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- VI. Europe and the World in European Historiography

II. Transversal Theme

- I. Citizenship in Historical Perspective

III. Doctoral Dissertations

- I. F. Peyrou, La Comunidad de Ciudadanos. El Discurso Democrático-Republicano en España, 1840-1868

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Islamic Religious Instruction in North-Rhine-Westphalia (1979-1999): Constructing a German Muslim Identity between Authenticity and Responsibility

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Europeiske land har, på bakgrunn av ulike tradisjoner hva angår forholdet mellom stat og religion, møtt ulike utfordringer i møtet med islam som ny minoritetsreligion. I Tyskland har spørsmålet om bekjennende religionsundervisning i den offentlige skolen stått sentralt i debatten om den institusjonelle integrasjonen av islam. Det bekjennende religionsfaget i den offentlige skolen er forankret i den tyske konstitusjonen, og tilbys i prinsippet alle trossamfunn, ettersom den tyske stat er konfesyonsnøytral og det ikke finnes noen statskirke.

Muslimske organisasjoner har siden slutten av 1970-tallet arbeidet for å bli anerkjent som offisielle samarbeidspartnere for staten, med det formål å få utarbeidet et konfesjonelt islamsk religionsfag på linje med det konfesjonelle katolske og protestantiske faget. Hittil har ingen muslimsk organisasjon lyktes. Den offisielle begrunnelsen fra tyske myndigheter har vært at det ikke finnes noen kirkeorganisasjon innenfor islam; ikke noe sentralisert og representativt muslimsk organ som representerer islam i Tyskland, og som staten kan forhandle med. Muslimske organisasjoner i Tyskland har snarere vært ansett som sosiale og politiske organisasjoner enn som trossamfunn, slik dette defineres innenfor tysk kirkerett.

Et sentralt argument i denne artikkelen er at den særegne pedagogiske og skolepolitiske tradisjonen den bekjennende religionsfaget står i, muligens representerer et mer dypereliggende dilemma enn den rent formal-juridiske siden. Det faktum at muslimske organisasjoner siden slutten av 1980-tallet har beveget seg langt i å utvikle sentraliserte, representative strukturer og medlemsbaserte organisasjoner tilsvarende kirkene, uten at dette har bidradd til noen løsning, synes å underbygge dette. Det bekjennende religionsfaget har etter den andre verdenskrig, særlig siden 1960- og 1970-tallet, utviklet seg i retning av et kultur- og identitetsfag. Det rettferdiggjøres i dag som en form for civic education, der formålet er å gi barna en fast kulturell og etisk forankring som igjen vil gjøre dem til sosialt ansvarlige borgere. Et problem med denne tilnærmingen er at den synes å forutsette at innholdet i den konfesjonelle undervisningen på vesentlige punkter stemmer overens med det som oppfattes å være samfunnets mer almene verdigrunnlag. Den kristne kulturarv oppfattes ikke å være i strid med grunnleggende samfunnsnormer og politiske idealer, men hva med islam? Det synes ikke foreligge tillit til at de muslimske organisasjonene i Tyskland vil ivareta den samfunnsgavnelige funksjon religionsfaget er ment å ha. De assosieres med en autoritær pedagogikk, med utenatføring av koranvers og politisk indoktrinering. Samtidig utgjør

diskrimineringen av de muslimske organisasjonene et påtrengende dilemma som politikere er enige om at må løses for at islam skal kunne finne sin plass i det tyske samfunn.

Skolepolitikk er i Tyskland er delstatsanliggende, og Nordrhein-Westfalen er den delstaten som har gått lengst i å utvikle et konsept for hva islamsk religionsundervisning på tysk kan innebære. Arbeidet med å utvikle tyske islamske læreplaner startet på slutten av 1970-tallet, og ble ledet av det statlige pedagogiske institutt som følge av at en ikke fant det en oppfattet som adekvate muslimske forhandlingspartnere. Faget er offisielt ikke-bekjennende, ettersom det er utviklet av den i prinsippet konfesjonsfrie staten. Likevel beveger det seg i grenselandet mellom bekjennende og ikke-bekjennende: det dreier seg ikke om ren religionshistorie, men er snarere et identitetsfag der elevene skal tilegne seg "orienteringsredskaper" for et liv i tyske omgivelser, på basis av islamske tekster. Artikkelen drøfter, med utgangspunkt i prosjektet i Nordrhein-Westfalen, hvilke kvaliteter politikere og pedagoger ser for seg at en islamsk religionsundervisning må ha for å tjene det overordnede mål om samfunnsmessig integrasjon.

INTRODUCTION

Due to different traditions of church-state relations, European countries have faced different challenges regarding the new presence of Muslim minorities. Particularly within the sector of public education different responses have been given as to how to deal with Islamic claims, from the wearing of headscarves to religious instruction. In Germany the institution of confessional religious instruction in public schools, in principle open to all faith communities (*Religionsgemeinschaften*), has been a major topic in the debate on the integration of Islam¹. No adequate solution has yet been found. The authorities have pointed to the lack of a centralised and representative Muslim body with whom to negotiate on the contents of such courses. Doubts have also been uttered regarding the compatibility between Islamic teachings and the broader pedagogical aims of the public school, as well as the German Constitution.

Some sort of Islamic instruction has been provided in most of the German *Länder* since the mid 1980s, generally as part of Turkish language classes and according to Turkish curricula. This instruction is, both in juridical and pedagogical-didactical terms, not equivalent to that of the Protestant and Catholic churches: it is non-confessional, not carried out in cooperation with Muslim organisations in Germany, and it lacks the status of ordinary school subject. It is therefore, after twenty years, still considered a provisional solution to the Muslim demands of religious instruction in public schools². While the fragmented Muslim community and the lack of a representative body officially have been presented by German authorities as the main reasons for this delay, I will claim that a more accurate understanding is perhaps the particular pedagogical and societal objectives of the institution of confessional religious instruction, and disbelief as to whether Islamic organisations in Germany will sustain these objectives.

