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# **MONOGRÁFICO / MONOGRAPHIC**

## **RELIGIONES COMPARADAS**

Comparative Religions

Coordinado por Terri Kim/ Coordinated by Terri Kim

1



## *Editorial: Religions in Comparative Education: the past and the present*

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*Editorial: Las religiones en la Educación Comparada: el pasado y el presente*

**Terri Kim\***

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This Special Issue (monograph) critically reviews the entwined relations of religions and politics in shaping national and international educations from a comparative historical spectrum.

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (*Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 1912), Durkheim asserts that religion is collective beliefs and practices that shape a society's moral identity, supplying a sense of belonging and moral scaffolding in modern societies (Durkheim 1912). Thus the role of religions is intrinsically entwined with education and the formation of educated identities. In the field of comparative education studies, however, religion has not been a major theme while comparative education focused more on the secular state education systems as the official framework of comparison.

This Special Issue sheds light on the different ways in which religions and nationalism have been entangled and articulated in shaping the modern educated identities in different places.

This volume helps to think the continuity of religious dogmas and political ideologies and their entwined relations in shaping educational identities in different societies from a long-duree perspective.

Current phenomena of globalization and postmodernity represent a specially favorable time for the rethink of the always debated relation among ideology and religion. Postmodernity, and its attributes to the celebration of diversity, difference and the voices of the other, reveal to be particularly propitious for the articulation of syncretical and dialogical processes which support aspects such as the religious ecumenism and the notion of the secular in societies influenced by Modernity and its features of universalism, normativism, tradition, defined identity, existential security and certainty. The new technologies prevailing in our globalized world provide forms of dissemination of modern metanarratives and of their postmodern correctives in a globe that, beyond the manifest historical differences, reveals a social axiological teleology of great convergence in what concern parameters such as the eradication of social injustice. The present monographic section on Comparative Religions seeks to reflect upon the role of religions and its implication for comparative education, from a comparative historical perspective, in this current epochal time of epistemological skepticism, ethical subjectivism, distrust of reason and a suspicion of the role of ideology in the maintenance of the political and economic power.

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## *Religion, schooling and the state: negotiating and constructing the secular space*

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*Religión, escolarización y Estado:  
negociando y construyendo el espacio secular*

**Leslie Bash\***

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## **Abstract**

As a prelude to the paper it should be stated that its genesis originates in conference presentations delivered on two separate occasions to two separate audiences. The first was to a mixed group of teacher educators, Roman Catholic priests and nuns, as well as others from diverse religious traditions, at a one-day conference on religion and pluralism held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland. The expressed focus for this conference was 'inter-faith' but with the addition of a secular dimension. The second presentation was to an international group largely comprised of comparative education scholars in Glasgow, Scotland. Although the two presentations were broadly similar in content the Dublin paper had a distinct orientation. Given that the publicly-funded Irish school system was characterised by a strong involvement of religion (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) – in particular, that of the Roman Catholic Church, the dominant tradition in that country – the Dublin presentation pursued an approach which sought to widen the educational agenda. Specifically, it focused upon the continuing discussion concerning the role of secularity in school systems where confessional approaches to religion were sanctioned by the central state. On the other hand, the Glasgow presentation was more 'academic' in tone, seeking to re-position secularity and religion in a non-oppositional relationship which was, in turn, argued to be functional for 21st education systems.

*Key Words:* Comparative Religions; Comparative Education; Secular space

## **Resumen**

La génesis de este artículo se origina en dos presentaciones en diferentes conferencias para dos audiencias diferentes. La primera fue para un grupo mixto de educadores de maestros, sacerdotes y monjas católicos romanos, así como otros de diversas tradiciones religiosas, en una conferencia de un día sobre religión y pluralismo celebrada en Dublín, República de Irlanda. El enfoque expresado para esta conferencia fue «interreligioso» pero con la adición de una dimensión secular. La segunda presentación fue para un grupo internacional compuesto principalmente por académicos de educación comparada en Glasgow, Escocia. Aunque las dos presentaciones eran muy similares en contenido, el documento de Dublín tenía una orientación distinta. Dado que el sistema escolar irlandés financiado con fondos públicos se caracteriza por una fuerte participación de la religión (Departamento de Educación y Habilidades, 2017), en particular, la de la Iglesia Católica Romana, la tradición dominante en ese país, la presentación de Dublín siguió un enfoque que buscaba ampliar la agenda educativa. Específicamente, se centró en la discusión continua sobre el papel de la secularidad en los sistemas escolares donde el estado central sancionaba los enfoques confesionales de la religión. Por otro lado, la presentación de Glasgow fue más «académica» en tono, buscando reubicar la secularidad y la religión en una relación no enfrentada que, a su vez, se argumentó, que era funcional para los sistemas de educación del siglo XXI.

*Palabras clave:* Religiones comparadas; Educación Comparada; Espacio secular

# 1. Introduction

As a prelude to the paper it should be stated that its genesis originates in conference presentations delivered on two separate occasions to two separate audiences. The first was to a mixed group of teacher educators, Roman Catholic priests and nuns, as well as others from diverse religious traditions, at a one-day conference on religion and pluralism held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland. The expressed focus for this conference was 'inter-faith' but with the addition of a secular dimension. The second presentation was to an international group largely comprised of comparative education scholars in Glasgow, Scotland. Although the two presentations were broadly similar in content the Dublin paper had a distinct orientation. Given that the publicly-funded Irish school system was characterised by a strong involvement of religion (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) – in particular, that of the Roman Catholic Church, the dominant tradition in that country – the Dublin presentation pursued an approach which sought to widen the educational agenda. Specifically, it focused upon the continuing discussion concerning the role of secularity in school systems where confessional approaches to religion were sanctioned by the central state. On the other hand, the Glasgow presentation was more 'academic' in tone, seeking to re-position secularity and religion in a non-oppositional relationship which was, in turn, argued to be functional for 21<sup>st</sup> education systems.

Thus, the paper attempts to reach beyond conventional polarised debates regarding the legitimacy of religion in relation to public education. Specifically, it turns on the meanings attributed to the *religious* and the *secular* and, accordingly, suggests that a comparative lens might be helpful in highlighting the limitations of an oppositional approach. In addition, the thrust of the paper rests on an underlying premise of *interculturality*, a premise which in this context challenges the assumed segregation of religious traditions from each other, both historically and currently.

*Interculturality*, as distinct from the prescriptive character of *interculturalism*, is used here to denote the realities of current and historical interactions between people of diverse heritages. Accordingly, interculturality can be viewed sociologically and manifested in such processes as synchronicity, hybridity and plurality. However, this not to deny the impetus given from a commitment to interculturalism which, to a large extent, has characterised the author's sustained involvement in the field of education and diversity. Interculturalism has certainly been subject to much critique (see Meer and Modood, 2011) and has often engendered responses ranging from the cynical to one of 'déjà vu'. Typical are accusations of a white educational establishment immersing itself in naïve, guilt-ridden, liberalism, while attempting to guard against the apparent ills of assimilation (see: Steinberg (2001). An intersectional, intercultural discourse also signals a degree of caution in relation to certain antiracist agendas which are frequently seen to be little more than an opportunity to indulge in simplistic political rhetoric. Central to this paper is the basic premise that the role of the educator is to engender change through enabling learners, both individually and collectively, to develop knowledge and understanding in a wide range of contexts, and thereby gain an increasing degree of control over their lives. Moreover, experience in the field of social studies education has provided the foundation for the argument that if education is not concerned with enabling young people to develop critical understanding and awareness it is deficient and unsuited to the modern world. However, at the same time, a parallel background in comparative education has also encouraged the more realistic observation that state-managed mass schooling systems will always shape and constrain that process.

As a rider, it should also be mentioned that there is an attempt, for the most part, to avoid a concentration on two areas which frequently attract public attention. The first of these areas is that of the activities of what many would designate as private 'fundamentalist' religious schools. The second is that which focuses on the impact of violent extremism and the apparent politicisation of faith. While both these areas, which at some level are sometimes perceived to be connected, arouse widespread concern and fear, often amplified by media intervention, they are judged to be a weak basis for theorisation and policy making. The central theme of the paper is at one and the same time more prosaic and more deep-seated.

At this point, it should be noted that an element in the construction of this paper is an assumption of the continuing significance of strong interrelationships between religion, mass education and the nation-state. This, in turn, is predicated upon the apparent resilience of religion as a dimension of social life which many had thought would have vanished in the wake of modernity. For such commentators, the persistence of religion is perhaps something of a curiosity in an era of apparent global modernity dominated by the fruits of science and technology (Bash, 2008). On the other hand, a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of religion might lend a degree of caution to such a conclusion.

For example, those with a Jewish heritage background (the author's own) may not necessarily find it at all strange that a disproportionate number of contemporary scientists also appeared to have hailed from such a background, reflecting the view that the Jewish tradition was frequently challenging as far as its religious character was concerned. For many of those who wished to retain their Jewish identity – and continue to do so – religious faith, as commonly understood, was not especially relevant. Notable academics and others who have acknowledged their 'Jewishness' but who have distanced themselves from the religious dimension have included: Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Marc Chagall and Albert Einstein. Still others have steered a path of 'non-overlapping magisteria' (NOMA) where religion is regarded as a realm of experience quite distinct from the realm of scientific enquiry and practice (Gould, 2006). On the other hand, religious faith continues to occupy a central place in the lives of many Jewish people – and for some it reigns supreme, to such an extent that it has given rise to public anxiety that it may have a detrimental impact upon children's learning and their capacity to be adequately equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to operate effectively in wider society (Abrams, 2015). The world of independent schools in the ultra-orthodox Jewish enclaves of North London, Jerusalem and elsewhere, gives rise to concerns as much as similar establishments allied to other traditions. Yet, such schools often appear to be beyond the reach of governments and therefore marginal to the overall relationship between religion, education and the state.

Nevertheless, from the standpoint of comparative education, there is little to challenge the observation of the fundamental role played by religion – and continues to be played – in the formation and re-formation of national education systems, from kindergarten through to the university sector. Moreover, for those who were initiated into the conventional academic subculture of comparative education it was axiomatic that the nation-state was the unit of analysis when undertaking investigations of educational phenomena. 'National character' and 'national culture' were the order of the day. The 'founding fathers' either explicitly showcased individual nations – such as Hans (1949) and King (1958) – while for others the nation was implicit. As a proviso, we are aware of



those who undertook regionally-based comparative studies, while there were others who decided that political-economic difference and socio-economic difference was of significance, as reflected in the well-worn binaries of: communist/socialist versus capitalist and rich versus poor. The perspective taken here, however, reflects a primary concern with what still others have considered to be core issues in education, surfacing in a diverse manner in the context both of educational practice and educational policy over the past fifty years in 'Western' societies. At the beginning of that period, and as befits that era, the focus was frequently on the need to generate social awareness in schools to enable the development of critical understanding against a backcloth of consumerism and depoliticisation (see: Bash, 1976, 1981a, 1981b). Religion appeared to be a social phenomenon, at least in Western societies, which bore little relevance since it was assumed to be on an inevitable decline into obscurity.

As a consequence, the paper attempts to approach these issues in a more eclectic, dynamic manner. Here, it is important to make some initial, fairly obvious, observations. The first is the recognition that the social construction of contemporary educational reality is a process which derives from the interplay between diverse macro and micro socio-economic, political and cultural phenomena. Given the place of religion in the process this somewhat unremarkable observation masks a complexity which requires further comment. It takes a mere glance at the histories of education systems and processes across the globe to pronounce with some confidence on the centrality of religion, at both the normative and institutional levels, in the majority of those histories. These histories will reveal that education has necessarily been largely anchored in religion, variously reflected in underlying philosophies, modalities of institutional governance, together with pedagogical theory and practice. The following would seem to exemplify the commonly accepted function of religion in respect of education in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century:

"It is no question of sect or dogma when a hope is expressed that religious truth, as derived from the Bible, in its plain, preceptive, and historical teaching, might still be an item of necessary instruction, since without it, it is hard to see how the character of the pupil can be formed, or the authority of the teacher upheld. Right and wrong must be maintained in a school. No minute, possibly, can pass in its curriculum without these being tested". (Melville, 1867)

While in 'late modernity' the governance of education apparently shifted to a more secular basis, especially with the exponential growth of science and technology, together with an increase in bureaucratisation, this was not a uniform process. In some cases, as with France, the governance of publicly-funded education and the control of curricula became the province of the secularised central state. In the United States, education was and is firmly entrenched as a state/local affair characterised by a softer version of secularism.

## 2. Religion and the public realm

Accordingly, this paper positions itself against a global backdrop of frequently conflicting perspectives concerning the legitimacy of religion in the public realm and seeks to engage with what may be considered to be key issues concerning the relationship



between religion and secularity in education. Specifically, there is an attempt to offer an overview of some crucial questions concerning religion, schooling and the state as a prelude to possible research which it is anticipated might yield fresh insights into the relationship between the religious and secular dimensions of educational and communal spheres of action.

The role of religion in public life is of course constantly rehearsed. The phenomenon of religious extremism is not new. Neither is the combination of the two, but until relatively recently, such a combination appeared to be confined to the past. At least, this is how it was perceived in popular Western discourse. A comparative, historical glance suggested a convergence of social systems: while religiosity, as measured by attendance at places of worship, had been in chronic decline for over a century in many Western countries, the erstwhile Soviet Union and its satellites had apparently banished organised religion to the margins. Moreover, despite the well-documented historical relationship between religion and education across nations and regions dominated by diverse heritages, there appeared to be, in an era of 'late modernity', an unstoppable movement in the direction of secularity.

Doubtless, this has been reinforced by the view that education and religion is indeed an unholy brew, a view which prompted an earlier examination of issues connected with the engagement of religion with education. Initially presented at a conference in Granada, Spain, in 2006 and appearing in a publication, 'Changing Knowledge and Education', two years later, possible tensions between education and religion were addressed (Bash, 2008). The primary task, it seemed, was to attempt to clarify the conflict between religion, on the one hand, and education in a modern liberal democracy on the other. It has long been apparent that the claims to knowledge which each was purported to have were not wholly compatible. Despite his often uncompromising tone the evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins (2006), together with his supporters, claimed with little fear of contradiction, that science sought explanations on the basis of a combination of rational, analytical thinking and empirical observation subject to public verification, while religion concerned the transcendent and thus not subject to the same tests. While, for the most part, that claim continues to be persuasive, there is at the same time an alternative argument which does not consider the realm of religion to be entirely antithetical to the quest for worldly knowledge and, by extension, to the realm of education. However, this would seem to depend on the extent to which religion is prepared not merely to tolerate the secular world but also to view secularity as a positive frame of reference for intercultural engagement, synchronicity and learning. For some religious traditions this may be a step too far - but for others it may be, as it were, a route to their salvation, especially those which have sought reconciliation with societal change. The following by Gita Sahgal lends support for this view (although, in the context of this paper, the preference is for 'secularity' rather than 'secularism'):

"When I say secularism, I do not mean the absence of religion but rather a state structure that defends both freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, where there is no state religion, where law is not derived from God and where religious actors cannot impose their will on public policy. A secular state does not simply limit religion, it also maintains the essential right of religious freedom as a duty not a favour. This means that it defends the freedom to worship and the right to maintain churches and temples, unhindered, and also defends minorities from attack". (Gita Sahgal, 2013)

Following this, much depends on the way in which secularity is conceptualised since, no less than religion, it is capable of being defined in diverse ways but, for the most part, secularity and religion are frequently viewed as mutually exclusive. The argument of this paper is based on the case for a secularity which is seen as compatible with the religious realm in societies which claim to be open, liberal democracies. This case is contingent upon a more cautious approach both to secularity and to religion where secularity denotes a space which facilitates the free articulation and interchange of knowledge, ideas and beliefs – and, most importantly, a space structured on the basis of equality. The secular space, defined in this manner, cannot operate effectively where there is unequal power, cultural domination and subordination, and hidden agendas. More constructively, the secular space is in a state of continual configuration, defined dynamically – and ideally – in the context of mutual respect, engagement, dialogue and inclusion. It is – to employ the terminology of Ivan Illich (1973) – a convivial space, experienced democratically and largely devoid of barriers.

However, the operation of such open secularity may often appear elusive, even in the supposedly enlightened Western hemisphere. We may judge this to be a somewhat limited interpretation of history, especially when applied to the context of publicly-provided education. The reality is characterised by a degree of complexity which bears some scrutiny and, in this context, reference may be made to one of the key symbolic events with regard to the legitimacy accorded to religion in the sphere of educational policy in the American public arena. This was the ‘Scopes Monkey Trial’ of 1925 which was referenced at a seminar presentation by James W Fraser (2016). Those whose knowledge of the trial was derived more from the Hollywood movie ‘Inherit the Wind’ than from historical sources were intrigued to discover that there was more to the case than appeared on the surface. The trial itself concerned the state of Tennessee’s ban on the teaching of evolutionary theory in schools, with Mr Scopes, the defendant who had taught evolution in defiance of the ban, surprisingly desiring a conviction with the expectation that it would result an eventual appeal to the US Supreme Court. The hope was that the court would deem the ban on the teaching of evolution to be unconstitutional and so have positive ramifications across the entire United States. However, in addition to this, it needs to be noted that the major protagonist on the prosecution side, while taking a fundamentalist, Christian, anti- evolutionist stance, was no simple ‘Bible Belt’ reactionary. On the contrary, he was apparently a left-wing radical politician who observed the dangers of the anti-egalitarian implications of evolutionary theory – wrongly, perhaps, when set against contemporary scientific thought - especially when observed in the context of eugenics with its now commonly accepted racist and classist connotations.

However, the long-term consequences for the relationship between religion and publicly-provided education in the United States were significant. Stephen Jay Gould noted that in 1999:

"...the Kansas Board of Education voted six to four to remove evolution, and the big bang theory as well, from the state’s science curriculum. In so doing, the board transported its jurisdiction to a never-never land where a Dorothy of a new millennium might exclaim, ‘They still call it Kansas, but I don’t think we’re in the real world anymore’.....". (Gould, 2006)

Yet, it *was* the real world for a majority of Americans, as indeed it has been for the majority of the global population. Evolutionary theory and other associated ideas could

be marginalised as the affected meanderings of atheistic academia. The somewhat overplayed narrative which privileges the regional divide in the United States – between the godly mid-west and the largely godless east and west coasts – nonetheless carries a sufficient degree of persuasiveness such as to provide something of a descriptive model to apply elsewhere. The legitimacy of religion as an essential, if not a defining, aspect of public life remains as much a part of rural Kansas as it does in rural Anatolia. Of course, we might wish to characterise such a distinction in terms of the obduracy of ‘tradition’ in the face of modernity. While late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century social scientists – Durkheim (1997), Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1946), Marx (Bottomore and Rubel, 1956) – in different ways assumed the inexorable triumph of ‘modernity’ they inevitably had to come to terms with social lag. *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, to use Tonnies’ (1955) terminology, appear to be able to exist side by side as social life based on ‘tradition’ and close kinship ties battles against the encroachment of patterns of human engagement grounded in contractual fleeting relationships.

