

OTHERNESS BETWEEN THE SHORES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

EXPLORING THE ITALIAN AND TUNISIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERCULTURAL APPROACH

L'ALTERITÀ TRA LE RIVE DEL MEDITERRANEO.
ESPLORARE IL SISTEMA SCOLASTICO ITALIANO E TUNISINO
ATTRAVERSO LA LENTE DELL'APPROCCIO INTERCULTURALE

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1. Immigration flows in Italy

In Italy the most recent estimates reveal a moderate fall in the number of foreign citizens (from 6,222,000 as of January 1st, 2019, to 6,190,000 as of January 1st, 2020 from 6,222,000 as of January 1st, 2019, to 6,190,000 as of January 1st, 2020), a trend affected by the reduction in the number of arrivals in 2018-19, as well as by the widespread economic and labour-market crisis, even before the pandemic.²

As in every corner of the world, in Italy the pandemic has affected every one of us, changing daily lives, spreading fear and concern and posing problems in terms of public health, social cohesion and economic turmoil. The corona-crisis has forced us to rethink the question of migration. In the meantime, it has underlined how vital immigrants are to our society (e.g., agricultural sector, home care for the elderly and the disabled, catering, etc.). As for irregular migrants, they are definitely not an exclusively Italian problem.³ Spe-

cifically, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the government responses to it has reshaped migratory movements and has shifted migration routes. This emergency has also significantly affected migration flows towards Italy. In fact, on April 7th, 2020 an inter-ministerial Decree (Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Infrastructure and Transport, Health) established that for the entire period of the health emergency no Italian harbour could be considered *places of safety*, as stipulated by the Hamburg Convention (Convention on maritime search and rescue, concluded at Hamburg on 27th April 1979), in regard to foreign vessels operating outside the Italian SAR area. Despite this decision, people continued to access Italy by sea.⁴ Moreover, this Decree caused NGO vessels to remain at sea without docking, even though they continued with their rescue operations.

With regard to educational contexts, the latest available data of the Italian Ministry of Education on Students

with Non-Italian Citizenship (NIC) (2018/2019 school year) recorded over 850,000 units, namely, 10% of the total number of students. Considering the territorial distribution, with a similar distribution to immigrant adults across the country, NIC students are more concentrated in the Northern regions. This presence is a characteristic of some specific areas, especially in the North and the Center. Indeed, Lombardy has always been the region with the largest number of foreign students (almost 218,000), while at the provincial level the highest number is in the Milan area (over 92,000). The multicultural evolution of Italian schools can also be traced by focusing on the origin of NIC students. Romania, Albania, Morocco, and China are the largest minority groups. Moreover, in the ranking of the top 10 nationality groups (almost 68% of foreign students) Asian countries (the Philippines, India, and Pakistan), East European countries like Moldavia and Ukraine, and Egypt are found. Since over 200 citizenships are present in the Italian school system (almost the whole world), Italy performs differently if compared to other European states, where the presence of foreign students has less ethnic heterogeneity and more concentration of national groups in local contexts. Nevertheless, the greatest change in the last decade concerns the differentiation of NIC students in terms of place of birth. In fact, those born in Italy have been the majority of fo-

reign students (64-5%). Finally, as a matter of fact, this situation is also associated with cultural, linguistic and religious differences which are present in the school-training system: 60.4% of immigrants in Italy between 6 and 17 years do not belong to the Catholic religion; the majority is Muslim (30.6%), followed by Catholic (23.2%), Orthodox (19.6%) and, at a distance, we can see the presence of Buddhists (3.6%) and Protestants (2.4%).⁵ In fact, Italy is experiencing an increase in religious diversity. 2020 represented an unexpected scenario, as all schools across Italy closed from late February-early March to the end of the school year to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been a dramatic change, cancelling all traditional learning and teaching and offering what has come to be known as Didattica a Distanza or DAD (Distance Learning). Even though, there are currently no detailed data on the effects of DAD on the educational paths, some have estimated the economic and social costs of the COVID-19 (e.g. poorer educational achievements, loss of human capital).⁶

2. Challenges of the pluralistic religious, ethnic and cultural situation in Tunisia

The population of Tunisia, according to the latest statistics, is 11,935,764 inhabitants.⁷ In fact, such a number does not reflect the exact composi-

RIASSUNTO

Oggi la maggior parte delle nazioni del mondo affronta sfide comuni, in termini di tensioni regionali, etniche e religiose. Di fatto, le crescenti ondate migratorie e il recente aumento degli attacchi attribuiti a ideologie religiose estremiste hanno alzato l'asticella di tali sfide.

Pertanto, è importante che queste crisi vengano superate con approcci specifici, al fine di ridurre il flusso di pregiudizi, razzismo ed estremismo, favorendo la convivenza soprattutto tra le nuove generazioni. Dal momento che attraverso l'educazione è possibile connettere culture diverse, conoscersi e rispettarci, l'interculturalità dovrebbe essere incoraggiata sempre di più come elemento efficace di confronto e integrazione. Tuttavia, tale opzione pone sfide reali, dato che, prima di tutto, i materiali didattici dovrebbero fornire un serio aiuto per acquisire competenze interculturali. Questo articolo di ricerca si concentra sull'Italia e sulla Tunisia come caso di studio in diverse sezioni (ad esempio, pluralismo religioso ed etnico, educazione interculturale). Lo studio esamina anche l'immagine dell'Islam e dell'*altro* non-musulmano attraverso i libri di testo e i programmi scolastici ufficiali. Nonostante le differenze tra il caso italiano e quello tunisino, l'ar-

ticolo arriva alla conclusione che l'immagine dell'Islam e dell'*altro* in entrambi i casi si basa sulla mancanza di precisione e standardizzazione.

Parole chiave

Italia, Tunisia, educazione interculturale, libri di testo, immagine dell'Islam, immagine dell'altro.

SUMMARY

Today the majority of the world's nations face common challenges, in terms of regional, ethnic and religious tensions. In fact, the increasing waves of immigration and the recent rise of attacks attributed to extremist religious ideologies have raised the bar of such challenges. Therefore, it is important that these crises should be overcome with specific approaches, in order to reduce the flow of prejudices, racism and extremism, promoting coexistence above all among the new generations. Since through education it is possible to connect different cultures, know and respect each other, interculturality should be encouraged more and more as an effective element for discussion and integration. Yet, such an option poses real challenges, given that, first of all, didactic materials should provide a serious help to acquire intercultural competencies. This research paper focuses on Italy and Tunisia as a case study in several sections (e.g., religious and ethnic pluralism, intercultural education).

The study also interrogates the image of Islam and the *other* non-Muslim through textbooks and official school programmes. Despite the differences between the Italian and Tunisian cases, the paper concludes that the image of Islam and the *other* in both cases are based on lack of precision and standardization.

Keywords: Italy, Tunisia, intercultural education, textbooks, image of Islam, image of the other.

RESUMEN

Hoy la mayor parte de las naciones del mundo afronta desafíos comunes, en términos de tensiones regionales, étnicas y religiosas.

De hecho, las crecientes migraciones, el reciente aumento de los ataques atribuidos a ideologías religiosas extremistas han subido el listón de dichos desafíos.

Por tanto, es importante que estas crisis se superen con enfoques específicos con la finalidad de reducir el flujo de prejuicios, racismo y doctrinarismo, favoreciendo la convivencia sobre todo, entre las nuevas generaciones. Desde el momento en el que a través de la educación es posible conectar culturas diversas, conocerse y respetarse, la interculturalidad debería promoverse cada vez más como elemento eficaz de contraste e in-

tegración Sin embargo, tal opción presenta retos reales, dado que, en primer lugar, los materiales didácticos deberían proveer una seria ayuda para adquirir competencias interculturales. Este artículo de investigación se concentra en Italia y Túnez como caso de estudio en diversas secciones (por ejemplo, el pluralismo religioso, la educación intercultural). El estudio examina también la imagen del Islam y del *otro* no-musulmán a través de libros de texto y de programas escolares oficiales. A pesar de las diferencias entre el caso italiano y el tunecino, el artículo llega a la conclusión de que la imagen del Islam y del *otro* en ambos casos se basa en la falta de precisión y de normalización.

Palabras clave

Italia, Túnez, educación intercultural, libros de texto, imagen del Islam, imagen del otro.

tion of the Tunisian society: in terms of the ethnicities, the minorities and the different groups that make it up, such as foreigners with non-Tunisian nationality (NTC). From this standpoint, the challenging problem is how to deal with the composition of the Tunisian society, because this number leads to a shocking reality reflected by a lack of information on ethnicities and religious minorities that the society comprises. In addition, there is the illusion of coexistence, homogeneity and harmony promoted since independence by various means in different contexts. On that understanding, it would inevitably lead to obscure the pluralistic character of Tunisian society especially since the Arab and Sunni Muslim identity promoted by the state is the most popular.

