British Journal of Religious Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cbre20

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To cite this article: Dag Hallvard Nestby (2023) How could the Norwegian RE subject express the presence of human rights thinking in Islam?, British Journal of Religious Education, 45:1, 14-22, DOI: 10.1080/01416200.2021.1938511

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1938511

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Published online: 17 Jan 2022.

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BRITISH JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
2023, VOL. 45, NO. 1, 14–22
https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1938511

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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Dag Hallvard Nestby

ABSTRACT
In this article I contribute to the scholarly discussion on how minority religions and world-views could be represented in the RE subject of Norwegian primary and lower secondary school. I will focus on Islam since Islam is the largest and – at the same time – most debated minority religion in Norway. The starting-point of my analysis will be the chapter on human rights in *Signposts* where the author, Professor Robert Jackson, refers to the Council of Europe's 2008 recommendation – on which *Signposts* is based – where it is stated that the dimension of religions within intercultural education should be seen as a contribution to strengthen human rights. This formulation is mirrored in the new National Curriculum of the Norwegian RE subject which states that pupils should acquire knowledge of common values (such as intellectual freedom and equality) and how these values are anchored in different religions and worldviews. With the theoretical support of Robert Jackson's three level model I try to demonstrate how RE teachers can realise this didactical vision when teaching about Islam.

KEYWORDS
Norwegian RE; Islam; *Signposts*; human rights

Introduction

Ever since the Norwegian RE subject became multifaith in 1997, scholars have been discussing how the different religions and worldviews should be taught. The discussion has often focused on Islam because of its problematic status in the media. Throughout the last years the public debate, both in Norway and other Western countries, about the integration of minority groups has to a significant extent become a debate about Muslims and their possibilities of becoming fully-fledged members of a democratic community (Furseth 2015; Marsden and Savigny 2009). Marie von der Lippe, among others, has shown that young people are affected by this debate. In her research she demonstrates that pupils often reproduce a media generated image of Muslims as anti-modern and fundamentalist. At the same time, she demonstrates that the same pupils would like alternative representations of Islam (von der Lippe 2010). In this article I wish to contribute to this discussion by drawing some didactical consequences from the *Signposts* chapter on human rights. On the first page of this chapter the author, Professor Robert Jackson, refers to the Council of Europe's 2008 recommendation – on which *Signposts* is based – where it is stated that the dimension of religions within intercultural education should be seen as a contribution to strengthen human rights (Jackson 2014, 77). He elaborates this point further down. In a subsection entitled 'Towards a constructive dialogue about human rights' Jackson notes that RE should generate a basis for intercultural communication, exploring 'related expressions of the idea of human rights within different cultural or religious ways of life' (Jackson 2014, 81). Through such an exploration pupils can identify at least some 'overlapping values' and by doing so, establish a common ground. These formulations are mirrored in the new National Curriculum of the Norwegian RE subject. The first section of the

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document – entitled 'Subject relevance and central values' – states that pupils should acquire knowledge of common values (such as respect for human dignity, intellectual freedom and equality) and *how* these values are *anchored* in *different* religions and worldviews (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2020).

As I see it, the formulations found in the human rights chapter of *Signposts* and the Norwegian National Curriculum contain – constructively understood – at least *one* element that can adjust the negative media image of Islam and give pupils an alternative understanding of this religion, namely a human rights perspective. This perspective has the advantage of downgrading the overarching orthodox components of Islam in favour of reform movements accommodating the notion of human rights. Such movements re-examine central assumptions and dominating perspectives in such a way that they generate a basis for subject-orientated thinking. The first question which I wish to answer is what strategy teachers could choose to make pupils aware of alternative movements. In my work on this question I will employ Robert Jackson's interpretive approach as my theoretical foundation since Jackson argues that a modern form of religious education should use a three level model when analysing religions. Jackson recommends that teachers de-emphasise the impression of religions as bounded systems of belief with a clearly defined content and instead convey an image of religions as amorphous and complex traditions. These traditions consist of individuals and groups that will assess the overarching components of their respective traditions in a vast variety of ways (Jackson 1997). Through qualitative employment of Jackson's concept of religion I wish to indicate how RE teachers can open critical spaces within the Islamic tradition that demonstrate the Muslim contribution to a mutual understanding of the significance of human rights. As part of my analysis, I will give three examples of such a contribution. The next question which I wish to answer is to what extent the two newest Norwegian RE textbooks (for lower secondary school) form a proper foundation for such strategies. Through qualitative analyses of the chapters on Islam I wish to clarify whether these textbooks indicate the existence of critical currents.