North-Rhine-Westphalia, the *Land* containing the largest Muslim population in Germany, represents a special case in that the authorities have initiated the elaboration of a German Islamic syllabus. The work was inaugurated in the late 1970s and has been a sort of pilot-project in Germany. None of the other *Länder* has moved as far in delineating

what a German Islamic instruction might look like, to serve the purposes of integration. Initially the Islamic courses in North-Rhine-Westphalia were part of the Turkish language classes, although the curricula were drafted in Germany to suit German conditions. Since 1999, however, the courses have taken place separately, in the German language, and are considered an ordinary school subject with marks³. Thus, a further step has been taken to incorporate Islam into the pedagogical canon of the public school. Before turning to the development and the design of the Islamic curricula in North-Rhine-Westphalia, the state-church relations in Germany and the institution of confessional religious instruction in public schools will be briefly outlined.

CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN GERMANY AND THE INSTITUTION OF CONFESSIONAL RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

From 1919 the Weimar-Constitution established the principle of separation between state and churches in Germany, a principle that was incorporated into the new West-German Constitution in 1949. The secular regime of Germany however does not involve a strict separation between state and church and religion and public realm comparable to the French *laïcité*. The autonomy of the churches coexists with a close, institutionalised cooperation between state and churches, not least within the education sector⁴. As Corporations of Public Law (*Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*) the churches also benefit from a range of legal and financial privileges. Given the neutrality of the state this public juridical status is offered to all faith communities (*Religionsgemeinschaften*) alike, presupposing that these can prove a certain endurance in and impact on society.

The institution of confessional religious instruction is not held by juridical scholars to be dependant on recognition as Corporation of Public Law⁵. According to article seven of the Basic Law religious instruction is provided in public schools according to the teachings of the faith communities. No explicit requirements are given regarding their legal status. When Islamic organisations have failed to enter the public schools this has been justified, in legal terms, by their lack of characteristics as faith communities. There is no legally enshrined definition of a faith community, but according to the juridical literature a faith community consists of adherents of the same faith, gathered within a certain geographical area to fulfil the particular religious rituals. Muslim organisations, it has generally been claimed, lack a distinguishable religious consensus and a definable stratum of adherents, and are rather to be considered as political or social organisations⁶.

The vast public legroom granted the German churches (and in principle other faith communities) is sustained by a legal and political tradition of considering religious freedom as a *positive* freedom: the neutral state should not endorse secularization but provide space for religious practice. The alliance between state and church has long historical roots in Germany. After the Second World War it regained relevance: the devastating experience of totalitarianism rendered a new legitimacy to the public role of the churches. Religion (Christianity) was considered a positive social and cultural force, serving democratization and strengthening moral standards. Even today vital religious communities are regarded by many as a necessary counter-balance against an overly powerful state⁷.

Religious instruction in public schools is thus rooted in a tradition of positive religious freedom and valuation of Christianity as an important part of German culture and history. From the 1960s and 1970s the religious pedagogical thinking shifted even more in the direction of *Kulturkunde*: in order to uphold the legitimacy of confessional religious instruction in public schools in an increasingly secularized society, religious education was conceptualised in terms of identity construction. Catechism and bible verses learned by heart were replaced by emphasis on reflective practices and social relevance. Thus, the defenders of confessional religious instruction maintain that this institution continues to fulfil an important pedagogical and societal task in contemporary Germany, namely that of educating morally responsible and culturally self-confident citizens. As put by the legal scholar Martin Heckel:

Der weltliche Staat hat auch ein eigenes Interesse an der religiöse Bildung seiner Bürger, weil er sich aus der Förderung ihrer religiös motivierten Sozial – und Individualethik zugleich eine Festigung seiner eigenen sittlichen Grundlagen und Verfassungsvoraussetzungen verspricht – weil also die weltlichen Wirkungen der religiösen Unterweisung auch einer säkularisierten Gesellschaft und Rechtsordnung weltlich von Nutzen sind. Die Religionsunterricht soll die Jugend der verschiedenen Bekenntnisse zur selbstständigen Auseinandersetzung mit ihrer religiösen Herkunft und zur freien Einsicht in die tragenden Werte führen, auf die zum guten Teil die kulturelle Leistungen und die sittlichen Fundamente auch des weltlichen Gemeinschaftsleben gegründet sind⁸.

DEVELOPING AN ISLAMIC CURRICULUM IN NORTH-RHINE-WESTPHALIA: NEGOTIATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES

In 1978 three Muslim organisations turned to the school authorities (*Kultusministerium*) of North-Rhine-Westphalia, claiming religious instruction in public schools, on a par with the churches⁹. A survey undertaken by the organisations revealed widespread support for such instruction among Turkish parents. The authorities first responded positively. There were several objectives underlying the decision to consider the inauguration of Islamic instruction in public schools. A public debate on the establishment of private Koran-schools in Germany had erupted in 1977¹⁰, and fear of Islamic fundamentalist pressure was clearly a motivation for considering public Islamic instruction¹¹. Moreover, German policy towards immigrants in the late 1970s and early 1980s was to encourage their return, and Islamic instruction was initially, together with Turkish language courses, assessed as a preparation for return, a sort of “mentale Rückkehrhilfe”¹².

