

Models of Religious Education in the Muslim World: Current Developments and Debates on How to Teach Religion and Ethics in Public Schools

Oddbjørn Leirvik

Introduction

In November 2005, an international workshop about “Teaching for Tolerance and Learning about the Other in Muslim Majority Societies” was held in Istanbul. The workshop came about through co-operation between the Centre for Values Education in Istanbul and the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which runs an international project called “Teaching for Tolerance”.¹ The workshop in 2005 brought together scholars and educators from a number of countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe, and resulted in the book *Teaching for Tolerance in Muslim Majority Societies* (Kaymakcan & Leirvik, 2007).

The book title “Teaching for Tolerance” suggests that the issue of religious education should be seen as part of a larger question of how school education may contribute to tolerance, respect and mutual recognition between different cultural and religious groups in pluralistic societies (Plesner, 2004; Özdemir, 2007).

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of current developments and debates on how to teach religion and ethics in school – in *some* parts of the Muslim world (cf. Leirvik, 2004; Leirvik, 2008). More detailed information as well as in-depth analyses of the situation in different countries can be found in the aforementioned book from the 2005 workshop (Kaymakcan & Leirvik, 2007); in another book from 2007 entitled *Teaching Islam. Textbooks and Religion in the Middle East* (Doumato & Starrett, 2007); and in country reviews available on the Oslo Coalition’s Teaching for Tolerance website.²

O. Leirvik (✉)
University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
e-mail: o.b.leirvik@teologi.uio.no

¹<http://www.oslocoalition.org/t4t.php>

²<http://www.oslocoalition.org/t4t.php> (see under “Resources”).

In both the Muslim world and in the West, a wide array of models for religious education are currently being applied – ranging from no religious education in school (France, USA) via different types of confessional instruction (the most widespread model in both Europe and the Muslim world) to more recent attempts at establishing non-confessional, comprehensive subjects of ethical and religious education which includes all pupils (as in England and Scandinavia, cf. also the new subject “Values and Ethics” in Egypt).

When confessional instruction is offered, it can either be in the form of a single option (in that case, pupils not belonging to that particular religion or confession are normally exempted), dual options (many Middle Eastern countries offer Islamic and Christian education as parallel alternatives) or multiple choices in accordance with the number of officially recognized religions (like in Austria and Indonesia).

Religious Education: Its Political Context and Constitutional Frameworks

In trying to analyse different models for religious education in school, it should be kept in mind that religious education has to do with far more than pedagogy. It relates also to broader issues of national politics, notions of communal identity and different perceptions of citizenship.

A central expression of modern nation building, mass education has been a powerful tool for transmitting national identity and its symbols. As noted by Sami Adwan, education in the Middle East has traditionally been used “as a tool for promoting a certain set of ideological, religious or nationalist perspectives” (Adwan, 1998, p. 1).

Since “a society is not only dependent on some type of internal coherence, but also on the ability to distinguish itself from what is outside” (Skeie 2001, p. 238), religious education in school should be analysed with a view to the portrayal of both external and internal others. Thus a critical question will be how religious education reproduces – or challenges – conventional notions of “us” and “them”. In the age of globalization, one needs also to discuss how current models respond to the need for interfaith respect and ethical bonding across cultural and national borders.

The fact that religious education in school reflect notions of national identity means also that one should expect some correspondence between models of religious education on the one hand and constitutional frameworks on the other. Constitutional arrangements in countries with a Muslim majority population vary considerably, on the spectrum from secular (Turkey) via more or less Islamic (Egypt, Pakistan, etc.) to multireligious (Lebanon, Indonesia) constitutions.

Before taking a closer look at models currently applied in ethical and religious education, two other perspectives on religion in school should also be taken into consideration: the possibility of a particular religion dominating the entire school curriculum, and the way in which history education reflects (or not) the cultural and religious diversity of the country in question.

A Particular Religion Dominating the Entire School Curriculum

In countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran, particular versions of Islamic state religion has dominated not only religious education but the entire school curriculum as well.

Thus after the Khomeini revolution in Iran, an overarching aim of school education has been to create pious and politicized Shi'ite citizens, with a clear cut distinction between insiders and outsiders (Mehran, 2007a; Mehran, 2007b). In the case of Saudi Arabia, Wahhabi ideology has long influenced the education system, in tandem with educational influences from the Muslim Brotherhood and the legitimacy concerns of the royal family (Dumato, 2007, p. 168). After September 2001, several international observers have criticized the confrontational Islamic ideology that shines through in many textbooks, expressing the concern that Saudi Arabia's educational system has actually been fostering intolerance and animosity (CRF, 2006; CMIP, 2003; Stalinsky, 2002). Although some of these reports on Saudi educational ideologies may reflect a particular political agenda (in particular, on the part of the United States), they have highlighted the problematic consequences for both internal minorities and external relations when school textbooks portray the religious other as an outsider whom cannot be trusted.