The formal coexistence as well as scarcity of information on ethnic and religious minorities in Tunisia is a centre of concern for scholars. In 2018, Silvia Quattrini⁸ stated: «while Tunisia is regarded as relatively homogenous compared to other countries in the region, with a population overwhelmingly Arab in its ethnicity and Sunni Muslim in its religion, this image - continuously promoted by the Tunisian government since independence - obscures the country's significant and longstanding diversity. Indeed, the now dwindling Jewish community is one of the oldest in the world, while Amazigh have been indigenous in the region for millennia,

long before the Muslim conquest of North Africa in the seventh century: a significant share of the Tunisian population has Amazigh ancestry. However, centuries of assimilatory Arabization policies, the limited availability of concrete data on Tunisia's minority and indigenous populations and the barriers communities may themselves experience in terms of identification and self-expression have contributed to their invisibility. Tunisia's post-colonial politics, beginning with Bourguiba's authoritarian rule from independence (1956) until 1987, followed by Ben Ali's regime until his ouster in 2011, has largely marginalized the role of those groups who fall outside the narrowly defined Arab and Sunni Muslim identity promoted by the state».⁹

It is true that the previous quotation proves historically that coexistence is a formal matter with political origins, but it remains a theoretical talk open to refusal at any moment, so what can the social inquiry add in this regard? Coexistence and acceptance of ethnic and religious groups as members of the public space in Tunisia is a complex and challenging issue in particular when religious affiliation is a backdrop for the debate. On this subject a group of Tunisian scholars from different disciplines has carried out the *Assessment of religious status in Tunisia between 2011 and 2015*. It should be noted that this research paper did not review the work, but rather the

most important conclusions reached in some related articles. In terms of behavior, it was noted that the personal freedom, with which interviewees describe Tunisians' affiliation to other religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Baha'i), does not actually translate into acceptance of friendship with the followers of these religions. On the other hand, Tunisians refuse to change their religion, because religious change is only acceptable if it means converting to Islam and is not acceptable if it is related to abandoning Islam. In this situation, it seems that freedom of belief is a slogan that many raise and only a few adhere to it. Giving up Islam to follow another religion is considered by many Muslim Tunisians as apostasy and *disbelief after faith*, which makes the Tunisian Muslim unable to adapt his religious beliefs to his human rights and civil principles.¹⁰ In daily life as a space for observation and activation of social relations, one encounters different groups belonging to various ethnicities and religions other than Islam which is the most widespread religion in the Tunisian case. However, from a statistical and social point of view, information about the *other* is rare, absent, marginalized and almost a taboo subject.

In spite of all this, Tunisia is characterized by a pluralistic atmosphere due to a policy of openness to immigration since antiquity.¹¹ This small country, located in the far north of

Africa and bordering the Mediterranean, is experiencing a wave of immigration that started some years earlier, and has increased notably since 2010. Many foreigners have chosen Tunisia as their final or transitory destination, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa, either to work, to apply for asylum, to study and settle, or to embark on a new immigration venture to Europe. Statistically about 20,000 sub-Saharan Africans reside in Tunisia;¹² nevertheless, reports of the *Tunisian General Labor Union* (UGTT) recently announced that this number is more than 700,000.¹³ As a matter of fact, the total number of foreigners is always unknown even to the Tunisian authorities, which makes it closer to estimations than to affirmations.

As for religious minorities in Tunisia, their number and their situation, as already noted, are shrouded in mystery, since as Silvia Quattrini states: «not much information is available about Tunisia's Christian population. In 1856 there were approximately 12,000 European Christian in Tunis. As most of them were Europeans, they were associated more closely in the minds of the general population with colonialism than other minorities such as the Jewish community. Nowadays, this religious minority is composed mainly of three communities: Christian Tunisians descendants from European migrants and European Christians who are permanent residents of Tunisia; Christian

sub-Saharan migrants; and former Muslim Tunisians who have converted to Christianity».¹⁴

In other documents about the Tunisian religious minorities, the exact number of Christians is about 30,000¹⁵ and their schools are opened even for 6000 Muslim students.¹⁶ This oscillation between recognition and non-recognition is annoying and gives an opportunity for many to practice discrimination. However, Tunisian pluralism cannot be denied even though the lack of information. Indeed, what is tangible is that Tunisia has a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and pluri-religious society. A significant number of Christians, Jews, Baha'is, Shiites, Ibadites and various ethnic groups make up the Tunisian social fabric. Indeed, the idea of excluding the *other* has infiltrated the schools, especially since pluralism has no impact on the Tunisian school system. The current situation of Tunisian schools can be summed up in a rupture between the transformed society due to several factors, the most important of which is immigration, and the school in particular if we consider that the supposed relationship between both institutions is to mirror one another.

3. The Italian way to intercultural education

The school, as an institution devoted to reception, has played a fundamental social role towards immigration, by increasingly adopting solutions which have developed with the aim

of ensuring the minors' right to education. Yet, NIC students' presence has created also a process of demographic transformation. It involves new didactic and above all pedagogical challenges regarding the testing of new possible ways of intercultural coexistence, whose main difficulties consist in discovering an essential stability between diversity and integration.¹⁷

Italian schools, through the presence of NIC students, has been becoming increasingly a multicultural school. Therefore, the concept of intercultural education and dialogue, strongly promoted by the EU with the proclamation of the *European Year of Intercultural Dialogue* in 2008 as a key competence for teachers working in changing and diverse classrooms,¹⁸ was (since the 1990s) a positive response to this new situation and is now common in the area of school legislation. In particular, the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, by providing various orientations for the promotion of intercultural dialogue, mutual respect and understanding, states the following: «Promoting intercultural dialogue contributes to the core objective of the Council of Europe, namely preserving and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law».¹⁹

In 1990 the Italian Ministry of Public Education defined through the Ministerial Circular no. 205 - *La scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L'educazione interculturale* (Compul-

sory Schooling and Foreign Students: Intercultural Education) - the role of intercultural education as the fostering of positive coexistence, preventing the creation of stereotypes and prejudices towards other peoples and cultures and overcoming any form of ethnocentrism. Later, in 1994, the Ministerial Circular no. 73 - *Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: l'impegno progettuale della scuola (Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Coexistence: The Planning Commitment of the Schools)* - represented the first systematic effort to shape what would later become the Italian approach to interculturalism. Indeed, intercultural education is defined not merely as a response to the issues raised by the presence of NIC students but, as one of the most important strategies to combat racism, also includes the complex issues deriving from the contact between different cultures. Furthermore, interculturalism includes the possibility of reciprocal discoveries, while respecting individual and collective identities, in a climate of dialogue and solidarity. Finally, Intercultural education implies that some measures should be adopted, such as: investments in intercultural training of teachers; reinterpretation of knowledge taught at school with an intercultural emphasis; critical analysis of textbooks. In addition, the multicultural configuration of today's society raises deep questions about the education and training systems. From such a point of

view, intercultural training of teachers occupies a very important position. It is only by starting from a correct formulation of educational work that one can hope to promote a necessary education for a culture of peace and co-existence.²⁰

All these reflections lead to affirm that school needs more and more intercultural education. It represents, in fact, a sort of framework for integration, so as to sow the seeds of innovative pedagogical and didactic actions. Moreover, didactic materials, in general, and textbooks, in particular, should propose different perspectives on given subjects and their content should be based on scientific findings,²¹ given that, as UNESCO stated: «Intercultural education cannot be just a simple 'add on' to the regular curriculum. It needs to concern the learning environment as a whole, as well as other dimensions of educational processes, such as school life and decision making, teacher education and training, curricula, languages of instruction, teaching methods and student interactions, and learning materials».²²

Last but not least, «The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people - in close cooperation with parents and families - to become active, responsible, open-minded members of society».²³

3.1. Teaching materials revision

In everyday practice teachers, beyond supplementary resources, often use textbooks to broaden student horizons or teach more substantial lessons. Notwithstanding, within education systems the issue of textbooks, along with other learning materials, has recently become a subject of concern, given that in some cases they still show a stereotyped and ethnocentric vision of the world, following a mere monocultural approach. It is, therefore, strongly recommended that, as declared by UNESCO, that «all people engaged in educational action must have adequate teaching materials and resources at their disposal. In this connection, it is necessary to make the necessary revisions to textbooks to get rid of negative stereotypes and distorted views of “the other”». ²⁴