Talks with the Muslim organisations were launched in 1978, but, according to the authorities, negotiations broke down due to disagreement among the Muslim partners involved¹³. Hence, the authorities decided to move on independently. In 1979 the state institute for further education (Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung) in North-Rhine-Westphalia was charged with the task of developing an Islamic curriculum. A curriculum committee was established, consisting mostly of Turkish language teachers and German scholars in the fields of religious pedagogy and history of religions. Klaus Gebauer from the state institute coordinated the work of the committee and gained a key role in the project¹⁴. Representatives of the Muslim organisations were not included. On the other hand cooperation with the Turkish state was started in the early 1980s. The cur-

riculum project in North-Rhine-Westphalia coincided with a shift in the policies of the secular Turkish Republic towards Islam. After a military coup in 1980, Turkish authorities sought to outbalance rightwing and leftwing radicalism through what became known as the Turkish-Islamic synthesis. This implied a growing sensitivity towards Islam as a means of strengthening national coherence, and after 1980 religious instruction merged with Turkish nationalism became compulsory in all Turkish schools¹⁵. In this perspective Islamic affiliations and activities among the many Turkish citizens in Germany also became highly pertinent. Hence, for different reasons German and Turkish authorities had a common interest in supervising Islam in Germany and in limiting the influence of Turkish Islamic organisations in Germany, many of them rooted in an anti-Kemalist tradition.

The work of the curriculum committee proceeded in the period between 1980 and 1986 within the tensions of different and conflicting interests. In 1986 the first curriculum draft was published and made available for use in the Turkish language classes. If preparing for return to Turkey initially had been a major intention, securing integration into German society moved to the fore of the political and pedagogical agenda as Turkish settlement progressed in the 1980s. This objective differed from that of the Turkish state, that favoured the stronghold of Turkish patriotism among its expatriated citizens. It also conflicted with the interests of the Islamic organisations in North-Rhine-Westphalia, who disputed the legitimacy of the state courses and their own lack of influence. They also feared that the courses would endorse a secularised Turkish state-Islam. Turkish language teachers and secular Turkish organisations in Germany, on the other hand, objected, as did the Turkish state, to a confessional Islamic instruction negotiated with the Islamic organisations. The German churches, finally, checked carefully that the legal arrangements between state and faith communities were not violated. They objected to state intervention in religious education, but were willing to accept the Islamic courses in North-Rhine-Westphalia provided that they took the form of non-confessional history of religion¹⁶.

The situation was thus: the Islamic courses emerged not as an equivalent to the Protestant and Catholic confessional instruction, but as a legal and pedagogical compromise. The courses were officially non-confessional, called *Islamische Unterweisung* and not *Islamischer Religionsunterricht*. Still the teachers had to be of Muslim origin and the curricula drafts were evaluated by theological faculties in Turkey and Egypt in 1984 and 1985 to ensure that the contents of the courses did not contravene Islamic teachings. Finally, the aim of the Islamic instruction was, as stated in the introduction of the curriculum draft, to make Muslim children in Germany aware of their religious and cultural roots, to convert this knowledge into interpretative skills, to support the children in their identity construction and to sustain the development of an Islamic identity viable in a non-Islamic society¹⁷. In 1987 the first curriculum, covering the first to the fourth grades, came into use. In the years 1988-1990 the state institute published the first German Islamic school-textbooks, and in 1991 and 1996 subsequent curricula appeared for the fifth to the tenth grades.

THE PEDAGOGICAL-DIDACTICAL DESIGN OF THE ISLAMIC CURRICULA

The design of the state-initiated Islamic curricula reflects a particular interpretation of the social situation of Muslim immigrants and their children in Germany, which, indeed, fits

into what the American scholar Peter O'Brien has labelled a new paradigm for the construction of otherness in post-war Germany: between civilized and modern on the one hand and traditional and backward on the other¹⁸. The Turkish immigrant population was ascribed a rural, traditional culture, which was considered inapt for managing life in urban, industrialized surroundings, or, as put in a curriculum draft from 1982, a society characterized by another degree of societal modernity¹⁹. The psychological stress stemming from this 'interpretative crisis' was deemed further aggravated by social and economical problems. This vulnerability of the Turkish immigrants, rooted in scarce social and intellectual resources, in turn made them accessible to the propaganda of Islamic fundamentalists²⁰.

The Turkish popular beliefs, perceived inadequate in Germany, not only rendered the immigrants vulnerable to 'fundamentalist abuse', but were also considered an obstacle to dialogue between Turks and Germans, Christians and Muslims. Rural, popular Islam, transmitted to Germany from the Turkish countryside was deemed a sort of silent (*sprachlos*) knowledge, characterized by mechanised practices and rituals, as opposed to an internalised and reflective form of 'modern religiousness'²¹. From this perspective the situation of the immigrant children was perceived as disturbing: they grew up on the borderline between two irreconcilable cultures, but also in a sort of 'interpretative vacuum'. Neither their parents nor the teachers of the Koran-schools were, by the German pedagogical scholars, considered competent in providing the intellectual and discursive tools needed for a well-conducted socialisation²². The children were in need of more 'sophisticated' intellectual equipment in order to surmount their difficult life conditions.

Thus, it was considered an important task of the public school to undertake Islamic instruction, to help the children to build a terminological bridge between the different cultural universes. Islam needed to provide answers to questions not posed in Islam's traditional surroundings²³. An 'intellectualisation' of Islam was required in order to accomplish the twofold task of serving the identity construction and successful socialisation of the individual child on the one hand and entailing mutual understanding between different religious groups on the other hand. As explained by Klaus Gebauer from the state institute in North-Rhine-Westphalia: "Dem Islam muss nicht nur materiell geholfen werden, sondern auch rechtlich, politisch und diskursiv [sic!]"²⁴. Public Islam courses were seen as the appropriate device for the intellectualisation of Diaspora-Islam. In other words, assimilation was rejected, rather culture and religion was perceived as contingently serving the object of integration. As Christian religious instruction was considered a sort of civic education, sustaining ethical consciousness, social responsibility and democratic competencies, so Islamic instruction could play an analogous role, if only adequately organised. As expressed by Klaus Gebauer:

Der demokratische Staat darf bei einer so grossen Bevölkerungsgruppe nicht zulassen, dass Identitätsdiffusion und Identitätsverlust verewigt oder gar gefördert werden, ohne Gefahr zu laufen, seine freiheitliche Verfassung zu gefährden. Politisch unartikulierbare soziale Konflikte können zu Gewalt und Friedlosigkeit und in Reaktion darauf zum Abbau demokratischer und freiheitlicher Errungenschaften führen. Der deutsche Staat hat deshalb ein objektives Interesse an einer gefestigten kulturellen Identität seiner Immigranten²⁵.