Jackson's three level approach to religions and its crystallisation of critical currents

Robert Jackson outlines his three level model most thoroughly in the third chapter of *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach* (1997). He emphasises how dominating the traditional understanding of religions as bounded and clearly defined systems of belief still is within religious education. Jackson points out that the concept of religion should be preserved (deleting the term from language is unrealistic), but researchers and other professionals should communicate clearly to pupils, students and the general public that the defining components of a religion play a different role than what is often expressed within the traditional concept of religion. The overarching doctrines do not constitute a totalising framework which all 'members' accept more or less uncritically; instead, the overarching doctrines constitute a set of contestable reference points which a certain number of individuals and groups have in common (at least to an extent), but which they accommodate in distinctly different ways. What determines the character of the considerations will vary from person to person; it will depend on factors such as social background, level of knowledge, experience and attitudes to existential questions (Jackson 1997, 62–63).

What is interesting about Jackson's approach – and what makes it useful for my purposes – is the model's ability to generate a landscape where even individuals and groups who carry out radical reinterpretations of 'their' religious traditions can be recognised as 'members' *of* the tradition and therefore be entitled to didactical treatment. This approach can be employed by teachers who wish – in accordance with the recommendations of *Signposts* and the new National Curriculum – to explore the Muslim contribution to a global human rights discourse and by doing so, accommodate pupils' request for alternative representations of Islam. Jackson notes, in this connection, that his method does not reject the didactical use of overarching concepts (Jackson 1997, 69). This implies that teachers should spend some time on presenting defining doctrines such as faith in a unified god and explaining the significance of the Five Pillars. A decisive question in this connection is whether these

defining doctrines express 'the idea of human rights'. Many experts on Islam and human rights, such as the Norwegian philosopher Lars Gule (2006) and the American jurist Ann Elizabeth Mayer (2007), point out that this is not necessarily the case. The defining doctrines of Islam, in their traditional *orthodox* interpretation, do not harmonise with human rights and the individualism, humanism and rationalism underlying human rights. Modern human rights thinking presupposes that a human being is an autonomous being and that a human therefore has an unassailable right to act independently. The right to act independently is combined with a duty to respect other individuals' right to act in the same manner. This vision of human freedom, which is rooted in the philosophy of Greek-Roman antiquity but which emerges in a more definite shape throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is partly connected to the (post-)Enlightenment insight that there no longer exist any definite answers to metaphysical questions which everyone can agree on. In such a situation it becomes the individual who – on the basis of his or her autonomy – must find his or her *own* answers to existential challenges. The Enlightenment vision of which liberties an individual can demand marks a clear contrast to the understanding of rights traditionally promoted by Islamic theologians, jurists and other intellectuals. A majority of Islamic scholars have until today, Gule and Mayer note, been deeply sceptical of the idea that humans can demand such a high degree of individual freedom. Humans have, strictly speaking, no right to autonomy; instead, they have an obligation to obey God's commands as expressed in the Koran and the customs of the Prophet. Humans cannot transgress the limits that God has decreed, for example by reinterpreting the Revelation or leaving Islam in favour of another religion or worldview, without negative consequences. Orthodox interpreters of the Islamic tradition award humans a few limited rights, but these rights are not derived from the subject's status as an autonomous agent; they are derived from the subject's obligations to God (Gule 2006, 70–97; Mayer 2007, 51–70).