Indeed, textbooks do not simply pass on knowledge, but mirror the values of the society in which they are produced and used. ²⁵ Therefore, a critical review of textbooks content should be constantly conducted by teachers, having an understanding of pedagogic content knowledge. ²⁶ Furthermore, it is becoming ever more urgent to develop intercultural skills and dialogue, critical understanding and appreciation of different religions in order «to prevent ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural divides [...] to move forward together, to deal with our different identities constructively

and democratically on the basis of shared universal values», ²⁷ without forgetting the issue of religious illiteracy and its effects on the social and political milieu. ²⁸

Hence, in an era of growing regional, ethnic and religious tension, it becomes obvious that learning materials are not totally free of bias and value judgements. Whilst this is most recognizable in history texts, ²⁹ it is not limited to them. In fact, textbooks on geography, social sciences and humanities may also contain partial or biased information. Thus, it becomes more and more necessary to have a perception of textbooks as a means of promoting peace and mutual understanding among all nations, since «Whenever new teaching materials, textbooks and the like are to be produced, they should be designed with due consideration of new situations [...]. Distance education technologies and all modern communication tools must be placed at the service of education for peace, human rights and democracy». ³⁰

Lastly, specifically for the teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools, in 2007 the *Toledo Guiding Principles* were developed, aimed at both legislators and schools, in order to contribute to an improved understanding of the world's increasing religious diversity and the growing presence of religion in the public sphere. As far as the preparation of curricula, textbooks and educational materials are concerned, it is de-

clared that OSCE participating States, whenever they choose to promote the study and knowledge about religions and beliefs in schools, they «should take into account religious and non-religious views in a way that is inclusive, fair, and respectful. Care should be taken to avoid inaccurate or prejudicial material, particularly when this reinforces negative stereotypes».³¹

3.2. A glance at Islam in some Italian textbooks

Council of Europe policies emphasize the study of religions and beliefs as a means to counter extremism, promoting human rights education, education for democratic citizenship and intercultural education.³² Since 2002, by regarding this educational activity as highly desirable within schools in democratic societies, it has been giving attention to education about religions in public schools across Europe. In addition, after the events of September 11, 2001, the previous view of excluding the study of religions in public education was re-evaluated, in order to build an approach to intercultural learning to promote dialogue, mutual understanding and living together. Indeed, the learning approaches, methods and experiences, as promoted by the Council of Europe, should be based on three principles: religion is an important cultural fact (similar to other identity sources such as languages, history or cultural heritage); beliefs

about the world and values must be developed gradually, based on real personal and social learning experiences; an integrated approach to spiritual, religious, moral and civic values must be encouraged.³³

As far as Italy is concerned, the religious education in public schools has always been a debated matter, due to the strong religious roots of the country as well as for the mainly public character of the Italian educational system.³⁴

By drawing attention to the importance of textbooks in good quality education policy, together with their various implications for education for all,³⁵ in this paragraph the first results of a research about Islam (as religion and culture) and Muslims in the most popular and modern Italian textbooks of Catholic Religion for upper secondary school³⁶ have been described.³⁷ The general aim is not to judge the analyzed textbooks, but to draw attention to a possible risk they might provoke.³⁸ Some examples of correct knowledge, for this reason, have been presented as well.

Given that «the overwhelming majority of history textbooks tend to be Eurocentric and are inadequate in terms of providing students with a balanced knowledge of Islam and Islamic societies»,³⁹ the analysis aimed mainly at understanding if in Islam and Muslims are presented in an objective way or receive negative connotations, by confirming the most widespread preconceptions. At the

same time, the analysis aimed at stimulating reflections on the adequacy of the proposed contents and understanding how islamophobic contents,⁴⁰ through fear, hatred or prejudice against Islam and Muslims,⁴¹ can become part of textbooks, or any other education materials, when not supporting correct knowledge, mutual understanding and not correcting common public misperceptions and stereotypes.⁴² Discrimination has a serious impact on individuals and on their communities. In fact, students subject to discrimination in schools have been reported as developing a number of negative effects, including low self-esteem, self-segregation and attraction to violent extremist ideologies.⁴³

In the textbooks analyzed Islam and Muslims do not account for lots of space, it is usually between 4 and 10 pages. Only in one case there are 23 pages.⁴⁴ Accordingly, it has been noticed that the representation of Islam is often reduced to essentials and this creates a spiral of a lack of appropriate knowledge, an absence of the complex history of Islam. Finally, it may cause students to falsely assume that Islam is a homogeneous religion. Its presence can be framed into several chronological categories (e.g., the early years of Islam; the Crusades; the newest history). One can conclude that Islam and Muslims depiction is not totally accurate, so students are provided with minor information, since the topic is not al-

ways analyzed deeply. The omission of deep information on the culture and history of Muslims certainly poses a problem. It is important providing teachers with information regarding pedagogical and curricular issues related to teaching about Islam: it can also help establish positive relationships with Muslim students and families, by understanding the requirements and core beliefs of Islam. Textbooks, therefore, should pay more attention to the connection of Islam with global, local and national cultures and histories and the historical and contemporary developments of Islam.

As a consequence, an appropriate way of introducing Islam, and its foundations, including cross-cultural differences, could lead at least to a modification of stereotypes about this religion and its believers. Furthermore, this could also avoid a widespread phenomenon, that is the *Arabisation* of Islam, namely it is quite often presented as a predominantly Arab religion, despite the fact that today, though the Arab world is often regarded as the historical heartland of Islam, Arabs comprise only about 20 percent of the world's Muslim population. Consequently, the words *Arabic* and *Islamic* are often wrongly used as synonymous and textbooks do not convey a sufficient information about religious (e.g. different Islamic denominations) and cultural distinctiveness of the Islamic world. The students can get the impression that

Islam is a homogenous religion. Finally, the exclusive relation of Islam with the Middle East, with rare references to other parts of the world, can provoke misconceptions in different ways. For instance, it could easily generate the idea that there is no other religious group in this area, to the detriment of other religious minorities (e.g., Christians and Jews). As far as the titles of chapters and paragraphs are concerned, it has been noted that they generally introduce information essentially related to: the origin of Islam, the role of Muhammad, as religious and political leader,⁴⁵ the first century of Islam (connected to the separation between Sunni and Shia),⁴⁶ the concept of faith, the sources (Koran and Sunna), the pillars of Islam,⁴⁷ the concept of *Jihad*, status of women (generally connected to veil, marriage and polygamy),⁴⁸ daily life and main Islamic festivals.⁴⁹ There is a clear lack of a diachronic approach considering, for example, the development of the different Islamic legal and theological schools. On the other hand, when it comes to modernity interreligious dialogue and fundamentalism (not only Islamic, but mostly connected to Islam) prevail.⁵⁰ Compressing and simplifying complicated contents for students and teachers is a challenge: textbooks cannot convey, for instance, the question of women or fundamentalism in Islam in a few sentences, since the student audience does not always have the background or maturity to

grasp its significance and evolution. In a case there is an effort to adopt an autobiographical approach.⁵¹ It could be a different way of presenting Islam, by taking the *other* point of view and deepening everyday issues, such as religions and food choices, as well as afterlife.⁵²

Attention has also been put on the translation and interpretation of some Islamic keywords. It has been found that there is still a confusion between *Islam*, as a religion, and *Islamism*, as a political ideology.⁵³ The terms are used as synonymous. The same can be said of *Muslim* and *Islamic*.⁵⁴ The latter used as a noun and not as an adjective. In most cases the word *Allah* is not translated as *God*,⁵⁵ except in one case,⁵⁶ with the possibility to represent *Allah* as the *personal god* of Muslims. It would be, indeed, nothing but a wasted opportunity for students to understand that Abrahamic religions have the same roots. Sometimes, in the same text there are *God* and *Allah*, but without an explanation.⁵⁷ Both *Muhammad* and *Maometto* (the Italian word for *Muhammad*) are still used.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it is fair to say that in different non-Arab Islamic countries the name has understandably been adapted to the specific local linguistic realities. For instance, since the Ottoman age, in the Turkic world, the name *Mehmet* has never raised doubts among the Muslim scholars of that and other parts of the Islamic world. In relation to the role of Muhammad

in a textbook it is explicitly said that «non è l'autore del Libro sacro» (*He is not the author of the Holy Book* [i.e. Qur'an]),⁵⁹ since in previous researches, in some textbooks, it was found the opposite.

With regard to the role of the *Imam*, it is clearly said that «non appartiene a una classe sacerdotale» (*he does not belong to a sacerdotal class*),⁶⁰ while in a previous research it was also translated in a textbook for primary school as *priest*: there was obvious confusion between roles.

Finally, the same can be said as regards the important concept of *Jihad* is concerned. Defining jihad is admittedly difficult, as definitions in circulation vary radically.

