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Islamic Religious Education in Belgian state schools: a post-secular perspective

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Abstract

Based on Habermas' normative theory of religion in post-secular society, this paper elaborates on the organization of Islamic RE in public schools. Hereto, a brief sketch of the Habermasian concepts of *reflexive religion* and *complementary learning processes* will be given. Subsequently, the author addresses the role of RE in post-secular society and applies the aforementioned Habermasian concepts to confessional RE, with particular attention for Islamic RE in Belgium, where this subject is organized in state schools since 1975, but where it is also criticized today, in particular with regard to content, teacher-training, textbooks, and inspection. These deficiencies will lead us to one of the main problems of Islamic RE and of confessional RE in general: the absence of state control. Based on Habermas' ideas, the author concludes that it is up to the state to elucidate under which conditions confessional RE can be part of the regular curriculum, and to facilitate these conditions, e.g. by funding and co-organizing teacher training; by reviewing curricula and textbooks; by formulating a 'core curriculum', and by controlling teachers. If these conditions have not been met, confessional RE should not be a part of the regular curriculum in a liberal state.

Keywords

Islamic RE – Habermas – post-secular society – reflexive religion – Belgium – public schools

Introduction

As a result of labor migration followed by family reunification, global mobility, and the recent refugee crisis, the Muslim population in Europe increased significantly over the past decades and accordingly, Muslims are now a substantial minority in many European nations. This new sociological situation has, among others, led to an increasing number of (state-funded) Islamic schools, and to the organization of Islamic RE in state schools. In this article, I will focus on the latter and try to find out why and under which conditions the state can organize Islamic RE in its schools.

In order to do so, I will elaborate on Habermas' ideas on post-secularism and on the consequences of this normative stance for RE. Subsequently, I will have a critical look at the organization of Islamic RE classes in Belgium, which is one of the few European countries with a long tradition of Islamic RE in state schools. However, in spite of more than four decades of experience with Islamic RE, the subject is at present very contested and needs improvement. This is a second reason why the Belgian case is of interest: its study will reveal some important deficiencies, which have important consequences up until today. Particularly for other European nation states, where Islamic classes in state schools are a more recent phenomenon, the Belgian case can be a 'wake-up call' because it proves how things can go wrong if the state is not sufficiently concerned with Islamic RE. Finally, some recent initiatives in Belgium are taken to improve the situation and also in this regard, this case could be inspiring for other (European) nation states.

Islamic RE in Europe

According to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR, 2nd article, 1st protocol), parents have the right to education "in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions". In order to guarantee this right, state schools can organize different RE classes,

of which Islamic RE can be one. According to T. Modood (2015, 9), this policy of accommodation of affirmative action can foster among many Muslims a feeling of equality and, in relation to this, of inclusion in a non-Islamic, European environment. In addition, organizing Islamic RE in state schools is, like other forms of co-operation between the Islamic community and the secular state, more and more seen as a way to prevent radicalisation among youngsters. As said by Modood (2015, 4),

(i)n recent years concern with Islamist terrorism and ‘radicalisation’ have led states to extol and condemn certain kinds of Islam, to co-opt certain Muslim groups into governance, to engage in matters of Iman training and the schooling of Muslim children.

In spite of these benefits, however, the organization of Islamic RE classes raises many issues and particularly the fear for radical, Salafist interpretations of Islam, which contribute to rather than prevent radicalism, is apparent among many citizens and politicians. Given the present revival of Salafism and religious terrorism in the Arab world, but also in Europe, this fear is not undeserved. Moreover, several deplorable events, such as the Murder of the Dutch film maker Theo Van Gogh (2004), the controversy about the Danish Muhammad Cartoons (2005), the attack on Charlie Hebdo (2015), the departure of many European Syria-warriors, and the rise of terrorist attacks all over Europe, prove that the radical interpretation of Islam is not merely a problem of ‘the other’, but also of our European co-citizens. As said by Bassam Tibi (2008, 71),

the problem is not the number of Muslim people living in Europe, but rather what Islam is coming to Europe. Is it European Islam, enlightened Islam compatible and consonant with the civilizational identity of Europe, or is it *Shari’a*-Islam? This is the real issue and this is what the future of Europe is all about.ⁱ

