girls. This approach, which invites participants to search for words within the pages of a book, allows language to transcend the often rigidly defined parameters of everyday communication and open up new perspectives. It begins with the provocation to think of oneself as “resilient curators of the spiritual community”. This process offers the opportunity not only to reflect on one’s existence—being in that place, praying amidst the surrounding noises, and interacting with others—but also to reconsider one’s relationship with reality and life. According to the pedagogist Scardicchio, the metabolic power of words enables a profound transformation of individuals, as words not only describe but actively shape and modify human thought and experience (2018). The capacity of language to evoke new meanings and possibilities is essential for both cognitive and existential renewal. By engaging in creative and reflective linguistic practices, individuals can cultivate interpretive spaces that transcend established social and cultural conventions. This process of linguistic revitalization enriches interpersonal communication and fosters a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the surrounding reality. Through this dynamic interplay of language and interpretation, we can explore the multifaceted dimensions of human experience, enabling a richer dialogue with ourselves and the world around us.

As we all know, creativity can rarely be attributed solely to the work of a single individual. Rather, it results from a complex interaction of psychological, social, cultural, and environmental factors. According to psychologist Sawyer (2012), creativity is an emergent process involving collaboration and co-creation rather than an isolated act of individual genius. Collaboration allows for the decomposition of

⁹ To delve into the details of the various steps of the technique, we recommend consulting the aforementioned book, as we have decided not to explain each step in detail in this article (see also Festa, 2015).



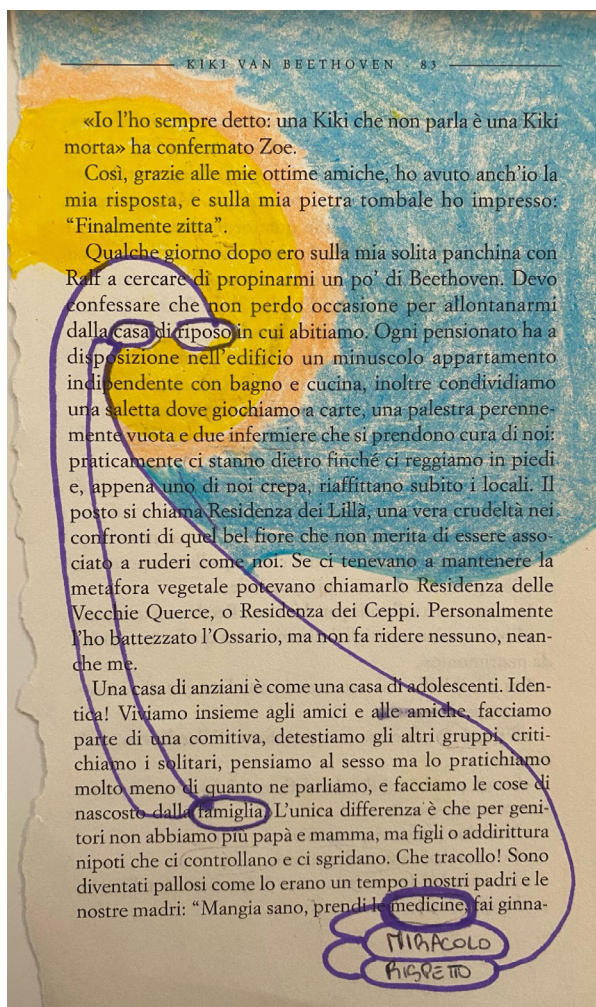
*Dio:
forza, creazione,
miracolosa è l'alba,
silenziosa.
Lezione di forza,
atmosfera
amorosa.
(F. L.)¹⁰*

complex problems, enabling tasks to be distributed according to the specific skills of each group member (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). This process not only makes challenges more manageable, but also stimulates divergent thinking—which is essential for change. Divergent thinking, as described by Guilford (1967), is the ability to generate new and original ideas by exploring multiple possible solutions that others can also share. Furthermore, collaboration facilitates the coordination of resources, creating an environment in which group members can exchange practices and knowledge (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006). This sharing is crucial for collective learning. Studies by Professors Brown and Duguid (1991) highlight how collaboration within communities of practice enables a continuous flow of tacit and explicit know-