There is greater precision of its definition, namely the difference between *big Jihad* and *small Jihad*, and to its translation, not simply *holy war*.⁶¹

As regards linguistic aspects, specifically there is more attention given to the translation of Arabic-Islamic expressions, while some transliteration mistakes still persist, such as: *Ramadhan*⁶² or *Ramadam*⁶³ vs. *Ramadan*, *Zakkat*⁶⁴ vs. *Zakat*, *Isafri*⁶⁵ vs. *Israfil*, *Zul Heggia*⁶⁶ vs. *Dhū l-hijja*; *azàn*⁶⁷ vs. *adhan*.

As to content mistakes, errors about Islam that occurred in older textbooks, in some case, have not been corrected but reiterated. It has been found, for example, a bad interpretation of Sunna, considered as holy as the Koran⁶⁸ or the following utter-

ance: «[Il Corano] non è soggetto ad alcuna opera di interpretazione o di traduzione» (*[The Koran] cannot be subjected to any interpretation or translation*).⁶⁹ Furthermore, without any chronological reference, it is stated that «il muro esterno di recinzione [della moschea] è fortificato per la difesa dei fedeli, in caso di attacco nemico» (*the external wall [of mosques] is sometimes fortified for the defense of Muslims in case of enemy attack*)⁷⁰ and that when Muslim make the pilgrimage to Ka'ba they «venerano la Pietra Nera» (*worship the black stone*).⁷¹

As far as sources are concerned, it is well known that they must be mentioned for further investigation and primary sources, in particular, expose students to multiple perspectives. In the present investigation, in each textbook analyzed the reference to the Italian translation of the Koran has never been found. Indeed, there are different Italian translation of this text: the first appeared in 1547 in Venice. This means that students cannot have access to the entire translation and cannot, for example, check the notes to the verses they will read.⁷²

The presence of a whole variety of images in textbooks, each with their own particular form, function and relationship to the text, all pose potential challenges for analysis. Pictures have an important function in the learning/teaching process, by influencing it. They support this process and serve as an intermediary by

visualizing knowledge. Thus, students often see images before reading texts and these images can improve (or decrease) the power of students' imagination. Surely, they can have a positive effect when they are related to the text. The relationship between the illustration and the text is, thus, a crucial aspect, as students' knowledge about Islam is often very low. So, it might be very difficult for them to understand the deeper sense of the illustrations without further information. Besides, as eye-tracking studies have shown, also the position of the illustrations is important: the ones that are placed before important text areas can have the effect of activating previous knowledge of the learner. In the textbooks analyzed it has been noted that in different cases images can be out of the context and some of them do not include captions, attributions or citations.⁷³

Moreover, they are usually reinforcing images and not always integrate the contents: this could lead to wrong interpretations of the illustrations or give the impression of being useless. They can be stereotypical images⁷⁴ but in different cases they represent also the cultural diversities within the same society.⁷⁵ Finally, images are very rarely provided with reading activities: for meaningful learning students need to make connection between visual and verbal representations. This can be one main problem since, it is important to underline, especially in the field

of Islam and Muslim culture, that the way the meanings of images are interpreted depends on the cultural background and on direct experiences, as well as on personal interests. In any case, illustrations should always have at least a relation to the text, or even better, to a task.

To conclude, although there is a clear improvement towards a more intercultural approach, the image of Islam remains quite limited and the Italian curricula are not always able to respond to the changing features of Italian society. Thus, even though the new textbooks for religious education have included more information about other faiths, they still do not convey sufficient information concerning pluralism and diversity. This is an incomplete view of religious cultures and traditions, with the risk of misrepresenting their foundations. Yet, thanks to a more widespread and shared intercultural approach, as a positive fact, unlike past researches, it should be appreciated that the analyzed textbooks do not communicate rude and offensive clichés, even though certain stereotypes and manifestations of Eurocentric perspective are still present. In fact, in most cases Islam is presented essentially as an oriental phenomenon and only rarely as a European one. It means that students can be led to wrongly falsely assume that Muslims, many of whom are living in Italy in the second generation (in some cases in the third), are still not really part of Italian society.

The risk is that Muslims may be considered as *othered* and disconnected from the West and from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, despite common Abrahamic roots and intercultural connections throughout the ages.

On the contrary, textbooks can certainly enrich the dialogue between Europe and the Muslim world, for example, showing also positive examples of the influence and impact of Islam on Europe, without hiding the critical issues associated.

4. Education shortcomings in Tunisia and the requirement of intercultural education

There is no doubt that the Tunisian school system succeeded at some point in achieving some major goals, such as reducing illiteracy and forming skilled staff that will work in state institutions, especially after independence in 1956, despite the fact that the demand to make education public and free of charge to all Tunisians dates back to the colonial period. It is equally true that the history of the education system in Tunisia witnessed transformations and reform movements that were managed by well-known Tunisian cultural and political figures, such as Mahmoud Messadi, Mohamed Charfi, Lamine Chebbi and Mohamed Mazali, but these reforms remained, in the eyes of the scholars and experts, a subject of political controversy.⁷⁶

The question of educational reform

has been repeatedly raised, given the crises and shortcomings that the Tunisian school system has witnessed, which is normal because the school is not isolated from its social, economic and political environments. Over the last years, several shortcomings in the Tunisian educational system has been noted, including: the geographical focus of educational institutions in the Greater Tunis and the Tunisian coast areas, scientific certificates that are not in line with the job market and the post-revolutionary economic and social realities in Tunisia, severe shortage of educational resources and infrastructure weakness of many educational institutions, especially in rural areas⁷⁷ and the high dropout rate among students.⁷⁸ As for the emerging problems, challenges of Covid-19 pandemic are imposed on educational systems, not only in Tunisia, but also worldwide.

In 2016 the Tunisian Ministry of Education issued the *White Paper*⁷⁹ with a subtitle *Project to reform the educational system in Tunisia* and with the slogan «For an equitable, high-performance Tunisian school that builds the citizen and elevates the country». That means that the four pillars of the Tunisian school for the coming decades are fairness, quality performance, building the Tunisian citizen, and the advancement of the country. All reform projects seem important, but deep questions remain to be answered: can these reforms really

be achieved? Was it not just political propaganda? Are these reforms in an effective relation to the pluralistic Tunisian society that involves minorities? Are these reforms really capable of building a global citizen?

What is noticed in the reform projects is that they put human rights issues at the forefront of their strategies, while they quickly retreat and contradict themselves as soon as they consider the society to which the student belongs as a monolithic and homogeneous society. Tunisian society is in the eyes of the majority, even in the view of education experts, an Arab Muslim society, and to be more precise, it is a Muslim Sunni Maliki society.⁸⁰

Such a self-centralization can be an incubator of extremist ideology from social identity theory that «stipulates that people categorize themselves and others as members of competing social groups. The in-group is a group of people who share an identity, such as religious, racial, or national. It is the group to which one belongs the *us* in *us versus them*. The out-group is a group of people who are excluded from a specific in-group. They are part of *them*».⁸¹

By closing on oneself and considering it as the most ideal form of ontology and the reference for all morals and ethics, the rejection of the other, violence and extremism will be the most prevalent problems in the society. That's why the school curricula should contribute to the formation of the student's awareness on diversity

and pluralism as an inalienable reality in all societies and that identity cannot be divided or limited on the basis of ethnicity or religion.

Can the Tunisian educational system, which calls for coexistence and acceptance of the other as a part of the social fabric, disprove the fact that there was in the last years a huge number of Tunisian fighters joining the ranks of the terrorist organization ISIS according to one of the reports completed at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) in 2018?⁸² These terrorists were students at some time and may include university graduates. They studied according to the Tunisian curriculum, which portrayed to them the society to which they belong as monolithic and homogeneous without ethnic and religious pluralism.

On this basis, it is necessary to (re-)think of an educational reform that puts intercultural education as a priority because it would never be reasonable today, in a world where human life is based on modern technologies, immigration, and the decline of the individual versus the universal, to talk about a mono-cultural or monolithic society. For such a reason, reform projects in the field of education should take into consideration the crucial need for intercultural education. According to some theoreticians of intercultural education «teaching within the intercultural education emphasizes on tolerance and respect for others. Goals of intercul-

tural education include: promotion of the conditions that lead to pluralism in society by increasing sensitivity towards other cultures and value systems; developing respect for the lifestyles that are different from theirs as to enable children to understand and appreciate one another; cultivation of a commitment to equality as to enable children to act responsibly in making choices and taking actions directed against discrimination and prejudice; and respecting the similarities and differences in terms of value and training all children to speak for themselves and to articulate their culture and history».⁸³

Such an educational philosophy is what the Tunisian educational system needs because Tunisia is not isolated from the ethnic and religious tensions plaguing the world. These tensions will only be resolved through the tolerance and mutual respect that intercultural education aims to establish. Indeed, since the so-called revolution of 2011, a new mentality has started to emerge and to exploit the new atmosphere of freedoms. In this context, many expressed some reform projects that were previously banned. Of course, education is concerned with these reforms and keeping up with the social change.