The exercises sketched out by the curricula all seek to combine theoretical knowledge of Islam with genuine life experiences of the Muslim children in Germany. This so-called

principle of correlation (*Korrelationsprinzip*) was also fundamental in Christian religious pedagogy, as reformed in the 1960s and 1970s²⁶. Regarding the education of the Muslim minority children it seemed to gain a particular relevance, as the gap between Islamic knowledge and customs on the one hand and norms of the German Christian and secularised society on the other hand, was more profound. Thus, the exercises were designed to produce reflections on the correlation between different cultural spheres; between discourses and practices and between the Islamic community (*Gemeinschaft*) and German society (*Gesellschaft*). The founding pedagogical and didactical principles of the curricula represented in fact the opposite of what was deemed the traditional Islamic pedagogy, as carried out by the private Koran-schools: the reciting of Koran-verses by heart and performance of external, corporal rituals.

One of the exercises in the curriculum for the first to the fourth grades is titled “Allah rewards those who work”. Contingent life experiences are referred to, as in such examples as “My father works in a factory”, “My uncle is unemployed and spends his days in the Turkish coffeeshouse” and “When I have finished doing my homework I help my mother”. Such life experiences should be reflected upon on the basis of Islamic texts dealing with human work, and rewards in this world and the hereafter. The pedagogical aim was to learn to take charge of one’s own destiny, in religious terms conceptualised as Jihad, understood not as holy war, but as personal effort and devotion. According to the curriculum it was important to transmit hope and confidence in the ability to influence and ameliorate one’s conditions²⁷.

Another exercise in the curriculum for the fifth and sixth grades is titled “Going away – pain and possibilities”. The experience of migration is associated with the Prophet Muhammad’s flight to Medina in 622, which made possible the foundation of the first Muslim community. The intention is, according to the curriculum, to make the children reflect upon the chances related to migration: leaving one’s home country can be painful, but also opens up the possibilities of finding a new home and making new friends²⁸.

The Islamic curricula of North-Rhine-Westphalia were and still are, officially, non-confessional. As pointed out above, the neutrality of the state requires cooperation with a faith community in order to arrange confessional courses, as envisaged by the German Constitution. No Islamic faith community has figured as official state-partner in North-Rhine-Westphalia. However, the curricula obviously represent something more than pure history of religion. The intention of the courses is rather to assist the construction of a Muslim identity according to what is perceived as suitable for life in Germany. Islamic sources are not treated as purely historical accounts. They are depicted as having relevance for present ethical and personal orientation. The discussions foreseen by the curricula have life in Germany as their focal point, and, moreover, the discussions as envisaged by the curricula are not to take place within an ethical vacuum. According to the didactical conceptions, as outlined in the curriculum for the seventh to the tenth grades, it would be inopportune to convey firmly a particular image of society within the public courses. Still, as religiosity deals with the present and future perspectives of humanity, a ‘responsible’ Islamic instruction (*verantwortungsbewusste Islamische Unterweisung*) should carefully point to the present and future challenges of humanity. These, according to the curricu-

lum, could be summarized as peace, democracy and equality between individuals, genders and ethnic groups²⁹.

According to Peter O'Brien's analysis of German minority policies in the post-war era, German officials adopted the 'civilising project' Western Allies had imposed on the Germans after the Second World War. Vis-à-vis the immigrants, the new 'illiberals', the Germans had taken on the task as civilizers. As they had come to believe deeply in the democratizing potentials of education, the political culture of the Federal Republic itself being a pedagogical achievement, education appeared the obvious means through which the immigrants could be 'saved' from their backward and bigoted mentalities³⁰. O'Brien's labelling of German integration policy as one with civilizing ambitions does indeed seem appropriate in the case of the Islamic curricula of North-Rhine-Westphalia. Concurrently the project reflects more generally the pedagogical traditions and political validations of religious instruction in German public schools, as this institution has evolved in the post-war era. Religious education is emphasised as something more than history of religion (*Religionskunde*); rather as a sort of civic education, sustaining democracy and social peace if correctly and responsibly undertaken.

Underlying this assumption of religion's social and pedagogical role seems to be a particular understanding of personhood, as so deeply embedded in culture and history as to be distorted if cut loose or alienated from these inherited belongings. Simultaneously, however, such collective schemes of interpretation should not be mechanized if democratic behaviour is to be accomplished. The critical and autonomous individual, as represented in the curricula, appears to be one who has internalised a particular culture, but who is also capable of performing the introspective activity of constantly questioning this cultural self. How did the Muslim community react to the state-initiated Islamic curricula? How did they perceive the 'liberalising endeavours' of the German authorities and pedagogical scholars?

MUSLIM REACTIONS

According to Michael Kiefer, who evaluated the project in 2000, nearly 80% of the Muslim children who had been offered Islamic instruction that year had participated. Kiefer's survey also indicated that the parents generally consented to the pedagogical methods and objectives³¹. Several Muslim organisations have, however, continuously disputed the legitimacy of the project since its beginning.

