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■ *Thementeil*

Pädagogische Praxen und Wissenschaften im Kontext von Re-Sakralisierung

■ *Allgemeiner Teil*

Naturerfahrung als Krise durch Muße? Struktureigenschaften der Bildungspraxis der „Draußenschule“ im Primarbereich

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■ *Essay*

Erziehungswissenschaftliche Fragen im Zusammenhang mit der Bewegung Fridays for Future

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Amandine Barb

A 'Postsecular' Religious Education?

The Case of the United States

Abstract: Over the past three decades in the United States, religious literacy has become an important educational and civic skill, fostered by various actors as integral to the making of reflexive citizens, able to cope with the challenges of a multi-faith democracy. The article argues that this development was the result of what Habermas described as the emergence of a 'postsecular consciousness' – i.e. the growing awareness of the contemporary resilience of religion as a crucial resource for identities, cultures and politics. The article first explains how this 'change in consciousness' has led to a global reassessment of the place and role of religion in the context of public schools. The second part critically examines the implementation of courses about religion in California, and questions to what extent they can truly contribute to the advent of a 'postsecular deliberative democracy'.

Keywords: United States, Education, Religion, Postsecularism, California

1. Introduction

Often considered an 'exceptionally religious' country, but whose Constitution, via the 1st Amendment, enforces a separation between church and state[1], the United States has repeatedly been confronted with controversies related to the status of religion in the classroom – from the 19th century 'Bible Wars' between Protestants and Catholics and the recurring conflicts over creationism, to the debates about the Supreme Court's jurisprudence, which today requires public schools to remain strictly neutral towards religion.[2] In this context, one of the most recent changes regarding the place of faith in American public education has been the introduction, since the end of the 1980s, of courses about religion, which have gradually become an established educational standard: in every

1 The religion clauses of the 1st Amendment, adopted in 1791, assert that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". According to the Supreme Court's jurisprudence, the 1st Amendment requires the state to remain neutral between religions, as well as between religion and non-religion (McCreary v. ACLU, 2005).

2 Religious instruction and teacher-led prayers have been ruled unconstitutional (McCollum v. Board of Education, 1948; Engel v. Vitale, 1962), followed by the devotional reading of the Bible (Abington v. Schempp, 1963), the teaching of creationism in biology classes (Epperson v. Arkansas, 1968; Edwards v. Aguillard, 1987), as well as moments of silent meditation or prayers (Wallace v. Jaffree, 1985).

state today, *World History* and *World Geography* curricula require students to learn about the history and beliefs of major faith traditions, while *US History* courses include references to important religious figures and movements (Barb, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). It is thus not religious education *per se,* as it exists in Germany – such a school subject was ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court in 1948 – but rather education *about* religion, taught *transversally,* in the context of other disciplines, from a strictly academic, non-sectarian and non-devotional perspective. Yet in the United States, where faith in general had been mostly left out of public schools since the mid-20th century, the widespread implementation of courses about religion in the past thirty years has been a significant, and intriguing, development.

The article argues that this educational shift was the result of what Jürgen Habermas described as the emergence of a "postsecular consciousness" (Calhoun, Mendieta & VanAntwerpen, 2013, p. 22) – i.e. the *realization* that, despite the secular nature of the state, or the decline of religious beliefs and practices, "religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularistic certainty that it will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground" (Habermas, 2008a, p. 21). For Habermas, this "change in consciousness", triggered by immigration and the resurgence of assertive "public religions" at the national and global levels, should lead to the advent of a "postsecular deliberative democracy" based on "mutual recognition" and "equal respect" between secular and religious citizens (Habermas, 2006, p. 258). An extension of his long-standing reflection on the public sphere and democracy, the concept of 'postsecular' stemmed from Habermas' concern, at the turn of the 21st century, that the dominant models of liberal democracies, as theorized by John Rawls or Robert Audi, for example, were fundamentally "unfair" to citizens of faith: accordingly, these models expect the latter to "translate" their religious arguments into "secular language" before entering the public sphere, thus forcing them to "split their identities" if they want to contribute to the process of democratic deliberation (Huw Rees, 2016, p. 122). For Habermas, in a global context where, as regularly evidenced by social and political events, "religious communities can obviously still claim a 'seat' in the life of societies" (Habermas, 2008a, p. 19), this 'burden' imposed on believers has become morally untenable. In order to fix these shortcomings and bring about a more inclusive "postsecular deliberative democracy", Habermas recommends that secular and religious individuals undergo a "complementary learning process", that would allow both sides to "take seriously each other's contribution" to society (Habermas, 2008a, p. 27, 21). This reciprocal "cognitive adjustment" (Huw Rees, 2016, p. 121), implies that secular citizens have to become receptive to religious discourses in the *informal public sphere* (i.e. "media, civil society and public discussions in general"), while members of faith communities have to agree to the rules of liberal democracies and be able to accept the primacy of "secular reasons" in the *formal public sphere* (i.e. the institutional and legal systems) (Huw Rees, 2016, p. 131).