One of the manifestations of such a social change is that some religious and ethnic minorities have started to present their problems as problems of public opinion, benefiting from the

rights guaranteed to them by the constitution of 2014.

However, the intercultural education has not yet been proposed, and this may be due to the many economic and political problems that have prevented stability and reform projects.

4.1. A look at the Muslim and non-Muslim images in the Tunisian Islamic education programmes

The Tunisian educational system has shortcomings, as mentioned earlier. These shortcomings are also related to school subjects and course content. For such a reason this part will focus on an evaluation of Islamic education programmes,⁸⁴ in order to find out their shortcomings and paradoxes through the images of the Muslim and non-Muslim.

In Tunisia, teaching Islamic education starts from the first degree of primary school level⁸⁵ and like other school subjects, there are textbooks for Islamic education with various topics and competencies to acquire at each level. It is evident that textbook analysis is a valuable task according to experts⁸⁶. Such a task is not arbitrary or haphazard; it is part of a significant history in the field of textbooks research which can be grouped in different research directions with specific and varied intents. According to Behnke: «current empirical research dedicated to textbooks and educational media can be summarised in five research directions. The first of

these relates to linguistic aspects, such as how language in textbooks may affect students' knowledge construction, reading comprehension, and foreign language learning.

The second revolves around effects of socio-cultural and socio-economic factors, such as gender representations and effects of access to or shortages of teaching materials.

Third, there are the effects of visual textbook parameters, such as design, layout, typography, images, and information design, on learning processes. Fourth are cognitive, affective, and behavioural effects such as student achievement, learning style, knowledge and skills acquisition, cognitive development, and assignment. Fifth are new technological and/or methodological approaches, such as digital learning environments, technology-enhanced learning, or game-based learning. However, numerous scientific areas are currently investigating the effects and efficacy of textbooks via manifold approaches. Only a limited set of studies covering a range of research topics on textbook effects and efficacy, such as the influence of textbooks on pedagogical practices in classrooms, were identified. This suggests a need for further exploration and indicates potential new directions in research».⁸⁷

Based on the foregoing, textbooks analysis is an important step in educational and pedagogical research. It's a required multi-method study, depending on the intent of the analy-

sis, for the design of teaching perspectives, but this section focuses on programmes which is a list of instructions for the teacher with a set of topics and competencies that the student must acquire at a determined level, i.e. the focal point will not be the textbooks as subject of study. Such a methodological option is for two reasons; the first one is that official programmes explain more than textbooks what philosophy is adopted and the second one is imposed by the situation of Islamic education in the Tunisian school system. In the primary level there are no textbooks for Islamic education. Students can have their textbooks only from the 7th year of the preparatory level, that's why analyzing programmes seems a plausible task given to the Tunisian context.

Islamic education is one of the school subjects of socialization⁸⁸ like history, geography and civic education. Students have to learn it from their first year in primary school but, the deep question to ask in such a context is about socialization in terms of experts and in terms of Tunisian educational perceptions. According to Maccoby «The term *socialization* refers to processes whereby naïve individuals are taught the skills, behavior patterns, values, and motivations needed for competent functioning in the culture in which the child is growing up. Paramount among these are the social skills, social understandings, and emotional maturity

needed for interaction with other individuals to fit in with the functioning of social dyads and larger groups».⁸⁹ Such a definition reveals the importance of the term socialization; it is a very complex process and it has a determining role in building the character of the individual(s) in the society. In the Tunisian Islamic education programmes, socialization means creating a particular profile for individuals and a model of interactions⁹⁰. This profile can be considered as significant from the outset but it is stereotypical and limited to the Arab Muslim identity when in fact, Tunisians are also part of the Mediterranean world, Africa and Maghreb; The Tunisian people share common features with those people. Even Islam is pluralistic; Sufis, Hanafis, Shiites, Malikis and Ibadis are variations within Islam in Tunisia⁹¹ but the Sunni Maliki Muslims are dominant and what tempted one to ask more questions is that there's no reference to such diversity in Islamic education programmes. As for Arabic, it is the official language of Tunisia but non-mandatory in daily communication. Berbers in southern Tunisia prefer to speak Berber rather than Arabic but such a linguistic activity is limited because «like all the other states that embrace Arab nationalism, the Republic of Tunisia does not officially recognise any indigenous ethno-linguistic minority within its borders. Recognition of a separate Berber *race* and culture in

Tunisia is ideologically incompatible with the accepted notion that the native inhabitants of Tunisia, all sharing the Muslim faith, are *Arabs*. Therefore, conducting research on the Berbers in Tunisia with either linguistic or social foci is a strenuous and controversial activity».⁹² They practice their identity in silence like other minorities until they get recognition. To be recognised as a member of public space school curricula should take into consideration the linguistic pluralism in Tunisian case, mention it clearly and correct the popular claim that Arabic is superior because it is the language of the Qur'an.

With a critical summary reading activity to Islamic education programmes, is clear that Muslim's image in these official programmes is a closed image that hides and ignores the variations and different expressions of Islam. It is a standard image in which emphasis is placed on the six elements of faith (*arkān al-īmān*), the five pillars of Islam (*arkān al-islām*), morals, rules and requirements for prayer (*qawā'id al- alāt*) and ritual Islamic purification (*al-wuḍū'*). It is an opportunity to pass political positions under the cover of religion as the rule of «honesty in word and sincerity in work» (*al-ṣidq fī al-qawl wa al-ikhlāṣ fī al-'amal*) which is well known in Tunisia, since Bourguiba speeches and required in such a political system that is allegedly democratic.

The *other* is mentioned in Islamic education programmes since the first year

of primary school without explanation. It is used as part of social interactions but is still an ambiguous term. Is it the Christian, Jewish, non-religious, Baha'i or the Muslim non-Sunni Maliki?

There are other issues from the core of the Islamic faith that the Islamic education programmes in Tunisia raise as teaching topics, such as monotheism (*al-tawḥīd*) which means the indivisible oneness concept in Islam. From a didactic point of view this theme is controversial especially when the society to which students belong is pluralistic. In this a context we can take for example the Muslims perceptions about The Christian concept of the Trinity. They see such a concept as paradoxical in comparison to the Qur'an.

Tunisian Islamic education programmes give the highest priority to monotheism and present it in a stereotypical way, without paying attention to the consequences of practicing this idea in a social context in which the Christian is a participant in everyday life.

In these programmes, tolerance with the *other* is recommended but not as an intercultural competence that stems from pluralism as a social reality: it is just a slogan. From here, the deep question arises about the mysterious identity of the *other* that is still unclear. This is not the only question that can be asked. Of course, there are other questions due to the high number of contradictions and ambiguities in the Tunisian Islamic education pro-

grammes that have manifestations in the related textbooks, which necessarily require deep revisions. These revisions should take into consideration the crucial need to teach Islamic education in Tunisian schools from the perspective of intercultural education.⁹³

5. Conclusion

Although Italy and Tunisia have opened up to cultural pluralism through waves of immigration, the openness to the other is still in its first steps. In the case of Italy, intercultural education has already been included in the educational system, allowing the school to keep pace with social transformation. Instead in Tunisia, the path towards the inclusion of intercultural education seems to stumble, despite the long history of ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism.

Education in Tunisia faces accumulated difficulties until today, and even thinking about intercultural education may take time to recognize it. But the fact remains that Intercultural education is a necessity today and the study of religions must be placed in an intercultural perspective, especially in the time of multi-level tensions and the waves of violence in the name of religion.

In this context, the paper questioned the image of Islam and the non-Muslim in Italian textbooks and official Tunisian curricula. Such an image is still characterized by stereotypes and generalizations. On this basis, the paper calls for a revision of this image to keep up with social and

global transformations.

Indeed, in modern pluralist societies teachers should also engage in interreligious dialogue as part of pedagogical and civic duty, ensuring a deeper understanding of others and their religions. Such an understanding could contribute to more peaceful coexistence of people in pluralistic societies, preventing social and civil conflicts in schools (and communities) between individuals and groups belonging to different religious denominations or groups and enhancing the quality of citizenship education.

NOTE

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* Although this essay is the result of common reflections and work, the various sections can be attributed to their authors as follows: Antonio Cuciniello: 1, 3, 3.1 and 3.2; Thamer Mahfoudhi: 2, 4, and 4.1. Conclusion has been written by both together.