With regard to Pakistan (Leirvik, 2008), the permeation of Islam in all school subjects corresponds to the islamization policies introduced from the late 1970s under Zia ul-Haq's dictatorship. Islamic education in Pakistani public schools is only for Muslims. But it does not help much that other religious groups are exempted as long as *all* subjects in school are marked by islamization policies. In post-9/11 debates, there has been a strong focus on the confrontational (even militant) tendencies in some of the *madrasa* curricula in Pakistan. From a minority perspective, however, the problem has been even more acute in public schools. According to a critical report published by Pakistani scholars in 2003 under the title *The Subtle Subversion. The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan*,

Madrasas are not the only institutions breeding hate, intolerance, a distorted worldview, etc. The educational material in the government run schools do much more than the madrasas. The textbooks tell lies, create hatred, inculcate militancy, and much more. (Nayyar and Salim, 2003, pp. 1–2)

According to this critical report, textbooks for Urdu, English, Social Studies and Civics have implied

- (1) that Pakistan is for Muslims alone;
- (2) that Islamic teachings, including a compulsory reading and memorization of Qur'an, are to be included in all the subjects, hence to be forcibly taught to all the students, whatever their faith;
- (3) that Ideology of Pakistan is to be internalized as faith, and that hate be created against Hindus and India; and
- (4) that students are to be urged to take the path of *Jihad* and *Shehadat* (ibid., p. 11).

Similar critiques of Pakistani school curricula and textbooks have been launched in other reports and scholarly analyses (for an overview, see Leirvik, 2008). After several years of continuous critical attention to these curricula, in 2007 the Pakistani government announced its intention to eliminate biases from school textbooks:

Pakistan's Education Ministry is making important changes to the school curriculum so that textbooks used across the country will be free from biases against non Muslim groups. New textbooks will include substantial chapters dealing with equality between the sexes, peace, ethics and moral values, and they will be open about the country's economic, social and cultural foundations. (Qaiser, 2007)

Whereas Islamist groups voiced their protest, the government's announcement was received with appreciation from the religious minorities, although with some reservations as to the prospects of efficient implementation. Anyhow, the announcement of the Ministry testifies to the fact that informed critique and pressure from minority and human rights groups may potentially make a difference.

The Image of the Other in History Education

The question of religion in school has also to do with the way in which history is taught. In the case of Pakistan, Yvette Claire Rosser has demonstrated how the history of the Indian subcontinent is rewritten in textbooks so as to serve the Ideology of Pakistan. She finds that in general, Pakistani textbooks downplay or ignore the rich cultural and religious diversity of the area's history, in favour of the Islamic history of the region (Rosser, 2004).

Three further examples from the Middle East, all of them pertaining to Christian–Muslim relations, indicate how difficult it may be to find inclusive ways to teach national history. Christian Palestinians are concerned about the fact that the history of Christian Arabs has been neglected and that Arab and Muslim identity is often conflated in Palestinian textbooks. According to Nathan Brown, in new curricula and textbooks Christians are explicitly included in the nation, “even as the Muslim nature of Palestinian society is constantly affirmed” (Brown, 2007, p. 134). The Christian–Muslim Al-Liqa’ Centre for the Study of Religion and Heritage in the Holy Land has repeatedly called on the educational authorities to improve on history, literature and Arab language textbooks in this respect (Khoury, 1998, p. 106).

In Egypt, similar concerns have been voiced about the under-representation of Coptic history and culture in relevant curricula (Pink, 2003). In the case of Lebanon, which has almost been torn apart by civil war, George J Hajjar notes: “Yes, Christians and Muslims have lived side-by-side for generations, but not really together. The Lebanese have been unable to agree upon an official national history textbook” (Hajjar, 2002, p. 2). The difficult process towards a formulation of a national curriculum for history education in Lebanon has been more closely examined by Munir Bashhur, who concludes that history education should encourage the students to reflect critically on the different ways in which national history can

be viewed, from different perspectives (Bashshur, 2007). A similar case is made by Yücel Kabapınar in his critical examination of the ideological biases in Turkish history textbooks (Kabapınar, 2007).

In Lebanon as well as in Bosnia, the question is how to teach history in an inclusive way in countries that have suffered severely from ethnic and religious conflict – even civil war. In such contexts, the question arises of whether different versions of the same history can be presented in school, as it has also been explored in the Holy Land by Palestinian and Israeli educators working together in a “Shared history project” (Adwan & Bar-On, 2003).

Religious Education as a Single Option, in the Framework of a Secular State

Turning now to the issue of religious education as a separate subject in school, let us first take a look at religious education as a single option. This can either take the form of Islamic education without parallel alternatives (as in the Saudi Arabian case), or more inclusive subjects of ethical and religious education. Turkey, which has a secular constitution with many similarities to the French one, has not followed the French tradition of banishing religious education from public schools. After having long been offered as a voluntary option, religious education became compulsory for Muslims in 1982 and is currently taught as “Religious culture and ethics”.