However, Jackson's method opens both teachers and pupils to the thought that Muslim voices with alternative understandings of how the foundational aspects of the Islamic tradition could be interpreted *also* can play an important role in the classroom. Teachers who wish to integrate such an approach into their formal instruction can find relevant voices in the tradition itself, but – above all – in the contemporary debate among Muslims. If one surveys the content of this ongoing debate, one can detect an increasing number of Muslim scholars trying to reformulate the intellectual heritage of Islam. One of Scandinavia's leading experts on the Islamic tradition, Anne Sofie Roald, notes that the human rights debate among Muslims has become more widespread during the last decades, and she notes that this development is interwoven with the gradual emergence of a critical academic tradition (Roald 2012, 190–210). Numerous scholars have contributed to this development. Many of them try to harmonise Islam with human rights by making a distinction between the founding texts of the Islamic tradition and orthodoxy (Vogt, Larsen, and Moe 2009).

Throughout the remaining part of this section I will give the reader an impression of what this enterprise implies by presenting the reform thoughts of Abdullahi An-Na'im, Halim Rane and Khaled Abou El Fadl. In his book *Towards an Islamic Reformation* (1990) An-Na'im argues that the Islamic scriptural sources can be interpreted in such a way that they *do* harmonise with current human rights standards. He makes it perfectly clear that *traditional* Islam, as expressed through the Sharia, is incompatible with human rights thinking on a wide range of issues. Muslims can, however, overcome this problematic structure by acknowledging the idea that the Koran contains two distinctly different messages. The first message is found in the verses from the Mecca period (circa 610–622). These verses express the essence of Islamic universalism and are of eternal importance. They confirm that humans have rights by virtue of being humans, focusing on ideals such as peaceful coexistence, equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, equality between the sexes and freedom of religion. The second message is found in the verses from the Medina period (circa 622–632). These verses sanction confrontation, discrimination against non-Muslims and women and comprehensive restrictions on individual freedom. They formed the ethical and legal foundation of Muhammad's rule in Medina and were, in An-Na'im's opinion, appropriate for that use. However, the verses from the Medina period do not express the basic spirit of Islam – only the more 'liberal' verses from the Mecca

period do that, and a modernised form of Islam should, according to An-Na'im, be based on these verses. Abandoning the Koranic verses from the Medina period in favour of the Koranic verses from the Mecca period also means abandoning the Sharia (in its traditional form). The Sharia is based primarily on the Medina verses since the medieval jurists who created this legal structure followed – as a general rule – the principle of abrogation: if a conflict between two Koranic verses is detected, the later verse supersedes the earlier one. However, this principle presupposes, according to An-Na'im, that God contradicts his own will, and – for a good Muslim – that is not an acceptable position. As an alternative to this principle, An-Na'im states that each Koranic verse has its own validity and specific applicability. The Medina verses (on which the Sharia is based) apply *only* to the state established by the Prophet *in* Medina. When this state ceased to exist, the Medina verses lost most of their validity. The Mecca verses, on the other hand, have not lost their validity, and a modernised Islam should be founded on these verses (An-na'im 1990, 34–68).

In his article 'Cogent Religious Instruction' (2019) Halim Rane argues, like An-Na'im, that historical Sharia – as developed by medieval jurists – is incompatible with current human rights standards. At the same time, he argues, like An-Na'im, that the original teachings of Islam harmonise quite well with a modern notion of human rights. Unlike An-Na'im, however, Rane argues that the Koran does *not* contain two distinctly different messages. According to Rane, the Prophet never abandoned the ideals of the Mecca period after migrating to Medina. Proof of this can be found in the Koran itself, but also in the Covenants of the Prophet (which were all written *after* the migration). In the Covenants Muhammad expresses sincere respect for Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims, pledging to protect their rights and interests. Rane acknowledges that there are verses focusing on confrontation and discrimination in the Koran, but he emphasises to an even stronger degree than An-Na'im that these verses must be read in context. They do not constitute a distinct message which stands in opposition to a more 'liberal' message. The ethical vision emanating from the scriptural sources (when analysed in their entirety) is one of religious pluralism, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. Rane concludes his line of thought by stating that any updated course on Islam should focus on a critical re-examination of the Koran, the Covenants and other original texts (Rane 2019).