² As far as the African component (1,159,000 residents) is concerned, it went up by 18,000 units, as a result of the growing number of residents from North Africa (+22,000), particularly from Morocco and Egypt. Cf BLAN-

GIARDO Gian Carlo - ORTENSÌ Livia Elisa, *Statistical aspects*, in CESAREO Vincenzo (ed.), *The Twenty-sixth Italian Report on Migrations 2020*, Milano, Fondazione ISMU 2021, 21-23.

³ For instance, in the USA the number of irregular (or unauthorized) immigrants has risen to approximately 10-11 million in the past decade. Cf KROGSTAD Jens Manuel - PASSEL Jeffrey S. - COHN D'Veira, *5 facts about illegal immigration in the U.S.*, in *Pew Research Center* (June 12, 2019), in <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/> (24-10-2021).

⁴ Following the first wave of the pandemic, between July and December 2020, 27,204 people arrived in Italy by sea, out of the total of 34,154 migrants who arrived by sea between January and December 2020. A high percentage of them originated from Tunisia (12,883, 37.7% of the total number of arrivals in 2020); cf CESAREO Vincenzo, *The challenges of the pandemic*, in CESAREO, *The Twenty-sixth Italian Report 14*. Between January and August 2020, agency Asdaa-Bcw conducted a study which reveals that 47% of young people from North Africa tried to emigrate (or seriously began to consider this option), due to the worsening of employment opportunities as a result of the pandemic (87% of respondents) or to deep mistrust in institutions and in the ruling elites in home countries (77% of respondents).

⁵ ISTAT, *Appartenenza e pratica religiosa tra i cittadini stranieri. Anno 2011-2012, 2015*. Dove?

⁶ Cf SANTAGATI Mariagrazia, *Education*, in CESAREO, *The Twenty-sixth Italian Report 59*. Among those who were especially affected by the interruption of educational activities at school, disadvantaged students could rely comparatively less on suitable ICT devices and internet connection, had less parental support, fewer adequate spaces to concentrate and study, etc. cf SAVE THE CHILDREN, *L'impatto del coronavirus sulla povertà educativa*, 2020. According to a survey of over 3,700 teachers conducted in June 2020, children from migrant families are one of the main groups excluded from DAD. Cf INDIRE, *Indagine tra i docenti italiani. Pratiche didattiche durante il lockdown 2020*.

⁷ Cf *Population Pyramids of the World from 1950 to 2100*, in <https://www.populationpyramid.net/tunisia/2021/> (24.02.2022).

⁸ She is the Middle East and North Africa Programmes Coordinator at Minority Rights Group International (MRG) which is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide, and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities.

⁹ QUATTRINI Silvia, *Identity and citizenship in Tunisia: The situation of minorities after the 2011 revolution*, London, Minority Rights Group International 2018, 5-6. The publication is also available at the following link: <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1117031/download> (24-10-2021).

¹⁰ Cf *Religious pluralism in Tunisia through field research* (in Arabic), in <https://cutt.ly/smk5DgE> (24.02.2022).

¹¹ In the Tunisian legendary saying, the foundation of Carthage in 814 B.C. is related to the immigration of queen Dido also known as Elissa from Tyre in Lebanon. She fled tyranny to found her own kingdom in North Africa. For a deeper understanding of the impact of immigration to Tunisia on the culture and society, we can take as an example the immigration of Andalusians to Tunisia between the 13th and 17th century. See, e.g., AL- AMRŪNĪ A mad, *al-Hijrāt al-andalusīyya ilā al-bilād al-tūnisiyya (Andalusian migrations to Tunisia)*, Carthage, MediaCom editions 2009.

¹² See *Death on the road to Europe is easier for Africans than living in Tunisia* (in Arabic), in <https://cutt.ly/KmvRkUo> (24.02.2022).

¹³ Cf *Tunisia: Inclusion of 700,000 Africans in the labor market* (in Arabic), in <https://cutt.ly/imvW5TI> (24.02.2022).

¹⁴ QUATTRINI, *Identity* 16.

¹⁵ Cf *Christians in Tunisia* (in Arabic), in <https://cutt.ly/KmvR4h6> (24.02.2022).

¹⁶ Cf *Tunisie: l'enseignement catholique, mailon essentiel de la paix entre les religions* (in French), in <https://cutt.ly/aWxa0XC> (24.02.2022).

¹⁷ Cf PATTARO Chiara, *The evolution of multi-ethnic schools in Italy: Research pathways on*

social integration, in *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education* 6(2014)3, 270-282.

¹⁸ Cf SKREFSRUD Thor-André, *The Intercultural Dialogue: Preparing Teachers for Diversity*, Münster, Waxmann 2016; HOLMES Prue et ALII (eds.), *Intercultural Dialogue: Questions of research, theory and practice*. London, Routledge 2016.

¹⁹ COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *White paper on intercultural dialogue. 'Living Together as Equals in Dignity'*, Strasbourg 2008, 8.

²⁰ Cf ALMA Hans - TER AVEST Ina (eds.), *Moral and Spiritual Leadership in an Age of Plural Moralities*. London, Routledge 2019.

²¹ Cf UNESCO, *Guidelines and Criteria for the Development, Evaluation and Revision of Curricula, Textbooks and other Educational Materials in International Education in Order to Promote an International Dimension in Education*, 1995.

²² UNESCO, *Textbooks and Learning Resources: Guidelines for Developers and Users* 2006, 19. Specifically, according to ID (33-38) a certain number of principles can be identified that may guide international action in the field of intercultural education. 1) Intercultural Education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all. This principle can be achieved through: a. The use of curricula and teaching and learning materials; b. The development of teaching methods; c. Appropriate teacher training; d. Interaction between the school and the community and the involvement of the learners and/or their communities in the educational processes. 2) Intercultural Education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society. This principle can be achieved through: a. The guaranteeing of equal and equitable opportunities in education; b. The use of curricula and teaching and learning materials; c. Appropriate teaching methods; d. A clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes; e. Appropriate language teaching; f. Appropriate teacher initial education and permanent professional training. 3) Intercultural Education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to con-

tribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations. This principle can be achieved through: a. The development of curricula; b. Adequate teaching and learning methods; c. The acquisition of skills to communicate and co-operate beyond cultural barriers and to share and co-operate with others; d. The teaching and learning of foreign languages; e. Adequate teacher initial education and permanent professional development.

²³ EU Ministers of Education, *Paris Declaration: Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education*, 2015, 2. In response to extremist violence and terrorist attacks in Europe, the EU Education Ministers adopted in 2015 the Paris Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. Cf JACKSON Robert (ed.), *International Perspectives on Citizenship, Education and Religious Diversity*. London, Routledge Falmer 2003.

²⁴ UNESCO, *Guidelines and Criteria* 1995, 11.

²⁵ FARRELL Joseph - HEYNEMAN Stephan, *Textbooks in the developing world: Economic and educational choices*, Washington, D.C., Economic Development Institute 1989.

²⁶ Cf SHULMAN Lee, *Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform*, in *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1987)1, 1-22.

²⁷ COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *White paper on intercultural dialogue* 3.

²⁸ Cf MELLONI Alberto - CADEDDU Francesca (eds.), *Religious Literacy, Law and History: Perspectives on European Pluralist Societies*, London, Routledge 2019.

²⁹ Cf PINGEL Falk *The European home: Representations of 20th century Europe in history textbooks*, COUNCIL OF EUROPE 2000; ARAÚJO Marta - MAESO Silvia, *History textbooks, racism and the critique of Eurocentrism: Beyond rectification or compensation*, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35(2012)7, 1266-1286; PADGETT Gary, *A Critical Case Study of Selected U.S. History Textbooks from a Tribal Critical Race Theory Perspective*, in *The Qualitative Report* 20(2015)3, 153-171.

³⁰ UNESCO, *Guidelines and Criteria* 1995, 11.

Furthermore, UNESCO stresses regional and global approaches to issues of textbook and curricular improvement and, in order to promote an international dimension in education, provides guidelines and criteria for the development, evaluation and revision of curricula, textbooks and other educational materials. In this direction, cf also "Guidebook on Textbook Research", a guide for peace-oriented approaches to textbook studies', and "Guidelines for Developers and Users", which offers suggestions for everyone involved with selecting, creating and using learning media of all kinds, so as to help countries meet the enormous challenges of providing quality education for all throughout life.