Of course, those who find difficulty with positivistic, linear models of change might find a worldview which privileges the intersectionality of the traditional and the modern, or, in the case of this presentation, the religious and the secular somewhat more acceptable. Or, more specifically, the main focus here is the intersectionality of religion and secularity in the dynamics of national educational systems and, accordingly, attempt to deconstruct the binary division between the two in an attempt to demonstrate that there have been, historically, syncretic and dialogic processes.

### **3. Interrogating the religious and the secular**

As far as the modern nation-state is concerned religion appears to be a relatively tightly drawn concept. Insofar it is to be seen as a significant dimension of the social system a religion would need to possess a certain degree of power, if not authority. Thus, Western states might safely dismiss Scientology as a marginal sect or cult, while the conventional variants of Christianity and what is perceived as mainstream Islam are accorded legitimacy; indeed, the question as to what actually constitutes a religion may vary from one jurisdiction to another. Likewise, what constitutes the secular equally invites interrogation. For some, it is epitomised by a strict separation of religion from the activities of the state and, by implication, from public life altogether, while for others, the secular indicates a looser, inclusive concept, worldly but not necessarily anti-religious.

Let us pause to consider the manner in which publicly-funded school systems have sought to incorporate and/or maintain the religious dimension of education in the face of increasing secularisation. There are those states which have adopted legalistic positions, often enshrined in constitutions or in laws which have constitutional implications and, as such, are able to be examined with relative ease. Nonetheless, the complexities surrounding the relationship between religion and education in such systems can be quite forbidding and open to varying interpretation. States as diverse as Iran, Israel and Greece exemplify the constitutional centrality of religion and, by extension, the religious character of education. Collective identity and nationhood in these case are inextricably bound up with, and defined by, a specific religious tradition. However, in the case of Israel, there are complexities and tensions which make any kind of analysis difficult: the divisions and diversity within the Jewish population; a large Muslim minority; plus Christians, Druze and others.

By way of contrast, as is well-known, secularism rather than religion is considered to be one of the foundations of the modern French state. In the case of France, secularism is enshrined in the notion of *laïcité*, a highly politicised notion, with its revolutionary and Napoleonic genesis. *Laïcité* is a fiercely defended cornerstone of public policy in contemporary France – a correlate of *liberté, égalité et fraternité* – one outcome of which has been, inter alia, the ban on the wearing of the burqa in public. In present-day France, the secular space may be regarded as an exclusive arena as it attempts to exclude all trappings of religious expression. The result, many would argue, is that it unfairly discriminates against minoritised populations for whom religious expression is an integral constituent of ethnic and cultural identity.

Recently, Myriam Hunter-Henin, a comparativist in the field of law at University College, London, has written incisively on this theme, highlighting some of the tensions and contradictions existing between the apparent *égalité* of the burka ban, established in 2010, and its consequence of a denial of *liberté*, and in so doing challenge a fundamental premise of the modern French state:

"The eradication of difference that is sought by the new law is alien to secularism which even in its most virulent forms is designed to manage rather than deny diversity of beliefs. Nor is the new law a crusade for feminism. The ideal and abstract female image it defends does not support the dignity of veiled women but seeks to protect the comfort of the majority". (Hunter-Henin, 2012. p. 617)

In any case, argues Hunter-Henin, such an interpretation of *laïcité* is based upon sociological misreading, in that the donning of the veil or burka is frequently an expression of:

"... a personal quest for meaning and identity rather than by an extremist religious position...". (*ibid.* p. 617)

Or, it may function as a means of expressing commonality with others who view themselves as coming from the same cultural tradition, but with little or no connection with the religious dimension. The veil or burka may indeed have acquired what might be termed a *neo-secular* status in the context of style or fashion, much in the same way that the Jewish mystical practice of Kabbalah, in becoming secularised, has been taken up by those with no connection with Judaism. For this reason, drawing upon the example of France, I shall argue for a more careful consideration of the relationship between religion, state and education.

What may possibly be at the heart of the matter is a conflation of 'producers' with 'consumers' and a misguided conception of social order. We might wish to view the 'producers' in this context as agents of the state charged with the supposed responsibility of managing the social order so as to ensure the optimal outcomes for the population as a whole. Consequently, state agents arguably have an obligation to act in a manner which does not require adherence to 'universalistic' modes of behaviour if particularistic acts do not threaten the social order. Here, *liberté* may trump *égalité* (although Balibar has attempted to navigate a way through this age-old tension with his neologism of *egaliberté* ascribed to the necessary conditions for the attainment of citizenship).

Those living at the margins of French society, finding themselves in a structural position of being both feared and the object of fear, unsurprisingly retreat into constructed ethno/religious identities, further reinforcing segregation in a society which has hitherto



failed, at the political institutional level, to fully acknowledge its historic cultural diversity. (It is plausible, though by no means incontrovertibly the case, that this was an element in attacks which took place in French cities in recent years.) At a more hidden, subtler level, some might argue that *laïcité* represents a deeply rooted collective self-image which belies the self-satisfaction conjured up by the spirit of post-Napoleonic France. The apparent anti-clericalism of *laïcité* is not perceived to extend equally to all religious traditions and that Catholicism retains dominance, if somewhat submerged, within French national culture.

The situation in Britain, on the other hand, suggests that superficially at least it does not hold with the strictures of *laïcité*, viewing it as a peculiarly Gallic notion. However, this might be observed as a less than justified position of holding to a superior view of the rigidity of post-revolutionary France. It is a view emanating from some of the liberal intelligentsia of English academe and, more often than not, one which has not sought to question historic responsibility for the consequences of colonialism and neo-colonialism, not least, of course, in the case of Ireland. Indeed, it might be argued that is a degree of collective self-satisfaction with the manner in which England specifically (rather than Britain as a whole) has engaged with religious diversity since the Reformation. Indeed, the Church of England is sometimes portrayed as some kind of semi-secular space in which all can participate, partly a consequence of its official established status, and partly because adherence to its customs appears – to some – to require relatively little in the way of personal commitment or sacrifice, certainly when compared with other Christian traditions.

In England, as might be expected, there has been a continuing ‘muddling through’ with the established church (Church of England) sometimes having an active role in institutional and curricular governance, sometimes a relatively nominal role and at other times no role at all. Meanwhile, the general perception has been that the state at both central and local levels has conventionally negotiated an educational settlement, in respect of tax-funded schools, with the aim of meeting the religious demands of diverse groups as long as such demands were not seen as extreme, fanatical or fundamentalist. Accordingly, in addition to Church of England schools, a considerable number of Roman Catholic schools, a lesser number of non-conformist Protestant schools and a few Jewish schools could be accommodated in this manner. More importantly, fully tax-funded non-denominational ‘secular’ schools were expected to have a vaguely ‘Christian’ character. More recently, other so-called ‘faith’ groups (to use the conventional but somewhat problematic British terminology) have decided that they wish to have a slice of the tax-funded educational action. I shall return to the UK context a little later on in the paper (we might note, as an aside, that in recent times a previous chief rabbi of the UK attended a Church of England secondary school in North London.) At the same time it might also be argued that Anglicanism, however benignly inclusive it might appear on the surface, had – and possibly continues to have – ramifications in relation both to the curriculum and to school governance. It may also be seen in the broader context of the control and legitimation of educational knowledge which characterised British imperialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (together with other European powers), producing elitist systems which negated the legitimacy of non-Western knowledge traditions. Until the demise of the old empires secular and religious power coincided to some degree in the way in which elitist education systems operated, with a substantial amount of sub-contracting to missionary bodies. The

contrast with the post-imperial context and the seemingly rapid advance of Islam as a world religion in many of the ex-colonies, alongside the parallel growth of educational secularism in Europe and North America, and its incursion into the field of educational provision and the curriculum, caught Western academics somewhat unprepared.

## 4. Secularism and secularity

Thus, there is a proposal to make a distinction between secularism and secularity. Here, secularism is held to be an ideology which frequently operates rhetorically. It is a banner to wave in the course of conflict between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, while secularity points to a dimension of social relationships and institutional behaviour. It is the latter which lends itself to an investigation into the extent to which the secular and the religious might co-exist. At this point, it is suggested that there is a case in which secularity can be seen to be compatible with the religious realm – at least in those societies which claim to be open, liberal democracies.

In this way, there is an attempt to move the narrative from one which focuses on religion as a machine which processes individuals in defining their actions and their very existence and which, as a consequence, views engagement between peoples as highly problematic. It is problematic because such engagement is perceived ultimately to result in a compromise - possibly betrayal - of principles and of particularistic behaviours. The alternative narrative – drawing on the lexicon of economics – speaks of religion, as with culture in general, as a resource. This narrative is premised on the primacy of open educational discourse which is, by definition, intercultural and therefore at variance with those discourses which privilege particularism in ‘culture’ and confessional approaches to religion.

## 5. Constructing the secular space

As a consequence, the paper shifts from a systemic approach to one which focuses more on patterns of interaction. So, in attempting to navigate through the intersection of religion, schooling and the secular space it is possible to consider some underlying issues regarding the construction of the secular space as a defining characteristic of classrooms. The first is the question of a redefinition of the relationship between the state and the structures and processes of education such that it does not - either explicitly or tacitly – assume the hegemony of any one particular religious tradition. Secondly, there is the question as to whether the state, through the implementation of policy at all levels, needs to privilege intercultural engagement in the creation of the secular space as a prime characteristic of educational practice. It might be assumed that such engagement is neither dependent upon the presence of minoritised children or children of a so-called migrant origin - ‘visible’ or otherwise – nor, in the context of this paper, of the presence of those who adhere to minority religious traditions – or, indeed, to no religion at all. Thirdly, there is the issue of inclusiveness of educational practice where inclusiveness is not defined conventionally in terms of the need to ensure all learners are formally integrated into the classroom. Rather the issue is to be seen in terms of the discursive nature of educational practice and thus challenges the assumption that the secular space can be created solely on the basis of non-discriminatory, equal opportunities rhetoric.

A focus on the discursive nature of educational practice suggests that the creation of the secular is to be found in the process rather than in the product and that one way of looking at this process is to see it as grounded in what the philosopher and sociologist, Jurgen Habermas, refers to as *communicative action*. For Habermas, communicative action refers to:

"...those social interactions in which the use of language oriented to reach understanding takes on a co-ordinating role ..." (Habermas, 2008, p. 53).

We are well aware that language is a significant, complex, rule-governed means of symbolic interaction between human beings. Thus, in social interactions, the way in which language is used to undertake this coordination role pre-supposes an ascription of some kind of rationality to the 'other' which might be considered as somewhat problematic for an arena in which religious orientations are present. The point here is that effective communication between individuals is possible if the space is freely constructed on the basis of equity where there exist some basic rules, implicit in the manner in which communication is undertaken

Communicative action is enshrined in Habermas' (2000, 97-99) classic notion of the *ideal speech situation*. Although Habermas has since modified his ideas I consider that the notion of the ideal speech situation still has utility, especially insofar as it refers to discursive reasoning. In particular, in the field of intercultural education, we encounter continual disputation: claims and counter-claims in relation to rights, ownership, privilege, cultural superiority and inferiority, linguistic dominance and subordination, religious hegemony, and so on. Truth claims in these contexts are highly problematic and cannot be settled in a conventional pedagogical manner – if at all. Thus, in offering a critique of Habermas, no amount of assertion grounded in 'evidence' however convincing, will necessarily shift opinion and attitude. Therefore, we must look at the nature of the discourse itself to discern the possibility of cognitive and/or affective change among its participants i.e. the manner in which the communicative process reveals a process of reasoning.

So, here, we are talking about both cognitive and affective change which I argue are central for the secular space in education. To what extent can discourse grounded in a process of reasoning have an impact upon affective change, especially when viewed in the context of a web of diverse religious loyalties? Very young children are largely ill-equipped in this arena where 'facts' are largely grounded in taken-for-granted truths imbibed at an early age. Developmental theory derived from Piaget and Kohlberg might give some guidance regarding preparedness for the kind of dispassionate engagement required for a Habermasian ideal speech situation. More generally, however, there is an awareness of the limits of the power of reasoned discourse. It may be judged that Habermas has been correctly taken to task for over-emphasising philosophical reasoning and downplaying the role of rhetorical persuasion in discursive interaction, especially if the process supposedly engages hearts as well as minds.

The central issue for education is the extent to which the relationship between religion and the state impinges upon the capacity of schools to provide the secular space which this paper has been attempting to outline. A dominant religious tradition which, at the very least has the ear of the state and, in some cases, is an integral part of the state apparatus will assume a privileged position, especially in the influence upon the educational narrative and agenda. In this situation, rhetorical persuasion will never be

far from the surface and the problem is that if rhetorical persuasion gains dominance we are faced with potential coerciveness and the abandonment of the entire business of reasoned argument. And yet, the elimination of affect from discursive processes, especially in the context of intercultural education, may mean that learners are deprived of significant cultural resources which can be legitimately employed to provide sufficient ontological security to enter the arena of reasoned argument.

To put it another way, affect is significant for the provision of motivational reasons for communicative action. From Habermas' standpoint, communicative action occurs within the context of what he terms *lifeworlds* i.e. taken-for-granted shared cultural allegiances, and, yet, the ideal speech act is supposed to transcend such allegiances. However, one commentator, Abizadeh (2007), has made a useful attempt to resolve the reason/affect binary divide, which hindered Habermas, to enable us to engage fruitfully with intercultural pedagogy – and thus to the construction of the secular space. If a major goal of secularity in education is not simply one of disinterested – and possibly de-humanised – rationalistic discourse but one which facilitates empathic understanding (*verstehen*) then affect cannot be viewed as separate from the process of reasoning enshrined in the ideal speech act. On the contrary, it is a necessary condition. Thus, it is only when an empathic connection can be made between inter-subjective experience in one 'lifeworld' context with inter-subjective experience in another that communicative action occurs and reasoned discourse becomes possible.

Finally, if the premise of what has been argued throughout this paper is accepted there is the inevitable question as to what can and should be done to create the possibility of constructing this secular space. Much depends on the extent to which educational professionals – especially teachers and teacher-educators – are willing and able to exploit the opportunities which may constitute an unintentional outcome of educational policy. However, as religion continues to play a significant role in public life in diverse societies it is clear that it will also continue to have ramifications for publicly provided education. In an era of continuing migration flows new constituencies will frequently express the need for their voices to be heard with regard to education and the way in which schools are run. As a consequence there is the understandable temptation for schools and the state at large to respond accordingly. Thus, many Church of England schools which have become largely populated by students with an entirely different religious heritage may feel the need to change their character, as did some local board schools in the east end of London at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century having 100 % Jewish student populations. Such schools essentially became Jewish schools all but in name – Hebrew was taught, Jewish holidays were observed, and so on. However, it has to be emphasised that this was an era of assimilationism, when all schools – whether religiously confessional or not – saw their function as ensuring a high degree of integration into the overall socio-economic order. Certainly, in London around 1900, religious difference appeared to be entirely compatible with Anglicisation.

Currently, however, in the face of challenges to the conventional structure of the nation-state, the increasingly fluid nature of population movement, together with the complex nature of the interaction between diverse religious traditions demands the adoption of an alternative perspective. Such an alternative, as this paper attempts to argue, might be the promotion of educational policies which work to ensure that schools become convivial spaces where not only are all children welcome but that they are all equally valued in what they bring to such spaces. However, policies and practices with



regard to the place of religion in schools continue, to a greater or lesser extent and either explicitly or implicitly, in many liberal democratic societies, to protect hegemonic positions which at the same time raise larger questions concerning the role of religion in society. In this broader context such questions are to be viewed in relation to the shifting boundaries between the public and the private realms as well as competing conceptions of social justice. For many who hold to contemporary Western democratic positions on public life there are challenges to liberal world views and the limits to such liberalism. Or, to put it another way, such challenges concern the position of secularity in those societies which are characterised as products of the Enlightenment and modernity. The secular space as a dynamic characteristic of the classroom, together with its capacity to negotiate difference, is one thing. It is quite another thing to extrapolate that to entire nation-states. As Basil Bernstein (197) famously observed, education cannot compensate for society.

## **6. Conclusion: towards a research agenda**

This paper has been at a relatively high level of generality and has not sought to consider a detailed research agenda which might provide an evidential foundation for the arguments presented. However, the impetus for comparative research in this field is significant. It is insufficient to see it solely as a matter for academic deliberation; a central value-judgement is inevitable. In societies where a single religious tradition is dominant and where the institutional structure reflects that dominance it is often immensely difficult to convince policymakers that plurality and secularity have relevance in publicly-run schools. In such societies, prevailing religious traditions are viewed as non-problematic – unless of course there are strains, tensions and divisions within those traditions. Minority traditions, especially when they are the outcome of earlier religious schisms, are often viewed as deviant, frequently regarded with hostility and with their adherents labelled as apostates (such was the case of the English Reformation and Counter-Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century with denunciations and judicial and extra-judicial killings on both sides).

In a country such as Israel, there is a kaleidoscopic situation: state-funded Jewish schools ('secular' and 'religious'); state-funded Arab (essentially Muslim) schools; independently funded Christian (essentially Arab) schools; independently funded 'ultra-orthodox' Jewish schools; etc. Jewish hegemony is, however, taken for granted in Israel, it is, not unsurprisingly seen as the natural condition of existence. Anything else is, to say the least, somewhat odd – and given the segregated character of the school system and in Israeli society as a whole the secular space is highly restricted. Israel is certainly culturally – and religiously - diverse but intercultural engagement is sorely lacking, even within the Jewish population.

However, it is anticipated that it could provide a basis for a preliminary comparative study of debates, research, policies and practices in diverse countries. An enquiry of this nature might focus both on non-denominational 'secular' and confessional 'faith' schools involving both theoretical and empirical investigations. In addition, a consideration of historical trajectories will permit an examination of the variety of ways in which the larger issues discussed in this paper are playing out in Europe. Furthermore, such a study may indicate which of these have the potential to create a shared liberal space for calibrating social cohesion, cultural plurality and individual autonomy in what may be viewed as the secular space.