Turning to Khaled Abou El Fadl, he states, like An-Na'im and Rane, that many of the interpretations dominating Islam are deeply authoritarian and intolerant. Consequently, these forms of Islam fail to provide a positive contribution to the moral growth of humanity. Muslims can respond to this problem by revisiting the scriptural sources and, as part of such a manoeuvre, acquiring a more complex understanding of what submission to God actually implies. According to Abou El Fadl, submitting to God means submitting to limitless and unbounded potentialities. He recognises that there is a tension between the notion of limitless potentialities and a determinable divine law. If the path of God offers infinite possibilities, does not this, in effect, negate any basis for absolute and unassailable truth in Islam? Abou El Fadl tries to resolve this tension by employing three critical categories taken from the founding texts: haqq, hikma and ma'arifa. Haqq refers to the true nature of things – the divine law. Haqq is only attainable through hikma which designates the time-bound balance of truths found at every stage of human history. Ma'arifa refers to the epistemological method required to search for haqq with the aid of an appropriate hikma. Through the combined utilisation of these three categories Muslims can embrace modern ideals such as human rights while simultaneously anchoring them in divine truth (Abou El Fadl 2015).

Representations of Islam in Norwegian RE textbooks

KRLE-boka (2016) or, in English, *The KRLE-book* and *Store spørsmål* (2015–2017) or, in English, *Big Questions* are the two newest RE textbooks for Norwegian lower secondary school (age 13 to 16). Both works are based on the previous RE Curriculum from 2015, but the old curriculum promotes, just like the new curriculum, the idea of human rights constituting a common ground. In the first subsection of this section I will focus on *The KRLE-book*, and then I will focus on *Big Questions* in the next subsection. Through qualitative analyses of the chapters on Islam I wish to clarify, as mentioned

at the end of the first section, whether these textbooks indicate the presence of critical currents (promoting human rights) which can generate a proper foundation for a less orthodox or fundamentalist image of Islam. As a preliminary remark, I can mention that *The KRLE-book* contains no recipe for a didactical scheme focusing on human rights in Islam, whereas the Islam chapter of *Big Questions* does contain elements of what could become a possible recipe.

The KRLE-book

The KRLE-book is written by Pål Wiik and Ragnhild Bakke Waale. The book was published in 2016, and readers are introduced to Islam in the sixth chapter. This chapter is divided into three subchapters: 'Practising Islam', 'The holy texts and Islam today' and 'What Muslims believe in' (the chapters on Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism are structured in the same fashion). Throughout these three parts Wiik and Waale create an image of Islam as a unified and clearly defined religion with a relatively homogeneous group of followers. The authors open the first subchapter in the following way:

A Muslim is someone who voluntary accepts God as the highest authority and that Muhammad is the last Prophet. A Muslim believes in the angels of God, the scriptures of God, the Prophets of God and life after death. A person who wants to become a Muslim must say the Creed and really mean it. (Wiik and Waale 2016, 266)

In the next sections the presentation of what characterises Muslims continues. The authors ascertain that Muslims believe in one God who has created everything and controls everything; they ascertain that Muslims have obligations towards God and humans; and they ascertain that these obligations are expressed through the Five Pillars which are fundamental in the life of an adult Muslim. In the next subchapter the authors present the most important texts of the Islamic tradition, namely the Koran and the hadith, and the distinction between Sunni and Shia Islam; and in the last subchapter they present the core of Islamic theology, namely belief in God, the Prophets, the angels, the scriptures and the Day of judgment. The central doctrines are outlined in a condensed and schematic manner. When the authors write about how Muslims view these doctrines, they are generally described as a unified group with one common faith. Alternative voices, on the individual and group level, are barely visible, and therefore the Islam chapter in *The KRLE-book* fails to realise the *Signposts* (and National Curriculum) vision of human rights constituting a frame of overlapping values. The RE scholar Ann Midttun has also written an article on this chapter (entitled 'Bits and pieces of Islam'), and she confirms that the authors' description of Islam is one-sided (Midttun 2014). It should be mentioned that her thorough analysis is based on the forerunner of *The KRLE-book*, namely *The RLE-book* from 2013, but the core text in the chapter on Islam has not been altered.