Despite what has rightly been criticized as its overly schematic and abstract underlying conception of secular and religious identities (see Huw Rees, 2016), Habermas' theory of postsecularism provides a useful framework to make sense of the introduction

of courses about religion in American schools over the past three decades. Accordingly, this article demonstrates that, in the United States, an overall 'change in public consciousness' triggered by the growing diversification and politicization of religious identities had the effect of turning interfaith understanding and religious literacy into core educational and civic skills. These are now fostered by various actors – public officials, scholars, educators, civil liberties activists – as integral to the upbringing of reflexive citizens, able to meaningfully engage with the (non-)religious 'other' and to cope with the challenges of a diverse democratic public sphere.

The article first explains how the "postsecular paradigm shift" (Loobuyck, 2015, p. 105) led to a global reassessment of the place and role of religion in the field of public education. The second part critically examines the implementation of teaching about religion in the state of California. Through this case-study, the article questions to what extent these courses can truly foster a 'complementary learning process', and thereby contribute to the advent of a 'postsecular deliberative democracy' as envisioned by Habermas.

2. The 'Postsecular Consciousness' and its Impact on Public Education

2.1 Schools as Vectors of a 'Complementary Learning Process': Global Developments and Trends

Although it was a decision influenced by national events and debates, the introduction of courses about religion in the United States first needs to be understood in the context of broader *global* developments related to religion and education in contemporary democracies. As Robert Jackson points out, indeed, "issues about the study of religions in public education are being discussed [...] more widely internationally as never before" (Jackson, 2014, p. 20). More particularly, there has been in recent decades, against the backdrop of a worldwide resurgence of religion-based violence and identity politics, a growing interest in the role that public schools could play in fostering communication, understanding and respect – i.e. a 'learning process' – between citizens of different, or no, faith(s). Supranational institutions, for example – from the *United Nations* to the *Council of Europe* – have been instrumental in promoting a more comprehensive and pluralistic inclusion of religion into school curricula, with the explicit goal of strengthening social and civic cohesion in nation-states confronted with rising tensions over the diversification and politicization of faith.

These institutions' active engagement with religion and education rests on the assumption that, as Habermas himself has acknowledged, a reciprocal "cognitive adjustment" between secular and religious individuals can hardly be enforced via "legal and administrative means" (Habermas, 2008b, p. 144). "Tolerance", further writes Habermas, "is, of course, not only a question of enacting and applying laws, [but] must be practiced in everyday life" (Habermas, 2008a p. 23). In that sense, public schools,

because they bring students together on an almost daily basis over several years, appear to be an ideal setting to promote an 'everyday life' tolerance: in the classroom, children can become acquainted with each other's core beliefs and worldviews from an early age, which could help minimize prejudices and misunderstandings in the long run. Moreover, as the *United Nations Alliance of Civilizations* explains, primary and secondary education is not only the period "that is the most important in forming educated opinion", but also, more pragmatically, the one "where public policy can have the most influence, because in many states public funding of education offers the opportunity to have [...] curricular influence" (UNAOC, 2011).