In order to counter ‘Sharia-Islam’ and promote a European Islam, the state must take its responsibility, also with regard to Islamic RE. What is needed is an ‘enlightened’ form of Islamic RE, which is adapted to the European context and to core European values such as freedom, (gender) equality, non-discrimination and autonomy. In the words of Ednan Aslan (2011, 32):

Islamic education is related to a specific context. Thus, Islamic education in Europe is also bound by its context. Attempts to establish an Islam in Europe, which is alien to its context, are ultimately doomed to failure.

This brings us to one of the main challenges in European Islamic RE: to which extent can the state control or supervise Islamic RE, without infringing on the separation of church and state? Is it sufficient to leave Islamic RE up to the religious communities, without any state control? Or should the state, in order to prevent totalitarian religious interpretations of Islam, be able to control the curricula, the teacher training programs, and the textbooks? Put differently, is it possible and desirable to encourage an enlightened form of Islamic RE at school? And if so, what should this kind of RE look like?

In order to answer these questions, I will have a critical look at the organization of Islamic RE classes in Belgium. Before I address this case, I will elaborate on Habermas’ ideas on post-secularism and on the consequences of this normative stance for RE. Even though Habermas’ ideas (for instance his distinction between the religious and the secular; his cognitivist, static view on religion; the rational burden he imposes on religious citizens; and his rather optimistic view on consensus) are not uncontested (e.g. Beckford 2012; Dillon 2012; Calhoun, Mendieta, and VanAntwerpen 2013; Neal 2014), the following paragraphs will show that his ideas about religion in post-secular society, and in particular his concepts of ‘reflexive

religion' and 'complementary learning processes' can be inspiring for Islamic RE in a secular school system, but also for other RE subjects.

Habermas and post-secular society

As an adept of the Frankfurter Schule, Habermas is, in his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Habermas 1981), suspicious about the role of religion in contemporary western societies. In his later work (e.g. 2002, 2006, 2008), this negative view on religion and its role in society have changed: according to Habermas (2008, 19; 2002, 66) religions will not disappear and 'still claim a 'seat' in the life of societies that are largely secularized'. Different from his earlier work, Habermas sees religion no longer as an archaic and meaningless residue, but as a *bearer of (semantic) potential*, which can, under certain conditions and restrictions, contribute to the democratic debate. In post-secular societies, religious traditions still have a potential of meaning, not only for their adherents, but also for non-religious persons and for the secular society in general because they 'have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life'. (Habermas 2006, 10)

However, religion can only be beneficial for society if there is a shift 'from the traditional to a more reflexive form of religious consciousness' (Habermas 2008, 28). In order to become 'reflexive', religious groups are required to accept (1) the fact of religious pluralism and of religious freedom; (2) the authority of science; and (3) the existence of a profane ground for ethics and, in relation to it, the secular character of the constitution and the separation of church and state (Habermas 2002, 66; 2006, 14).

This learning process is not a one-direction way, but 'a cooperative task in which the non-religious citizens must likewise participate. [...]' (Habermas 2006, 11). Because different world religions bear a semantic potential 'that unleashes an inspiring energy for *all of society*'

(Habermas 2006, 17), secular citizens are expected to open their mind to the ‘possible truth content’ of these religions and enter into dialogue with its adherents.

Also for the non-believer, the learning process thus requires a change in mentality that is ‘no less cognitively exacting than the adaptation of religious awareness to the challenges of an ever more secularized environment’ (Habermas 2006, 15). From both sides – religious and secular –, a change in epistemic attitudes is required: while the religious consciousness becomes ‘reflective’, the secular consciousness transcends its secular and rational limitations. For these reasons, Habermas (2006, 4, 18; 2008, 28) speaks about ‘complementary learning processes’.