On the one hand they defied the legitimacy of the curricula on formal grounds: the curricula had come about without close cooperation with representatives of organized Islam in Germany, hence, in their eyes, discriminating the Muslim community vis-à-vis the churches. On the other hand, the formal aspects, in terms of who represented Islam to Muslim children in Germany, had potentially wide-reaching consequences for the contents. The question of representation had troubled the authorities in North-Rhine-Westphalia, and was a major reason for implementing public Islamic instruction in the first place, in order to weaken the impact of private Koran-schools. Similarly the question of representation disturbed the Muslim organisations, who themselves strived for the right to undertake religious instruction.

The marginalisation of Muslim organisations in the political and pedagogical process was perceived as disturbing since the courses were obviously not 'neutral'. They were constructed to transmit a particular understanding of the human being and his or her position in the world. The fact that Islamic instruction until 1999 was provided as part of the Turkish language classes was likewise disapproved. Not only did this exclude Muslim children of other nationalities, it also entailed the risk that Turkish language teachers, generally close to the secular doctrines of the Turkish republic³², would misinterpret and distort the Islamic teachings³³. The involvement of Turkish language teachers, as well as the negotiations with Turkish state officials in the mid 1980s, caused apprehension that the Islamic courses would serve to convey a secularized and, in their eyes, a politically instrumentalized Islam. Muslim organisations in Germany favoured what they construed to be the *universal Islam*, cut loose from particular nationalist doctrines³⁴.

The heavy involvement of German scholars and school authorities was, per se, appraised as an affirmation of the importance of Islam in the process of socialisation³⁵. On the other hand, the Muslim organisations who were hostile to the public Islamic curricula in North-Rhine-Westphalia challenged the methods and pedagogical concepts upon which the project rested. Since the mid 1990s several Muslim organisations in Germany have moved far in adopting the pedagogical principle of correlation, in order to gain access to the public schools and be recognized as state-partners. In fact, in 1999 the two main umbrella organisations, the *Islamrat der muslimen in Deutschland* and the *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland*, joined forces and published their own Islamic curriculum, where the principle of correlation, as well as intellectualisation and critical discussion, are presented as basic didactical conceptions³⁶. Before the mid 1990s, however, the pedagogical principle of correlation was the main target of criticism. It was claimed that this principle, according to which teachers could freely induce discussions on the meaning of Islamic texts in relation to the living conditions of Muslim children in Germany and vice-versa, represented a relativistic and historicising approach that concealed the universal and timeless values and principles of Islam. As expressed in an article in the German Muslim revue *Al-Islam* in 1983: the particular life conditions of an East-Anatolian and proletarian family settled in Germany should not overshadow the richness of the Islamic civilisation³⁷. And as claimed by another article in the same revue the year after: the greatness of God was replaced by focus on a continuously shifting society, like a false god³⁸.

In the prolongation of this criticism of the principle of correlation, as too historical and too relativistic, another critical argument appeared which questioned the effects of the social analysis upon which the pedagogical concept rested. It was claimed that the principle of correlation, also frequently referred to as *Konfliktpädagogik* by the Muslim organisations, conceived the Muslim pupil as a patient in need of treatment³⁹, and conveyed an image of the Muslim family as weak and conflict-ridden both internally and externally. If the image of unemployment, marginalisation and family quarrels were allowed to replace pride of one's Muslim background, it would damage the self-esteem of the child, it was argued, which was contrary to the ambitions of the project. As expressed in a critical assessment by the *Islamischen Arbeitskreis in Deutschland* (precursor of the *Zentralrat*):

Es wird bei diesem Thema unseres Erachtens zu sehr die Schwäche der Eltern, ihre Schwierigkeiten und ihr Scheitern in der deutschen Gesellschaft betont. Von den Schülern wird charakterliche Stärke erwartet, so dass sie die Eltern trotz ihrer Schwäche nicht verachten. Dabei werden die Lernvoraussetzungen der sechs- und siebenjährigen Schüler nicht genügend berücksichtigt. Ein Kind in diesem Alter hat sicherlich noch nicht erlebt: „Vater braucht meine Hilfe bei Behördengängen“, „Mutter begleite ich zum Arzt“. Kinder in diesem Alter vertrauen den Fähigkeiten der Eltern. [...] Die Familie als kleinste „Ummah“ ist von zentraler Bedeutung für das Leben eines Muslims. Aus der Sicht islamischer Pädagogik erwartet man hier als Schwerpunkt die Behandlung des religiösen Lebens in der Familie und nicht wie im vorliegenden Curriculum geschehen eine Übertonung sozialer Probleme, wie Arbeitslosigkeit, Wohnungsnot, Krankheit, Pflichten im Haushalt, Video oder Fernsehen bis in der Nacht etc⁴⁰.

The claims for a genuine confessional Islamic instruction, equal to the Christian religious instruction, are maintained, even if the main Muslim organisations adopted a more pragmatic approach to the pedagogical and didactical questions towards the end of the 1990s. Responding to the authorities' argument; that confessional Islamic instruction cannot be organized due to lack of a representative Muslim body, local organisations have formed larger regional and federal umbrella organisations. The two main national umbrella organisations, the *Islamrat* and the *Zentralrat*, were founded in the late 1980s, comprising the quasi-totality of Muslim organisations in Germany not belonging to the foreign branch of Turkish state-Islam; Ditib⁴¹. The three organisations which had turned to the authorities of North-Rhine-Westphalia in 1978, requesting Islamic instruction, all joined either the *Zentralrat* or the *Islamrat*.