Although Muslims formally constitute almost 99% of the Turkish population, as reflected in a strong quantitative emphasis on Islam in “Religious culture and ethics”, the subject provides also some space for teaching about other religions, in order to “support the national and general culture” and “develop more tolerant attitudes towards the followers of other faiths” (as expressed by the Ministry of Education in 1992 and 2000 respectively, Kaymakcan, 2002, p. 53). As Recep Kaymakcan and others have noted, “neo-confessional methods” have long guided the portrayal of Christianity in the textbooks and controversial issues that distinguish Christianity from Islam have been dealt with from a traditional Muslim point of view (Kaymakcan, 1999). In recent years, however, important revisions have been in curricula and textbooks with regard to the image of the other, with the aim of conforming to the self-understanding of the religion in question (Kaymakcan, 2007).

In Turkey, both Jews and Christians have been granted the right to opt out from religious education in school, without having the opportunity of establishing an alternative form of ethical and religious education. As for intra-Muslim relations, it has been noted for some years that “some Alawi groups criticize this form of religious education, demanding that Alawi Islam must also be included in curriculum and textbooks” (Kaymakcan, 2002, pp. 52–53). In 2007, the European Court of Human Rights issued a ruling against the subject “Religious Culture and Ethics”, after a complaint from Alevi parents (*Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*). In the

view of the Court, the Turkish subject is too much dominated by Sunni Muslim perspectives to be truly inclusive for all pupils.

The question arising from the Turkish case, then, is how a subject of religious education can be developed in a way which makes it acceptable to all religious groups that it is supposed to include. The general requirement of the European Human Rights Convention is that the State (as expressed in the First Protocol to Article 2) “in the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, . . . shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religions and philosophical convictions.” In the interpretation of the European Human Rights Court, this implies that the State (in any subject that is made compulsory) “must take care that information or knowledge included in the curriculum is conveyed in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner.”

Interestingly, Turkey and Norway have been faced with quite similar challenges in this respect. In 1997, a new and compulsory subject called “Christianity, Religion and World Views”, was introduced in primary and secondary schools in Norway, replacing the previous system of multiple choices in which the parents might choose between (1) Christian Education, (2) a secularly oriented “World Views” alternative, or (3) no religious education at all.

In the new Norwegian subject, Christianity is taught alongside Islam and other world religions, as well as secular world views. Another important aim of the new subject has been to open an arena for interfaith dialogue in school. The subject has, however, been met with resistance from both the Muslim minority and the secular humanists who have felt that it was too much dominated by Christian majority interest to be fully inclusive. After formal complaints by the secular Humanist Association, the subject was criticized by the United Nation’s Human Rights Committee in 2004 for putting too much emphasis on Christianity. Then in 2007, the European Court of Human Rights issued a similar judgement against Norway, albeit with a narrow 9 to 8 majority (*Folgerø and others v. Norway*).

In the wake of these rulings, some revisions of the curriculum have been made and the name of the subject has been changed to “Religion, World Views and Ethics”. Parallel to these revisions, inclusive pedagogical classroom practices have made the subject more acceptable to the minorities.

In this process, pressure from international human rights agencies has played a constructive role. Global human rights principles presuppose that the minorities are the best judges of whether a common subject of religion and ethics in school does in fact do justice to all – be it in Norway or in Turkey.

Religious Education as a Dual Option Between Islamic and Christian Instruction

In the Middle East, many countries negotiate majority and minority interest by offering both Islamic and Christian instruction in school. This may happen in the

framework of constitutions that are either Islamic (for instance in Egypt) or multi-religious (Lebanon). This system of parallel options in religious education reflects the historic presence of relatively large Christian minorities, as well as nationalist ideologies that have emphasized a faith-transcending, Arab identity.

The parallel option of Islamic and Christian education in school has been offered in Egypt since 1907, in Syria since 1946, in Lebanon since 1968 and in Jordan since 1997 (Leirvik, 2004, p. 227). In the case of Egypt, the inclusion of Christian education on a par with Islamic education was part of the nationalist project in the first half of the twentieth century, when Muslims and Christians fought together against British domination and Western missionary influence. It was also facilitated by a strong movement for catechetical renewal in the Coptic Church (Morcos, 2002).