Wiik and Waale emphasise that there are different movements both within Sunni and Shia Islam, but this diversity is not outlined to any great extent (Wiik and Waale 2016, 269). Towards the end of the chapter the authors do indicate the existence of a more individualistic debate about which rights the Islamic tradition might be willing to acknowledge:

God has created women and men equal, but they have different responsibilities and obligations. These tasks complement each other. Women have for example the main responsibility for bringing up children. A mother is highly regarded and respected in Islam. The man's task is to support the family, but that does not mean that the man should not contribute around the house. (Wiik and Waale 2016, 286)

And on the next page Wiik and Waale write the following: 'Today it is more usual that the parties find each other on their own and then tell their families. Islam prohibits forced marriage' (Wiik and Waale 2016, 287). These formulations could have been related to the ongoing debate among Muslim scholars (and Muslims in general) about the reinterpretation of Islamic scriptures; they could also have been related to the negative media image of Islam (in an attempt to moderate its impact on pupils). Unfortunately, the authors do not take advantage of these possibilities.

In defence of the authors, it should be mentioned that in *The KRLE-book*'s chapter on philosophy and ethics they argue that a component promoting humans rights can be found in *all*

religions. Wiik and Waale base this assertion on the (alleged) fact that all great religions have a principle of mutual recognition (Wiik and Waale 2016, 31–32). Within Islam this principle is expressed, the authors note, through the second surah of the Koran (verse 279): 'Deal not unjustly, and ye shall not be dealt with unjustly' This is an interesting move; it harmonises well with the formulations found in *Signposts* and the National Curriculum; and it gives teachers and pupils something to build on. The problem with these reflections is that they are not related to the chapter *on* Islam and those issues which are discussed there. The same problem arises in the subsequent chapter (which deals with various forms of humanism). Here the authors mention the Pakistani Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai's struggle for promoting the education rights of girls in her native country. However, Malala's liberation project is not anchored in her understanding of Islam, and it is not connected to the chapter on Islam in any way. As a result, Malala does not come into view as a representative of currents promoting human rights within Islam, but rather as a representative of humanism.

Big questions

Big Questions is written by Olav Hove, Jørg Arne Jørgensen, Jarle Rasmussen and Marit Sandboe. The work was published between 2015 and 2017, and it consists of three volumes (one volume for each of the three levels of Norwegian lower secondary school). The Islamic tradition is outlined in the third chapter of the second volume. This chapter consists of four subchapters: 'The children of Abraham', 'The history of Islam – the life of Muhammad', 'Tradition and faith' and 'From Arabian fellowship to world religion'. Throughout these four parts Hove, Jørgensen and Sandboe present Islam as a relatively unified religion (Rasmussen is not listed as a co-author of the second and third volume). At the same time they manage to a greater extent than the authors of *The KRLE-book* to make the diversity and – not least – the disagreement among Muslims visible. Hove, Jørgensen and Sandboe open the first subchapter by ascertaining that 'Muslims believe in one God. Islam is therefore a monotheistic religion, like Judaism and Christianity' (Hove et al. 2016, 96). On the next page they write that being a Muslim means living in accordance with the will of God. At the same time they emphasise that there are different views on how to live a proper Muslim life in today's world. In this connection the authors refer to the debate about whether women should cover their heads or not. The authors note that the Koran is ambiguous on this issue; it is therefore a matter of interpretation whether the use of head-dress should be mandatory or not (Hove et al. 2016, 97).