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## *Re-thinking comparative education and religion: temptations, traditions, and politics\**

*Repensando la educación comparada y la  
religión: tentaciones, tradiciones y política*

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## **Abstract**

This article opens by refusing some traditional ways to approach the theme of comparative education and religion-and-education. Partly, this is because some topics, in terms of religion and education, have been well covered. More generally, there is an explicit refusal of the clichéd assumption that 'comparative education articles' compare (e.g. education systems in Argentina and Australia, or in Brazil and Bolivia; and so on), juxtaposing narratives on any-old-topic which interests the writer, provided the narratives are about two or more different countries. Fortunately, some current changes in the 'epistemic gaze' of comparative education create new levels of theoretical difficulty and permit a break from the classic political equilibrium problem of the liberal secular state juggling education policy choices and juggling competing religious groups. Starting from a different axiom, a sketch of new possibilities is offered. The sketch is theoretically clumsy but it opens up a strategically different way to tell comparative education stories, of the kind which traditionally we have not tried to tell. The conclusion of the article makes a guess about why religion and education might again become a major topic in comparative education.

*Key Words:* comparative education; deductive rationalities; religion

## **Resumen**

Este artículo comienza rechazando algunas formas tradicionales de abordar el tema de la Educación comparada y la religión y la educación. En parte, esto se debe a que algunos temas, en términos de religión y educación, han sido bien cubiertos. En términos más generales, hay un rechazo explícito del supuesto cliché de que los 'artículos de educación comparada' se comparan (por ejemplo, sistemas educativos en Argentina y Australia, o en Brasil y Bolivia, y así sucesivamente), yuxtaponiendo narrativas sobre cualquier tema antiguo que interesa el escritor, siempre que las narraciones sean sobre dos o más países diferentes. Afortunadamente, algunos cambios actuales en la «mirada epistémica» de la educación comparada crean nuevos niveles de dificultad teórica y permiten una ruptura con el problema de equilibrio político clásico del Estado liberal secular que hace malabares con las opciones de política educativa y con los grupos religiosos en competencia. A partir de un axioma diferente, se ofrece un bosquejo de nuevas posibilidades. El boceto es teóricamente torpe, pero abre una forma estratégicamente diferente de contar historias de educación comparativa, del tipo que tradicionalmente no hemos tratado de contar. La conclusión del artículo hace una conjetura sobre por qué la religión y la educación podrían convertirse nuevamente en un tema importante en la Educación comparada.

*Palabras clave:* Educación comparada; racionalidades deductivas; religión

## 1. Temptations

This article does not begin with religion. It begins with sociology: T.H. Marshall made a distinction (in his Inaugural Lecture at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1946) between ‘the way to the stars’ and ‘the way to the sands’. He imagined a sociologist who was a slave to concepts; and a sociologist who was a slave to methods. The distinction still has power, seventy years later. It illuminates what is happening to English sociology of education and other branches of educational studies in current PhD and EdD training programmes; but it also helps in taking decisions about writing articles. This one will aim to get a bit above ground level, but not so much that vertigo sets in.

Thus the article will step back from the task of tackling comparative education and religion on a world-wide basis: it will step back from tracing, for example, the complex relationships of religion and education within international programmes for Education For All (Marshall, 2010) or trying to re-think the relations of religion and the education of women (King, 1987). The speed with which those two themes and their literatures is changing in the hands of specialists, including feminists, is impressive. Tackling those themes would be an act of hubris.

Similarly, the article will step back from what, in comparative education terms, is ‘the way to the sands’: an over-interpretation of ‘*comparative*’ and ‘*education*’ that creates the simplistic definition that ‘comparative education’ *must be* narratives about one society and descriptions of its ‘educational system’[sic] juxtaposed with (compared against) another society and descriptions of that educational system[sic]. Comparative education as a field of study is a bit more complicated than that.

The matching temptation, which is another invitation to do routine comparative work, is to look at the domestic - here, the theme of the United Kingdom itself, partly because the United Kingdom is axiomatically ‘a comparison’ in its own right. Such a comparison would involve narrating something about four nations and outlining the different religious traditions of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Within that account, it would also be necessary to describe minority and immigrant-minority groups whose religions are acknowledged in the publicly-funded educational system and within the private school sector that includes Catholic, Jewish and Muslim schools. However, any new narration of this kind (even of a complex case like the UK), were it well done, might add to the tradition and literature on the theme of comparative education and religion – but it is unlikely to disturb it.

## 2. Traditions: some of the literature

Certainly, there has been a lot of ‘comparative’ narration. In the history of comparative education, the theme of religion-and-education has been important. A conventional signal of that is whether the topic was covered within one of the (World) Yearbooks of Education which were part of cooperation between the comparative education departments of the Institute of Education of the University of London and Teachers College, Columbia. And, yes, there is indeed a volume devoted to the theme of religion and education, edited by George Bereday of Teachers College, Columbia and Joseph Lauwerys of the Institute of Education in the University of London (1966).

The tradition of looking at religion and education is, however, older than that. It is very visible in the writing of scholars such as Isaac Kandel (1933; 1936) and Nicholas



Hans. Indeed 'religion' was one of Nicholas Hans' "factors" which he outlined in his major book (1959) that constructed a classic perspective within the academic study of comparative education. His ideas became one of the basic, traditional, ways to think comparatively using the perspective of history. (Hans' other factors included language, race, geographic and economic circumstances, and political philosophes.) All, in various combinations, were and are powerful framing forces of educational systems.

In other words, within an historical comparative education gaze, religion can be shown to be one of the 'forces and factors' which was a major influence in defining identity and 'education': the expansion of Buddhism to China; the territorial explosion of the new faith of Islam which took it along the Mediterranean rim, south into Africa, and north into Spain; the mix of religions on the Indian sub-continent surviving well enough until the catastrophe after the very hasty withdrawal of the British at the beginning of the end of the imperial era. There has also the theme of bitter tensions between faiths (Jews as a community were massacred in England in the city of York as early as 1190 - an indirect part of the mass hysteria called The Crusades) and hatred within faiths, such as the fundamentalist desecration of images within Christian cathedrals at various points in European history; Protestants burning Catholics at the stake and vice versa. All this is well known and had clear impact on peoples' lives - and on art, music, architecture, languages, forms of writing, science, and assumptions about education.

Historically, political power and religion are often inter-twined; though the Roman Empire was remarkably tolerant of most (if not all) religious sects within the principle of 'render unto Caesar...'. In contrast, religion was an integral part of the expansion of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, most dramatically perhaps in South America. Other Empires - such as the British, the French, the Russian, and the late nineteenth century expansion of the American 'empire' outside of the continental United States - all had different mixtures and tensions between the secular motifs of Empire and the work of religious missionaries and decisions about what would count as 'education'. Those relations between religion and education - a motif in most empires - had quite dramatic variations. For example, Jesuits were among the early arrivals from Portugal to Brazil. In contrast, the British Empire in India began in trade. The East India Company, licensed to trade by the British State, kept extending its trading empire (sometimes with the use of military force) until the governance of 'India' - understood as a sub-continent rather than in its contemporary definition - was finally taken over by the British Government. Thereafter, in India, the religious enthusiasms of the Christian missionaries especially in the nineteenth century (and the religious motifs within what the British chose to call 'The Mutiny' in 1857) meant that Christian missionary movements, despite their popularity at home in Britain, were often seen by British administrators in India as a bad influence: one which made calm governance of a complex sub-continent difficult.

Contemporaneously, variations around the 'religious question' continue. For example, it remains clear that in Northern Ireland the theme of identity in terms of the tension of nationality AND religion underpins many of the disputes between the 'nationalists' and the 'unionists', as these are represented in Northern Ireland by the political parties of Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party. For example, it remains clear that in the United States (even if we ignore the astonishingly frequent invocation of God, in public, by American politicians) there were still in the twentieth century considerable tensions between religion-based and science-based interpretations of the world. In schools, what may be taught to children continues within a classic struggle between

evolution-and-science and extreme versions of religious belief, as the proper way to discuss 'man and nature'. For example, a powerful mix of religious and nationalist views and tragedies of violence continue in Afghanistan and Egypt, in Nigeria and the Yemen, in the former Yugoslavia and in Syria. Nor are more gradualist forms of adjustment between the past and the present, the relation of the secular and the religious, easy: for example, the tension between secular and religious-based versions of the Turkish State is a tension which has gone in and out of sharp focus, almost malevolently, since the secularisations of Turkey by Kemal Atatürk.

Thus, given such well known indications of the political and cultural, sociological and economic visibility of religion in contemporary affairs, it might be expected that, within comparative education, religion would be given regular and serious attention. It has been given serious attention, but that attention has not been regular: the major scholarly books on religion and education have not tried to offer an explicit comparative perspective: de Souza, Durka, Engebretson, Jackson & McGrady (2006); Catholic (Grace & O'Keefe, 2007), Islamic (Daun & Arjmand, 2018), Jewish (Miller, Grant & Pomsom, 2011) and Protestant education (Jeynes & Robinson, 2012). There is also literature in which the theme of religion is very important as a sub-theme but where a comparative motif is not explicit (for example in the World Yearbook Education on *Intercultural Education* edited by Coulby, Jones and Gundara (1997)).

One or two books have treated the theme of religion and education by the classical tactic of juxtaposition of narratives about various countries. One such book is edited by Charl Wolhuter and Corene de Wet (2014) with an opening essay by de Wet that sets out the themes of the book. The countries given attention – in fairly loose coupling, with considerable variation in the sub-themes of the chapters – are Armenia, Israel, Tanzania, the United States, the Netherlands, Greece, Brazil, South Africa, Japan, Malaysia and Iran (though this last chapter in the book takes the form of a bibliographic essay). Another relatively recent book, by Keith Watson and Bill Ozanne (2012) who are two well-known British specialists in international and comparative education, contains some reprinted articles: Katherine Marshall (2010) and an article by Watson and Ozanne (2010) themselves – for the obvious reason that the organising question of the book follows the title of their earlier article: 'education, politics and religion: can they ever be separated?' Answers are provided in three chapters which look at (different) aspects of the education of Christians in different places; a chapter on Jewish and non-Jewish education in Israel; an analysis of political Islam and the headscarf with special reference to Turkey; a 'comparative' chapter on the Sikhs in the USA, India and the UK by Bill Ozanne, and a chapter by Kamat and Mathew which spells out a theoretical position and then explores curriculum, in California and in Kerala, to try to interpret the likely consequences of using the pedagogic strategy of a politics of recognition or a politics of redistribution.

The latest book on religion and education within the field of 'international and comparative' studies is edited by Malini Sivasubramaniam and Ruth Hayhoe (2018) and looks at 'issues, tensions and possibilities'. In practice, this means that there are three chapters with broad themes (by the editors, by Katherine Marshall who returns to her topic of religion and global education challenges, and a chapter by Ruth Hayhoe which looks at the interactions of Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism). Then there is coverage of a remarkable number of places (Bangladesh, Canada, Kenya, Haiti, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Northern Ireland, Northwestern China, Russia,



Senegal, South Korea, Tajikistan, Thailand, Western China) with two closing chapters that look at 'diverse and interconnected societies' and a 'cluster analysis of 20 Western democracies.' The sub-themes of the chapters vary with the way in which religion and education is seen by the authors and editors as being important in particular locations, so the sub-themes covered include 'sustainable living', the 'modernisation' of Islam, 'religious extremism', 'desecularization', and 'multiculturalism and school policies and religion'.

Overall, then the theme of religion and education is visible in the contemporary comparative literature without, it may be suggested, being central to it. The tradition of lightly linking education and religion to the theme of multiculturalism remains. There are some changes -- for example the book by Malini Sivasubramaniam and Ruth Hayhoe escapes the tradition of giving a lot of attention to Christianity and a lot of attention to Europe. A changing world is being reported and so far, the study of religion and education has not, fortunately, collapsed into studies of 'evil empires'; this time religious ones. Good, but a slight puzzle remains. Can we get beyond reporting a changing world? Can we 'see' a different world, that is re-think the existing one? How, these days, should we deal with the Watson and Ozanne question: 'education, politics and religion: can they ever be separated?'

To get at these themes ('seeing', 're-thinking'), we need to assess what we are trying to re-think with. In more elegant language, what is the epistemic tradition which has shaped what counts as 'comparative education' and what are its emergent forms, now?

### **3. Traditions: comparative education**

It was hinted, earlier, that the field of study of comparative education should not be thought of as being defined simplistically by the 'form' of its texts (Afghanistan-compared-with-Zanzibar; or by research in which the number of hours of homework undertaken by children in five countries is counted, tabulated, and offered to the world with the word 'comparative' in the title of the research note). Such a definition of 'comparative education' trivialises it.

The traditions of comparative education are complex. Firstly, the field of study is extremely sensitive to the politics of 'the age' (or *Zeitgeist* if that expression is preferred). For example, between 1930 and 1950, the themes of comparisons of fascism and 'democracy' and 'communism' and education are very visible, as is the sensitivity of comparative education to forms of nationalism and the shaping of educational systems. Secondly, the tradition of comparative education shows major shifts in assumptions about a preferred epistemic gaze (for example 'history' versus 'scientific' thinking: that was a major squabble in the 1960s). The third discontinuity is emerging currently. From 1900 at least -- when Michael Sadler asked his classic question 'how far may we learn anything of practical value from the study of foreign systems of education?' (Higginson, 1979) -- comparative education has been in a reformist stance, worrying about the improvement of educational policy. It still does (Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012).

However, that tradition is beginning to change. Partly because of the startling oversimplifications of PISA as a specific type of comparative education (Cowen, 2014a) and its political and educational implications at domestic levels (Auld & Morris, 2016), and partly because it is more and more clear that - above 'the nation state' - new modes of the governance of educational systems have emerged (Jones, 2007), there is now a strong

interest in the transnational flows of power which shape educational patterns. What I normally call ‘the agenda of attention’ of comparative education is edging towards tracing new forms of *‘imperium’*. This means a strong interest in investigating the transnational mobilities and the shape-changing of educational ideas and practices when they move.

‘As it moves, it morphs’ (Cowen, 2009a) is a succinct statement of this problem which is an important one because we cannot describe, with any delicacy or complexity, educational ‘shape-shifting’. For example, our older vocabularies suggest our educational systems are ‘centralised’ or de-centralised; or that our universities are ‘public or private’; and so on. Each of these dichotomies is a statement of ‘shape’ – but of course the reality and complexity of educational shape-changing is outstripping our concepts.

We cannot instantly ‘see’ shapes. We are not sensitised to them (Cowen & Klerides, 2009). Yes, we can ‘see’ that the European Union has had an impact on education and there is good literature on that (Lawn & Grek, 2012; Nóvoa & Lawn, 2002). Yes, we have invoked ‘globalisation’ as an explanatory concept for over two decades (though we have normally edged into oversimplification (Cowen, 2009b). And, yes, we can see that school and university systems are increasingly ‘shaped’ by international and domestic rankings of educational performance. But we have neither a theory of the sociological and political impact of metrics nor a theory of the new, emerging, ‘shapes’ of school systems, in which traditional school structures, epistemologies, governance systems, and styles of assessment and evaluation are fracturing.

The challenge is to take up the theme of educational patterns at the intersection of international and domestic politics, and to be alert to ‘shape-shifting’ - which is likely to disturb those who think comparative education is about juxtaposing narratives of description of educational systems and their ‘contexts’; or about assisting in the practical reform of educational systems; or advising the Minister on how to move her (or his) educational system up the competitive ladder, created by PISA.

The challenge is also likely to disturb the literature though two ground-clearing steps might be sensible. A simple first step is to get rid of that conceptual albatross, ‘the educational system’ which so blocks fresh perspectives in comparative education and legitimates a pragmatic fixation on reform, as if we were politicians or educational administrators – an error which has a long history. Noah and Eckstein (1969), in their teleological account of comparative education moving from ‘traveller’s tales’ to ‘a science’, gave educational administrators (who looked overseas in the nineteenth century for examples of educational reform – persons such as Horace Mann in the USA or Egerton Ryerson in Canada) major visibility in the history of the field; as if comparative education should aim to become an applied administrative science.

Thus, secondly, a slight re-phrasing is not only useful but necessary: not ‘educational systems’ but ‘educational patterns’. ‘Educational patterns’ does not axiomatically mean ‘the school system’, with its elementary and secondary levels and examinations and so on; nor what is taught within it in the name of religion or excluded from it *because* it is religion; or the ‘wrong’ religion (Jackson, 2004). The concept of ‘educational pattern’ is taken, here, as including distinctions between the pure and the polluted, hierarchies of educated identity, the forbidden and the favoured, rituals and rites, and (in Basil Bernstein’s phrase) images of conduct, character, and manner. And so, where to start?

## 4. Perspectives

Perhaps with memories – memories of three books: Voigt's *Unto Caesar* (1938); Erwin Goffman's concept of 'total institutions' (1968); and Emile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995). What was shocking about those books is that they challenged routine forms of analysis and thinking. Thus Voigt's book for example, written in 1938 – and which I read in the 1950s in full knowledge of the bitter struggle between German fascism and Soviet communism in which, literally, tens of millions of people had died - illustrates the sociological similarities of their political systems. Goffman shocks by offering the possibility to see institutions devoted to 'good causes' (such as taking care of the sick or educating people) as places whose sociology constructs peculiar forms of identity and specific styles of oppression. And Durkheim, the son of a rabbi, shows the sociology of the sacred in a way which does not attack the sacredness of religion; but his analysis certainly suspends it.

And, there remains that small question of Watson and Ozanne (2010): 'education, politics and religion: can they ever be disentangled?' The short answer to that is "not often".

The three basic positions are clear: the domination of politics; the domination of religion; and efforts at a balance – typically the secular State with the religious freedoms of the individual being 'guaranteed'.

The third position – a secular State with religious freedoms guaranteed to the individual (about which there is always the occasional crisis and hint of muddle) - is very familiar in the examples of France and the USA, with the paradoxical United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, whose Queen is Head of the Church of England, managing nevertheless to have worked out all sorts of compromises. In the UK and in practice, the State - except in many of its public rituals of governance - functions more or less like a secular State, not least after a major and historic compromise in the 1944 Education Act about what would be taught in the state-financed schools as the only compulsory subject within the curriculum: 'religious education'. (There were minority rights of withdrawal from this compulsory subject, on the grounds of religious affiliation. Unfortunately, individual children did not have the right to withdraw on the grounds of mind-numbing boredom.)

The other two basic State positions tolerate less ambiguity, just as particular individuals might take their identity from Marxism, which locates religion; or a fundamentalist Christian or a fundamentalist Muslim might take their identity from religion, which locates politics. Similarly, with States: Oliver Cromwell's England insisted on religion as a major determinant of politics, as do contemporary Iran and Saudi Arabia. The USSR took politics to be determinant of the position of religion (only a few priestly seminaries of the Russian Orthodox Church were allowed to remain open in the socialist period); clearly the Chinese State remains concerned about the potential political significance of minority religions; as did Japan, with brutal consequences for Christian converts in the early seventeenth century. Obviously, it is possible to give precise examples of these patterns: the point has been pursued with varying degrees of determination in the comparative literature already cited on religion and education. That is true for, say, the Bereday and Lauwerys *World Yearbook of Education* (1966) up to the contemporary literature, though the literature tips towards illustrating the theme of the officially or constitutionally secular State - after a compromise with organised religion - guaranteeing individual rights to worship.