The revised curricula for Islamic and Christian education in Egypt, initiated in 1993, are still firmly confessional in nature. But increasingly, they are also expected to promote civic values such as tolerance of the other, human rights and co-citizenship. Furthermore, moral virtues and religious values are supposed to be mobilized as a shield against extremism (al-Dab', 2002; Shenouda, 2002). However, whereas friendly relations between Muslims and Christians are commended, stereotyped images of the Jews as inherently deceitful have continued to assert themselves in the textbooks.³ Indicative of a form of nationalism that leans heavily on the Islamic tradition, a section about the benefits of the month of Ramadan draws a direct line between the first Muslims' historic victory over the idolaters at Badr and Egypt's successful October War against Israel in 1973.⁴

In contrast, new Palestinian textbooks do not repeat such anti-Judaic stereotypes (IPCRI, 2003, p. 32). In Palestine, new curricula for Islamic and Christian education in public schools have been developed as part of the general effort to produce a full set of Palestinian textbooks. The teams for Christian and Islamic curriculum development have been working separately but a co-ordinator from the Ministry of Education has been sitting with both teams.

With regard to confessional subjects, the shared challenge in the subjects of Islamic and Christian education is how to include sound information about the other religion in one's own textbooks. This applies both to internal relations between Muslims and Christians in the Middle East and to the relation between Islam and the West. Since the 1990s, some important project has been carried out between researches in Europe and the Middle East, with the combined aim of improving the image of Islam in European textbooks and the image of Christianity in textbooks for Islamic education (Reiss, 2007; Ashmawi, 2007).⁵

³See for instance *Al-tarbiya al-diniyya al-'islamiyya*, Fourth Grade, Part One (2002–2003), p. 33.

⁴*Al-tarbiya al-diniyya al-'islamiyya*, Fourth Grade, Part Two (2002–2003). For more examples, see Reiss, 2003.

⁵See also the project "Images of the Self and of the Other. Muslim Societies and Europe" (<http://www.gei.de/index.php?id=464&L=1>), by the Georg-Eckert-Institut für Internationale Schulbuchforschung.

Multiple Choices in Religious Education

Moving eastwards to Indonesia, we find a different system of religious education that corresponds also to another type of national ideology (Leirvik, 2002; Said, 2007). Indonesia is known for its unique, multireligious conception of national identity known as the Pancasila ideology. According to the Pancasila principles (as stated in the preamble of the Indonesian constitution), Indonesian identity is bound together by the five beliefs in “the One and Only God, just and civilised humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by the inner wisdom of deliberations amongst representatives, and the realization of social justice for all of the people of Indonesia”.⁶

Like in the Middle East, religious education in Indonesia is confessional. In public schools, religious education (*pendidikan agama*) has long been offered for adherents of the five recognized religions, which are Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism. The curricula are prepared in close co-operation between the Ministry of National Education and representatives of the various religious communities. The Education Bill from 2002 (MNA, 2002) states explicitly that every student is entitled to religious instruction according to his or her religion – taught by an educator who belongs to the same faith. But a minimum number of students are required for the group in question to be offered religious education by the local school. If no suitable alternative can be offered in accordance with the student’s faith, students have – in principle – the right to be exempted.

In the general curriculum, enhancement of “faith and piety” and of “morals and noble character” are stated as general aims of school education that should apply to all subjects, together with the recognition of “local religion and culture” and “the dynamic of global development” (MNA, 2002, p. 12). As for religious education, the 2002 curriculum states that all religions should be taught with a view to living faith and moral practice (i.e. not only as dogmatic subjects). Although the system is still confessional, the latest revision of the curricula may point in the direction of a more unifying vision that stresses the civic dimension of religious education.

In the case of Indonesia, confessional religious education in school should also be seen in the light of the long-established tradition of so-called “Pancasila education”, which has traditionally aimed at instilling in the students the national values and obligations. After the fall of Suharto, in whose era the Pancasila ideology was discredited because it was used as a stick against non-conformists, Pancasila perspectives have been integrated in Civic Education (*Kewarganegaraan*, literally “citizenship”), which also includes the subject of human rights. The overall curriculum seeks thus to balance the potentially divisive effects of confessional instruction in separate classes with a form of civic education that “aims at stimulating students to realize that in spite of having different religious affiliations or beliefs they are united in one nation that is Indonesia” (Said, 2007, p. 259).

⁶<http://inic.utexas.edu/asnic/countries/indonesia/ConstIndonesia.html>

Visions of and Attempts at Inclusive Forms of Teaching Religion and Ethics in School

During a visit to Israel and Palestine in 2005, I picked up the latest issue of the magazine *This Week in Palestine*. My eyes fell on a short reflection entitled “Knowing Thy Neighbour?” written by Nadia Najjab of the Department of Education and Psychology in Birzeit University (Najjab, 2005). Najjab relates a conversation with her 6-year-old daughter Nadine who questions why she and her Christian school-mate Koreen must go to different religion classes. “I wanted for us to be together in one class”, Nadine declares. Najjab also notes that her 8-year-old daughter Leen has become more alert to religious differences and started asking people around her: “Are you a Christian or a Muslim?”