This global interest in the potentially key role of public education as a vector of 'mutual recognition' and 'equal respect' between secular and religious citizens was decisively exacerbated in the aftermath of 9/11, when the resilience of religion as a resource for identities, politics and conflicts became inescapable. In November 2001, just two months after the terror attacks in New York, an *International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination* was convened in Madrid by the *UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*. The main objective of this event was to issue recommendations for how public schools could help promote peaceful religious coexistence. At this occasion, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief argued that religious education "can make a real contribution to the prevention of intolerance and discrimination [...]", provided that it is "conceived as a tool to transmit knowledge and values pertaining to all religious trends, in an inclusive way, so that individuals realize their being part of the same community and learn to create their own identity in harmony with identities different from their own" (Amor, 2001). These ambitions further materialized with the establishment in 2008 of the "Clearinghouse on Education about Religions and Beliefs" by the *UN Alliance of Civilizations*. This program encourages schools to "provide [...] an understanding and respect for the diverse religious beliefs [...] in the world" and, for that purpose, it promotes a multi-faith, inclusive and academic approach to religious education (UNAOC). Similarly, the UNESCO has repeatedly emphasized the importance of "pluralism" as "an asset" for students, as well as the crucial role of teachers in "fostering [...] respectful interfaith exchanges" (UNESCO, 2017). At the European level, the *Council of Europe* had launched its own working group on the *Religious Dimensions of Intercultural Education* in 2002, with the underlying rationale that learning *about* religious diversity in school, with the goal of advancing "interfaith and interreligious dialogue", was "of central importance" to the future of contemporary democracies (Council of Europe, 2003).

2.2 The New Status of Religion in American Public Schools

Against the backdrop of these global developments, a similar paradigmatic shift occurred at the national level in the United States, where the diversification and politicization of religious identities – and the growing *public consciousness* of their resilience – have led, over the past three decades, to a significant reassessment of the role of religion in the "resolutely secular" sphere of public education (Mayrl, 2016, p. 11).

The once-pervasive influence of faith in American public schools started to decline in the first half of the 20th century – a trend reinforced with their strict secularization by the Supreme Court from the 1940s onwards. As Justices were pushing religious instruction, prayers and any kind of devotional faith out of the classroom – although explicitly recommending its continued presence under an academic form[3] – the few educators and scholars who wanted religion to keep a place in schools had two main objectives: to enable students to understand the country's (Christian) cultural heritage and to ensure the transmission of 'moral values'. In 1953, for example, the *American Council on Education* wrote that "public schools [...] can provide for the factual study of religion both as an important factor in the [...] development of our culture and as a source of values and insight for [...] people in finding the answers to persistent personal problems of living" (ACE, 1953, p. 11). In the following decades, several projects were developed by universities and state Departments of Education in order to more concretely foster a constitutionally–sound education *about* religion in public schools (Barb, 2019b). Yet most of these endeavors failed to gain momentum, and to attract enough financial and institutional support. Even 'multicultural education' – as it had been implemented in the United States since the 1960s – overwhelmingly focused on ethnic and racial minorities (Spinner-Halev, 2000). Reflecting on this "blind spot" of public education, Yale Professor Stephen Carter lamented as "embarrassing" the fact that "in this age of celebration of American diversity [...] the schools have been so slow to move towards teaching about our nation's diverse religious traditions" (quoted in Boyer, 1997, p. 114).

At the same moment, however, the growing presence of immigrant non-Christian minorities[4] as well as the rise of the so-called 'Christian Right' under Reagan's presidency, and the international tensions over political Islam, led to a 'change in consciousness' among many public officials, scholars, educators and civil liberties activists, grown aware of the resilience of religion in the public sphere, both in the United States and the world (Barb, 2019b). In that context, the well-documented religious illiteracy of American students became an issue of national concern – which in turn provided a window of opportunity for the advocates of teaching about religion: they could now defend their project as an ideal compromise between, on the one hand, the unsustainable secularist oblivion of faith and, on the other, the aggressive identity politics of con-