However, what if the question ‘education, politics and religion: can they ever be disentangled?’ becomes ‘education, politics and religion: are they the same?’ Clearly this has been a real-life goal in some States; though the full fusion so far, with the possible exception of classical Sparta, has always broken. More generally, the point is that the suggestion ‘education, politics and religion are the same’ (in severally significant sociological ways) gives a sense of shock - but also permits several dimensions of religion and politics and education to be seen in a fresh way.

Here, three such ways will be identified in increasing order of theoretical complexity: illustrations of (a) sociologies of the construction of identity; (b) discursive frames; and (c) symbolic symbioses.

(a) *sociologies of the construction of identity*

What we need to be alert to are the ways in which, in politics, in religion, and in education, the construction of identities is captured in roles and rituals, assemblies and processions, and definitions of the pure and polluted within the sociology of institutions. In education in the USSR (and reflecting socialist politics there and in East Germany, etc.), the white shirts and red scarves and Lenin badges of the Octobrists and Young Pioneers in the USSR celebrate a concept of community and socialist modernisation. The formal ties, collars, hats, and the display of small totems – marks of status on the clothes of the English public school boy and English public school girl - reflect future elite status. The nominally romantic (but gender-specific) *Wandervögel* and strenuous physical exercise - as well as comradeship and explicit political messages - of the Hitler *Jugend* anticipate a future marked by *Lebensraum*. All of these ritualised roles define identity rules, the pure and the polluted, and construct a community, as do gender-specific forms of dress encouraged within Islam, and the clothing and gender-framed rituals of various forms of Judaism.

Similarly, in religion, politics and education, processions and music confirm emotionally the nature and hierarchies of a religious, political, and educational community: processions in Greece and Italy and Spain, or Bali and Brazil, mark religious and national identity simultaneously – or as a minimum, religious and local community identity; the processions which attend the formal opening of Parliament in London confirm, in clothing and formal symbolic gestures, the history and hierarchies and political principles of the governance of the United Kingdom. Given the old tradition of English schooling – that the school day opens with a collective act of worship - the processions of staff and selected pupils dressed in formal clothes, walking to carefully chosen music (often religious) confirm a community, both its collective identity and its interior hierarchies. Perhaps one of the more charming rituals of recent interest, is the confirmation of political identity through military parades, allegedly done fairly well in Paris, London, Edinburgh and Moscow; although less so and less frequently it would seem in the USA.

The analogy can be pushed further: religion, educational patterns, and politics all contain sequences: age sequences, clothing-as-uniform sequences, sequences of admission, and perhaps moments of conversion, formal shifts in identities of belonging – moments of ‘admission’ to another identity. Recruitment to the Soviet Komsomol was one such moment in education at the intersection with politics; being awarded the badge of ‘prefect’ in the English secondary school system was another. In religion there are moments of ‘confirmation’ and admission to full membership of the religious community – as there are in the admission to ‘Party Membership’ which usually has hints of special



honorific status and commitment to action, both in terms of the transmission of the faith and practical effort to build the future - for example the 'cadre schools' of Mao's China.

And finally, 'the faith' almost always involves a 'holy book' - in this instance the *Little Red Book* of Mao Tse Dong (which - compared to *Mein Kampf* - had the virtue of being less heavy and so, to great visual effect, it could be waved by converts). In the major organised religions, there is a Holy Book, and mastery of at least some - and sometimes all - of its contents is demanded as a principle for membership. Of course, we do not have that in education, do we? We do. Sometimes the sociological equivalent for admission to the mysteries is Latin; sometimes a display of Marx-Leninist thought; and just as there are hierarchies and several levels of membership of a church beyond a basic ritual of admission (say, baptism or verbal acceptance of conversion), so the basic marker for admission to full membership in formal education is not age - the moment when education becomes an obligation - but the *baccalaureat*, the *vestibular*, 'high school graduation' (as in the USA), the *Abitur*, or the gaining of three A Level subjects (as in England). That is, the moment when 'education' becomes an identity.

### (b) discursive frames

Politics, religions and educational patterns all have the potential to be framed by 'deductive rationalities'. A deductive rationality is a very small number of clear principles from which actions can be deduced (Cowen, 2005) and the pure and the polluted can be defined. For example, Mao's "Learn from the workers, soldiers, and peasants" is a deductive rationality. The point is NOT whether the initial proposition is rational. The point is, if you take the proposition as an axiom - a 'rationality' - then deductions from it can be done relatively easily and relatively systematically (as if the axiom were true).

In politics, in the case of Maoism, this included the closing of schools and universities for a period of two years. In the case of Maoism, this included a theory of what needed to be learned and how it was to be learned and a vision of a social world. To be 'red and expert' meant to acquire a socialist consciousness, and later specific expertise in some branch of labour. And of course the proposition ("Learn from....") contained not merely a definition of a teacher but a pedagogic theory - learning by practical example - and a definition of what was pure and polluted (e.g. bourgeois teachers; with murderous consequences for some individuals at the hands of the Red Guards). In religion (for example, in the radical position of Luther, the Spanish Inquisition, Puritan New England) the basic principles of the religion - which normally include a definition of a social world on this earth - become 'deductive rationalities'. From the basic principles, a very small number of explicit propositions can be deduced, such as 'do not take life' or 'respect all other religions' (or the opposite). These provide a definition of the identity of the believer and are a theory for life-living. Similarly, a teacher - probably specially marked off by status, obvious charisma, training (such as years of meditation), clothing (such as a 'clerical collar', or the robes of a Buddhist novice or a monk) - can be publicly identified. But we don't do that in education, do we? We do. In education, the invocation of (economic) globalisation became a deductive rationality within neo-liberal states. This included a theory of what needed to be learned and how it was to be learned; for example, dropping the word 'education' and using the concept 'skills' instead; constructing schools and university systems as a 'market' in which they would 'succeed' i.e. show their own market competence and distribute market competences to students; and defining quality as

that which can be measured by tests of attainment, rather than be deduced from classic visions of what 'education' is. Of course this neo-liberal 'educational' vision is extreme, but that comes from the confidence of being certain. Certainties always affect education - between the wars of the twentieth century, there were the aggressive certainties, and the educational rubrics of Nazism and Communism. After about 1970 we have witnessed the over-confident certainties of extreme forms of the neo-liberal state and its educational prescriptions being read off - as in Australia and England - the deductive rationality of 'economic globalisation'.

Deductive rationalities of these kinds, in politics, in religions, and in education, may provide an extreme definition of the pure and the polluted: heresy and the heretic, though the specific vocabulary of the period might speak of 'enemy of the party', or a category of persons (*kulaks* in the USSR or 'landlords' in Mao's China) might collectively be so labelled - and punished in the same way as there was clear intent to punish Luther or Henry VIII. But we don't do that in education, do we? Yes, we do. Children get banned from schools. Even a minor criminal act, officially recorded, will ensure an individual may not teach. Tenure in universities usually depends on not being a heretic. Heretics are those who have not absorbed clear messages about 'performativities', whether these be principles of output ('five articles in the top ten journals in the field of study published within five years') or principles of process ('research will be robust': i.e. only empirical research will count as 'quality' research) or principles of relevance: i.e. contribute to policy formation or be sure your work has immediate social and economic impact. Universities in England have established principles and practices which define academic purity: training courses for MA and PhD students in learning how to do 'robust' research, and in-house training courses for academics in how to be 'relevant'.

Deductive rationalities of these kinds, in politics, in religions, and in education, are likely to provide sharp definitions of time-past and time-future. The confidence of being certain, and the deductive rationalities that go with it, create a messianic sense of things which are wrong with the past (such as a certain kind of image in a Christian church or the existence of Confucian temples, or Buddhist statues - so they should be destroyed). The religious and architectural past itself is judged not merely to be delinquent and disident; but disposable. There is a moment when 'the present' begins, captured for example in the Christian 'Before Christ' and 'After Christ' as a dating system (even if *Anno Domini* does not translate literally as 'after Christ'). In politics and in religion, a future is specified; and the future in the secular vision - with the occasional exception (such as a speech by Winston Churchill) - is always good, and in the religious vision often delightful. Political and religious systems both offer definitions of heaven, although one definition is axiomatically secular (the dictatorship of the proletariat; 'independence or death'; or 'the republic'). History is always finishing. But we don't do this in education, do we? Yes, we do. In English educational history there is the messianic moment of the abolition of the 11+ examination and of most of the grammar schools (the selective academic secondary school). A messianic future of common schools for all ('comprehensive schools') beckoned. The Institute of Education itself, within the University of London, was for a moment immersed in a new discourse - as a deliberate ideological move - about 'the old Institute': semi-explicitly under a new Director, there was for a moment a 'New Institute'. The common-sense notion that the 'new Institute' would grow old was lost within the considerable enthusiasms of in-house ideologues. More generally major public moments in education (in England, such as the 1944 Education Act, or the Plowden Report or the

Robbins Report – but parallels can easily be found for France, Spain, the USA and so on) – are moments which axiomatically define a bad past and a good future.

*(c) symbolic symbioses*

Boston in Lincolnshire in England is directly related to the naming of Boston in the United States, as are place names such as Duxbury and Bridgewater and Plymouth and so on; but the relationship is not as romantic and relaxed as it might appear to be at first sight. ‘The Pilgrims’ who sailed on the Mayflower (and whose descendants are so celebrated in the United States) were a nuisance within existing forms of governance and tradition within Europe – an irritant to the political authorities of both England and the Netherlands. The groups that came to be called The Puritans (persons trying to rid the English Reformed Church of what they judged were the remnants of Catholicism) were political dissidents. Their religious position had gradually become a political position. This pattern, where a religion becomes a politics, has a long history, often marked by blood: the Druids in Wales and Jews at Masada within Roman Empire; as indicted earlier, Christians in Hideyoshi’s Japan; the Protestants in the Low Countries and the Spanish Bourbon empire; the Cathars and the violent history of the Languedoc in France; the Mao Mao in Kenya within the British Empire; or the Buddhist protests by priests against the shaping of South Vietnamese society in the mid-1960s by a small Catholic governing elite. The list of illustrations of religion-as-resistance is remarkable: Catholicism in ‘communist’ Poland; Methodism in England; and cataclysmic events such as the Thirty Years War, the creation of Pakistan, and the fracturing of Yugoslavia which became, like the Holocaust, part of the tragedy of religions and politics. These are situations in which religious identity becomes a political identity. However, many of these situations are not a complex symbiosis but a conflict which becomes binary: one identity does not permit another, except through an act of renunciation and conversion, as with Jews during the Spanish Inquisition.

There is a more complex and very different sociological process which is symbiotic.

Phrasings such as ‘political religion’ used by Emilio Gentile for Italian fascism (1990; 2005; 2006) hint at serious efforts to decipher the probability that “In modern society, secularization has not produced a definitive separation between the spheres of religion and politics” (Gentile, 1990, p. 229) while along with “.... this process of secularization within both the state and society, there has also been a ‘sacralization of politics’, which reached its highest point in the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century” (ibid). Interpretive comment about fascism as a political religion goes back, at least among Italians, to the 1920s, includes an assessment of the politics of the Lateran Pact with the Pope, and even permits reinterpretations of Mazzini’s ideas and their relation to the *Risorgimento*. This and other literature makes firm distinctions between the Italian fascist and Nazi and Soviet forms of a ‘political religion’ (Burleigh, 2007).

Granted then that such reinterpretations of politics now have a considerable history (and that Voigt’s work was also brilliantly of its time), we have an important shift in concepts.

The core theme of the classical comparative education literature on religion and education is an equilibrium. Normally, there is a secular State. In places of early revolution, such as France or the USA, or in certain kinds of Empire (the British in India or the Japanese in Korea) or in ‘mature democracies’ such as Australia or Canada or

Scandinavia, organised religion (e.g. the Catholic Church or missionaries or the Lutheran Church) is a policy question: it is 'balanced' within a political version of an equilibrium. In other places with a different kind of revolution (as in the USSR) there is a 'crushing' of religion – which is a dramatic collapse of a former political equilibrium of governance. In other places (such as Iran) religion is so dominant the 'the State' disappears, nominally a dramatic collapse of a political equilibrium. This of course is nonsense in an empirical sense (Daun & Arjmand, 2018). It is also too tight as a theoretical perspective. It is a consequence of thinking in terms of a theory of domestic politics which makes a distinction between the King and the Bishop, between the Holy Roman Empire and the Pope, a dichotomy between the secular and the sacred, between the State as an agency of governmentality and religion as an expression of community, a distinction between temporal and mystical identities.

The second crucial shift – religious modes of shape-changing, the sociological mutation of religions - is extremely well illustrated by Mona Atia (2012): the way in which one religion, Islam, is being re-thought and transmitted in such a way it makes religious sense of the changing world of high modernity and permits coherent action on it and within it. A different shape-changing - illustrated with remarkable subtlety and complexity by Janette Habashi (2011) – indicates how a 'religious identity' became and continues to become an identity of political resistance, while remaining a religious identity. This is a long way, historically and sociologically and comparatively, from some of the future Pilgrims getting arrested near Boston, Lincolnshire, England on a dark night in 1607. The Pilgrims do symbolise religion-as-resistance in England but they do not symbolise symbiosis. That complexity is marked by more difficult vocabularies, such as the 'sacralisation of politics' and 'pious neoliberalism'.

Thus the final layer in changing the perspective of comparative education on religion-and-education is to recognise that what is now called 'education' is a secular ideology which is internationally mobile. The ideology combines an economic rubric about skills and a political rubric about human rights and it is a mobile discourse, a form of the flow of international power. Within Martin Wight's typology of international political relations, it is certainly not an illustration of Hobbesian realism, nor is it 'messianic'. That said, what is in theory a 'rationalist' position is starting to have revolutionary effects 'in the minds of men' (Cowen, 2002) where allegedly 'the defences of peace are constructed.' However the whole of the 'Westphalian position' in international political relations theory is now being seriously discussed (May, Wilson, Baumgart-Ochse & Sheikh (2014) – which is likely to have considerable implications for theorisation in contemporary comparative education.

In the short term, it is probably no longer possible for analyses in comparative education of 'religion and education' to remain so determinedly domestic, so inter-national, juxtaposing illustrations of policy adjustments and stable and labile and collapsed equilibria of State-and-religion-and educational relations. A world of transnational mobilities and symbolic symbioses beckons and how to think about that is a stern challenge.

## 5. Conclusion: perspectives on politics

It may be clearer by now why this article avoided moving directly to the theme of education-and-religion. The article was emphasising the first half of its title: it was trying to disturb the literature of comparative education itself. One step towards that was noting



and worrying about some of the traditional but almost invisible assumptions of the comparative religion-and-educational literature: it has tended to be 'comparative' in the simplistic sense – after introductory reflections about education and religion, it has concentrated on (loose) juxtaposition of descriptive narratives; it has tended to be concerned with equilibrium, in the sense of the secular State staying in balance, given 'the problem' of religions; and it has tended to discuss religion when it was a salient policy problem in education, usually within the implicit assumption that comparative education includes a reformist agenda of action.

Indeed that creates a nagging background puzzle which was there from the beginning of the article: why has the theme of religion not remained very close to the centre of the comparative education literature? There are clear reasons why it should be a continuing motif. Those reasons include the need to know the complex relationships between religious background and educational attainment (PEW, 2016) and the emergence of new forms of continuing tensions between secular States and minority religious groups, whether this is in the relationships of fundamentalist Christians in the USA to national politics and new forms of populism, or Muslims in China. The tentative answer of course is that discussion of new kinds of States (both neo-liberal and supra-national States like the EU) displaced traditional themes, such as religion, as an urgent topic. The important world was not the world of religions but the world of economics. 'Globalisation' as an economic system (Held et.al. 1999) has been central to the ways in which much of the comparative education literature and many politicians in many societies have addressed education, until the tweeting of Mr Trump.

As usual, even in this remarkable situation there is a final irony which is offered as a conclusion (though that is exactly what it cannot be). Ironically, it is a new beginning: religion as a theme is returning to the literature in an old disguise.

When I went to study at Trinity College Dublin, as part of my formation as a future teacher, my responsibilities included doing some teaching practice under supervision, the reading books by Plato and Herbart, attending lectures on the history of Irish education, on health education, and on comparative education (and wasting long autumnal afternoons on psychological experiments the point of which – for practical pedagogy – could have been explained with total clarity in less than five minutes). So, I was studying in an education course which was solid and sensible (with the exception of the psychological experiments); all quite proper and predictable. However, I was startled towards the end of the first term by a small-group seminar in the Professor's room with a paper given by a student - on Max Weber. I had been reading him, very happily, at the London School of Economics and Political Science where I had just finished my first degree. But Weber in Trinity College, with its Oxbridge atmosphere, the Book of Kells on display, and a promise to be read out in Latin before one could gain membership of the Library? It took a few moments for the click to occur. Teachers in training at Trinity College, Dublin (many of whom might be expected to work overseas in places such as Africa - the health education lectures had included advice on how far apart beds in the dormitories in boarding schools should be placed - were being introduced to Weber's theories about economic growth and Protestantism. Trinity College was very much an Anglo-Irish college, with a tradition of training a Protestant elite within an Ireland that celebrated the Catholic faith. The seminar – and its sociological quality was steady enough – was also cultural and political; a confirmation of religious-political identity.

Sometime later... it looks as if the theme of religion is about to be rescued by the puzzles of 'development' and religion and economic growth. This theme is one motif in the new book, mentioned earlier, edited by Malini Sivasubramaniam and Ruth Hayhoe (2018). But the theme is - almost - central to the brilliant analysis by Mona Atia (2012) which, rooted in the literature of political geography, invents and illustrates the concept of 'pious neoliberalism', faith-based development, and Islam.

So at some time in the future, the irony is that the theme of religion and education may be routinely rescued as a theme of importance - in the international and comparative literature - by failures in economic development (in what used to be called 'the Third World') and by the perennial question: what kinds of religion are linked with relative economic failure and what kinds 'cause' of success? *Plus ça change...*

But of course it is not really the same thing: religions - Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Shintoism and so on - and politics, and education shape-shift, implode sociologically into each other, and it becomes necessary to invent new forms of comparative understanding. That, at least in my judgement, is clear. However, what those new forms of comparative education are, or might be, is not.