Given the absolute and exclusive character of many religions, putting Habermas’ religious learning process into practice is not an easy task, but rather an ‘arduous work of hermeneutic self-reflection’ (Habermas 2006, 14). However, in spite of this difficulty, Habermas is quite optimistic about this learning process. Moreover, both the Catholic Church and the German Protestant churches already went, to a large extent, through this process:

It is a well-known fact that the Catholic Church first pinned its colors to the mast of liberalism and democracy with the Second Vaticanum in 1965. And in Germany, the Protestant churches did not act differently. (Habermas 2008, 27)

With regard to Islam, however, things are different and ‘[m]any Muslim communities still have this painful learning process before them’ (Habermas 2008, 27). Nonetheless, since ‘the insight is also growing in the Islamic world that an historical-hermeneutic approach to the Koran’s doctrine is required’ (Habermas 2008, 27-28), a ‘reflexive’ or Enlightened Islam is, according to Habermas, not impossible. Without any doubt, this has also its consequences for Islamic RE.

Habermas, reflexivity and Religious Education

Given the presence of diverse religions in post-secular society, the semantic potential of religion, and the importance of complementary learning processes, we can, from a Habermasian perspective, give ‘a strong argument in favor of integrative, religious studies based religious education’ (Loobuyck 2015, 100) for all students. When this kind of RE is taught in a ‘critical, objective and pluralistic manner’ (cf. *Folgerø v. Norway* 2002, Appl. no. 15472/02; 2002), the students’ post-secular attitude of reflexivity and reciprocity can be stimulated (cf. Loobuyck 2015, 98; also Fabretti 2013, 58) and the *complementary learning process* can be brought into practice:

[T]he secular student can learn from religious students, the religious student can learn from the secular one, and both can experience the right to disagree and develop an attitude of reciprocity. (Loobuyck 2015, 98)

Accordingly, there, are, from a Habermasian perspective, good reasons to have non-confessional and integrative RE on the school curriculum of all *regular* schools (including faith-based schools), without the possibility of opting out.

But what about confessional and denominational RE, i.e. education *into* religion, organized by or in co-operation with the religious communities (cf. Bråten 2013, 22-24)? As said by Fabretti (2013, 58), multi-religious and separative RE ‘meets the recognition of diversities in their own specificities as a starting point as well as the criterion of co-presence of secular and religious actors’ and is, at this point, in line with Habermas’ post-secular perspective. However, because students are segregated according to their religion or worldview, dialogue and critical reflection are not stimulated in the most extensive way, and multi-religious RE is thus ‘only partially coherent with the post-secular perspective’ (Fabretti 2013, 58). This, however, does not imply that there would be no room at all for confessional and separative RE

in the post-secular school. As noticed by Loobuyck (2015, 102), '[p]ost secularism does not exclude it, but it has not the same priority as religious studies-based, integrative religious education'.

Moreover, if confessional RE wants to be part of the regular school system, it should be adapted to this school system and, in a broader perspective, to the general aims of liberal education: cultivating autonomous and critical reflection, and being aware of the best knowledge at hand (cf. Levinson 1999). Hence confessional RE is not 'a lawless zone' (Ferrari 2008, 121) but should, as a subject within the liberal education system and similar to other school subjects, be bound by the rules and conditions of the liberal, post-secular society.

From a Habermasian perspective, this means that RE should become *reflexive religious education*, which is 'in line with the normative building blocks (freedom and equality) of liberal democracy and [does] not contradict scientific knowledge' (Loobuyck 2015, 102-103). In exchange for recognition and (financial) support by the state, RE should be 'reflexive', which means that teachers and students should at least accept (1) the fact of religious pluralism and the right to religious freedom; (2) the reliability of scientific knowledge and the difference between science and religion; and (3) the value and importance of secular arguments in ethical and political debates and, in relation to it, the separation of church and state. Unfortunately, this process is not so evident and particularly for Islamic RE, this is problematic today, as the Belgian case below will make clear.