In the remaining part of the first subchapter the individual level of the Islamic tradition is downplayed in favour of the overarching components. The authors give an account of the role of God, the role of the Messengers and the role of the hadith. In the next subchapter, which presents highlights from the life of Muhammad, the individual level is not particularly visible either, but in the first section of the third subchapter, 'To follow the Sunna of the Prophet', it reappears. On page 115 and 116 the authors present Malala Yousafzai, and in contrast to the authors of *The KRLE-book* they anchor Malala's liberation project *in* her understanding of Islam. Hove, Jørgensen and Sandboe note that for Malala the Islamic tradition is an inspiration for promoting the rights of girls, and they refer to a paragraph in her Nobel lecture (from December 2014) where she demonstrates exactly this point: 'What I have learnt from the Holy Koran, is the word *iqra*, which means "read", and the word *nun wal-qalam*, which means "by the pen". And therefore I say that one child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world' (Hove et al. 2016, 115). In the succeeding sections of the third subchapter the authors have once more a somewhat one-sided focus on the overarching level of Islam. They present the Five Pillars, the central doctrines and the Koran in a condensed and standardised way. When the authors attempt to describe how Muslims view these elements, they are (once again) presented as a fairly unified group:

You can ask Muslims anywhere in the world, a scholar who knows the Koran and hadith by heart or a teenager on the street, and you will discover that they agree on this: [belief in God, the angels of

God, the Prophets of God, the scriptures of God, the Day of judgment and a life after death]. (Hove et al. 2016, 120–121)

However, in the last subchapter, 'From Arabian fellowship to world religion', both the individual level and the group level come more into focus, and they do so in a manner that accommodate the human rights formulations of *Signposts* and the new National Curriculum. Hove, Jørgensen and Sandboe first give a description of the distinction between Sunni and Shia Islam, and then they include a section about Sufism. After this they approach the debate among Muslims about how to handle the presence of modernity. They first present the fundamentalist response to the challenge of modern life. Islamic fundamentalists respond by wishing to preserve the religion in its 'original' form. This implies, among other things, a rejection of modern (Western) values like freedom of speech, freedom of religion and gender equality. Instead of embracing liberal democracy, fundamentalists support an authoritarian Sharia state imposing severe restrictions on what people can and cannot do. The authors note that fundamentalist interpretations of Islam are widespread in some Muslim countries – e.g. Saudi-Arabia and Iran. They also note that some fundamentalist groups, such as al Qaida and the Islamic State, not only reject the modern world, but actively attack it through terror strikes. These groups believe that the Koran authorises the use of violence against non-Muslims.

The problems associated with Islamic fundamentalism play a dominating role in the negative media image of Islam – an image which, according to von der Lippe and other scholars, affects pupils' attitudes. The role of the media is not thematised by Hove, Jørgensen and Sandboe, but they do briefly mention some of the difficult issues arising within the media context (as stated in the previous paragraph). Furthermore, the authors try to moderate this negative image by pointing out that many Muslims reject the fundamentalist response to modernity and discuss how Muslim values can be combined with humanistic values and human rights. In this connection the authors mention young well-known activists such as Faten Mahdi al-Hussaini, Amal Aden and Kadra Yusuf as examples of Norwegian Muslims trying to oppose oppressive attitudes among their own (Hove et al. 2016, 131–133).

Hove, Jørgensen and Sandboe reintroduce this topic in the third volume of *Big Questions*. They round off the last volume with a chapter summarising some of the main elements connected to the five world religions. Towards the end of the section on Islam the authors note – under the headline 'Reform of Islam?' – that many Muslims support reforms so that the Islamic tradition can embrace the ideas of humanism. Muslims advocating reform argue that the Koran and the Sunna must be interpreted along a line harmonising these texts with modern values. The authors mention the Muslim feminist Sofia Rana as an example. She represents a Norwegian-Pakistani network that promotes religious freedom and the rights of homosexuals. Sofia means, the authors write, that a rebellion has started among young people in the Norwegian-Pakistani community and that imams in many mosques represent reactionary and antiquated ideas (Hove et al. 2016, 226).

Concluding discussion

The Islam chapter of *The KRLE-book* focuses primarily on the overarching orthodox components of the Islamic tradition. Alternative voices on the individual and group level are almost completely absent, and, consequently, *The KRLE-book* contains no recipe for a didactical scheme focusing on human rights in Islam. The one-sidedness of *The KRLE-book* is not unique, though. Studies carried out in other parts of Europe demonstrate how widespread this phenomenon is. Abdoldjavad Falaturi's and Udo Tworuschka's comprehensive analyses of German textbooks from the 1980s show that the image of Islam given by these textbooks is both simplistic and – on occasion – inaccurate (Falaturi and Tworuschka 1992). Susanne Kröhnert-Othman, Melanie Kamp and Constantin Wagner have also executed an extensive study which is more recent. The researchers examine 27 German, British, French, Spanish and Austrian textbooks published between 2005 and 2010, and they conclude that a majority of these books tend to both homogenise and essentialise the Islamic tradition (Kröhnert-Othman, Kamp, and Wagner 2011).