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# 4



## *Educación comparada, Teología y Postrelativismo*

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*Comparative Education, Theology and Post-relativism*

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## **Resumen**

Los procesos de Globalización y Postmodernismo han determinado la necesidad de operar un reajuste del corpus epistemológico de la disciplina comparativa de la educación necesario para integrar las exigencias gnoseológicas de dichos discursos en nuestro saber. Adicionalmente a ello, la resolución de las vulnerabilidades científicas de la Educación Comparada, y el logro de una fase postrelativista en la construcción del discurso de nuestra ciencia, requiere del concurso del trabajo interdisciplinar en la elaboración de dicho discurso. Particularmente imperioso se revela en el abordaje de los retos epistemológicos aludidos el acometimiento de un trabajo interdisciplinar con las ciencias teleológicas de la educación que cimienten y asienten en bases sólidas la elaboración y articulación de una disciplina comparativa fecunda y estable, más allá de los cambios teóricos disciplinares que conllevan los ciclos históricos sucesivos.

*Palabras clave:* Globalización; Postmodernidad; Educación Comparada; epistemología; interdisciplinariedad; Teología

## **Abstract**

The phenomena of Globalization and Postmodernism have determined the need to overtake a readjustment of the epistemological corpus of the comparative discipline in Education, necessary to integrate the demands of such discourses in our academic field. Additionally, the resolution of the scientific vulnerabilities of Comparative Education, and the achievement of a postrelativistic phase in the construction of the discourse of our discipline, demand the competition of an interdisciplinary work in the construction of such discourse. Particularly overriding in the approach of the epistemological challenges mentioned, is the commitment of an interdisciplinary work with teleological sciences of education, that allow the foundation and settlement in solid basis of a fertile and stable comparative discipline, beyond the natural changes of successive historical cycles.

*Key Words:* Globalization; Postmodernity; Comparative Education; Epistemology; Interdisciplinarity; Theology



## 1. Vulnerabilidad y fortaleza de la Educación Comparada

El carácter internacional y transfronterizo del proceso de la Globalización conduce inexorablemente a la potenciación y legitimación de disciplinas como la Educación Comparada. En este sentido, autores como Cowen y Kazamias prodigan la gran fecundidad de esta disciplina en estos primeros años del siglo XXI en términos de producción científica y organización de congresos y redes internacionales (Cowen & Kazamias, 2009, pp. 3-4). No obstante, estos autores matizan y apuntalan su diagnóstico introduciendo un cierto escepticismo en sus manifestaciones en relación a la salud real de nuestra disciplina: «Las estructuras superficiales de la Educación Comparada –sus revistas, sus departamentos, sus sociedades profesionales– parecen gozar de una excelente salud. Por debajo de la superficie, no obstante, hay confusiones en relación a lo que de hecho es la Educación Comparada o lo que ella podría ser» (Cowen, 2009, p. 964).

Los académicos comparatistas de la educación nos hallamos en un momento de reajuste del corpus epistemológico y metodológico de la disciplina necesario para integrar las exigencias gnoseológicas de los discursos postmodernos en nuestro saber. Con vistas a que este proceso sea operado con las máximas garantías de fecundidad y éxito, la comunidad comparatista de la educación debemos acometerlo desde el reconocimiento de los puntos vulnerables de nuestra ciencia, y de los elementos –también– de extraordinaria fortaleza que permiten la vertebración de nuestra disciplina en sólidas bases futuras.

Las dificultades epistemológicas de la Educación Comparada son reconocidas por la gran mayoría de académicos comparatistas de los diversos entornos geográficos. Así, Rappleye (2014, p. 93) afirma que «(...) la disciplina está (...) de forma incesante en búsqueda de sí misma». Por su parte, Manzón (2014, p. 127) se pregunta: «¿por qué no hay una forma universal de Educación Comparada?». La pluralidad (algo caótica, podemos decir) del ámbito de la Educación Comparada ha sido resumida por académicos como Cowen en la afirmación de que «existen muchas educaciones comparadas» (2009, p. 4). En su emblemática obra de *Fundamentos de la epistemología de la Educación Comparada*, el catedrático español García Garrido también se hace eco de las «discusiones y muchos más desacuerdos sobre su objeto» (1996, p. 113) que tradicionalmente han caracterizado a la epistemología de esta ciencia. García Garrido enumera hasta seis posturas existentes defendidas por los diversos académicos comparatistas en relación con el objeto científico de la Educación Comparada (1996, pp. 92-96). Así, si bien la disciplina de la Educación Comparada se revela un ámbito científico de gran tradición y solera que se remonta a la Antigüedad Grecorromana, en estos primeros años del siglo XXI esta ciencia sigue revelando una extraordinaria pluralidad, heterogeneidad, hibridación, diversidad y eclecticismo que han determinado la gran dificultad experimentada por los académicos consagrados a la misma en articular de manera consensuada elementos epistemológicos básicos como, muy particularmente, el objeto de estudio de la misma. Podemos afirmar sin ningún género de dudas, que esta heterodoxia y disenso en relación con el elemento más nuclear y sensible de un campo científico –su objeto de estudio– constituye una de las mayores vulnerabilidades, quizá la mayor, que aquejan al desarrollo unánime y coordinado del corpus epistemológico comparativo en educación. Como todos los comparatistas de la educación conocen, durante largo tiempo en el desarrollo de la disciplina durante la Modernidad, un número mayoritario de académicos comparatistas, tanto en

el siglo XIX como en el siglo XX (en no escasa medida por decisivo influjo del precursor positivista Jullien de Paris), se han suscrito en sus trabajos académicos a la concepción del objeto de estudio de la Educación Comparada como el estudio comparado de los «sistemas educativos». Acreditados comparatistas han luchado a favor de una interpretación amplia de esa concepción objetual, advirtiendo de la necesidad de «eliminar la actual identificación fáctica entre lo *educativo* y lo *escolar*» (García Garrido, 1996, p. 110). Con esta apostilla estos académicos no solo han roto una lanza en favor de las concepciones y el carácter educativo de los entornos no formales sino que, al mismo tiempo, y sin explícitamente pretenderlo, han avanzado hacia posturas epistemológicas cercanas a las sostenidas por científicos como Tusquets, los cuales abogan por una concepción de la Educación Comparada como ciencia o saber que se articula en torno al estudio comparado de la «educación» ampliamente entendida a través del método comparado, aspecto este último cuyo rigor y fundamento cobran una importancia mayúscula como sustento de primer orden de la investigación comparativa. El comparatista británico Cowen, en su extraordinaria e innovadora obra *International Handbook of Comparative Education, IHCE*, editada de forma conjunta con el comparatista griego-americano Kazamias, también aborda la temática objetual. Su visión ontológica es interesante, y está a caballo entre la concepción objetual de Tusquets y la de los académicos más ortodoxos. Así, Cowen esboza que, más allá de la variación de los «puzzles normales» de un determinado periodo (Cowen, 2009, p. 1.285), hay ciertos temas básicos que todos los académicos de la Educación Comparada han explorado a lo largo de un prolongado período de tiempo: «hay una sorprendentemente similar agenda profunda» (ídem). Dicha agenda, en su análisis, se vertebra en torno y en el seno de una constelación de ideas nucleares o «ideas unitarias» que, prácticamente, unifican este campo de estudio. La entidad de dichas ideas es la siguiente: espacio, tiempo, el Estado, sistema educativo, identidad educada, contexto social, transferencia y praxis (ídem). En el apartado prospectivo que Cowen redacta en esta emblemática obra del *IHCE*, este académico añade las ideas de «cambio de forma» –*shape shifting*–, «rosetas educativas», vuelta a la tríada de relaciones (transferencia, traslación y transformación), y lectura de lo global, como ideas de necesario procesamiento y abordaje en la construcción epistemológica del ámbito comparado en educación para superar la «trampa modernista» y el subsiguiente dilema de un bajo nivel de problemática intelectual y teórica, en la construcción de la epistemología comparativa (Cowen, 2009, p. 1.288).

Un segundo elemento de vulnerabilidad en nuestro ámbito disciplinar lo constituye la cuestión metodológica. Hace unas décadas, el desarrollo de la disciplina comparativa de la educación en líneas de Modernidad reveló un cierto consenso metodológico en torno al cual se articuló el trabajo de los comparatistas: «(...) el acuerdo sobre la existencia y aplicabilidad a la educación del método comparativo ha sido una constante –iuna de las pocas! – entre los cultivadores de nuestra disciplina, de Jullien a nuestros días» (García Garrido, 1996, p. 114). No obstante, este mismo experto comparatista admite, tras ello, la existencia de enfoques diversos en la metodología comparada (ie. descripción, explicación, aplicación, valoración) y, a la postre, la «validez científica de una pluralidad de enfoques metodológicos» y la necesidad de «evitar la tentación del monopolio metodológico» (*ibídem*, pp. 115-121); además de reconocer la existencia de métodos y técnicas auxiliares que incluyen la contribución de la reflexión filosófica, de la metodología histórica y de las aportaciones de las ciencias sociales (*ibídem*, pp. 136-166).

El aspecto metodológico de las investigaciones comparativas constituye una de las partes más sensibles y relevantes de los estudios de nuestro ámbito. El editorial del mes de noviembre de 2017 de la norteamericana *Comparative Education Review*, *CER*, reivindica el «rigor y solidez metodológicas de los manuscritos» que se envíen a esta revista, tanto si los estudios comparativos se vertebran en líneas cuantitativas como cualitativas. El equipo editorial de la *CER* comunica que, en lo que atañe al plano metodológico, las decisiones editoriales se adoptan en base a la «fortaleza de este análisis» (*Editorial, CER*, noviembre 2017, vol. 61, número 4). Uno de los académicos que más ha contribuido al replanteamiento de la cuestión metodológica de la Educación Comparada es el comparatista germano Jürgen Schriewer. Sus planteamientos metodológicos apuntan a «relativizar las metodologías ortodoxas» (Schriewer, 2000, p. vii) y a reivindicar la «crisis del universalismo», la complejidad y la impredecibilidad. La cuestión metodológica sigue abierta, y su articulación y forma concretas se revelan en dependencia directa de las contribuciones, y de la misma metodología, de las ciencias sociales que coadyuvan en cada caso en la elaboración de los análisis comparativos. Especial mención merece, por sus relevantes aportaciones al plano metodológico del análisis comparativo, la obra del catedrático comparatista de la Universidad de Alicante (procedente del ámbito de la Literatura comparada), el Dr. Pedro Aullón de Haro. Este académico dirige el Instituto Juan Andrés de Comparatística y Globalización. Como curiosidad comparatista, el Dr. Aullón de Haro reivindica la figura del alicantino Juan Andrés (1740-1817) como primer comparatista español, pionero y anterior al emblemático Jullien de Paris. En su obra *Metodologías comparatistas y Literatura comparada* (2012), este autor revela su concepción epistemológica en líneas cercanas a los pedagogos García Hoz, Villalpando o Nassif, afirmando que la comparación es un método y el comparatismo o la comparatística una gama metodológica, no una ciencia o una gama de disciplinas autónomas. Su obra escrita y su recién inaugurada revista *Metodologías humanistas en la era digital* constituyen un valioso referente para el campo abierto y de variado diseño y complejidad de la metodología comparada o, más exactamente, las metodologías comparatistas.

En la solventación de las vulnerabilidades de nuestra disciplina, el trabajo interdisciplinar no solo se revela imperativo y crucial, sino que constituye una de las principales fortalezas de los estudios comparados acreditados. Cowen revela el hecho de que la revitalización intelectual de la Educación Comparada se ha producido «desde fuera» de la disciplina y, muy especialmente, procede del ámbito de la Sociología y la Historia (Cowen, 2009, pp. 1.279-1.280). Este académico apunta al ascenso del trabajo teórico comparativo problematizado gracias a las aportaciones del marxismo y sus variaciones, además de a los escritos En relación con el colonialismo y al análisis de los sistemas mundiales. El Catedrático Emérito García Garrido también alude en su obra al hecho de que «la Educación Comparada es un ámbito sustancialmente interdisciplinario» (1996, p. 138), esbozando que «es deseable que el comparatista tenga una buena formación previa en al menos un campo de especialización (Historia, Ciencia Política, Sociología, Economía, etc.), además de en Pedagogía (1996, p. 139). La interdisciplinariedad constituye, pues, la principal fortaleza de nuestra disciplina, y solo si en la construcción epistemológica de la misma contamos con los aportes gnoseológicos y metodológicos de otras ciencias, la Educación Comparada podrá fortalecerse y salir robustecida de los embistes globalizadores y postmodernos con los que se enfrenta en estos años del siglo XXI. Adicionalmente, por su carácter de ciencia de rango analítico sintético, la Educación Comparada no debe solo relacionarse con las ciencias analíticas de índole antropológica y metodológica de la

educación –que son con las que tradicionalmente ha tenido más relación (ie. Sociología, Política)– sino también muy especialmente con las analítico sintéticas (ie. Historia), las sintéticas (ie. Pedagogía General) y, en estos complejos años de comienzos del siglo XXI, muy primordialmente con las disciplinas teleológicas (ie. Filosofía y Teología). En este tiempo de globalización y modernidad tardía, la Educación Comparada solo logrará cimentar y estabilizar su objeto de estudio, y solo se verá capacitada para dar cumplida y eficaz respuesta a sus finalidades teóricas y aplicadas si desarrolla su epistemología de forma conjunta muy especialmente con las ciencias teleológicas. Retomaremos esta reflexión en líneas posteriores.

## 2. Modernidad, Postmodernidad y Postrelativismo

Precisamente, la grave y prolongada carencia de un trabajo interdisciplinar en Educación Comparada es la responsable de la «ausencia de rol de la comunidad de comparatistas de la educación en la discusión postmoderna» (Rust, 1991, p. 614). Según el comparatista Val D. Rust, «la idea postmoderna ha existido en la ciencia social y la literatura estética desde la década de 1950 (*ibídem*, p. 610). El historiador Perry Anderson, de la Universidad de California (UCLA), en su obra *Los orígenes de la posmodernidad*, remonta más atrás en el tiempo el origen de este fenómeno. Así, Anderson afirma que la idea de *postmodernismo* emergió primero en el intermundo hispano en los años treinta del siglo XX, una generación antes de su aparición en Inglaterra y los EE.UU. (Anderson, 2000, p. 8). La aparición de este término en el mundo anglófono no se produjo sino hasta veinte años más tarde, en un contexto muy distinto y como categoría histórica más que estética (*ibídem*, p. 9). El célebre historiador Toynbee introduce el término de «edad postmoderna» en el octavo volumen de su colección publicado en 1954. A su parecer, la edad moderna estaba marcada por dos procesos: el auge de una clase obrera industrial, en Occidente y, en el resto del mundo, el esfuerzo de las sucesivas *intelligentsias* por dominar los secretos de la modernidad y volverlos contra Occidente. Sus ejemplos eran el Japón de la era Meiji; la Rusia bolchevique; la Turquía kemalista y la recién nacida China maoísta (*ibídem*, p. 10).

La Postmodernidad, también denominada posthumanismo, posthistoricismo (Kunitz, 1955) o Post-Occidente (Olson, 1987), no alcanzó difusión más amplia hasta los años setenta. La apropiación de la insignia postmoderna de los arquitectos, que se produjo entre 1977 y 1978, resultó duradera. La primera obra filosófica que adoptó la noción fue *La condition postmoderne* de Jean-François Lyotard, publicada en 1979 en París. Para Lyotard, la llegada de la postmodernidad estaba vinculada al surgimiento de una sociedad postindustrial, teorizada por Daniel Bell y Alain Touraine, en la que el conocimiento se había convertido en la principal fuerza económica de producción; en un flujo que sobrepasaba a los Estados nacionales, y al mismo tiempo había perdido sus legitimaciones tradicionales. Según Anderson, el rasgo definitorio de la condición postmoderna (2000, p. 31-32) es la pérdida de credibilidad de las metanarrativas modernas. Entre estas destacan las metanarrativas derivadas de la Revolución Francesa, y las que descendían del idealismo alemán. A ellas Lyotard amplió y declaró difuntas a la redención cristiana, el progreso de la Ilustración, el espíritu hegeliano, la unidad romántica, el racismo nazi y el equilibrio keynesiano. Frente a ello emergió la proliferación de la paradoja, del paralogismo, los descubrimientos del caos y la «teorización de la propia evolución como discontinua, catastrófica, no rectificable y paradójica» (*ídem*). Al parecer



de Anderson, la narrativa como tal no desaparece en los tiempos postmodernos, sino que se vuelve miniaturizada y competitiva. Su equivalente social es la tendencia al contrato temporal en todos los ámbitos de la existencia humana, el ocupacional, el emocional, el sexual y el político: unos lazos más económicos, flexibles y creativos que los vínculos de la modernidad (*idem*).

Las reflexiones del filósofo Habermas en su discurso de 1980 titulado *La modernidad, un proyecto inacabado*, ocupan un lugar a la par peculiar y privilegiado dentro del discurso de la postmodernidad. Las aserciones de Habermas constituyen las primeras en las que la idea de la postmodernidad recibió un tratamiento negativo. El proyecto ilustrado de la modernidad tenía dos vertientes. Por un lado, la ciencia, la moralidad y el arte, al no estar ya fundidos en una religión revelada, se diferencian por primera vez en unas esferas de valor autónomas, gobernadas cada una por sus propias normas: verdad, justicia y belleza. Por el otro lado, se trataba de verter el potencial de esos dominios recién liberados al flujo subjetivo de la vida cotidiana, en el cual pudieran interactuar para enriquecerlo. Según Habermas (Anderson, 2000, pp. 42-51) este era el proyecto de la modernidad aún por realizar: la reapropiación de las culturas de expertos que cada uno de esos dominios había producido y su integración en el lenguaje de la experiencia común. Según Anderson, el «proyecto» de la modernidad, tal como lo describe Habermas, es una amalgama contradictoria de dos principios opuestos: la especialización y la popularización. Las intervenciones de Lyotard y Habermas, al parecer de Anderson, sellaron el terreno por primera vez con el cuño de la autoridad filosófica.

En el ámbito de la Educación Comparada, uno de los primeros trabajos comparatistas que integran el postmodernismo en la epistemología de esta disciplina fue el de Val D. Rust, en el año 1991, con su artículo *Postmodernism and Its Comparative Education Implications*, publicado en la norteamericana *Comparative Education Review*. La tardía entrada de la comunidad de comparatistas de la educación en la discusión postmoderna se debió, según Rust, a dos factores. El primero radica en el hecho de que gran parte de nuestro campo apunta al mundo en desarrollo, mientras que el postmodernismo se focaliza casi exclusivamente en Europa y Norteamérica. El segundo estriba en que la comunidad educativa profesional más amplia solo recientemente ha participado en las discusiones postmodernas (Rust, 1991, p. 614). Así pues, hasta fechas recientes, el principal marco teórico que informó la investigación en Educación Comparada ha sido el de la modernización.