Islamic RE in Belgium

Post-secularity in Belgium

Like many other European nations, Belgium is characterized by sociological secularisation and a decline of institutionalised religion (Dobbelaere 2002). Since the 1960s, church practice has decreased and even though most Belgian citizens still subscribe to some Christian values and

call themselves Catholic, more and more people no longer identify with the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, belief in God has decreased and more and more Belgian citizens call themselves atheists or agnostics (Dobbelaere et al. 2000, 117–52). According to a recent survey (Ipsos 2017), Belgium is today one of the most secularized nations worldwide: 69% of Belgian citizens see religion a force for bad rather than for good in the world, which is the highest rate in the survey.

Notwithstanding this process of secularisation, Belgian society can, from a Habermasian perspective, be labeled as post-secular: although the impact of institutionalized religions decreased substantially, religion is still alive and particularly the increasing number of Muslim and the related visibility of Islam in the public area, have led to numerous discussions about the place of religion in the Belgian society. Hence one of the main challenges today is how the Belgian state should deal with religion, and particularly with those religious ideas and demands that seem not always to fit into the ‘liberal’ and ‘secular’ ethos of the state. It is in this post-secular context that present discussions about Islamic RE are situated.

Islamic RE: Facts and Figures

Belgium is a complex federal state, wherein the French, Flemish and German Communities have autonomy over education. In addition to this regionalization, the Belgian education system is characterized by pillarization or “the ‘vertical’ division of society in closed social groupings or ‘pillars’ along class and ideological or religious lines, with each pillar having its own social institutions such as newspapers, broadcasting organisations, political parties, trade unions, health insurances, farmers’ associations, banks, schools, hospitals, universities, youth movements and sport clubs.” (Franken & Vermeer 2017, 2). As a consequence, most Belgian schools (about 70%) are private, Catholic schools which are extensively funded by the state. In these schools, which are attended by 50% of the Muslim students, Roman-Catholic RE is a

compulsory school subject and there are, with the exemption of a few primary Catholic schools, no Islamic RE classes on the curriculum.

Even though other religious groups can also establish their own schools, the number of these schools is very small. Today, there are only four recognized and thus state-supported Islamic schools in the French Community (Brussels-Capital). In these schools, the regular curriculum is taught and in addition, two hours of Islamic RE are scheduled on a weekly basis. In the Flemish community, several attempts have been made in order to establish Islamic schools, but without success. More successful are the 'Lucerna colleges', which are managed by the Turkish Gülen movement. Although these schools do not have the official status of confessional Islamic schools, but of non-confessional private schools, all the students in these schools are enrolled for Islamic RE.

This is different in state schools, which are attended by 30% of the students in the Flemish Community and by the other 50% of Muslim students. In line with the Constitution (art.24, §1), these schools are required to organize RE classes in the recognized religions (Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Anglicanism, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism and Islam) and in non-confessional ethics. All these classes, which are two hours scheduled on a weekly basis, are, like Roman-Catholic RE in Catholic schools, subsidized by the state and autonomously organized by the respective religious (or humanist) communities.ⁱⁱ

For several decades, Islam in Belgian state schools was a minority religion that was only taken by a few students. Last years, however, we see an increasing number of students taking Islamic RE: in the Flemish Community, Islam is taken now by 20% of the students in primary and secondary state schools (Flemish Ministry of Education), which is twice as much as ten years ago. In large cities, the number of students enrolled in Islamic RE is significantly higher and in Brussels, Islam is even the main subject in state schools today, taken by 50% of the students.