Enquiring other parents about their experiences, Najjab’s impression is corroborated that Palestinian children are more than before looking for religious identity as a basis of distinction. Najjab describes this as a new development in Palestine, which is home to “a long tradition of sharing the national struggle under a common identity”. In line with this heritage, children may also react with surprise to the fact that religion is in fact treated as a dividing factor in school.

The vision of more inclusive ways of teaching religion in school is not a new one. A short story from 1969 by the Egyptian Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz entitled *Jannat al-atfal* (“The Children’s Garden”), suggests that children may harbour more inclusive intuitions than their parents. The story is about a Muslim girl who interrogates her father about the religious separation in school between herself and her best friend, the Christian girl Nadia. Nadia and I are always together, says the daughter, in the classroom, in the courtyard, and when we eat. “But in the religion class, I go to one room and Nadia to another!” In the course their conversation, the daughter presents her father with the challenging effects of a “modern pedagogy” that invites children to ask all sorts of hard questions to their parents. Reluctantly, the father gives in to his daughter’s inquisitiveness. They discuss similarities and differences between Muslims and Christians, agreeing that God is beyond and above all human difference. The conversation ends with the daughter declaring her desire always to be with Nadia, both here and in the afterlife – and “even in the religion class!” (Mahfouz, 1988/1969).

The separation of pupils according to religious affiliation is not at all specific to Palestine and Egypt. On the contrary, confessional religious education is rather the global rule, with relatively few exceptions of religion and ethics being taught as an inclusive subject in school (as it has been attempted in England, the Scandinavian countries and South Africa).

Tuning in with inclusive visions like the ones cited above, some Muslim majority countries have discussed the possibility of introducing new and inclusive models for teaching ethics and religion in school. In Palestine, the question of placing more emphasis on comparative religion was raised in a comprehensive report produced by the first Palestinian Curriculum Development Center in 1996 (Brown, 2001). Just before the revision of the religious education curricula, a study of the situation in religious education in Palestine was carried out by Sami Adwan, on the initiative

of the Al-Liqa' Center (Adwan, 2001). A parallel investigation was carried out in public and private Arab schools in Israel (Khoury, 1998). In the surveys, questions were asked about the basic confessional system and the desirability of an extra class per week about "common religious culture" (*thaqafa diniyya 'amma*) for Muslims and Christians together (Adwan 2001, pp. 195–198, p. 392). As of yet, however, these ideas have not influenced the educational policies of the Palestinian government. However, attempts at inclusive forms of teaching religion have been made on a project basis – in the context of teacher training courses and in some schools (Adwan, 2007).

As for attempts at teaching culture and religion to all pupils in the same class, it is interesting to note that two countries with a recent history of civil war – notably Bosnia and Lebanon – have developed models and materials for teaching what they call "The culture of religion". In 1998, the Lebanese government proposed to make confessional religious education optional and replace it with a new and compulsory subject of civic education that would include the issue of a shared religious culture. The "religious culture" proposal provoked a heated debate in the media and was opposed by religious leaders who strongly defended the confessional model (Dagher, 2000, p. 128). As a compromise, it was decided that new textbooks with a more ecumenical approach should be produced for the confessional subjects (Hajjar, 2002). For the university level, a new book on Islam and Christianity meant for introductory courses has been produced, sponsored by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2002). UNESCO has also sponsored the development of a teaching manual for teenagers about the cultural aspects of Christianity and Islam (Kreidi, 2007).

The possibility of introducing an inclusive subject called "Culture of Religion" has also been debated in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The proposal of a common subject originates from the international community and its presence in post-war Bosnia. A project was initiated in 2000 by OSCE (The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) in co-operation with the Goethe Institute in Sarajevo, with the involvement of the cantons' ministries, the country's religious communities, teachers and other experts (Popov & Ofstad, 2006, p. 97; Ziemer, 2001). A similar subject was pioneered by the First Bosniak High School in Sarajevo as early as from 1995 (Baljević, 2007).

The aim of the subject is to give knowledge of religions, to enhance the understanding of religion's role in the development of cultures and civilization, to encourage tolerance and to develop dialogue skills. The new subject is not meant to replace confessional religious instruction (in Islam, Catholicism or Orthodox Christianity) that has been offered in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the early 1990s (Grabus, 2007; Popov & Ofstad, 2006). The proposal has received reluctant support of the religious communities and is currently being tried out in some regions.