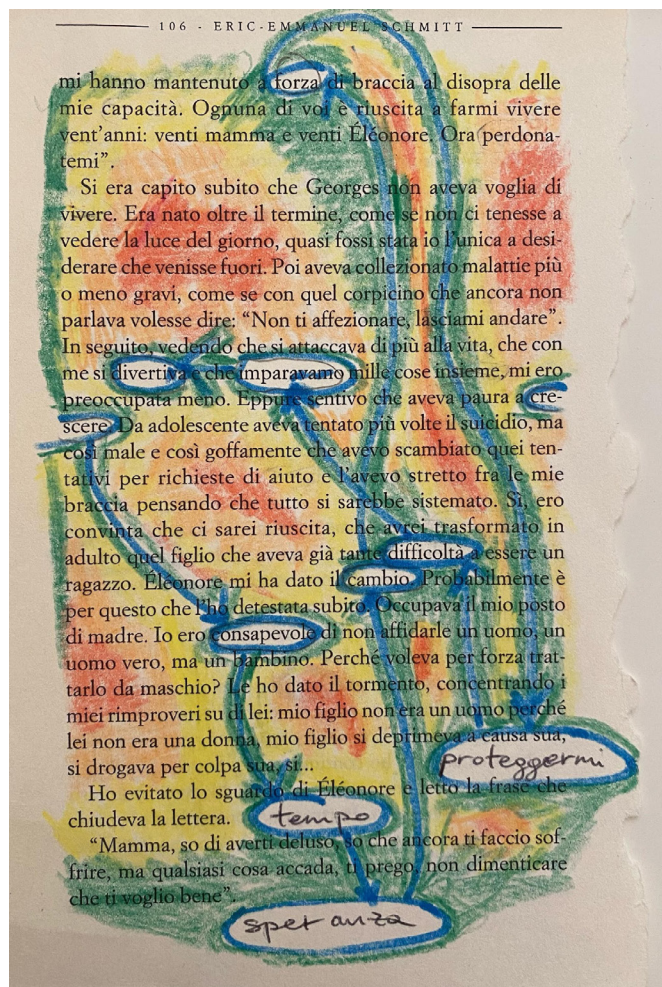
¹⁰ God: | strength, creation | miraculous is the dawn | silent. | A lesson in strength, | an atmosphere | of love.

ledge, essential for innovation and revolution. A collaboration that was implemented now in artistic practice (i.e., now of “creative erasure”). The experimentation, in this case, is infinite and comes alive with the colors provided. According to the creator of Caviardage, writing poetry is an act of listening to our heart and reading our mind, with the intention of expressing ourselves in fresh words. This fosters what Formenti calls “biographicality” (i.e., the ability to observe oneself) (1998). Given the appropriate time, and after accompanying them to the “birth” of their poetry, time was set aside for mutual listening.

*La medicina
قرج (miracolo)
e il rispetto
nella casa
in famiglia
riposando.
(S.H.)¹¹*



¹¹ Medicine | miracle | and respect | in the home, | in the family, | resting.

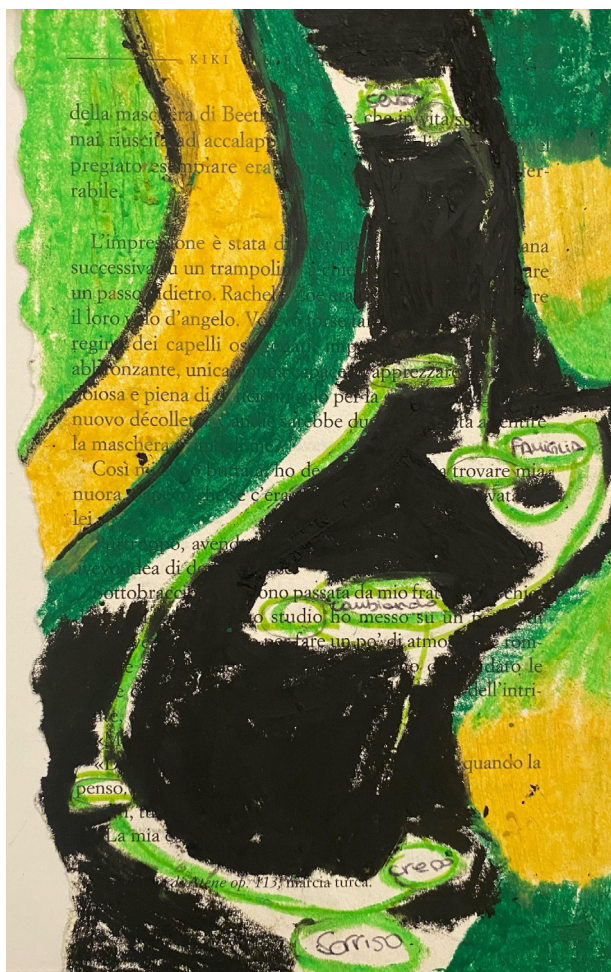


*Crescere consapevolmente
nel tempo,
speranza, cambio, forza.
Proteggermi dalle difficoltà,
imparo e mi diverto!*
(A.E)¹²

The time of narration, understood as the act of telling one's own life and the lives of others, becomes an educational and self-educational experience when transformed into a time of passionate listening. This narrative time acquires aesthetic value for both the self and the other, taking shape through interaction and recognizing the differences from oneself as indispensable and precious elements of one's own narration. It is not merely an act of personal expression, but rather a dialectical process involving the whole person.