Islamic RE: Implementation

Since the official recognition of Islam in Belgium in 1974, state schools are constitutionally required to organize Islamic RE. At present, the Centre for Islamic Education (CIO), which cooperates with and is supervised by the Executive of Muslims in Belgium (EMB) is responsible for this school subject in the Flemish Community. Also in the other Communities does the EMB take final responsibility over IRE. However, the establishment of this Executive, which is the official mediator between the Muslim community and the Belgian state, did not go smoothly and accordingly, the implementation of Islamic RE was no sinecure.

Before 1993, the EMB did not exist and up until then, the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) was the mediator between the Islamic community and the Belgian state. However, the (financial) connections of this Centre with the Islamic World League, and thus also with Saudi-Arabia's conservative Wahhabism, have far-reaching repercussions for Islam and for Islamic RE. Because the ICC was, from 1975 to 1993, responsible for Islamic RE and because the Belgian state was, for many years, not concerned about Islam and Islamic RE, several problems concerning this school subject still exist up until today.

Islamic RE: Teacher training, curricula and inspection

When the first Islam classes were organized in 1975, there were not enough qualified Islam teachers. In order to solve this problem, teachers were imported from abroad (mainly from Turkey and Morocco), but most of them did not speak the Belgian languages and did not have enough knowledge of and affinity with the Belgian culture. Up until today, this policy has its consequences and the average level of Islamic RE teachers is still very low: in the Flemish Community, only 38% of the present teachers in secondary schools obtained the required degree and in primary schools, this is only 16% (Knack 12-04-2015). Even though there are

some formal requirements for Islamic RE teachers (they need a general degree in pedagogy; they must succeed for a language test; and they need at least a certificate in Islamic RE, organized by the EMB), the content of the specific teacher-training classes at the EMB are not supervised by the state and were for many years far insufficient. In this regard, it is problematic that the state can only control whether the abovementioned requirements are fulfilled, while it cannot evaluate the Islamic RE teacher training programs as such.

Another problem is the longstanding absence of curricula. In the French Community, there were no curricula before 2013, while in the Flemish Community, the first curricula were designed in 2001. However, as a result of the influence of Saudi Arabia, these were very traditional. In 2013-14, the Flemish curricula were substantially transformed by the EMB: since then, there is some attention for religious diversity, for fundamental rights and freedoms, and for (the dangers of) religious fanaticism. In addition, several controversial issues such as the status of women within Islam, internal diversity in the Islamic community, the tension between religion and science, and the importance of text interpretation, are no longer excluded.

Notwithstanding these improvements, the curricula still have some deficits (cf. Franken 2017b) and many teachers are not well prepared to work with them because they are not trained to do so and because there are no qualitative, actualized and context-related textbooks: at present, the few Flemish textbooks for Islamic RE are merely translations from Turkish textbooks, edited by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). Thus far, there are no textbooks for Islamic RE written by Belgian Muslims, or edited in Belgium. Accordingly, teaching Islam in a way that is adapted to the Belgian (and European) societal, political and educational context, is not evident.

In addition, there is a problem with the number and appointment of Islamic inspectors, which were not appointed before 2005. Currently, there are seven inspectors for Islamic education in Belgium: four in the Flemish and three in the French Community, but it is not sure

whether this number will be sufficient for the increasing number of Islamic teachers and students.

Finally, the inspection of the curricula raises many issues. In order to assure the separation of church and state, Islamic RE is in Belgium the responsibility of the EMB, and not of the state: the state merely *facilitates* Islamic RE classes (by offering the required classroom infrastructure, financing teaching materials, and paying the salaries and retirements of teachers and inspectors), but is not responsible for its *content* and *inspection*. Even though the curricula must officially be in accordance with the international and constitutional requirements concerning the rights of men and of children in particular, this religious autonomy facilitates education of ideas that are opposed to the principles of liberal democracy, or education of religious theories such as creationism, under the guise of a true scientific theory. As a result of the separation between church and state, it is almost impossible for the state to intervene here. Very recently, there were several attempts to have more state control over the RE curricula, but the Belgian Council of State was critical towards these attempts and argued that they might lead to an infringement of the freedom of education, religion, and speech/expression.