Rust señala cuatro problemas cruciales para nuestro campo comparativo derivados de la dimensión postmoderna, de los cuales vamos a referirnos a dos: la naturaleza totalitaria de las metanarrativas, y los problemas del Otro. En lo que atañe al primer problema, el postmodernismo revela una gran «incredulidad hacia las metanarrativas» (*ibídem*, p. 615), las cuales «encierran a la civilización en sistemas de pensamiento totalitarios y logocéntricos», como la «visión modernista de que el conocimiento y la verdad se basan en principios abstractos y constructos teóricos más que en experiencia humana directa y subjetiva» (*idem*). Según Foucault, estas teorías globales o totalitarias son vulnerables a los «cricismos o críticas locales» y productos teóricos «no centralizados». Según Rust, «un desafío del postmodernismo a los comparatistas de la educación es la clarificación de las metanarrativas que presiden nuestro trabajo y que tendemos a universalizar» (*ibídem*, p. 616). A su parecer, las metanarrativas legítimas deberán abrir el mundo a sociedades e individuos, a través de la provisión de formas de análisis que expresen y articulen diferencias y que promuevan el pensamiento crítico sin cerrar el pensamiento y las vías

para la acción constructiva. Los postmodernistas rechazarían cualquier pretensión de que una manera de conocimiento es la única vía legítima (ídem).

En lo que atañe al segundo aspecto, el problema con el Otro, el replanteamiento de esta temática censura el Eurocentrismo (y su sentido de superioridad atribuido a movimientos como el proyecto de la Ilustración) y el Imperialismo. El nuevo tiempo postmoderno, en el que con creciente fuerza y presencia se hacen sentir movimientos de liberación y autodeterminación que involucran grupos étnicos, minorías, grupos de vida alternativa, representantes de gays y lesbianas, feministas, etc., demanda una nueva y plena participación en la toma de decisiones en todo tipo de vida social y política, incluida la escuela, el ámbito laboral y el gobierno local. Según Rust, «el símbolo más obvio de la nueva era es la obsolescencia de la norma de la mayoría, la cual mitiga la variedad, la apertura y la diversidad» (Rust, 1991, p. 618). Está en juego la misma identidad de las culturas tal y como las hemos conocido en la modernidad (ídem).

Podemos afirmar que, si la modernidad se vincula a ideas de tradición continuada, Cristianismo, Europa, racionalismo, universalismo, normativismo, tradición, moralidad, historia y virtudes, la postmodernidad se asocia a ideas de ruptura, cultura de lo nuevo, movilidad, aceleración de la historia, discontinuidad, nuevo valor atribuido a lo transitorio, lo esquivo y lo efímero (Habermas, 1988, p. 89), rebelión contra todo lo que es normativo, contra la tradición, posthistoricismo (García Ruiz, 2011) y, muy especialmente, a un parámetro muy característico de la epistemología postmoderna, que constituye uno de los rasgos más presentes y generalizados en la cultura de la modernidad tardía, que ha sido muy contestado por la gran mayoría de los académicos, y cuyo análisis detenido debemos necesariamente acometer para dar respuesta a las inquietudes epistemológicas que suscita en la construcción de conocimiento científico y comparativo. Este parámetro es el relativismo.

El rasgo del relativismo es un atributo universalmente reconocido como signo y símbolo del estado epistemológico de la postmodernidad. Anderson (2000, p. 33) afirma que el relativismo «pasa por ser la marca distintiva de la postmodernidad». El profesor Cowen, en sus escritos en el *International Handbook of Comparative Education* de 2009 alude al «problema relativista» y se pregunta, como interrogante e inquietud epistemológica primordial actual: «¿dónde están los límites del relativismo?». Académicos y teólogos como el Papa Emérito Benedicto XVI se refieren a la «Dictadura del relativismo» como signo del estado epistemológico característico de estos años del siglo XXI (Sayés, 2012, p. 9).

Desde un prisma histórico y filosófico, podemos afirmar la existencia omnipresente de relativistas a lo largo del tiempo, desde los sofistas de la antigua Grecia. La raíz del relativismo ético de nuestros días, en Occidente, la encontramos en la filosofía de Guillermo de Ockham. La filosofía de Ockham sentó las bases del relativismo ético. Y ella, según Poole Derquí, sirvió al pensamiento posterior tanto para fundar la realidad moral solo en la voluntad de Dios (ie. los protestantes, empezando por Lutero), o solo en la naturaleza humana (ie. los racionalistas modernos). Los reformadores protestantes marginaron el estudio de la ley natural, y de la razón natural que la conoce; y los secularistas modernos, centrados solo en la razón humana, prescindieron de la ley divina, y de la fe por la que llegamos a conocerla. De este modo, la razón y la fe llegaron a ser enemigos en lugar de los aliados que fueron durante toda la filosofía clásica medieval (2016, p. 16). Por contraste, la filosofía medieval anterior a Ockham consideraba buena la acción humana tanto por su conformidad con la naturaleza humana como por su adecuación a la voluntad divina (ídem).

Tras Ockham, el racionalismo secularista de la Ilustración prescindió del orden de la creación impuesto por Dios para justificar toda la moralidad desde el pensamiento del hombre. El empirismo que siguió a esa corriente filosófica reemplazó la lógica racionalista de las ideas inmutables del entendimiento humano, por las sensaciones. Hume desarrolló la teoría emotivista del valor y, a partir de ahí, la moral es siempre una proyección subjetiva y relativa al sujeto que produce el juicio moral, y la moral se entiende como *sentimiento* en lugar de *conocimiento* (*ibídem*, p. 7). La concepción relativista de la moral fue promovida por la moral kantiana, por el idealismo hegeliano, y por otros grandes filósofos del siglo XX como Kelsen, Weber y Berlín.

El fenómeno del relativismo consiste y surge a partir de la crisis y negación de las metanarrativas universales. Desde el prisma de la construcción del conocimiento científico, hablamos de relativismo *epistemológico*. En los argumentos de los comparatistas de la educación que han abordado «el problema relativista» (Cowen, 2009, p. 961), como el británico Cowen, es, no obstante, el relativismo ético el que con mayor presencia y fuerza inquieta e impacta en los actuales planteamientos epistemológicos (frente a otros tipos de relativismo como el *cultural*, el *individual* o el *sociológico*). La inquietud de Cowen más objetivamente explicitada radica en el conocimiento de la entidad e identidad del *momento* concreto y de los *criterios* específicos que deben presidir la emisión de juicios (mayormente ausentes en los escritos de los comparatistas, afirma él) «condenadores de modelos educativos (...) como la presión extrema impuesta a los alumnos por los sistemas de exámenes en Japón, Hong Kong o Corea del Sur» (*ibídem*, p. 962). Cowen aduce que los comparatistas de la educación, por su misma inmersión en esta disciplina específica, «han aprendido a amar lo exótico y lo extraño», siendo fomentadas como virtudes profesionales adquiridas la tolerancia y la empatía con lo extraño (*ídem*), aunque dichos entornos revelen prácticas pedagógicas y educativas censurables y reprobables, las cuales quedan sin cuestionar.

No todos los académicos actuales comulgan con el relativismo reinante. El relativismo es, de hecho, «el rasgo de la Postmodernidad más enérgicamente rechazado por un gran número de académicos» (García Ruiz, 2012, p. 48). Tampoco todos los académicos admiten la relegación y el rechazo en estos tiempos de modernidad tardía de atributos característicos de la Modernidad de gran valía como, muy especialmente, la tradición y la verdad. En su obra *Relativismo y tolerancia*, Poole Derquí avanza la crítica de que «todo relativismo que pretenda ser razonado implica una contradicción consigo mismo: si ningún criterio puede ser verdadero, el juicio de que toda verdad es relativa tampoco puede tener carácter de validez absoluta, lo que destruye, con sus propias armas, al relativismo» (2016, pp. 8-9). Poole también combate con lucidez la negación de las promesas liberales de progreso y mejora por la Postmodernidad: «(...) un fin es valioso, no porque se desea, sino porque objetivamente el hombre se hace mejor al conseguirlo. Lo cual presupone una idea de «progreso» en la vida humana. En el plano físico e intelectual nadie discute que el hombre está en un continuo proceso de desarrollo, pero en el moral muchos dudan de que haya un paradigma o un modelo de hombre bueno o realizado» (2016, p. 56).

En lo que atañe al rechazo postmoderno de la tradición, Poole reitera acertadamente la necesidad de la naturaleza humana de la tradición, por mucho que los actuales tiempos postmodernos quieran trascenderla. La tradición hace que la experiencia sobrepase los estrechos límites del aquí y ahora para servir a las futuras generaciones. «El pasado, por la tradición, se hace normativo, pero no por ser pasado, sino porque ha sido



probado, validado, por la experiencia (*ibídem*, p. 32). Por eso existe la tradición: formas de vida probadas y purificadas por la experiencia de nuestros predecesores. Y el valor máspreciado de una tradición es la moral. Toda verdadera tradición es portadora de moral (ídem). Y, según el académico Kreeft, «aquellas sociedades que han sido las más tradicionales, han sido también las mejores moralmente y las más prósperas» (1999, p. 59). Poole destaca la generalización actual del uso del término *valores* para referirse a la moral, en lugar de los términos clásicos de «virtudes, leyes o bienes» (2016, p. 18). En lo que atañe a la moral y su relación con la religión, Poole destaca el hecho de que la historia demuestra que, «en los cimientos de cualquier sistema moral que ha tenido un mínimo de consistencia y duración en la historia se encuentran las grandes religiones. La religión es el soporte más firme de la moralidad. La moralidad siempre ha necesitado la religión» (2016, p. 37). Por su parte, Kreeft añade que «si destruimos la religión, destruimos la moral, y si destruimos la moral, destruimos la sociedad» (1999, p. 162). En lo que respecta a la existencia objetiva de la verdad, elemento negado por el relativismo, la tradición filosófica siempre ha entendido que «el amor a la verdad y la fe en el poder de la inteligencia, son la primera condición de la indagación filosófica» (Hegel, 1818, citado por Poole, 2016, p. 55).

Estos primeros años del siglo XXI constituyen un período de notable crisis y cambio por la irrupción de los fenómenos de la globalización y el postmodernismo. El impacto de estos fenómenos en la epistemología de nuestra ciencia comparada se ha revelado con una virulencia especial, dada la ya mencionada vulnerabilidad epistemológica en ámbitos nucleares ya citados como la definición y acotamiento de su objeto de estudio. Desde la reflexión académica personal En relación con el *statu quo* epistemológico de la Educación Comparada, considero que el trabajo científico de nuestra disciplina ha estado durante su desarrollo en los siglos XIX y XX (y también en el actual siglo XXI), fundamental y exclusivamente centrada en los *procesos* educativos (ie. el funcionamiento de los sistemas educativos; la entidad de las políticas y las reformas educativas, etc.). Esos procesos son cambiantes por naturaleza y por evolución histórica y, por ello, una ciencia cimentada de forma exclusiva en los mismos, no acaba de encontrar su arraigo doctrinal (más allá de que una disciplina siempre tiene que estar abierta a la evolución con las nuevas etapas históricas). La Educación Comparada ha descuidado a lo largo de su historia su atención gnoseológica a los *actores* del proceso educativo (ie. muy especialmente la concepción de persona humana sujeto de la acción educativa comparativa), y a la *finalidad* de dicho proceso (ie. notablemente, la idea de la sociedad mundial pretendida y hacia la que se tiende). La concepción de la persona humana no varía ni está sujeta a las crisis de los tiempos, y la finalidad última y más esencial de la sociedad mundial (en términos de paz mundial y felicidad, al estilo de un *Proyecto de una ética mundial*, como la propuesta por el teólogo Hans Küng) tampoco. Sólo desde una Educación Comparada de cuño también filosófico y teológico (y no meramente histórico, sociológico y político) tendrán respuesta inquietudes como las mostradas por Cowen relativas a los *criterios* que deben presidir la emisión de juicios –hasta ahora «mayormente ausentes en los escritos de los comparatistas»- (Cowen, 2009, p. 962).

Decíamos en líneas anteriores que la moralidad ya no está fundida en una religión revelada y que, desde la filosofía de Ockam y el empirismo, la moral se entiende como *sentimiento* en lugar de *conocimiento*. El Dr. Sayés es el autor de una extraordinaria y muy clarificadora obra de análisis del relativismo contemporáneo en la sociedad española y mundial. A su entender, es en los postulados de la Ilustración donde se ubican los

principios que enmarcan la ideología laicista de nuestra época, pues en ellos se suprimen la metafísica y la fe como ámbitos del conocimiento humano y, con ello, la fundamentación de la religión o la moral. Sin esa fundamentación, no es posible abordar la emisión de juicios de valor sobre criterios certeros que echa en falta el catedrático británico Cowen en los trabajos comparativos.

Es mi convicción personal y académica que el logro de una cimentación epistemológica sólida de la disciplina comparativa pasa por la articulación y vertebración de una firme y cristiana idea de persona y sociedad (actores), y de los fines culturales y sociales europeos y mundiales (finalidad), en cuya articulación se requiere el concurso de las directrices y presupuestos ontológicos procedentes de las ciencias teleológicas: la Filosofía y, muy especialmente, la Teología. En estos momentos de relativismo y de negación de las metanarrativas universales, solo determinados presupuestos de la ciencia teológica pueden establecerse como componentes de una epistemología postrelativista y superar la tan mentada *posverdad* como aseveración que no se basa en hechos objetivos, sino en las emociones, creencias o deseos.

En este sentido podemos con toda certeza afirmar que, en el actual mundo de la segunda década del siglo XXI, afrontamos una gran contradicción desde el punto de vista axiológico y espiritual. Por un lado, la sociedad mundial revela un grado innegable de secularización como nunca antes en la historia. Como afirma el historiador Sotelo, «el concepto de Postmodernidad implica una ruptura semejante a la que ocurrió con la aparición del Cristianismo, y supone que este habría llegado a su fin. La identidad del Cristianismo con la Modernidad pone de relieve que, en rigor, la Postmodernidad implicaría un mundo que hubiera roto hasta las últimas amarras con el Cristianismo» (Sotelo, 2003, p. 58). Sotelo esboza que Jaspers en 1932 caracterizaba *la situación espiritual de nuestro tiempo* con dos rasgos distintivos: el predominio del ateísmo y la dominación de la técnica, dos fenómenos que influyen de manera decisiva en los más variados aspectos de la vida material y espiritual. Al parecer de Sotelo, la noción de Postmodernidad habrá que involucrarla a la crisis radical de los valores cristianos, tanto en sus formas conscientemente religiosas, como aquellas ya secularizadas. Nietzsche, al llevar a sus últimas consecuencias la crítica radical de lo cristiano, es el filósofo que anuncia la Postmodernidad (ídem). «Pensar la Postmodernidad, en último término, consisten en hacerse cargo de la *muerte de Dios* con todas sus implicaciones. La Postmodernidad, en este sentido, no sería otra cosa que una interpretación del mundo consecuentemente atea» (ídem, p. 59).

Por otra parte, no obstante, podemos afirmar que este aparente consenso y triunfo del secularismo reinante dista, en el fondo, de atestiguar todo el cuadro de la situación espiritual de nuestro tiempo. Reputados comparatistas como el profesor Cowen, en su emblemático *International Handbook of Comparative Education, IHCE*, al hablar de la construcción de la identidad en tiempos moderno-tardíos, alude al hecho de que «en la alteración de la naturaleza de los entornos educativos en la modernidad tardía, la cuestión de las culturas educativas y la identidad pedagógica tiende a desvincularse de nociones como ciudadanía, y a devenir más y más poderosamente vinculada a la economía o la *religión*» (Cowen & Kazamias, 2009, p. 6. La cursiva es mía). De hecho, los comparatistas Cowen y Kazamías, en su *IHCE* dedican una sección entera de esta obra a la temática religiosa. De igual modo, la conferencia presidencial del Dr. David P. Baker en la norteamericana *Comparative and International Education Society, CIES*, en el año 2013, reivindicó más investigación educativa comparada e internacional a la relación entre educación y religión: «Quizá un fenómeno más descuidado y prometedor de investigación para

la Educación Comparada e Internacional es la entidad de la religión y la espiritualidad en la sociedad escolarizada» (Baker, 2014, p. 16). Baker afirma que la religión ha sido imposible de erradicar a lo largo del mundo; que, en la nación americana, a finales del siglo XVIII solo el 17 % de la población total practicaba la religión, pero a finales del siglo XX la filiación eclesiástica ha crecido al 60 %, y el 95 % de los americanos afirman creer en un dios. La religión prospera a lo largo del mundo (ídem). Sigue Baker afirmando que la espiritualidad no deviene marginal o irracional para muchos individuos. La revolución educativa, entendida como progresiva democratización de todos los niveles de la educación a la población, establece las bases para un pluralismo religioso extenso, y conduce a una mayor adhesión religiosa (*ibídem*, p. 17). La religión y la espiritualidad, prosigue Baker, no declinan en la sociedad escolarizada, y pueden incluso prosperar. La sociedad escolarizada y su espiritualidad educadas crecerán en el futuro. Las siguientes palabras tienen muchas implicaciones para los comparatistas: «Esto revela un gran potencial para la investigación de la Educación Comparada e Internacional, que ha estado virtualmente muda en la materia. Hasta la fecha, toda la investigación ha sido realizada por científicos sociales interesados en la religión, no particularmente en educación. Esto demanda un estudio comparado más sistemático. Y es un tema futuro central para la investigación en Educación Comparada e Internacional» (*ibídem*, p. 18). Para hacer frente al relativismo imperante en nuestro mundo actual y, en concreto, desde la disciplina de la Educación Comparada, necesitamos incorporar a nuestro saber algunas de las directrices y presupuestos ontológicos procedentes del ámbito de la Teología, ciencia teleológica de la educación que tradicionalmente ha sido relegada al olvido. Como afirma García Garrido, «el reconocimiento de la Teología de la Educación como ciencia está supeditado a una previa toma de posición de la Filosofía de la Educación. Sólo una filosofía que opte a favor del principio de *transcendencia* permitirá el posterior establecimiento, como saber distinto, de una Teología. Por el contrario, la opción por una concepción inmanente de la realidad conlleva, como lógica consecuencia, la negación de toda realidad exterior al mundo físico y humano y de su posibilidad de estudio científico» (1996, p. 214).