¹² Growing mindfully over time, | hope, change, strength. | Protecting myself from hardships, | I learn and have fun!

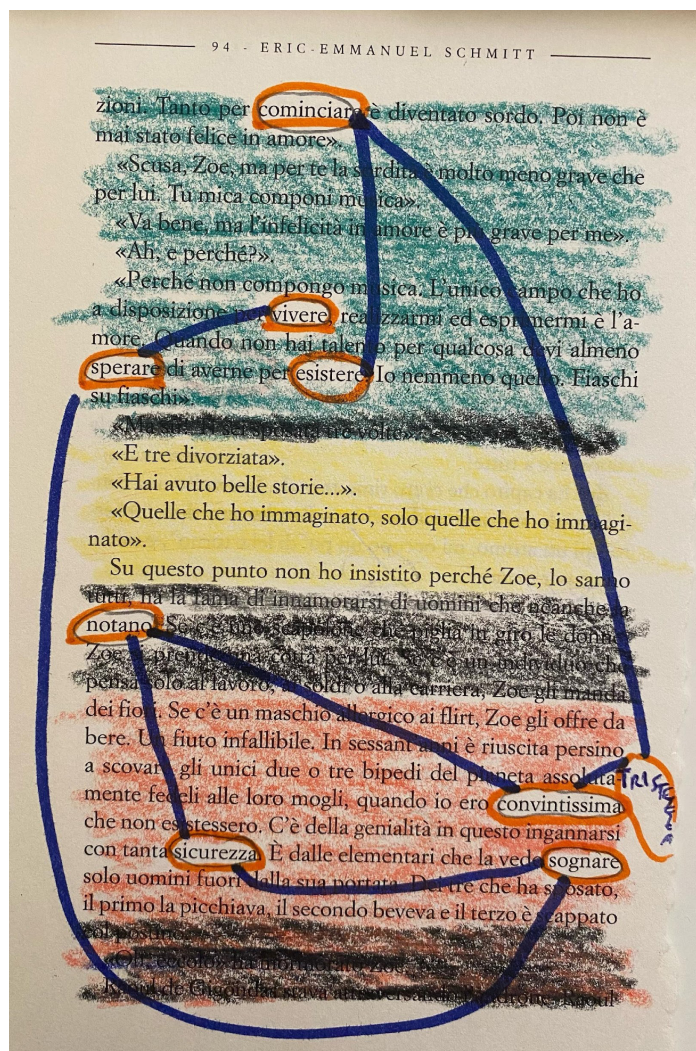
*Da Senso di vita,
trovare Famiglia
Studiando e Cambiando
con il sorriso e con il Credo
io penso Apprezzando.
(H.U.A.)¹³*



In this context, pathos assumes a pivotal role, catalyzing a profound quest for meaning. The emotions experienced and shared become a driving force within this formative and transformative process. This search for meaning, ignited by pathos, not only deepens the understanding of both individual and collective experiences, but also facilitates personal and relational transformation. Consequently, the act of storytelling becomes intrinsically educational, fostering personal growth and cultivating greater awareness and mutual understanding.

¹³ From the meaning of life, | finding family | by learning and changing | with a smile and with faith | I think, appreciating.

3. A shared re-reading



*Vivere,
sperare,
sognare,
sicurezza!
Notano convintissima
ma tristezza?
Cominciare
ad esistere!
(Y.M.)¹⁴*

Creativity as a collective phenomenon benefit enormously from collaborative dynamics, so we wanted to allow for a final moment of discussion following the listening of each person's poems. In this moment of re-reading, inherent to action research, it emerged that:

¹⁴ To live, | to hope, | to dream, | security! | Do they notice utterly certain sadness? | To begin to exist!

"The eye sees the words you need, so what you have in your head, you grasp. But only by reading can you appropriate it. You don't immediately have the final poem in mind, but you already perceive it. And in the end, you see what others also perceive differently from you, despite the same background" (A.M.).