Islamic RE in Belgium: A Habermasian Perspective

In spite of the long experience with Islamic RE in Belgium, this school subject is not always as *reflexive* and *critical* as required in post-secular societies. Even though one of the main aims of the subject is ‘to enable youngsters to make autonomous choices, particularly with regard to religion and the way of life [...]’ (Curriculum Secondary Education 2012-13, 7; see also Tan 2014), these aims are not always reached and Islamic RE is often organized in a traditional and catechetical way, without much attention for contextualization, critical/hermeneutical text reading, and other religious and non-religious traditions.

In May 2017 for instance, anti-radicalization expert Montasser AlDe'emeh, was shocked by young pupils' perception of Islam and their related feelings of dread and fear. The idea that every breach of Quranic rules will lead to eternal punishment and torture in hell, is for instance common among many pupils and even leads to sleep disorders. In a journal article on this topic, AlDe'emeh states the following:

Where does this terrifying worldview come from? The least you can say is this: those who are in the best position for putting these children's minds at rest – imams and teachers of Islam in official schools – do not take any initiative. They do not oppose these horrifying stories. Why? Because they also believe in these stories? Or do they want to stop the intellectual liberation of Muslim youths, in order to keep controlling these kids? Anyway, it is a fact that they create, via their indoctrination, a culture of fear. (Knack 2017-05-09; also Knack 2017-05-11 and De Standaard 2017-05-11)

In a similar vein, Jacky Goris (present director of the Flemish Community Schools in Brussels), pointed at pupils' radical interpretation of Islamic rules: very young children refuse, for instance, to drink water or to swim during Ramadan (in order to prevent swallowing water), or to participate in music classes, which are considered to be *haram* (De Standaard 2016-06-10). Unfortunately, Islamic RE teachers seem to be an important part of, rather than a solution to, these problems:

In many cases, [Islamic RE teachers] have an alarming lack of knowledge of their own religion and make an appeal to a limited number of mainly extremist texts, while they do not know or neglect other texts. It is clear that Saudi influences and petro-dollars are also part of this [problem]. (Knack 2017-05-10)

Taking this into account, it is not inappropriate to say that Islamic RE in Belgium has some more work to do in order to succeed in the Habermasian *learning process*. First of all, the textbooks should be adapted to western society and culture and not, as is now the case, be imported and translated from abroad. Even though there are no such textbooks in Belgium today, several initiatives from abroad (for instance in the Netherlands and Spain) show that the design of western textbooks for Islamic RE is not impossible.

Furthermore, attention should be given to the diversity of and within religious and non-religious worldviews; to the freedom of religion; and to the separation of church and state. In addition, different ethical perspectives should be discussed and an attitude of respect with regard to other ethical and religious views should be encouraged. Finally, the tension between faith and reason should be approached in a critical way, which means at least that the reliability of scientific theory should be accepted and that teachers and students should be aware of the tensions between faith and scientific knowledge, and of possible ways to reconcile these tensions.

Even though Islamic RE still needs to go through this learning process, we should not only be pessimistic about it. In response to the increasing number of Islamic RE classes and the aforementioned problems, several recent initiatives have been taken in the Flemish Community in order to adapt Islamic RE to post-secular society. In 2013 for instance, the traditional syllabi were replaced by new syllabi, which are more open and reflexive.

Also significant is the increasing number of teacher training programs. In 1998, Islam was for the first time organized in a teacher training program in Brussels and last decades, the number of these programs increased significantly: at present, there are Islamic RE teacher training programs in five Flemish colleges. Since 2014-15, there is also a master of *Islamic Theology and Religious Sciences* at the Faculty of Theology (Catholic University of Leuven),

which is since 2017 officially recognized by the EMB. Similar initiatives, “whereby state academic posts concerned specifically with Islamic studies and pedagogy as well as theology operate within existing university structures” (Rissanen & Sai 2017, 9) can also be found in Austria and in Germany and should be encouraged if Islamic RE is organized in public schools.