As part of their continuous struggle for confessional Islamic instruction, undertaken in cooperation with representatives of organized Islam, the two umbrella organisations signed a common request to the authorities of North-Rhine-Westphalia in 1996⁴². In 1999 a common body dedicated to the question of Islamic religious instruction was founded and the same year the Islamic curriculum, based on German pedagogical conceptions, was published⁴³. The year before, in 1998, the two organisations had brought their case before the court in North-Rhine-Westphalia, but finally lost in 2001. The tribunal concluded that the two organisations were not faith communities according to German law, and hence not in a position of negotiating on religious instruction with the state⁴⁴. This was shortly after the non-confessional and state-initiated *Islamische Unterweisung* was made a separate and ordinary school discipline in the German language, in 1999. Commenting upon the legal questions and the court process of *Zentralrat* and *Islamrat*, the head of the education department in North-Rhine-Westphalia, Rainer Ernst, declared:

Voraussetzung für die Erteilung von Religionsunterricht als ordentlichem Unterrichtsfach ist danach die Bildung einer organisierten Religionsgemeinschaft. Existiert eine solche nicht, kommt [...] nur ein vom Staat verantworteter religionskundlicher Unterricht nach Art der in Nordrhein-Westfalen angebotenen islamischen Unterweisung in Betracht. Ansonsten bleibt die Bildung einer Religionsgemeinschaft abzuwarten, die befugt ist, verbindlich die religiösen Inhalte des Religionsunterrichts zu formulieren und zu vertreten⁴⁵.

CONCLUSION

In the German political debate on Islamic religious instruction, which has been going on for more than twenty years, the lack of a centralised and representative Muslim body has been

purported to be the major reason for not organising confessional Islamic courses equivalent to the Protestant and Catholic instruction, and as envisaged by the Constitution. As expressed in the quotation above, this argument has also been conveyed in North-Rhine-Westphalia. In fact, the head of the education department, Rainer Ernst, asserted that confessional Islamic instruction would be undertaken in public schools once a proper Muslim faith community, capable of communicating a particular dogma, had materialized.

I have suggested that a perhaps more accurate understanding of the German dilemma regarding the institutional integration of Islam is the vast public influence granted faith communities (historically the churches) by the Constitution, particularly within the school system, and the social function that religious instruction is presumed to have in society at large. The fact that Muslim organisations in Germany in the last ten to fifteen years have moved far in building centralised structures without gaining access to public schools, seems to underscore that the problem basically lies elsewhere than in formal features. The basic problem seems to be the lack of trust in Muslim agents, and their capability of formulating a dogma that is compatible with the civic virtues to be endorsed by religious instruction in public schools.

North-Rhine-Westphalia is the *Land* which has gone furthest in developing a German concept of Islamic instruction. This concept, officially non-confessional and clearly secular in its objective to integrate the Muslim children, still differs fundamentally from the French notion of *laïcité*. Religion is not deprived of public relevance but rather considered an asset if only carried out 'responsibly'. In fact, the valuation of the authentic religiousness, as contributing to the constitution of a 'whole' and morally responsible being, obviously permeates the rationale of the curricula to the extent that the demarcations between confessional and non-confessional seem to vanish. Ironically, however, this very assessment of authenticity entails an instrumentalisation of the religious in service of the secular task of integration.

NOTES

- ¹ Germany has the second largest Muslim minority in Western Europe (after France), approximately 3.2 million. The vast majority is of Turkish origin, about 2.4 million. See F. Şen - A. Hayrettin, *Islam in Deutschland*, München 2002, p. 15.
- ² I.-C. Mohr, *Islamic religious instruction in Germany and Austria. A comparison of principles derived from religious thought*, "Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien", 33, 2002. Article found at <http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/publica/cemoti/textes33/mohr.pdf>
- ³ North-Rhine-Westphalia is the first Land to introduce Islamic instruction as an ordinary school subject. See B. Schröder, *Islamische Unterweisung in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, in P. Schreiner - K. Wulff (eds.), *Islamischer Religionsunterricht. Ein Lesebuch*, Münster 2001, p. 107.
- ⁴ S.V. Monsma - C.J. Soper, *The challenge of pluralism. Church and state in five democracies*, New York - Oxford 1997, pp. 155-156 and G. Jonker, *Muslim emancipation? Germany's struggle over religious pluralism*, in W.A.R. Shadid - P.S. van Koningsveld (eds.), *Religious freedom and the neutrality of the state: the position of Islam in the European Union*, Leuven-Paris 2002, pp. 39-40.
- ⁵ See for example S. Koriath, *Islamischer Religionsunterricht und Art. 7 III GG. Zu den Voraussetzungen religiöser Vielfalt in der öffentlichen Pflichtschulen*, "Neue Zeitschrift für Verwaltungsrecht", 16, 1997, p. 1046; W. Bock, "Verfassungsrechtliche Probleme der Einführung islamischen Religionsunterrichts", "Recht der Jugend und des Bildungswesens", 49, 2001, pp. 336-337 and A. Campenhausen, *Neue Religionen im Abendland*, in "Zeitschrift für Evangelisches Kirchenrecht", 25, 1980, p. 146.