In the case of Egypt, attempts at creating a common arena have focused not on "religious culture" but on "common values" instead. In 2001 the Ministry of Education decided to supplement Islamic and Christian education with a common ethical subject called "Values and ethics" (*al-qiyam wa-l-akhlaq*) – not instead of but in addition to the confessional subjects (Kouchok, 2007, pp. 159–161; Pink, 2007). In the preparation of the subject, the Ministry of Education established a committee

of both Muslims and Christians. Pivotal values to be propounded in the new subject are freedom, happiness, peace, solidarity, love, economic awareness, humility and tolerance.⁷ Regarding Muslim–Christian coexistence, a lesson about peace uses a picture of a priest and an imam holding a flag together showing the crescent and the cross (the nationalist symbol of the Wafd party from the beginning of the twentieth century).⁸

In Egypt, the introduction of a new subject of values and morals, detached from religious education, has provoked a heated debate similar to that in Lebanon. Islamists organized a media campaign against the new subject and several Muslim leaders argued that it is neither advisable nor possible to separate moral education from religious instruction. In the new subject, religious belief is not dealt with as a separate issue, but it is taken for granted and often referred to. In response to initial critiques that the religions' moral traditions were not explicitly referred to, the Curriculum Centre inserted some references to the Qur'an and the Bible in textbooks for the school year 2002–2003.⁹

Thus attempts at establishing more inclusive forms of teaching religion and ethics in school in Muslim majority societies have so far been made under the heading of either “culture of religions” (Lebanon, Bosnia) or “values and ethics” (Egypt). Except for examples of teaching religion in a non-confessional way in Bosnian high schools (Baljević, 2007), the cited subjects or project have come in addition to, not instead of confessional religious education.

Time will show whether further attempts will be made to replace confessional subjects with common subjects that are more pluralistic in nature, in line with how the Turkish subject “Religious culture and ethics” will probably have to develop after the 2007 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights.

Religious Education in Private Schools

The discussion above has focused on the role of public schools in fostering tolerance through new forms of religious and ethical education. To complete the picture, the role of private schools in this respect should also be taken into consideration. Several of the countries referred to above have a large percentage of private schooling – for instance, 60% in Lebanon and 30% in Indonesia, against only 6% in Egypt (not including semi-public Al-Azhar schools) and Palestine.¹⁰ The cited numbers include not only the *madrassa* (in Indonesia: *pesantren*) sector but modern types of private schools as well. In countries with a large percentage of private schools, the

⁷*Al-qiyam wa-l-akhlaq* (2001–2002), grades One-Three (cf. al-Dab', 2002, pp. 5–6).

⁸*Al-qiyam wa-l-akhlaq* (2001–2002), Second Grade, Part Two, p. 1. Cf. Pink, 2003.

⁹For instance in *Kitab al-qiyam wa-l-akhlaq* (2002–2003), Fourth Grade, one will find seven references to the Qur'an, one reference to Hadith and a single reference to the Bible.

¹⁰For references, see Leirvik (2003, p. 226) and Leirvik (2008).

private school sector is clearly co-responsible for how education contributes to the general cultural climate in the countries in question.

In this context, I will only briefly consider the role of private schools in Indonesia in fostering either intolerance or tolerance of other beliefs. Private Muslim schools in Indonesia are either so-called *pesantren* madrasas that transmit classical Islamic learning, or religious schools of a more modern kind. Most of them are linked with the country's two large Muslim networks, Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which have more than 30 million members each and encompass both conservative and liberal tendencies. The strength of these organizations and their involvement in private schooling implies that in Indonesia, the question of how civic and religious education may contribute to interreligious understanding is largely a question of what tendencies will prevail in these networks. In both Muhammadiyah and Nadhlatul Ulama schools, there are some examples that ideals of gender equality, democracy and religious pluralism have been included in the curricula at various levels (Munir, 2003; Leirvik, 2002, pp. 23–26). However, contrary tendencies can also be cited and relative weight of different tendencies in Muslim private schools will obviously be quite decisive for the future of tolerance education in Indonesia.

The same can be said of the future role of madrasas and modern private schools respectively in Pakistan. As demonstrated in a study by Tariq Rahman, the attitudes regarding equal citizenship for religious minorities and relations to India vary considerably between madrasa students on the one hand and public as well as modern private schools on the other (Rahman, 2003; Leirvik, 2002; 2008).

Conclusion

My concluding questions to the different models for religious education referred to above are as follows:

- How can the image of the religiously other be rectified, in confessional models of religious education?
- What kind of joint learning about religious cultures, values and ethics can be envisaged in public schools?
- Who are included or excluded, in attempts at more comprehensive ways of teaching history, religious cultures and ethics in school?

As for the latter question, the minorities are the best judges.

References

- Adwan, S. (1998). Analysis of the 1967 War Narrative in Palestinian History and Civic Education School Textbooks. Tønsberg: Vestfold College/Høgskolen i Vestfold.
- Adwan, S. (2001). *Wāqī' al-tarbiya al-dīniyya al-'islamiyya wa-l-masīhiyya fī-l-madāris al-falastiniyya*. Betlehem: Al-liqā.