3 See McCollum v. Board of Education (1948) and Abington v. Schempp (1963).

4 The 1965 *Immigration and Naturalization Act,* which removed the restrictions on immigration from Asia and the Middle East, had led to a growth in the number of non-Christian minorities in the United States.

servative Christians, who wanted prayers and creationism back into the classroom. In 1987, the *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,* a national educational organization, called for "decisive action [...] to end the current curricular silence on religion" (Boyer, 1997, p. 119). In 1988, a statement titled *Religion in The Public School Curriculum* was endorsed by 17 organizations, including the *American Academy of Religion,* the *American Federation of Teachers,* the *National Association of Evangelicals,* and the *American Jewish Congress.* Noting that "growing numbers of people in the United States think it is important to teach about religion in the public schools", the statement explained that "knowledge of the role of religion in the past and present promotes cross-cultural understanding essential to democracy and world peace" (AAR et al., 1990, p. 309–310). Therefore, as the political and religious context had changed, so had the rationales for the study of religion. Gone was the concern for moral values: as in the aforementioned international policy recommendations, including faith into American school curricula now carried a distinct *civic* dimension – i.e. fostering greater understanding and engagement between students of different, or no, faith(s). In 1989, a report written for Congress described a "growing movement for teaching about religion in the public schools", whose promoters argue will "enhance mutual respect and goodwill [...], helping to diminish religious prejudice that may derive from ignorance [...]" (Whittier, 1989, p. 4–5).

California had been one of the first states to make teaching about religion compulsory in 1988, and seven years later, in 1995, the *Federal Guidelines on Religion in Public Schools* made clear that "public schools may not provide religious instruction, but they may teach about religion" (US Department of Education, 1995). Despite recurring conflicts between scholars, religious interest groups and church/state separation advocacy organizations over the *content* of these courses (Barb, 2017), there is today a broad consensus on the *legitimacy* and *necessity* of teaching about religion in American public schools.

After decades of being overlooked in the classroom, religion has thus come to be reconsidered a valuable resource for the education of "informed, critical and engaged citizens" in the United States (National Council for the Social Studies, 2017, p. 93). In that sense, the introduction of courses about religion exemplifies the "postsecular" transition from a general perception of faith as irrelevant to democratic citizenship, "toward a different [...] agenda" (Shakman Hurd, 2015, p. 26), in which religion is considered an inescapable, but potentially divisive, social and political force. As a result, it has become the responsibility of public schools, as central state institutions, to foster a "complementary learning process" between students, as a way to minimize the tensions arising from religious politics and a growing diversity.

3. The Example of California

3.1 Fostering a 'Complementary Learning Process' Through Teaching About Religion

Because California is undoubtedly the US state that has invested the most efforts in advancing teaching about religion, it provides an ideal case-study to understand the underpinnings, concrete implementation, and shortcomings of this project in the American context.

A pioneer for multicultural education, California put greater emphasis on the study of religion in 1988, when the local Board of Education, "acknowledg[ing] the importance of religion in human history", required *World History* curricula for the 6th and 7th grades to include courses about Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, so that students would "become familiar with the basic ideas of [...] major religions" (California Department of Education, 1988, p. 7). Students were also "expected to learn about the role of religion in the founding" of the United States (California Department of Education, 1988, p. 7). Since the end of the 1980s, a unit on Sikhism has been added and, more generally, the state of California has sought to offer an increasingly comprehensive religious studies program to its secondary school students. For that purpose, the Department of Education has built a partnership with various actors interested in improving the content of courses and the training of teachers. The "3Rs Project" ("Rights, Responsibilities, Respect"), launched in 1993, exemplifies these ambitions, as it brings together the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, school districts, teachers, scholars as well as 1st Amendment activists. This endeavor provides public schools with various resources, such as information about religious traditions and 1st Amendment law, as well as curriculum or lesson templates (California 3Rs Project). Involved in the "3Rs Project", the Department of Religious Studies at California State University in Chico has also been home since 1995 to the 'Religion and Public Education Project'. One of the very few dedicated to this issue in American universities, it "consults with classroom teachers, school administrators, school board members, textbook publishers, academic researchers, journalists, members of the legal profession, and members of the general public in efforts to understand and support public education about religion [...]" (California State University, Chico). Since 2009, the 'Religion and Public Education Project' has been part of the aforementioned *UN Alliance of Civilizations'* initiative on "Education about Religions and Beliefs".