³¹ OSCE/ODIHR, *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* 2007, 17. In 2012 ISESCO wrote the *Guidebook for History Textbooks Authors*, a publication of the project *The Image of the Other in European and Arab-Islamic Textbooks*. It is based on the premise that the risks of the feeling of the superiority of one's civilization over the others all arise from the instrumentalization of cultural and religious issues. Thus, it is not primarily to provide a critique of past and current textbooks, but rather to offer suggestions as to how textbook authors can approach the study of history in order to give students a more complex understanding of the Other. Indeed, it is declared that «It is a fact that misinformation, misperception and most of all ignorance constitute the main elements that lead to hatred, confrontation and instability. We all have important and vital roles to play on the individual, communal and international levels to defeat the negative forces leading to discrimination and religious intolerance with all their implications. Our responsibility is to promote a vision that would lead to a better world where tolerance, justice, cultural diversity, mutual respect and peaceful relations prevail» (ISESCO, *Guidebook for History Textbooks Authors* 2012, 5). Finally, another remarkable initiative is the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) programme. Established in 2005, as the political initiative of Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, encourages education about religions and beliefs globally through its Education about Religions and Beliefs; cf *Education About Religions and Beliefs*,

in <http://erb.u-naoc.org> (24.02.2022).

³² Cf ASLAN Ednan - RAUSCH Margaret (eds.), *Religious Education. Between Radicalism and Tolerance*, Wiesbaden, Springer 2018.

³³ Cf KEAST John (ed.), *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book for Schools*, COE 2007. Educational perspectives, as well as policies and practices, in Europe have become increasingly committed to resolving intercultural issues. Byram and Zarate provide a good example of an attempt to address the issue of difference in European education; cf THOBANI Shiraz, *European Education and Islam: Liberalism and Alterity*, in KARIM Karim - EID Mahmoud (eds.), *Engaging the Other Public Policy and Western-Muslim Intersections*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan 2014, 67-87.

³⁴ The only religious education in the past was indeed the teaching of Catholicism. Article 36 of the Concordat of 1929 (between Italy and the Holy) Cf provided for a compulsory Catholic education in all the degrees of State educational system. Catholic education had quite the same aim as catechism activity, since Catholicism was the State religion at that time. In 1984 there was a new agreement between the State and the Catholic Church: the Concordat was amended partially. In view of a rising plurality of Italian society, the new agreement provides that teaching of Catholicism is voluntary instead of compulsory. As a consequence, every student at every form and level of education could choose to attend the Catholic religious education (*Insegnamento della Religione Cattolica* or *IRC*) or not. Moreover, it was no longer intended as pastoral or catechetical education, but rather as a cultural approach to the religious phenomenon from a Catholic point of view, justified by the cultural and historical heritage of Italy. Article 9 of the law n. 121/1985, implementing the 1984 Concordat, has established, among others, the curricula for the various types and levels of the public schools and the criteria for selecting the textbooks that are controlled by the competent ecclesiastical authorities; cf GIORDA Mariachiara, *Religious Diversity in Italy and the Impact on Education: The History of a Failure*, in *New Diversities* 17(2015)1, 77-93, in <https://cutt.ly/jWxgHpd> (24.02.2022); COGLIEVINA Stella, *Religious education in Italian public schools: What room for Islam?*, in *State,*

Churches and confessional pluralism. Telematic magazine (www.statoechiase.it) 29(2017), 1-15, in <https://www.statoechiase.it/it/contributi/religious-education-in-italian-public-schools-what-room-for-islam> (24.02.2022).

³⁵ Cf AMAN Robert, *The Double Bind of Interculturality and the Implications for Education*, in *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 36(2015)2, 149-165. For an interesting take on how the scientific study of religion can examine specific aspects of religious education in schools, cf ANDREASSEN Bengt-Ove - LEWIS James (eds.), *Textbook Gods: Genre, Text and Teaching Religious Studies*, Sheffield, Equinox 2014. Cf also the following European research groups: ENRECA, REDCo, and EAWRE.

³⁶ These textbooks have been all approved by the Italian Episcopal Conference and published between 2014 to 2017.

³⁷ Data were collected through the help of a grid. The qualitative analysis has investigated different descriptors mainly grouped in three categories: text(s) and source(s), images and source(s), and didactic tools/teaching aids. A detailed analysis was carried out through reading of titles (chapters and paragraphs), contents, images and captions. Studies aiming at investigating the image of Islam and Muslim culture in schoolbooks and school curricula exist to a certain extent. This is especially true for schoolbook research. Most of the studies were done in the area of history didactics or in the didactics of religion. There are only a few investigations in the field of didactics of geography. Cf, e.g., Császár Zsuzsa, *Representation of Islam in the Hungarian Geography Textbooks*, in *Review of International Geographical Education Online* 2(2012)2, 181-191; Zecha Stefanie et ALII, *Islam and Muslim Life in Current Bavarian Geography Textbooks*, in *Review of International Geographical Education Online* 6(2016)1, 86-110.

³⁸ In 2010 in a study called *No Chance of Belonging? Islam and Modern Europe Remain Segregated in European Textbooks* Georg Eckert Institute has stated that the majority of history and politics textbooks examined from Germany, Austria, France, Spain and England give the impression that there is one Islam and one modern Europe yet which are largely without overlap or similarities. Fur-

thermore, this study has found that textbooks in European countries adhere to simplified depictions of Islam and thus perpetuate the perception of Muslims as a religious collective of non-European others. The lack of differentiation between Islam as a religious model and Muslim cultural practices is essential to this perspective; cf KAMP Melanie et ALII, *No chance of belonging? Islam and modern Europe remain segregated in European textbooks*, Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research 2012; THOBANI Shiraz, *European Education and Islam*; JACKSON Liz, *Muslims and Islam in US Education: Reconsidering Multiculturalism*, London, Routledge 2014.

³⁹ BAYRAKLI Enes - FARID Hafez (eds.), *European islamophobia report*, SETA 2016, 234. Cf also JONKER Gerdien - THOBANI Shiraz (eds.), *Narrating Islam: Interpretations of the Muslim world in European texts*, London, Tauris Academic Series 2010; KAMP Melanie et ALII, *No chance of belonging?*.

⁴⁰ Cf ALLEN Chris, *Islamophobia*, Surrey, UK, Ashgate Publishing 2010.

⁴¹ The Islamic faith, history, and culture in pedagogic texts are often treated in a problematic manner, conveying an image that leans toward scriptural dogmatism, authoritarian morality and unreformed medievalism. Indeed, «Islam and Muslims appear overwhelmingly (only) in connection with political and social conflicts, wars, terrorism, and fundamentalism within the context of international policy and migration» (KAMP Melanie et ALII, *No chance of belonging?* 13).

⁴² Cf OSCE/ODIHR, *Toledo Guiding Principles*.

⁴³ Cf DEI et ALII.

⁴⁴ Cf MANGANOTTI Renato - INCAMPO Nicola, *Il nuovo Tiberiade*, Brescia, Editrice la Scuola 2017.

⁴⁵ Cf TRENTI Zelindo et ALII, *L'ospite inatteso*, Torino, SEI 2014, 368.

⁴⁶ Cf SOLINAS Luigi, *Le vie del mondo*, Torino, SEI 2014, 37; BOCCHINI Sergio, *Incontro all'Altro Plus*, Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniane 2015, 95; PISCI Alberto - BENNARDO Michele, *All'ombra del Sicomoro*, Milano, Marietti scuola-DeA Scuola 2016, 205.

⁴⁷ Cf TRENTI et ALII, *L'ospite inatteso* 367.

⁴⁸ BOCCHINI, *Incontro all'Altro Plus* 93; PISCI - BENNARDO, *All'ombra del Sicomoro* 259; PORCARELLI Andrea - TIBALDI Marco, *Il nuovo La sabbia e le stelle*, Torino, SEI 2017, 84; MAGLIOLI Piero, *Capaci di sognare*, Torino, SEI 2017, 269.

⁴⁹ SOLINAS, *Le vie del mondo*, 42; BOCCHINI Sergio, *Incontro all'Altro Plus*, 94.

⁵⁰ Cf TRENTI et ALII, *L'ospite inatteso*, 352, 369; BOCCHINI, *Incontro all'Altro Plus* 95; PISCI - BENNARDO, *All'ombra del Sicomoro* 330-337; CRISTIANI Claudio, *Non è nel cielo*, Brescia, Editrice La Scuola 2017, 437-438; CRISTIANI Claudio - MOTTO Marco, *Coraggio, andiamo!*, Brescia, Editrice La Scuola 2017, 380-381; MANGANOTTI Renato - INCAMPO Nicola, *Il nuovo Tiberiade*, Brescia, Editrice La Scuola 2017, 364-365.

⁵¹ Cf BOCCHINI, *Incontro all'Altro Plus* 89.