- ⁶ See for example M. Heckel, *Religionsunterricht für Muslime?*, "Juristenzeitung", 54, 1999 and S. Muckel, *Islamischer Religionsunterricht und Islamkunde an öffentlichen Schulen in Deutschland*, "Juristenzeitung" 2, 2001.
- ⁷ Monsma - Soper, *The challenge of pluralism* cit., pp. 162-165 and H. Schmidt, *Religionsunterricht angesichts einer religiös pluralen Gesellschaft*, in "Loccumer Pelikan (Religionspädagogisches Magazin für Schule und Gemeinde)", 3, 1992, pp. 11-12.
- ⁸ Heckel, *Religionsunterricht für Muslime?* cit., p. 746.
- ⁹ W. Schiffauer, *Fremde in der Stadt*, Frankfurt 1997, p. 51.
- ¹⁰ This debate was instigated by a report by a North-Rhine-Westphalian school official, Renate Irskens, which gained nation-wide attention. Irskens claimed that Islamic fundamentalist organisations were rapidly gaining influence among immigrants, not least among the younger ones, who were recruited to Koran-schools and sport clubs where a deeply intolerant religious ideology was conveyed. North-Rhine-Westphalia's Education Minister established a special commission to investigate and combat the problem. See P. O'Brien, *Beyond the swastika*, London-NewYork 1996, p. 64.
- ¹¹ Koriouth, *Islamischer Religionsunterricht und Art. 7 III GG*. cit., pp. 1043-1044.
- ¹² Expression used by Klaus Gebauer, see K. Gebauer, *Schulversuch Islamische Unterweisung in deutscher Sprache – organisatorische Rahmenbedingungen, curriculares Konzept und Qualifikation der Lehrerinnen und Lehrer. Zwischenbericht*, December 2000, p. 2.
- ¹³ Klaus Gebauer from the state institute of further education in North-Rhine-Westphalia pointed, however, later to the lack of a recognised Muslim faith community as the reason for the interruption of the negotiations. See K. Gebauer, *Islamischer Religionsunterricht. Ein Beitrag zur Verständigung*" (1990), in Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung (ed.), *Religiöse Unterweisung für Schülerinnen und Schüler islamischen Glaubens in Nordrhein-Westfalen (1979-1995)*, Soest 1995, p. 49.
- ¹⁴ Schiffauer, *Fremde in der Stadt* cit., p. 51.
- ¹⁵ H. Alacacioğlu, *Ausserschulischer Religionsunterricht für muslimische Kinder und Jugendliche türkischer Nationalität in NRW. Eine empirische Studie zu Koranschulen in türkisch-islamische Gemeinden*, Münster 1999, pp. 31-33.
- ¹⁶ See K. Gebauer, *Islamischer Religionsunterricht an deutschen Schulen – Diskussionsrahmen und Diskussionsebenen* (1987), in Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung (ed.), *Religiöse Unterweisung für Schülerinnen und Schüler islamischen Glaubens* cit., pp. 5-14.
- ¹⁷ CIBEDO-Dokumentation, *Islamischer Religionsunterricht an deutschen Schulen. Drei Curricula*. December 1983, 28 and Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung (ed.), *Religiöse Unterweisung für Schülerinnen und Schüler islamischen Glaubens, 24 Unterrichtseinheiten für die Jahrgangsstufen 7 bis 10*, Soest 1996, p. 7.
- ¹⁸ O'Brien, *Beyond the swastika* cit., pp. 58-64.
- ¹⁹ Landesinstitut für Curriculumentwicklung, Lehrerfortbildung und Weiterbildung (ed.), *Religionsunterricht für Schüler islamischen Glaubens—zwölf Unterrichtseinheiten*, 1982, p. 5.
- ²⁰ See for example Gebauer, *Islamischer Religionsunterricht. Ein Beitrag zur Verständigung* cit., p. 48.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-47.
- ²² See for example Landesinstitut für Curriculumentwicklung, Lehrerfortbildung und Weiterbildung (ed.), *Religionsunterricht* cit., pp. 48-49.
- ²³ "[...] der Islam muss Fragen beantworten, die ihm dort, wo er zu Hause ist, so bisher nicht gestellt wurden". See Landesinstitut für Curriculumentwicklung, Lehrerfortbildung und Weiterbildung (ed.), *Religionsunterricht* cit., p. 6.
- ²⁴ K. Gebauer, *Islamische Tradition, Integration und politisches Bewusstsein—einige Überlegungen und Folgerungen* (1984), in Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung (ed.), *Religiöse Unterweisung für Schülerinnen und Schüler islamischen* cit., p. 97.
- ²⁵ Gebauer, *Islamischer Religionsunterricht. Ein Beitrag zur Verständigung* cit., pp. 49.
- ²⁶ More on the pedagogical principle of correlation and its conceptualisation in relation to Islamic religious instruction, see K. Gebauer, *Islamische Unterweisung und Möglichkeiten interreligiösen Unterrichts in den Schulen von Nordrhein-Westfalen (1992)*, in Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung (ed.), *Religiösen Unterweisung für Schülerinnen und Schüler islamischen* cit., pp. 64-68.