- Adwan, S. (2007). Reflections on teaching religious education in the Palestinian education system: The situation, challenges and the way forward. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Eds.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*. Istanbul: DEM Press.
- Adwan, S., & Bar-On, D. (2007). *Shared history booklet project*. Peace Research Institute in the Middle East 2003 [cited 22 November 2007]. Available from, <http://vispo.com/PRIME/internat.htm>
- al-Dab', M. (2002). Ta'lim al-dīn al-'islāmī fī Misr. Paper read at Religious Education and Education in Religions, at Alexandria 18–21 September.
- Ashmawi, F. (2007). Revision of textbooks with respect to the image of “the Other” (Christians and Jews) in some Arab and Muslim countries (Egypt, Jordan and Syria). In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Eds.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*.
- Baljević, N. (2007). Teaching culture of religions in Sarajevo. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Eds.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*. Istanbul: DEM Press.
- Bashshur, M. (2007). History teaching and history textbooks in Lebanon. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Eds.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*. Istanbul: DEM Press.
- Brown, N. (2001). *Democracy, history, and the contest over the Palestinian curriculum* (Paper prepared for Adam Institute) 2001 [cited 22 November 2007]. Available from, http://www.geocities.com/nathanbrown1/Adam_Institute_Palestinian_textbooks.htm
- Brown, N. (2007b). The Palestinian National Authority: The politics of writing and interpreting Curricula – Genesis of a New Curriculum. In E. A. Doumato & G. Starrett. *Teaching Islam. textbooks and religion in the Middle East*. Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienne Publications.
- CMIP (2007). *The West, Christians and Jews in Saudi Arabian Schoolbooks* (CMIP Report No. SA-03–02). Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace 2003 [cited 22 November 2007]. Available from, <http://www.edume.org/research/sa/index.html>
- CRF (2006) *Saudi Arabia's Curriculum of Intolerance. With Excerpts from Saudi Ministry of Education Textbooks for Islamic Studies*. Center for Religious Freedom of Freedom House [cited]. Available from, <http://www.gulfinstitute.org/IGA051605/IGA-FH-SaudiReport.pdf>
- Dagher, C. H. (2000). *Bringing Down the Walls. Lebanon's Post-War Challenges*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Doumato, E. A. (2007). Saudi Arabia: From “Wahhabi” Roots to contemporary revisionism In E. A. Doumato & G. Starrett (Ed.), *Teaching Islam. Textbooks and religion in the Middle East*. Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienne Publications.
- Doumato, E. A., & Starrett, G. (Eds.). (2007). *Teaching Islam. Textbooks and religion in the Middle East*. Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner Publications.
- Grabus, N. (2007). The Image of “the Other” in Textbooks about Islamic religious elementary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Eds.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*. Istanbul: DEM Press.
- Hajjar, G. J. (2007). *Aspects of Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Lebanon* (Online articles, The Duncan Black Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations) 2002 [cited 22 November 2007]. Available from, http://macdonald.hartsem.edu/articles_hajjar.htm.
- IPCRI (2003). Analysis and Evaluation of the New Palestinian Curriculum. Reviewing Palestinian Textbooks and Tolerance Education Program. Jerusalem: Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information.
- Kabapınar, Y. (2007). The image of “Others” and tolerance in Turkish history and social studies Textbooks: “Not us”, “The Other is to Blame”. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Eds.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*.
- Kaymakcan, R. (1999). Christianity in Turkish religious education. *Islam and Christian-Muslim relations*, 10(3), 279–293.
- Kaymakcan, R. (2002). Religious education in modern Turkey in the context of freedom of religion or belief. In L. Larsen & I. T. Plesner (Eds.), *Teaching for tolerance and freedom of religion or belief*. Oslo: The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