Existe una Teología de la Educación desde el momento en que un nutrido grupo de estudiosos se consagra a ella con suficiente base científica. Para estos estudiosos, la opción de transcendencia supone admitir que el fin de la educación no es exclusivamente de alcance terrenal. Como afirma García Garrido, «si para el hombre es importante su destino eterno, esto significa que la educación no puede desentenderse de este importante tema. Es entonces cuando entran en juego las creencias religiosas y, de modo especial, la admisión de la Revelación divina como fuente de conocimiento. En este supuesto, la Teología de la Educación analizaría el mensaje revelado con el fin de encontrar en él los principios teológicos por los cuales debería regirse el proceso educativo. Y, como es lógico, la Teología de la Educación sería subsidiaria de las concretas creencias religiosas que se profesasen. Existen, teóricamente hablando, tantas Teologías de la Educación como religiones (García Garrido, 1996, p. 215).

La Educación Comparada como ciencia debe apuntar, en su doble finalidad teórico-práctica, y en su condición de ciencia analítico-sintética, a dar cumplida respuesta a esta dimensión espiritual, y a apuntar a elevados horizontes espirituales y axiológicos para la sociedad mundial actual. Este y no otro es el mejor legado que esta disciplina puede dejar a los futuros ciudadanos mundiales. También esta finalidad axiológica conlleva y supone una cimentación sólida de la epistemología de la disciplina comparativa, pues dichos horizontes teleológicos se revelan de estabilidad permanente, aun cuando la sociedad humana evolucione y cambie. Estas reflexiones nos conducen al siguiente –y último– epígrafe de este estudio.

### 3. Teología y Educación Comparada

Al comienzo del artículo hemos analizado la situación fragmentada y estéril de la epistemología comparada en estos años del siglo XXI. Es mi hipótesis que, en la revitalización de nuestro campo de estudio, la Educación Comparada debe asumir su rol central. En relación con la definición de la naturaleza y atributos de la persona humana íntegramente considerada objeto de la educación en su trabajo comparado, y también en lo que atañe a la conformación de las finalidades históricas, sociales y espirituales de las culturas mundiales a que dichas personas pertenecen y cuyo logro se ansía. El análisis, a modo de ejemplo, de las bondades de una pedagogía formal frente a una progresista, o de un modelo de escuela diversificada frente a una comprensiva, o de una educación diferenciada frente a una mixta, o de la ubicación de los diversos países en el baremo de PISA, etc., no tienen ningún sentido ni objeto si no atiende a la entidad e identidad de la persona humana que se pretende formar, y a la sociedad y cultura deseada y en la que dicha persona se va a integrar y va a modelar. Por lo tanto, procede operar la reflexión de la entidad y atributos de la persona humana, íntegra y completamente considerada, y de las finalidades legítimas de las sociedades y culturas a las que pertenece. Podríamos establecer como objeto de estudio de la Educación Comparada en los actuales tiempos postmodernos, el siguiente: «El logro, a través de la educación y los sistemas, políticas y reformas educativas mundiales, de personas y sociedades libres, comprometidas y desarrolladas en todas sus dimensiones, y de culturas y civilizaciones solidarias e inclusivas, a través del método comparado y el consejo de las ciencias teleológicas del saber».

En esta labor, la Educación Comparada debe atender a las directrices marcadas por la Teología actual. Una de las obras, anteriormente citada, que arrojan más luz a este respecto es la de Sayés, *Teología y relativismo. Análisis de una crisis de fe*. Afirma Sayés en su obra que «hoy día la Teología está enferma, y en consecuencia, no se puede transmitir la fe, porque no se fundamentan las certezas que se deben transmitir» (Sayés, 2012, p. IX). Sayés muestra el inicio de la teología de la secularización de forma cronológicamente coincidente con el término del Concilio Vaticano II, y causa de que se interpretara el Concilio en ruptura con la tradición. Las heridas de la teología de la secularización (cuya crisis de fe llegó mucho antes a la teología y a los seminarios que a la misma sociedad), con autores como Bonhoeffer, Robinson, Cox, Altizer, Hamilton, Vahanian, Van Bureu, siguen abiertas en la teología actual. En los años del posconcilio, expone Sayés, se nos presentaba esta teología de la secularización como la auténtica interpretación de *Gaudium et spes* –única constitución pastoral del Concilio Vaticano II– cuando en realidad dicha teología no tenía nada que ver con el Concilio (*ibídem*, p. X). Sacerdotes como el Cardenal Seper hacen constar la «abundancia actual de la literatura sobre el ecumenismo, siendo que, en realidad, la crisis doctrinal católica es, al presente, un terrible obstáculo para el ecumenismo» (*ídem*). Es en los postulados de la Ilustración, como hemos afirmado, donde se ubican los principios que enmarcan la ideología laicista de nuestra época. Al parecer de Sayés, «Se pretende reducir las doctrinas de la revelación a verdades naturalmente evidentes y racionalmente demostrables, e interpretar la fe cristiana como pura religión racional, privándole así de su índole sobrenatural y de su carácter de misterio: la revelación y el milagro, la encarnación y la redención, la acción de los sacramentos para obrar la gracia, etc., quedan suprimidos de un plumazo» (*ibídem*, p. 30). La teología de la secularización, nacida de una crisis de fe y de la incapacidad de vivir una oración gratificante (*ibídem*, p. 6) todavía perdura entre nosotros, y lo



hace enlazando con el movimiento laicista que reina en nuestra época. La teología de la secularización ha querido suprimir a Dios de la sociedad y del mundo para reducirlo a un sentimiento interior de la conciencia. Como afirma Sayés, «con la influencia de estos pensamientos, hoy día se quejan muchos de que las homilias no dicen nada. Perdidas las certezas, ya no se puede iluminar ni fundamentar la fe» (*ibídem*, p. 31). «Hoy no se transmite la fe, porque en realidad está enferma» (*ibídem*, p. 32).

A pesar de que expone Sayés que, según Ratzinger, el pluralismo teológico se sustenta con frecuencia en un puro subjetivismo; que un teólogo que intente ser fiel a la doctrina queda relegado (*ibídem*, p. 35), y que es difícil que un teólogo sea prestigioso si no tiene algo o mucho de disidente respecto de la «la doctrina» oficial de la Iglesia (a cuya adhesión es catalogado como adherente a una teología caduca, superada, meramente repetitiva, ininteligible para el hombre de hoy, creyente o incrédulo) (*idem*), este autor lanza un mensaje de esperanza, optimismo y firmeza en el cuerpo de doctrina tan amplio y tan perfecto, se trate de temas dogmáticos, bíblicos, morales, etc.». «El Catecismo es una auténtica catedral de doctrina que durará mucho tiempo como ley de orientación» (*ibídem*, p. 34). Al decir de Sayés: «Gracias a Dios, a pesar de la crisis actual, la Iglesia sabe lo que cree» (*ibídem*, p. 36). De este vasto cuerpo doctrinal, cabe extraer no solo criterios éticos firmes postrelativistas para valorar comparativamente las pedagogías mundiales –elemento que reclama el académico británico Cowen– sino también algunas de las finalidades últimas para las sociedades y culturas mundiales (ie. atención a la dimensión trascendente; carácter comunitario de la vocación humana, virtudes, deseo de felicidad y vocación a la bienaventuranza, acción libre y responsable, justicia social, moralidad de los actos humanos, etc.). Es generalmente admitido que a las humanidades y las ciencias sociales, muy particularmente la Educación Comparada, compete, más que a otras disciplinas, el diseño del modelo de sociedad y de hombre para el siglo que ha comenzado (García Ruiz, 2011, p. 526). Entre dichas ciencias, es la ciencia del espíritu de la Teología la que goza del atributo de vigía humano y social por excelencia. Por su parte, el concepto de persona humana cabe también extraerlo, por la riqueza y compleción que presenta, de la tradición cristiana. El concepto de *persona*, tan usado por las ciencias del espíritu, tiene una profunda raíz en la teología cristiana occidental. Esta raíz cristiana, reflexionada, madurada y articulada desde la época patristica, medieval, renacentista y contemporánea, ha configurado no solo el concepto sino, además, una reflexión en torno al valor y dignidad del hombre. En el pensamiento de los grandes teólogos de los siglos XX y XXI, la persona humana tiene un gran significado en su dimensión teologal-relacional (Buriticá, 2014, pp. 467-468); como persona abierta y en relación con lo trascendente. La revelación cristiana confiere al hombre la capacidad de encuentro con el «otro», la alteridad, como condición necesaria para la radical comprensión de sí mismo. La raíz cristiana del término *persona* plantea que es desde la relación donde se encuentra la identidad del ser humano. De un modo fundamental, la relación que define y orienta la verdadera identidad es la relación con el Ser Trascendente, con quien el hombre establece un diálogo definitivo y que lo abre a sus múltiples posibilidades, para responder de manera adecuada a los desafíos propios de su condición. Esta relación le da a la persona una medida más allá de sus propios límites, pero con un sentido solidario hacia los demás; reconoce que, en todos los seres humanos, dicha relación con lo trascendente es posible y realizable y que, a su vez, ella abre, de manera particularísima, a una relación con el otro (persona, igual, hermano) desde la entrega y la solidaridad, y con lo otro (mundo, criatura, objeto) desde la responsabilidad (*ibídem*, pp. 490-491). Pedro Abelló

alude a las trece notas del concepto de persona cuya integración y consideración en toda actividad educativa, y análisis y cotejo comparado, deberían contemplarse: 1) naturaleza espiritual, 2) libertad, 3) centralidad, 4) unicidad/inaprensibilidad, 5) singularidad, 6) condición de sujeto y soporte del ser, 7) dinamismo/autosuperación, 8) virtualidad/potencialidad, 9) sinergismo, 10) universalidad, 11) relacionalidad, 12) autonomía, 13) naturaleza sacrificial.

## 4. Conclusiones

Los académicos comparatistas nos enfrentamos, en esta segunda década del siglo XXI, a la construcción epistemológica de la ciencia comparativa de la educación desde el contexto cultural y filosófico de la postmodernidad y sus planteamientos de crisis del universalismo, complejidad, impredecibilidad, y pérdida de las legitimaciones tradicionales. La resolución de la crisis epistemológica de nuestra disciplina de la Educación Comparada, y de sus vulnerabilidades gnoseológicas (muy particularmente el disenso en la consideración de su objeto de estudio), así como la sanción de una fase científica postrelativista, requiere del trabajo interdisciplinar con las ciencias teleológicas que proporcionen unos elementos científicos a nivel de actores y finalidades del proceso educativo comparado, que cimienten y orienten definitiva y sólidamente la disciplina y la capaciten para proseguir tanto su desarrollo académico teórico, como sus recomendaciones y propuestas prácticas a la clase política nacional y mundial, de forma consolidada y firme.

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5



## *Challenges in higher education and the role of Muslim cultures and civilisations in developing a new paradigm in education\**

*Los desafíos en la educación superior y el papel de las culturas y civilizaciones musulmanas en el desarrollo de un nuevo paradigma en Educación*

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the challenges modern Muslim scholars face when acquiring and producing knowledge and when thinking about what they can borrow and revive from the educational approaches of Muslim scholars of the Middle Ages in order to come up with a new paradigm of learning in education. Some of these challenges are the gaps between secular and religious education, marginalisation of various types of learning and the dominance of one mode of learning - especially the dominance of western-based epistemology and ethical principles in education, struggling to choose between competing and often contradictory paradigms, not knowing much about one's own cultural and civilizational legacy and what it could offer to resolve these issues, etc. Some scholars started researching these challenges, yet it is very rare that a combined library research and field work is conducted to examine such issues. In this research, drawing on the analysis of relevant literature and qualitative interviews conducted with prominent scholars, we aim to shed light on some of these challenges and provide solutions to them. The seriousness of these challenges and searching for ways to resolve them compels us to look back and critically examine what educational approaches were used by Muslim scholars and pedagogues in the Middle Ages and what happened to those approaches in the modern times. Critical examination of such legacy is very important so that we avoid the temptation of just regurgitating those achievements in terms of Muslims' world view about education and epistemology in the past and creatively revive those according to the needs of modern times.

**Key Words:** Islamic legacy, epistemology, knowledge acquisition, modes of learning, ethical principles and values

## **Resumen**

Este documento explora los desafíos a los que se enfrentan los eruditos musulmanes modernos cuando adquieren y producen conocimiento y cuando piensan en qué se puede pedir prestado y qué puede recuperarse de los enfoques educativos de los eruditos musulmanes de la Edad Media para idear un nuevo paradigma de aprendizaje en educación. Algunos de estos desafíos son las brechas entre la educación secular y la religiosa, la marginación de varios tipos de aprendizaje y el dominio de un modo de aprendizaje -especialmente en el Oeste- basado en los principios éticos en la educación, que luchan por elegir entre competidores y, a menudo, contradictorios paradigmas, sin saber mucho sobre la propia cultura y legado de su civilización, y lo que podría ofrecer para resolver estos problemas, etc. Algunos académicos comenzaron a investigar estos desafíos; sin embargo, es muy raro que se realice una investigación combinada de bibliotecas y trabajo de campo para examinar dichos problemas. En esta investigación, aprovechando el análisis de la literatura relevante y las entrevistas cualitativas realizadas con destacados académicos, nuestro objetivo es arrojar luz sobre algunos de estos desafíos y brindarles soluciones. La seriedad de estos desafíos y la búsqueda de formas de resolverlos nos obligan a mirar hacia atrás y examinar críticamente qué enfoques educativos utilizaron los eruditos y pedagogos musulmanes en la Edad Media y qué sucedió con esos enfoques en los tiempos modernos. El examen crítico de este legado es muy importante para evitar la tentación de solo regurgitar esos logros en términos de la visión del mundo de los musulmanes sobre la educación y la epistemología en el pasado, siendo preciso revivir creativamente aquellos de acuerdo con las necesidades de los tiempos modernos.

**Palabras clave:** Legado islámico; epistemología; adquisición de conocimientos; modos de aprendizaje; principios y valores éticos

# 1. Introduction

When deliberating about the challenges modern Muslim scholars face in acquiring and producing knowledge and when thinking about what they can borrow and revive from the educational approaches of Muslim scholars of the Middle Age to develop a new paradigm of learning in education, one must critically examine these challenges and the historical past of education among Muslims. Most of these are challenges educational institutions and scholars have been encountering since the introduction of modernity among Muslims. For instance, the gaps between secular and religious education, marginalisation of various types of learning and the dominance of one mode of learning - especially the dominance of western-based epistemology and ethical principles in education, struggling to choose between competing and often contradictory paradigms, not knowing one's own cultural and civilizational legacy and what it could offer to resolve these issues, etc. In this paper, we attempt to combine library research and field work to examine such issues. Drawing on the analysis of relevant literature and qualitative interviews conducted with prominent scholars, we aim to shed light on some of these challenges and provide solutions to them. The critical examination of Muslims' educational legacy allows us to avoid the temptation of just regurgitating those achievements in terms of Muslims' world view about education and epistemology in the past and creatively revive those according to the needs of modern times. It is not sufficient to just be proud of what Muslims achieved in the past any more. It is the right moment for us to think and utilise their methods and ways of thinking and come up with a new re-interpretation of those methods and world-views suitable for our age, or as Henzell Thomas encourages us, to examine "how the values and principles which gave rise to such a civilisation can be renewed, re-interpreted and applied in contemporary world" (cited in Sardar, 2015, p.6).

Some important questions with regard to how in the Middle Ages Muslim scholars with diverse approaches to knowledge acquisition, nevertheless all worked under the guidance of the holy Qur'an and its world-view have been addressed by this author (Muborakshoeva, 2013a; 2013b). However, critical questions still to be pursued are; why we, contemporary Muslim scholars, are unable to work under the same educational framework? Why is it that we, in modern times, often dichotomise our lives and world views when acquiring and producing knowledge? What lesson, as contemporary Muslim thinkers, can we learn from our medieval colleagues and how can we revive and renew some of this educational heritage they had left for us? Why is it that despite the turmoil and upheavals in the Muslim contexts of the middle ages, the educational environment was more accommodating for the emergence of diverse approaches to knowledge acquisition and production tolerant of each other and why in the contemporary times mostly one view of how to acquire and produce knowledge predominates and other modes are either marginalised or deemed to be unscientific?

This paper firstly argues that most of these challenges educational institutions and individuals face are as a result of Muslims' encounters with modernity since the nineteenth century. Contrary to the relatively harmonious relationship between science and religion in the medieval times, contemporary Muslim scholars have been facing numerous challenges since the introduction of modernity in Muslim contexts. Secondly therefore, using the qualitative interviews, the paper discusses the challenges modern Muslim scholars have been facing when it comes to reconciling their belief and academic endeavour. The paper contends that some of these challenges remain unresolvable if

we do not reconceptualise our educational approaches and do not learn from our own Islamic legacy. Thirdly, the paper provides some solutions to these challenges, especially those related to epistemological issues, and proposes some possible ways for how to re-interpret and revive the epistemology used by Muslim thinkers of the past so that we, contemporary Muslim scholars, are able to come up with our own educational paradigm that is inclusive of all aspects of our lives and is not divisive. Existing research as well as qualitative interviews conducted with prominent scholars in the UK and Pakistan on the aspects related to these themes will be utilised.

## **2. The roots of challenges contemporary Muslim scholars and educational establishments face**

The situation with knowledge acquisition and its production in Muslim contexts has been the subject of scrutiny over the last few decades. It is felt that the state of learning and teaching, research and publication, innovation in science and technology, and art and culture is deplorable in the Muslim world and there is a need to urgently remedy the situation. Ever since the 1970s many scholars have concerned themselves with resolving these issues and have initiated many projects and organised conferences to address them. Evaluating the state of education in the Muslim world and searching for alternative models for higher educational institutions, scholars have explored what Islam as a religion and civilisation can offer to resolve some of these dilemmas. They have provided conceptual framework for the so called 'Islamisation of Knowledge' project (see Al-Attas 1980, Al-Faruqi & Nasseef 1981, Ashraf 1985, Ashraf and Bilgrami 1985). Despite numerous merits to their work and thought provoking arguments proposed by the scholars supporting the 'Islamisation of Knowledge' project (Muborakshoeva 2013a), their approach has been criticised for having political agenda and, in some cases, the scholars have been accused of legitimizing the rather questionable policies of the state (Abaza, 2001).

Learning from these earlier experiences, a recent attempt to re-open the debates about the state of education in Muslim contexts has been initiated by scholars at the International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT). They feel that there is a lack of understanding about Muslim cultures and civilisations of the past and its utility in modern times. They provide some policy recommendation for the governments and institutions to follow and plan to hold seminars and conferences in the future to work on the recommendations (IIIT, 2013). The conference on the 'Reforming Education in the Muslim World' to be held in March 2016 and organised by IIIT is part of such initiatives.