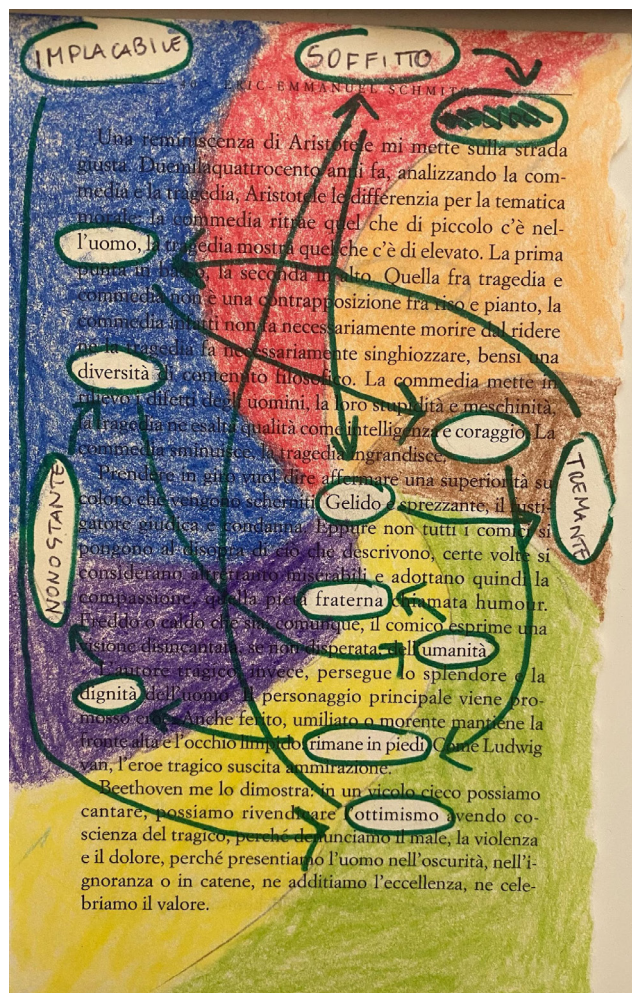
To which (A.I) adds,

"I had a dialogue with the text that seems to have been made on purpose, that really reflects our place," and adds that *"certain issues are really not emphasized by us,"* as if to underline how poetic practice has helped him become more aware. To this, one girl adds, *"it was difficult to delete the chosen words that were able to describe with more complexity. Choosing what to give importance to and discovering that even in the few words there is meaning was really beautiful, important"* (N.F).

A moment that emphasizes the power of narration and confrontation, which plays a crucial role in triggering and directing the search for meanings within a broad spectrum of possible contents. Through narration, it is possible to conjugate reality with the subjunctive, allowing for reflection that embraces the past, present, and future. As Bruner (1991) argues, narrative not only organizes human experience, but also creates a structure for interpreting and making sense of our lives; in this case, religious practice in a contrasting context, such as being under a bridge. By opening, however, to the future, a narrative can be temporal (Ricoeur, 1984) and allows us to understand human time as an interweaving of different temporalities, which makes it possible to reflect and project oneself in time. As if to emphasize that it is from each person's human stories that we learn and receive provocations for our "being in the world", as from this poem.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research highlights the enduring resilience of young Muslims in Bergamo. Despite the stark realities of their physical environment, they continue to aspire to create spaces that nurture their spiritual growth and communal identity. While the harshness of concrete may dominate their surroundings, it serves as a constant reminder of their quest for beauty and harmony in their lives. Their longing for improved places of worship and community engagement reflects not only a desire for a more conducive environment for spiritual practices, but also underlines a universal human aspiration for belonging and connection.



*Con implacabile ottimismo
un soffitto gelido tremante
l'uomo si fa coraggio
a rimanere in piedi con
dignità
nonostante la diversità, che
l'umanità è fraternità.
(A.B.Ĵ.)¹⁵*

By envisioning places that resonate with their cultural values and spiritual needs, these young individuals challenge the limitations imposed by their current environment, seeking to transform adversity into opportunity. Their dreams of better places signify not only a personal longing, but also a collective hope for a more inclusive and understanding society, where diverse spiritual expressions are celebrated and accommodated. Ultimately, this aspiration reflects a broader narrative of resilience,

¹⁵ With relentless optimism | beneath a cold, trembling ceiling, | a man gathers courage | to stand tall with dignity | despite diversity, | for humanity is brotherhood.

emphasizing that the pursuit of beauty, serenity, and belonging is an integral art of the human experience, even in the most challenging circumstances.

Research Ethics Statement

The research has been conducted with the approval of the Muslim Young-BG association. Informed oral consent was obtained from the participants, and all the procedures to ensure their anonymity were pursued. The data obtained in the questionnaire have been consulted with and revised by the participants. The manuscript of the article – including pictures and poems – has been presented to the Muslim Young-BG association with the request of sharing it with the participants and asking for their feedback, which was positive.

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