The most recently revised *History-Social Science Curriculum Framework* adopted by the California State Board of Education in July 2016, gives a strong justification for studying religion in public schools, as it argues that

> teaching about religion [...] is one of the most important things that schools can do to build a generation of Americans who understand enough about the ideas and values of others that they can continue to promulgate a society that protects rights and

> respectful interactions among its peoples [...]. (California Department of Education, 2017, p. 789)

This statement emphasizes once again the relevance of religion to civic education, while the references to mutual understanding and 'respectful interactions' echo the Habermasian ideal of a 'postsecular deliberative democracy'. A close examination of courses about religion as they exist today in California shows more concretely how they are meant to foster a 'complementary learning process' between secular and religious citizens.

On the one hand, these courses offer students a basic knowledge of various faith traditions. Because of the requirements of the 1st Amendment and the long-standing absence of an entire course specifically dedicated to religious education in the United States, American public schools have favored a 'phenomenological approach' to the study of religion, integrated into history and geography curricula. This means that in California, for instance, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism are approached from an "informational, descriptive and neutral" perspective, and that courses mostly "concentrate [...] on the different social and cultural expressions of spirituality" (Tan, 2008, p. 178). California's *Curriculum Framework* explains, in that respect, that "[r]eligious texts, leaders, and events should be examined by using the same academic rigor and history–social science analysis skills applied to other topics" (California Department of Education, 2017, p. 786). Overall, religions are mostly taught in *historical* perspective: Judaism is studied within the chapter on the "Ancient Israelites", while the units on Islam are limited to the Middle Ages. This is therefore very different from Germany, where religious education is a school subject of its own, mandated by the Federal Constitution, taught by teachers trained in faculties of theology, and that students attend separately, depending on their (or their parents') religious preference. The goal of this religious education is for students to explore, discuss and reflect on, their *own* faith – rather than to learn about the religious 'others'.

More particularly, California's *Curriculum Framework* requires *World History* courses to address some of the following questions: "How did major religions [...] develop and change over time?" (California Department of Education, 2017, p. 180); "How did [...] the history of the Israelites, and their interactions with other societies shape their religion?" (California Department of Education, 2017, p. 154); "How did the Muslim empires and institutions help different regions of Afroeurasia become more interconnected?" (California Department of Education, 2017, p. 195). The guidelines also indicate that students should learn "about the Sikh Scripture [...], articles of faith, the turban, and Sikh history" (California Department of Education, 2017, p. 233); or that "through selections from Biblical literature, they will learn about those teachings of Jesus that advocate compassion, justice, and love for others" (California Department of Education, 2017, p. 189). The corresponding textbooks for *World History* used in California illustrate the chapters dedicated to each tradition with excerpts from their main sacred texts, and explain their basic concepts, such as 'Covenant' in Judaism, 'Jihad' in Islam, or 'Dharma' in Hinduism. They also describe their rituals, beliefs and core figures, while emphasizing the religions' contributions to art and knowledge.

Ideally, these courses should thus make religious worldviews, values and discourses – the "polyphonic complexity of the diverse public voices" (Habermas, 2008a, p. 29) – more accessible to secular citizens. This could allow the latter to be more receptive to religious contributions made in the 'informal' public sphere, thereby alleviating part of the 'burden' faced by believers, who would be less pressured to systemically translate their arguments into a secular language that, for them, is often lacking in authenticity and sincerity. Accordingly, by knowing more about their mindsets, non-religious citizens could be more likely "to meet their religious fellow citizens as equals" (Habermas, 2008a, p. 29).