- Kaymakcan, R. (2007). Curriculum and textbook revisions regarding the image of the "Religious Other" in Turkish religious education. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Eds.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*.
- Kaymakcan, R., & Leirvik, O. (Eds.). (2007). *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*. Istanbul: DEM Press (Centre for Values Education).
- Khoury, G. (1998). Dawr al-tarbiya al-dīniyya fī-ta'kīd 'alā wahdatinā al-wataniyya. In G. Khoury (Ed.), *Sha'b wāhid lā yaqbulu al-qisma 'alā ithnayn*. Betlehem: Al-liqā'.
- Kouchok, K. H. (2007). How to teach and not to teach tolerance to young children: Some reflections from the Egyptian context. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Ed.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*. Istanbul: DEM Press.
- Kreidi, J. (2007). A planned teaching manual for teenagers about the cultural aspects of Christianity and Islam. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Ed.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*. Istanbul: DEM Press.
- Leirvik, O. (2002). *Report from a delegation visit to Indonesia by the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief, July 29-August 11, 2002*. The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief 2002 [cited 22 November 2007]. Available from, http://www.oslocoalition.org/html/project_indonesia/indonesia_project_report.html
- Leirvik, O. (2004). Religious education, communal identity and national politics in the Muslim world. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 26(3), 223–236.
- Leirvik, O. (2008). Religion in school, interreligious relations and citizenship: The case of Pakistan. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 30(2), 143–154.
- Mahfouz, N. (1988/1969). *Jannat al-atfāl*. In *Khammārat al-qitt al-aswad*. Cairo: Maktabat Misr.
- Mehran, G. (2007a). Iran: A Shi'ite Curriculum to Serve the Islamic State. In *Teaching Islam. Textbooks and Religion in the Middle East*. Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienne Publications.
- Mehran, G. (2007b). The portrayal of the "Insider" and "Outsider" in the school textbooks of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Ed.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*. Istanbul: DEM Press.
- MNA. (2002). Bill of the Republic of Indonesia on National Education System: Ministry of National Education, Jakarta.
- Morcos, S. (2002). Al-ta'lim al-dīnī al-masīhī. Al-bidāyāt wal-masārāt. *Al-dīmuqrātiyya*, 2(8), 87–96.
- Munir, L. (2007). *Nurturing tolerance in pesantren*, 5 September 2003 [cited 22 November 2007]. Available from, <http://folk.uio.no/leirvik/OsloCoalition/NurturingTolerance-JktPost.htm>
- Najjab, N. (2005). Knowing Thy Neighbour? *This Week in Palestine*, 83(March): 25.
- Nayyar, A. H., & Ahmad S. (2003). The subtle subversion. The state of curricula and textbooks in Pakistan. Urdu, English, social studies and civics. Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute.
- Özdemir, I. (2007). Promoting a culture of tolerance through education, with special reference to Turkey. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Ed.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*.
- Pink, J. (2003). *Nationalism, Religion and the Muslim-Christian Relationship. Teaching Ethics and Values in Egyptian Schools*. Center for Studies on New Religions 2003 [cited 22 November 2007]. Available from, http://www.cesnur.org/2003/vil2003_pink.htm
- Plesner, I. T. (2004). Promoting tolerance through religious education. In T. Lindholm, J. W. Cole Durham & B. G. Tahzib-Lie (Ed.), *Facilitating freedom of religion or belief: A deskbook*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Popov, Z., & Ofstad, A. M. (2006). Religious education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Z. Kuburić & C. Moe (Ed.), *Religion and pluralism in education: Comparative approaches in the western Balkans*. Novi Sad: CEIR.
- Kaiser, F. (2007). *Islamabad to eliminate biases from school textbooks* (Asia News 01/11/2007) 2007 [cited 22 November 2007]. Available from, <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?art=8208&l=en#>

- Rahman, T. (2007). *Pluralism and intolerance in Pakistani society. Attitudes of Pakistani students towards the religious "Other"* 2003 [cited 22 November 2007]. Available from, <http://www.tariqrahman.net/lanmain.htm>
- Reiss, W. (2003). Die Juden im islamischen Religionsunterricht. Ein Vergleich ägyptischer, jordanischer und palästinensischer Schulbücher. Teil 1: Die Darstellung des Judentums in Ägypten. *Ökumenische Informationen der katholischen Nachrichten-Agentur*, 49, 8–15.
- Reiss, W. (2007). Obstacles and chances of an international dialogue on Curriculum revision in the Middle East: Experiences of a German research project on school textbooks in Egypt, Palestine, Turkey and Iran. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Ed.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*.
- Rosser, Y. C. (2004). Contesting historiographies in South Asia: The Islamization of Pakistani social studies textbooks. In S. C. Saha (Ed.), *Religious fundamentalism in the contemporary world*. Lanham etc: Lexington books.
- Said, N. (2007). Some notes on the problems of religious tolerance in Indonesia. In R. Kaymakcan & O. Leirvik (Eds.), *Teaching for tolerance in Muslim majority societies*.
- Shenouda, N. (2002). Wāqī' al-tajriba al-misriyya fī tadrīs al-tarbiya al-dīniyya al-masīhiyya. Paper read at Religious Education and Education in Religions, at Alexandria 18–21 September.
- Skeie, G. (2001). Citizenship, identity politics and religious education. In H.-G. n. Heimbrock, C. T. Scheilke & P. Schreiner (Ed.), *Towards religious competence. Diversity as a challenge for education in Europe*. Münster-Hamburg-Berlin-London: LIT Verlag.
- Stalinsky, S. (2002). Preliminary overview – Saudi Arabia's education system: Curriculum, spreading Saudi education to the world and the official Saudi position on education policy (Special Report – No. 12). The Middle East Media Research Centre, December 20 2002 [cited].
- UNESCO, Lebanon (2002). *Al-'aish al-mushtarak fī-l-'islām wa-l-masīhiyya*. Beirut: UNESCO Lebanon.
- Ziemer, C. (Ed.). (2001). 'Kultur der Religionen' in den Schulen in Bosnien und Herzegovina. Internationale Fachkonsultation zur Einführung eines Faches 'Kultur der Religionen' in den Schulen in Bosnien und Herzegovina 18–21. März 2001. Dokumentation. Sarajevo: Abraham und Goethe-Institut.