In contrast to the Islam chapter of *The KRLE-book*, the Islam chapter of *Big Questions* (in combination with the summarising section) does indicate the existence of critical currents. Consequently, *Big Questions* does contain elements of a possible recipe for an Islamic human rights didactic. Towards the end of the Islam chapter (and the summarising section) the authors focus on a few individual voices promoting liberal reform of the Islamic tradition. However, the presentation of these voices does not constitute a complete didactical scheme. Hove, Jørgensen and Sandboe indicate that debates about the modernisation of Islam are actually taking place, but they write very little about the content of these debates, and they write nothing at all about the academic underpinnings of these debates (such as the distinction between the founding texts and orthodoxy).

In the remaining part of this concluding section I will try to complete the Islamic human rights didactic of *Big Questions* and by doing so, giving teachers wanting to realise the human rights vision of *Signposts* and the new National Curriculum something to build on. I have already given a clear indication of which components such a didactical scheme should contain to be satisfactory. In the second section I have stated that teachers should spend some time on presenting the defining doctrines of Islam – an assessment based on Robert Jackson's recommendation. The overarching doctrines do not constitute a totalising framework; instead, these doctrines constitute a set of contestable reference points, but *as such* – pupils should know something about them. This implies that the textbook author can initiate his or her presentation with a subchapter on the origin and history of the religion and a subchapter on the scriptural sources, the central doctrines and the Five Pillars. After the initial stages, however, the author should turn to voices on the individual and group level (as Jackson recommends) and focus primarily on these in the remaining part of the chapter.

An obvious challenge, in this connection, is which voices to select. It would, in my opinion, be reasonable to first present some academic voices. By doing so, the textbook author can make both teachers and pupils aware of *how* human rights can be anchored in the scriptural sources. Personally, I would recommend the use of authorships that have some similar features, but which also demonstrate the breadth of Islamic reformism – e.g. the authorships of An-Na'im, Rane and Abou El Fadl. If the author chooses these three scholars, he or she should first present their views on which inadequacies characterise the orthodox form of Islam (as expressed through the Sharia). This presentation could be combined with a more general discussion of why orthodox Islam has a problem coming to terms with human rights. Subsequently, the author should outline An-Na'im's, Rane's and Abou El Fadl's attempts at overcoming these inadequacies through their re-examinations of the original teachings (a didactical manoeuvre which, of course, has to be carried out in a language accessible to teenagers).

After an investigation into the nature of Islamic reformism, the author should conclude by presenting a handful of liberal voices from the public debate both in Norway and elsewhere. It is important, at this final stage, that the author chooses voices that the pupils might have heard of and whose endeavours they might easily acknowledge (Malala Yousafzai is, I think, a good example). And as a final remark I could ask myself – and the reader – the following: will the didactical scheme of such a chapter be enough to counter a negative media image of Islam? This is a pertinent question for at least one reason. Sophisticated academics such as An-Na'im and famous activists such as Malala can easily end up as exceptions to the rule, thus confirming the image of Islam as a monolithic religion where the vast majority of believers subscribe to orthodoxy and fundamentalism. There is no easy solution to this problem, but, in my opinion, the textbook author can avoid it (at least to an extent) by repeatedly emphasising one of Jackson's main points: the overarching doctrines of Islam (like the overarching doctrines of any other religion) *do not* constitute a totalising framework; they constitute a set of contestable reference points which most Muslims have in common, but which they will accommodate in different ways. It follows from this that also 'ordinary' Muslims (whoever that might be) will often have a more complex understanding of the defining doctrines than many in the media and elsewhere might presuppose.

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

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