Finally, there is an increasing co-operation between the Islamic community and the Ministry of Education. In order to improve the quality of Islamic RE, the EMB and the Flemish Minister of Education signed a ‘*Statement of engagement for qualitative Islamic RE*’ (Flemish Ministry of Education 2016). The aims of this statement are, among others, ‘the improvement of Islamic RE and the investment in training and refreshing courses for Islamic RE teachers.’ In order to realize this, the Statement mentions four points of action: (1) teacher training; (2) an actualization of the present teacher degrees for Islamic RE; (3) the appointment of an extra inspector; and (4) a reorganization of the Centre for Islamic RE.

Conform this statement of engagement, a new Inspector was appointed in May 2017 and at the same time, the criteria for Islam teachers became more stringent: in the future, teachers for primary schools and lower secondary education will need a bachelor degree in Islamic education, while a master in Islamic theology will be required for teachers of the higher grades of secondary education (De standaard 2017-05-06). However, since the EMB – and not the state – is responsible for Islamic RE, it is up to this religious stakeholder to take the initiative here. Unfortunately, history has shown that this is not always evident.

This brings us to one of the main problems with Islamic RE in Belgium (but also in other countries): because the religious communities are responsible for the content of their RE classes, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for the state to intervene, to control the classes, and to adjust the curricula. Unfortunately, the consequences of this policy are disastrous in Belgium, as the abovementioned quotes show. If IRE is to be included in public schools, more state control is required, so that Islamic RE can become truly reflexive.

Conclusion

Based on the Habermasian concepts of post-secularism, complementary learning processes, and reflexive religion, there is a strong argument for non-confessional RE in the compulsory school curriculum in post-secular societies. In addition, confessional RE can be organized as an optional subject, but only if several conditions have been met.

Unfortunately, a restrictive view on the separation between church and state often impedes the required learning process and facilitates traditional and even fundamentalist forms of education. At this point, improvement is needed. If the state facilitates Islamic RE in its schools, it is up to the state to elucidate under which conditions this kind of RE can be part of the regular curriculum, and to guarantee these conditions (e.g. by funding and co-organizing the required teacher training classes; by reviewing curricula and textbooks; by formulating a ‘core curriculum’, by controlling teachers;...). If these conditions have not been met, this kind of RE should not be a part the regular curriculum in a liberal state.

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i Although I think the ideas of Tibi have many benefits, they are not uncontroversial. Probably the most know critique comes from Tariq Ramadan (e.g. 2015), who considers Tibi’s Euro-Islam too assimilationist. In Belgium, Khalid Benhaddou (2016), who defends a ‘rational’ Islam, is also critical towards a ‘European’ or ‘Enlightened’ Islam because of its dualistic worldview (Europe versus Islam) and its emphasis on European history and culture. In a similar vein, Khan (2011, 327) labels Tibi’s ideas as one sided: “Europe teaches and Islam listens. [...] Why not the other way round and propose a solution based on the democratic elements inherent in Islam (e.g. consultation, critical thought, egalitarianism)?” Also noteworthy is the recent publication *Islam after Liberalism* (2017), edited by Faisal Devji and Zaheer Kazmi, who condemn the colonisation of Islamic thought by liberalism and plead – contra Tibi – for a more de-territorialised and decentralised vision of Muslim politics in a globalised age.

ii This explicit model of “multi-religious and seperative RE” (cf. Franken 2017a) can also be found in Finland and Austria and, to a lesser extent, in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Spain. Peculiarly, Finnish RE aims to be ‘non-confessional’, which is not the case for the other countries and for Belgium.