- ²⁷ Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung (ed.), *Religiöse Unterweisung für Schüler islamischen Glaubens. 24 Unterrichtseinheiten für die Grundschule*, Soest 1986, pp. 102-103.
- ²⁸ Id. (ed.), *Religiöse Unterweisung für Schülerinnen und Schüler islamischen Glaubens. 12 Unterrichtseinheiten für die Klassen 5 und 6*, 1991, pp. 118-128.
- ²⁹ Id. (ed.), *Religiöse Unterweisung für Schülerinnen und Schüler islamischen* cit., p. 11.
- ³⁰ O'Brien, *Beyond the swastika*, cit., pp. 64-67.
- ³¹ M. Kiefer, *Der Islam in der Schule*, in E. Gottwald - D.Chr. Siedler (eds.), *„Islamische Unterweisung“ in deutscher Sprache. Eine erste Zwischenbilanz des Schulversuchs in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Neukirche 2001, pp. 50-51.
- ³² The secular attachments of the Turkish language teachers were also acknowledged by Klaus Gebauer from the state institute in North-Rhine-Westphalia. See Gebauer, *Islamischer Religionsunterricht an deutschen Schulen* cit., p. 11.
- ³³ See for example A. Zilelioglu, *Islamischer Lehrplan umstritten*, „Al-Islam“, 01.08.1983 and *Islamischer Religionsunterricht an deutschen Schulen – eine Herausforderung an die Muslime in Deutschland?*, „Al-Islam“, 01.02.1984. Republished in Zentralinstitut Islam-Archiv-Deutschland e.V. (ed.), *Islamunterricht in NRW. Muslimische Stellungnahmen*, Dokumentation nr. 2, 1997.
- ³⁴ On the different notions of Islamic religious instruction in Germany, and the contrasts between the ‘universal’ and the ‘nationalist’ conceptions, see H.E. Hamer, *Differing conceptions of Islamic religious instruction in German schools*, in “British Journal of religious education”, autumn, 1984 and H.E. Hamer, *Die öffentliche Schule und der islamischen Religionsunterricht*, “Pädagogik und Schule in Ost und West”, 32, 1984.
- ³⁵ See for example Zilelioglu, *Islamischer Lehrplan umstritten* cit.
- ³⁶ Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland e.V., *Lehrplan für den Islamischen Religionsunterricht (Grundschule)*, Cologne 1999, p. 3.
- ³⁷ Zilelioglu, *Islamischer Lehrplan umstritten* cit..
- ³⁸ *Islamischer Religionsunterricht an deutschen Schulen – eine Herausforderung an die Muslime in Deutschland?* cit.
- ³⁹ Expression used in Zilelioglu, *Islamischer Lehrplan umstritten* cit..
- ⁴⁰ VIKZ, *Kritische Analyse der Unterrichtseinheiten der ersten Klasse der „Religiösen Unterweisung für Schüler islamischen Glaubens“*, Cologne 1992, pp. 9-11.
- ⁴¹ T. Lemmen, *Muslime in Deutschland. Eine Herausforderung für Kirche und Gesellschaft*, Baden-Baden 2001, pp. 120-124.
- ⁴² M. Wehner, *Die Debatte über islamischen Religionsunterricht*, “Die Brücke”, 6, 2000, p. 35.
- ⁴³ Jonker, *Muslim emancipation?* cit., p. 43 and Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland e.V., *Lehrplan für den Islamischen Religionsunterricht (Grundschule)* cit.
- ⁴⁴ *Schulrecht – Religionsunterricht: Islamischer Religionsunterricht (NRW)*, “Schulrecht. Informationsdienst für Schulleitung und Schulaufsicht”, 4, 2002, pp. 78-79.
- ⁴⁵ R. Ernst, *Einführung und Einrichtung von islamischen Religionsunterricht*, “Schulverwaltung NRW”, 10, 2001, p. 286.

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SOURCES

Tasks of the religious instruction for Muslim pupils in the elementary school (didactical introduction)

Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Everliving, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist; slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep; whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He pleases, His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both tires Him not, and He is the Most High, the Great (Sure 2, 255)

Assumptions and intentions

Religious instruction for Muslim pupils in the schools of the Federal Republic of Germany takes place under particular circumstances, from which special tasks and challenges emerge. Most Muslims in Germany are living within an unfamiliar cultural context. A different degree of societal modernity, a different relation between religion and culture, and between society and politics structures life differently, and offers different means of dealing with concrete life experiences. Such cultural differences can be arduous, and also pose difficulties regarding the development of long-term perspectives regarding life in Germany. Furthermore, linguistic, social and economical problems influence the everyday-lives of people who have come to Germany to find work.

The children suffer from additional problems. They know their original culture only through oral stories and the everyday practices of their parents – not through personal experience of life in the country of their families. For Turkish Muslims another challenge is rooted in the fact that society in their country of origin for more than fifty years has been undergoing substantial changes in the fields of politics, economy, culture and religion. The values and patterns of behaviour they have brought with them are often incompatible or badly adapted to life in Germany. Frequently this entails insecurity in their intercourse with Germans and German society and culture. This disparity and discomfort is necessary strengthened by the fact that the norms and values they have brought with to Germany also are deteriorated and under pressure in their home country.

Only slowly, due to the constraints of coexistence and cooperation, new patterns are likely to emerge that can bring the different cultures closer to one another.

Particularly for the generation already born in Germany the two cultures are confronted directly in the process of identity construction: on the one hand the upbringing and everyday life in the family, where traditional values and patterns of behaviour rule, on the other hand everyday life in the neighbourhood and at school, as well as media and the work of their parents.

Such a bicultural socialisation should not be left to its own dynamics if peaceful and constructive coexistence and cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims in Germany are to prevail to the benefit of all.

Religious instruction has, under these circumstances, the following particular tasks:

- to instruct, above all the Muslims born in Germany, in their history, ethics and religion, and to help them to make use of these traditions in their identity construction and life course.
- to support the development of a Muslim identity in non-Muslim surroundings.
- to provide a contribution to a prosperous coexistence between Muslims and Christians, particularly between Turks and Germans, in equality, peace and mutual exchange.

This means that the religious instruction for Muslim children must be related to the situation in Germany.

The Islamic tradition must help Muslims in interpreting and managing life in Germany. This means, also, that Islam must provide answers to questions hitherto not posed in its traditional surroundings. There must be established a correlation between the Islamic tradition and the living conditions of Muslims in the Federal Republic. This implies that conceptions of moral and ethics within the two cultures must be communicated; the compatible and the incompatible must be exposed through open and honest dialogue. This way the efforts to attain consensus and solidarity can be endorsed through mutual learning.

The teacher faces high expectations and challenges. He must, on the hand, be able to transfer the Islamic tradition to the societal conditions in Germany. On the other hand he must be capable of interpreting the Islamic texts from the perspective of the life experiences of these children in such a way that this can provide help in handling this everyday life. The curriculum can only offer suggestions and indications as to how this may be done.

From:

Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung, *Religiöse Unterweisung für Schüler islamischen Glaubens. 24 Unterrichtseinheiten für die Grundschule*, Soest 1986.