Yet, as previously explained, the 'complementary learning process' does not only require secular individuals to 'take seriously' the voices of religious citizens. It also implies that the latter, if they want to contribute to the system of democratic deliberation *qua* religious citizens, as Habermas argues they should, first have to commit to respecting the basic norms of liberal democracies (e.g. the rule of law, gender equality, freedom of conscience) – i.e. "appropriate the secular legitimation of constitutional principles under the premises of their own faith" (Habermas, 2008a, p. 27).

Jean-Paul Willaime asserts that public education is inherently well-suited to foster this reverse "learning process", since, according to him, "[i]ntroducing religion to state school is to introduce it into the sphere of [...] critical examination" (Willaime, 2014, p. 108). Studying religions from a phenomenological perspective, writes Willaime, "is in itself an important contribution to citizenship", because "it places religious facts in the space of collective deliberation" (Willaime, 2014, p. 116). Jeff Spinner-Halev has similarly defended the "extension of diversity" to religion in school curricula as "the best way to aid liberal citizenship" (Spinner-Halev, 2000, p. 70). According to him, citizens of different, or no, faith(s) who "confront one another, and learn from each other, will (hopefully) construct their own individuality", thus, in the words of Stephen Macedo quoted by Spinner-Halev, "becom[ing] immanent, interpretive critics of themselves, others and their culture" (Spinner-Halev, 2000, p. 75). Echoing Willaime and Spinner-Halev, the *American Academy of Religion* explains that "teaching about religion gives credibility to religion itself as a valid field of inquiry and assumes the legitimacy of multiple religious perspectives" (AAR, 2010, p. 8). In that sense, courses about religion could also contribute, in the long run, to foster a "shift" towards a "more reflexive form of religious consciousness", compatible with the expectations of a democratic, secular citizenship (Habermas, 2008a, p. 28).

Moreover, in the context of California, the *content* of courses about religion also reflects a specific – "democracy-friendly" – narrative about faith and religious diversity, one that "favors moderate, reflexive, and ecumenical religions, and highlights examples of interfaith encounters, while downplaying instances of conflicts and violence" (Barb, 2017, p. 210). Using the case studies of Baghdad, Cairo, or Sicily in the Middle Ages, for instance, teachers in California are explicitly asked to insist on the peaceful interactions between Jews, Christians and Muslims, notably though the example of trade, or of intellectual and scientific collaborations. The *Curriculum Framework* recommends that instead of "religious differences", the emphasis should be put on the "many ways in

which Christians, Muslims and Jews interacted" as well as on their "common features" (California Department of Education, 2017, p. 200). *World History* textbooks used in California draw parallels between the three Abrahamic faiths, describing their shared history, values and theological characteristics (Barb, 2017). It could thus be argued that this purposely liberal, tolerant and positive approach to faith and interfaith relations is also meant as a way to "include religious facts in the citizenship of pluralist democracies" (Willaime, 2014, p. 116).

3.2 A 'Postsecular' Education?

Yet despite the considerable efforts made over the past three decades, teaching about religion in California – and in the United States more generally – is still restricted today to a mere presentation of 'facts', taught in the context of other disciplines.[5] This reality questions therefore the possibility of a truly 'postsecular' education in American public schools bound by the neutrality requirement of the 1st Amendment: can their inherently limited approach to religion really create the necessary conditions for a mutual 'learning process'?

As it is, the fact that courses about religion are still mainly taught in history curricula, without much consideration for recent developments, already contradicts Habermas' expectation that religious communities should not be treated as "archaic relics of premodern societies persisting into the present" (Habermas, 2008b, p. 138), but "taken seriously as modern contemporaries" (Habermas, 2008a, p. 29). More generally, the phenomenological model used in American public schools has long been criticized by education scientists, as it presents students with a reified, compartmentalized, and thus superficial view of religions (Chidester, 2002). Through this 'top-down' approach to faith, students are not given the opportunity to engage with one another on this topic, and are not encouraged to share their experiences as (non-)believers, or to reflect on key ethical and social issues based on their respective (non-)religious worldviews. The United States is, in that sense, a long way from other countries such as England or Canada, where an 'interpretative' system of religious education – i.e. multi-faith, comprehensive and student-centered – has been implemented (Jackson, 2014). As a result, American students do not learn how to cope with disagreements involving religious 'others', nor how to build a constructive argument and dialogue with them, which undermines the premises and goals of a "postsecular deliberative democracy" as imagined by Habermas. The pressure of the 1st Amendment, the fear of lawsuits among school administrators and the lack of a proper training for teachers explain the persistence of such a rigid, rudimentary and unsatisfying approach to the study of religion in the United States (Barb, 2017, 2019b).