⁵² Cf SOLINAS, *Le vie del mondo* 43; BOCCHINI, *Incontro all'Altro Plus* 92, 117-118; PISCI - BENNARDO, *All'ombra del Sicomoro* 390-391.

⁵³ Cf MANGANOTTI - INCAMPO, *Il nuovo Tiberiade* 368.

⁵⁴ Cf SOLINAS, *Arcobaleni* 330.

⁵⁵ *L. cit.*

⁵⁶ Cf PORCARELLI - TIBALDI, *Il nuovo La sabbia e le stelle* 370.

⁵⁷ Cf PISCI - BENNARDO, *All'ombra del Sicomoro* 229.

⁵⁸ It is not generally known that the Italian *Maometto* dates back to the Middle Ages *Malc(h)ometto*, used by Rustichello in his transcription of Marco Polo's travel report at the end of the thirteenth century (1298, however in a year following 1295) and has, among the different connotations, a sort of negative meaning: the idea of Muhammad as a false prophet. In this respect, schools should play an effective role in correcting the negative image of Islam and Muslims in the West, which is actually mainly inherited from the Middle Ages, the Golden Age of the Islamic problem.

⁵⁹ Cf TRENTI et ALII, *L'ospite inatteso* 366; PISCI - BENNARDO, *All'ombra del Sicomoro* 30.

⁶⁰ Cf PISCI - BENNARDO, *All'ombra del Sicomoro* 31.

⁶¹ Cf TRENTI et ALII, *L'ospite inatteso* 368; POR-

CARELLI - TIBALDI, *Il nuovo La sabbia e le stelle*, 84; MAGLIOLI Piero, *Capaci di sognare*, 267.

⁶² Cf PISCI - BENNARDO, *All'ombra del Sicomoro* 206.

⁶³ Cf PORCARELLI - TIBALDI, *Il nuovo La sabbia e le stelle* 369.

⁶⁴ Cf SOLINAS, *Arcobaleni* 333.

⁶⁵ Cf *IVI* 335.

⁶⁶ Cf PORCARELLI - TIBALDI, *Il nuovo La sabbia e le stelle* 84.

⁶⁷ Cf SOLINAS, *Le vie del mondo* 39.

⁶⁸ Cf *ivi* 42; *Id*, *Arcobaleni* 335.

⁶⁹ Cf PORCARELLI - TIBALDI, *Il nuovo La sabbia e le stelle* 83.

⁷⁰ Cf SOLINAS, *Arcobaleni* 334.

⁷¹ Cf TRENTI et ALII, *L'ospite inatteso* 367.

⁷² Cf SOLINAS, *Arcobaleni* 330; CRISTIANI, *Non è nel cielo* 363; MAGLIOLI Piero, *Capaci di sognare*, 263; PORCARELLI - TIBALDI, *Il nuovo La sabbia e le stelle* 83; MANGANOTTI - INCAMPO, *Il nuovo Tiberiade* 369.

⁷³ Cf TRENTI et ALII, *L'ospite inatteso* 336-337; SOLINAS, *Le vie del mondo* 39; PISCI - BENNARDO, 206, 253; PORCARELLI - TIBALDI, *Il nuovo La sabbia e le stelle* 84; MAGLIOLI Piero, *Capaci di sognare*, 269.

⁷⁴ Cf TRENTI et ALII, *L'ospite inatteso*, 334; PISCI - BENNARDO, *All'ombra del Sicomoro* 253; MAGLIOLI, *Capaci di sognare* 269.

⁷⁵ Cf TRENTI et ALII, *L'ospite inatteso* 350; PISCI - BENNARDO, *All'ombra del Sicomoro* 318; PORCARELLI - TIBALDI, *Il nuovo La sabbia e le stelle* 81.

⁷⁶ Cf *Educational reforms in Tunisia: A political history par excellence* (in Arabic), in <https://cutt.ly/qmbLvJt> (24.02.2022).

⁷⁷ Cf *Reading the shortcomings of the Tunisian educational system*, in <https://cutt.ly/hWcIIU> (24.02.2022).

⁷⁸ Cf *School dropout: An analytical scientific study of the Tunisian model* (in Arabic), in <https://cutt.ly/rmmqDW8> (24.02.2022).

⁷⁹ The "White Paper", or it can be translated with the "White Book", *Al-kitāb al-abya*, is available in Arabic language on the Tunisian ministry education website, in <https://cutt.ly/PWvj8Fn> (24.02.2022).

⁸⁰ This becomes clear through a comparison between two sections in the "White Paper": "the background of the reform project", *Marja'iyāt al-i lā*, from page 43 to page 47 and "the student's intended profile to acquire", *Malāmi al-muta'allim*, page 109.

⁸¹ BERGER John, *Extremism*, Cambridge, MA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2018, 24.

⁸² Cf ZELIN Aaron, *Tunisian foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria*, Washington, D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2018, in <https://cutt.ly/CWcPsxs> (24.02.2022).

⁸³ BEĆIROVIĆ Senad, *The role of intercultural education in fostering cross-cultural understanding*, in *Epiphany Journal of transdisciplinary studies* 5(2012)1, 141.

⁸⁴ In Tunisia, the expression "official programmes" is adopted by experts. It is a set of instructions for the teacher that includes skills, competencies and the contents required for a determined learning level. It should be noted in this context that many terms in the field of education, such as "programme" and "curriculum", are subject of debate, especially since some of them are used as synonyms. Some scholars have noticed such a problem and have tried to identify the distinctive features of each one of the terms with different efforts, be it dictionaries or studies. Cf, e.g., KNEZ Sandy, *Les notions de référentiel, curriculum, programme: quelle définition pour de futurs enseignants?*, in *Synergies France*, 11(2017), in <https://cutt.ly/2WxR3Fc> (24.02.2022).

⁸⁵ The Tunisian school system is structured as follows. Basic education is divided into two levels: the primary level lasts 6 years (it is composed of 3 degrees and each degree has 2 classes); the preparatory level lasts 3 years; secondary education lasts 4 years (school orientation is at the end of the first year of secondary education). At the end of the fourth year, students sit for the national baccalaureate examination for higher education entrance.

⁸⁶ Cf PINGEL Falk *The European home*, COE 2000.

⁸⁷ BEHNKE Yvonne, *Textbook effects and efficacy*, in FUCHS Eckhardt - BOCK Annetkatrin (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Textbook*

Studies, New York, Palgrave Macmillan 2018, 391-392.

⁸⁸ Cf programmes for Islamic education in <http://www.education.gov.tn/?p=500&lang=fr> (24.02.2022).

⁸⁹ MACCOBY Eleanor, *Historical overview of socialization research and theory*, in GRUSEC Joan E. - HASTINGS Paul D. (eds.), *Handbook of socialization: Theory and research*, New York, London, The Guilford Press 2007, 13.

⁹⁰ This can be inferred from the so-called "status of Islamic education", *Manzilat attarbiya al-islāmiyya*, which is a frequent element in the introduction to Islamic education programmes for each degree. Cf programmes for Islamic education, in <https://cutt.ly/hWcSMKj> (24.02.2022).

⁹¹ These different expressions of Islam reveal through the architecture of mosques the peculiarities of human's relationship to space, the human vision of the world and his adaptation to climate and nature in the construction of places of worship. The architectural styles of the mosques can be utilized to foster a sense of pluralism and diversity in the image of Tunisian Muslim(s) and Islam among students. To know more about Islamic architectural styles cf e.g. PREVOST Virginie, *Les mosquées ibadites du Maghreb*, in *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 125(2009), in <https://cutt.ly/jWxTvly> (24.02.2022).

⁹² GABSI Zouhir, *An Outline of The Shilha (Berber) Vernacular of Douiret (Southern Tunisia)*, University of Western Sydney, 2003, 1, in <https://cutt.ly/4Wxj390> (24.02.2022).

⁹³ To achieve the objective of strengthening affiliation to a cultural space, this affiliation can be divided into sub-levels. For example, belonging to the Maghreb can be strengthened by teaching students Qur'anic verses written in Maghreb script with a brief historical and literary, in the sense of a children's story, definition to such script. This would create a particularity in belonging to the Maghreb on the one hand and would pave the way for the acceptance of pluralism on the other hand, since this pluralism begins from the Arab Muslim identity which is wrongly considered as unitary and indivisible. These suggestions for a new design of Islamic education lessons in

Tunisia will be the topic of a forthcoming paper. In short, these reflections are supposed to draw attention to the common claims of pluralism in Tunisia, the rupture between education and society in terms of course content and competencies to acquire, and the requirement of teaching within intercultural education. Finally, it should be noted that this is a limited reading activity through Islamic education programmes in particular the Muslim and non-Muslim images which are ambiguous. A deep analysis or more can be conducted in other works.