5 A few school districts offer electives on 'comparative religions', but their number remains very limited.

There is, however, a growing awareness of these shortcomings among American scholars and educators, and a few initiatives have been recently launched in order to address them. A training seminar for teachers convened in 2018 by the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), and sponsored by the *National Endowment for the Humanities,* a US Federal agency, put an explicit emphasis on the need to learn about "religions as *living* traditions" (Center for the Study of Religion at UCLA). Participants were for example invited to meet with members of local congregations in Los Angeles. The program's organizers argued that "exploring varieties of religious traditions with an eye toward the lived experience", when replicated in schools, "[would] be a catalyst for encouraging civic engagement and bridge building within local and global communities" (Center for the Study of Religion at UCLA). A similar training seminar, also sponsored by the *National Endowment for the Humanities,* takes place annually in New York: titled "Religious Worlds of New York", it aims to help teachers "move beyond the 'dates and doctrines' approach to the study of religion – a "superficial form of religious literacy that does not prepare students to participate in civic life". To better understand the "everyday life of American religious diversity", participants visit houses of worship and meet with faith leaders in various neighborhoods of the city (Religious Worlds of New York). The question how these recent initiatives, focused on learning about, and engaging with, the religious 'other' through 'lived experiences', could be translated into the classroom – while respecting the 1st Amendment and avoiding controversies – remains open.

4. Conclusion

Although a critical step has been achieved since the 1980s in normalizing teaching about religion in American public schools, the case-study of California reveals that the corresponding courses, as they exist today, do not allow students to fully engage into a "complementary learning process" with one another. Despite their promoters' high expectations, therefore, these courses' contribution to an 'everyday life' tolerance and an inclusive deliberative public sphere appears *de facto* limited. In that sense, the American experiment falls short of the premise of a truly 'postsecular' education, as it has been fostered by supranational institutions, for example. Nevertheless, the strong consensus that exists in the United States on the civic importance of religious literacy, and the recent efforts by educators and scholars to imagine new teaching methods aimed at fostering a more dynamic mutual learning process, still leave open the possibility of further improvements in that field – provided, of course, that they receive enough institutional support and that the overwhelming secular ethos of American public education does not inhibit them.

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Zusammenfassung: In den letzten drei Jahrzehnten hat sich in den USA die religiöse Kompetenz zu einer wichtigen pädagogischen und staatsbürgerlichen Fähigkeit entwickelt, die verschiedene Akteure als zentral ansehen, um die Ausbildung von reflexiven Bürgerinnen und Bürgern zu fördern, welche in der Lage sind, die Herausforderungen einer multireligiösen Demokratie zu bewältigen. Der vorliegende Beitrag argumentiert, dass diese Entwicklung das Ergebnis dessen war, was Habermas als die Entstehung eines ‚postsäkularen Bewusstseins', d.h. das wachsende Bewusstsein für die zeitgenössische Widerstandsfähigkeit der Religion als entscheidende Ressource für Identitäten, Kulturen und Politik, bezeichnete. Erklärt wird zunächst, wie diese ‚Bewusstseinsveränderung' zu einer globalen Neubewertung des Ortes und der Rolle der Religion im Kontext öffentlicher Schulen geführt hat. Der zweite Teil untersucht kritisch die Umsetzung von Religionsunterricht in Kalifornien und fragt, inwieweit er tatsächlich zum Aufkommen einer ‚postsäkularen deliberativen Demokratie' beitragen kann.

Schlagworte: USA, Erziehung, Religion, Postsäkularismus, Kalifornien

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