Recent research publications also confirm the seriousness of the crisis in education, especially in higher education in Muslim contexts. Combining historical and field research, the book *Islam and Higher Education: Concepts, Challenges and Opportunities* highlights that higher education in Muslim contexts, rich in heritage and conceptually diverse, nevertheless faces many challenges in contemporary times (Muborakshoeva, 2013a). Among numerous challenges the most outstanding ones are funding, quality assurance, leadership and management, organization of knowledge, position of women, reconciliation of modernity with tradition, and teaching of Muslim cultures and civilizations, especially religion. Most of these issues and challenges in higher education though are not of recent origin. The educational landscape in Muslim contexts has been facing numerous challenges since the encounters with foreign influences via colonialization or



other interactions with the industrial nations of Europe from the nineteenth century or earlier, depending on when such encounters occurred (Ibid). It was the time when the indigenous schools started to be marginalised and the modern institutions for higher education to be established as early as nineteenth century in some Muslim countries. Hence it can be argued that most of these issues were inherent in the nature (or in the conceptualisation) of the institutions of higher education since their inception.

Marginalisation of indigenous educational establishments and scholars produced by such institutions had in most cases occurred due to an assumption that the enhancement of societies in Europe was as a direct result of its advanced higher educational institutions. There was little realisation that these advancements were largely linked with the Europeans colonising other nations and exploiting their wealth to develop industries and capitalist structures back home (Ibid). In fact, the educational institutions such as universities in Europe were not at the forefront of industrial, scientific and technological revolutions, or the philosophical 'Enlightenment' movement (Scott, 1984). As a result, these 'revolutions' made it possible for governments and individuals to invest in education, especially universities, and develop them as centres for quality teaching and research. Gradually therefore universities in the developed world have become the forerunners of knowledge production without which it is almost impossible for modern societies to function. Societies in such contexts are now heavily dependent on universities. This however, does not exempt these universities from facing challenges – most of them do face challenges similar to those that universities in Muslim contexts experience.

This is because most of the issues raised by Muslim scholars in terms of epistemology, approaches to education and knowledge acquisition and its production are global issues. As Sardar (2015, p.10) rightly observes, "epistemologically, the Enlightenment idea of modernity... has failed", because "its associated concepts of progress, efficiency, and development, transformed vast swathes of our planet into disaster zones- of which climate change is the most evident example." Similarly, he thinks, postmodernism "has generated an acute crisis in identity that is a major source of so much conflict in today's world" and its encouragement for globalisation or multiculturalism have reinvigorated the dominance of Western cultural and moral values on the rest of the world. I would add that the educational establishments, especially the universities of the Western countries are places to perpetuate those values and disseminate them successfully throughout the world. That is why the universities in the West too are in crisis as a result of their own students (whether they are from western or non- western cultures) questioning these global inequalities. To address such challenges at all levels of education, some intellectual and scholarly movements have started to question the current dominant educational paradigms (Forbes, 2003). The most formidable criticism of such paradigms comes from the proponents of holistic education who would like to move away from dogmatic scientific paradigms and replace it with a paradigm that aims to develop the whole person (Miller, 2005) and "integrates science and spirituality in an expanded framework of human experience" (Nava, 2001, p.5). Muslim scholars too are examining the challenges education faces and searching for new responses and educational world-views. They particularly call for an integrated approach to knowledge which takes an account of all aspects of human life and does not leave any aspect (e.g. religion, identity, culture, etc) aside.

In order to come up with an integrated approach to knowledge and have an holistic view of education in Muslim contexts, some of these challenges Muslim scholars and institutions have been facing since the enhancement of modern development need to be



examined at a deeper level. Relying on the analysis of qualitative interviews here we focus on discussing challenges related to the dominance of one mode of learning, namely, the outdated western-based approaches to learning and the search for a new paradigm in education, methodological challenges in research, and how to understand and practice academic freedom.

### **3. The dominance of one mode of learning & the search for a new paradigm in education**

One particular challenge learners, teachers and scholars, and the institutions for teaching and learning generally face in Muslim contexts, is the dominance of one mode of teaching and learning, namely reading and writing. 'An educated person', in accordance to modern understanding, is the one who can read and write as a result of going through formal schooling from primary to higher education level. Knowledge acquired without having reading and writing skills is mainly considered worthless and not much appreciated by the society, and indeed, the person lacking those skills would not find employment or have any respectable position in the society. A scholar related to me how he found 'the idea of literacy which is rooted in reading and writing in formal modern schools from primary to university levels' disturbing. He further elaborated:

"If you look at Muslims' history, reading and writing were not the only means to transmit knowledge, rather it was the word, the spoken word, which was a much more popular method than formal reading and writing... the Qur'an did not come in a textual but rather an oral form and was transmitted orally throughout the centuries by people memorising it and transmitting it even though it was already available in written form".

Historically, methods of teaching and learning in Muslim contexts have been diverse and would have been utilised both in formal and informal educational settings. The fact that mostly one mode of teaching and learning prevails in Muslim contexts today contradicts the very nature and traditions of knowledge acquisition and transmission among Muslims. The holistic approach to education and diverse pedagogies allowed knowledge to be acquired and transmitted via any method such as reading and writing, memorisation, recitation of the Qur'an and poetry, story-telling and literature, calligraphy, or painting and other forms of art. Even today there are personalities, who may not have reading and writing skills, yet they could be well aware of and knowledgeable about a vast body of literature on Islamic religious doctrines or ethics and moral values as propagated by Prophet Muhammad, the caliphs and the Imams (for the Shi'a). Such learning was accessible to them due to a sheer participation in religious gatherings and ceremonies and listening to intellectual discourses there as well as growing up in a vibrant and creative culture (Muborakshoeva, 2013a; 2013b).

Most scholars I spoke to believed that the reason for Muslims not being able to value and promote their own diverse methods of teaching and learning and being stuck with a rather narrow approach to education in formal institutions is linked with broader issues and circumstances they are in. This is connected with the indigenous traditions of knowledge acquisition and transmission being marginalised since the colonial time, as discussed earlier, as well as consequent challenges education in Muslim contexts is

facing in terms of epistemology and philosophy of education. According to some interviewees contemporary Muslim scholars and intellectuals never could fully accept the positivist epistemology, but at the same time they are unable to come up with their own educational philosophy or paradigm. A retired professor from Karachi University told me how, for instance, logical positivism depreciated the values, especially religious and moral values, yet in the Eastern context these values are still given huge importance:

"...the dilemma is this that the entire [modern] legacy is bound to science and its technological culture, its industry and businesses, there is a plain rejection of fantasy and imagination, poetry and mysticism and all that...logical positivism, for instance, says that only verifiable facts are addressed, values, religion, ethics and that is all transcendental is nonsense. But all these things matter for life, there must be some imagination and some dreaming. The sheer rejection of these will make a person egoist, focused on his self-interest, which means the more you produce and consume the more you can get. This is what has separated West from East, where the latter is still going by its own religion, because if religion goes ethics goes, aesthetics goes in the form of mysticism. Mysticism is very important and has been emphasised in the West as well, after Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, all these postmodernists realised that though God is dead the world is not".

Consequently, Muslim scholars find it hard to accept such educational approaches, which neglect the important aspects of cultural and moral values in society. At the same time they are rarely able to address such challenges posed to their values or approaches to knowledge acquisition and transmission. In fact, one can conclude that inadvertently scholars in Muslim contexts are clinging to a rather outdated Western epistemology, which has been challenged in the West itself as scholars there search for other alternative and creative educational theories and approaches. I explored with some interviewees the reason as to why in Muslim contexts most scholars are incapable of responding to such challenges when in the West scholars using phenomenology and hermeneutics have challenged logical positivism and other reductionist approaches in education. The responses were that scholars teaching at secular as well as religious institutions have a rather confused understanding of epistemology and educational approaches. They lack criticality and creativity to even question the status quo and come up with their own newly formulated educational paradigm rooted in their own heritage and addressing the needs of the changing world. A scholar from Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) highlighted:

"...most Muslim scholars and intellectuals, I would argue, do not know which paradigm they belong to, so they are actually working inadvertently with the liberal-secular-humanistic point of view... The reason they do not consider a communist point of view is that it does not allow the possibility of God, the liberal-secular-humanist point of view is also not premised upon God, but it tolerates God as long as God is kept in his place and separate from the field of inquiry... As far as the response to the scientific paradigm is concerned, there is a small school in Pakistan, which is a traditional school ... This school of thought provides some formidable critique of modernity... these are a group of scholars who have spent at least 15-20 years in the West and have first-hand knowledge and experience of modernity".

This then leads to scholars often dichotomising their lives and educational activities when it comes to following their religion and getting secular education. A professor of Islamic studies thought that nowadays indigenous institutions such as madrasahs train you for the world to come as opposed to their former function where they prepared professionals fully aware of religious and cultural heritage too. The secular institutions prepare a person "for this world, but there is another world out there" for which they are illiterate. This dichotomy between the two educational systems, he added, "introduced tensions in Muslim societies from which they have not yet recovered and unless they recover from that there will continue to be a lot of tensions and unhappiness". A female professor who has taught for 25 years at the University of the Punjab told me:

"... unfortunately that is what I feel [that] people do dichotomise their lives, it is like religion is given and put on a pedestal but it doesn't permeate what is called sort of western secular knowledge, and the Muslims are divided, on the one hand they don't question the religion, on the other hand if they do indulge let's say in secular studies or westernised that is, they feel that it will not infiltrate into their religion so they keep them side by side, separate, and somehow I feel that this polarisation means that you don't let what I call critical and creative thinking to come to the forth. So for me the concrete first step is to get the teachers to teach as if they are two sides to a picture, and then a student will realise that there are more than one ways of looking at things, only then you do begin to analyse and then critique, you look at the pros and the cons, if you only look at the pros all the time and the teachers made the decision and decided which is the most positive thing that must be transmitted, then the students have nothing to do, and they just accept passively and therefore what the teachers do they just pour down knowledge on an empty vessel..."

Most interviewees thought that the ulama are not in a better position either –they generally take a defensive stance and in some contexts have attempted to influence the organisation of knowledge at higher educational institutions:

"...the inability of religious parties to make a philosophical response to the theory of evolution forces them to [retreat] to the intellectual ghettos, to intellectual relativism... so in Pakistan you will find several examples, where the presence of religious parties is strong, where they have gone and shut down biology and physics departments because they are teaching 'haram' things. I am myself aware of the shortcomings of the theory of evolution... But it is not a reason to stop the theory of evolution [being] taught, you should teach it as a theory among several theories".

As a result many departments for Islamic studies were created in many Muslim countries. It perhaps can be argued that marginalisation of the indigenous institutions and the introduction of the department of Islamic studies with little critical input into what needs to be taught in those departments and what epistemologies and methodologies were to follow, created more challenges than resolving the existing ones. An interviewee, therefore, highlighted that although the indigenous institutions of learning have been marginalised it does not mean that the ulama are completely powerless or do not have any influence on the affairs of the state and society in some Muslim contexts. He explained:

"The ulama became a body within the society who have their strength, interest, and have opposed to any innovation... May be they were marginalized because people preferred modern education, but their influence is there, because there is no alternative, no one could be put in place, it was their views, their teachings, their methods, their limitations which were imposed and still are imposed... Every state now in the Muslim world has this problem, it is how to place these elites. Now even in Saudi Arabia these kinds of elites have a great power in society who act like religious police in the country".

However, blaming the scholars only, whether in religious or secular institutions, for the lack of criticality and innovative approaches in education is perhaps not entirely fair. This is because they operate in societies, which very often struggle with national economies, politics, cultures, and identities since the Second World War when they obtained their independence. Moreover, most of these countries experience strong neo-colonial influences and as such they cling to a kind of defensive approach they have developed ever since the colonial age. Therefore, the societies as a whole are not entirely free and open to critical thinking and innovation and this ultimately affects all social institutions negatively. Some interviewees discussed the strong influence of the state on what is to be taught at universities across the Arab world. For example, in Morocco, a scholar told me, the state had a say and control over the organisation of knowledge and its production:

"For example, in Morocco [in the 70s], the regime did not like training people in the humanities, because at some point they thought the people become leftists, or communists and will be critical about the Kingdom, and the King, the regime, and the society. And they did not want that, so they did everything, for example, and made an historical decision... They decided in one day to close all philosophy departments and replaced them by Islamic studies [departments]... I was [back then] beginning my career there, so, I had to choose either to teach something that I was not trained in, I knew nothing about Islamic studies, or to find another job. The state wanted engineers and so on and they did not want critical minds, at that moment the idea was to train people to do the everyday jobs that were needed and nothing else, to be obedient to the society and not think..."

Added to this is the overall lack of Muslim scholars' awareness and critical understanding of Muslim cultures and civilisations and the educational legacy of the past Muslim scholars. An interviewee commented that a critical examination of Muslim cultures, especially its educational heritage, has not happened yet. Some critical and open research on philosophy of education and approaches to knowledge and on Muslim cultures and civilisations has been conducted at the universities in Europe and the USA rather than at the educational establishments in the Muslim world. This demonstrates how societies, scholars, and the institutions in general have very little to contribute, when it comes to the enhancement of knowledge in science and technology or in culture and religious studies.

Nevertheless, there is some awareness among Muslim scholars about deficiencies and shortcomings of the current dominant epistemology and the need for evaluating and revising it critically. A lecturer from LUMS thought that approaches to knowledge in the Eastern context, whether it be Islamic or other traditions, essentially have a non-materialist spiritual outlook on life. This then becomes a philosophical premise from which the sciences flow. If the purely materialistic approach and understanding of sciences

continue, then there is very little hope for the reconciliation of tradition with modernity and scholars developing new epistemology. He elaborated:

"...[if this state of affairs continues] then modernity and tradition cannot be reconciled, they go to completely separate directions, because the emphasis is on corporality and materiality in modern systems- it is the system of verification, system of objectivity and so forth are empirical and materialistic, the end of the science is somehow not spiritual, I mean if you look at all paradigms in the American or the European universities there is a conscious moving away from God, because you cannot see and touch God. The allegation of science is that verification can only be done by five senses and so it discounts or dismisses other ways of knowing and this is the biggest debate, which is on the nature of human being, human being as animal with nothing in it, human being as partly animal. But what makes us human is the possibility of soul, spirit, elements of spirituality and so forth. So as long as the modern science would not take the spiritual element [into account] its role would be a certain type of science [only], whereas the traditional sciences ... are premised upon the notion of ultimate reality which is non corporeal and so therefore all the things that are seen in this world are not really permanent reality but they are ephemeral they come and go, so there is a distinct world view that informs us how the society can be looked at..."

The other deficiency with the modern higher education scholars identified was how the teaching of philosophy has been marginalised globally as a result of which the disciplines are compartmentalised and disconnected from their shared philosophical foundations. A scholar commented that a critical school he belongs to raises these questions and tries to find solutions to them:

"For all social sciences, humanities, and even hard sciences that is physics, chemistry and biology, the assumptions are all philosophic in nature so you actually cannot study either the hard sciences or the social sciences in isolation from their philosophical assumption and so immediately there is a precedent that has to be given to philosophy and metaphysics. As long as you don't live with the root of the thought you cannot really know what are the implications of it in the society or in the intellectual life of the scholars at large..."

Research findings also demonstrate that the perceived dichotomy between traditional and modern education might not be as sharp as it is often assumed. There are interchanges and influences of the former on the latter as it was discussed earlier. There are examples of some societies (e.g. Turkey in the 1880s,) and individuals that successfully bridged the traditional and secular education. For example, intellectuals such as Fazlur Rahman, Said Hussain Nasr, and many others went through traditional education as well as secular training (Muborakshoeva 2013a) or Hasan Turabi was taught the religious sciences by his father at home and completed his formal education up to the PhD level in Sudan (El-Affendi, 1990).

## **4. Methodological challenges**

Linked with the epistemological challenges discussed earlier, there are methodological issues that Muslim scholars face and cannot get out of that dead end. A scholar from LUMS highlighted:



"We focus on problems that the world has not given much attention to, but in order to research these we need people who are knowledgeable about methodologies that the West has developed for decades. That also puts a bit of constraint..., because in the Muslim and developing world we first need to understand that methodology and then apply it to this context... But in terms of pure research contribution this is not regarded as a very high calibre contribution in the academic world, because when they consider tenure promotion they want to know what kind of innovation and methodology you have contributed... So, if we focus on our relevant problem then we may not be able to publish in international journals, if we gear our research towards the requirements of international journals, our research remains irrelevant to the context".

Thus yet again the scientific paradigm are methodologies of research too are defined by the market oriented publishing companies, which decide what is worthy of publication and what is not.

## 5. Towards a new epistemology: What may it look like?

Scholars proposed that when developing new approaches in education, one should be careful and avoid labelling it one way or another. They suggested avoiding using the term 'Islamic' in relation to epistemology or educational approaches and other concepts indiscriminately. Once you label it as 'Islamic', they said, you claim that you know what Islamic means or that the concept is strictly and rigidly tied with religion, which is problematic. Islam is the name of the religion and in fact was rarely used even in relation to religion in the medieval times, *let alone* using it as an adjective to refer to other entities (e.g. philosophy, culture, education, etc). It is in modern times that the term 'Islamic' has been misleadingly used with different concepts and even sometimes abused when it is linked with politics and ideologies (Muborakshoeva 2013a). A scholar thought that utilising the term Islamic as an adjective for epistemology, educational approaches and philosophy of knowledge is misleading. He proposed that it is much better if we refer to our heritage as 'Muslim histories, cultures and civilisations', because:

"...there have been times and moments in cultures of Muslims where there were critical attitudes, opening, lively discussions and creative thinking. This did happen in Muslim contexts and does happen in some contexts until today, for example, in some universities in Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Pakistan and many others there is something very positive going on. Once we substitute the problematic constructions such as 'Islamic education' or 'Islamic philosophy of knowledge' with 'approaches to education in Muslim contexts', then it would immediately open the horizon before us and nobody can claim that there is only one way of knowing and understanding the world. There then rather be philosophies of knowledge, which means there are a spectrum of philosophies or attitudes and no one can say that there is only one way".

Others thought that knowledge acquisition should not have any borders. In the history of Muslim cultures and civilisations, another scholar stated, there have been thinkers such as al-Kindi, the Ikhwan al-Safa, etc. who held the view that "you get knowledge, the best knowledge wherever you can, so you are open to knowledge from everywhere,



because the moment you close your border you will not have access to all knowledge. One way of doing this is firstly to make sure that your distinctiveness lies in the fact of your openness and access to the best quality knowledge. Secondly, you need to ask how this excellence and distinctive capacity of knowledge find their resonance in your own culture, how it is validated by your own culture, by your own language, by your own literature and so on."

Scholars also confirmed that historically there were little or no tensions between reason and revelation in Muslim contexts or at least these tensions were experienced not in a similar manner as they were felt in the Christian world. A scholar thought that the relationship between reason and revelation had a different type of relationship in Muslim contexts historically:

"...the relationship between reason and revelation in Muslim society, that tension that was felt in Europe, it was not felt in a similar manner in Muslim societies. So many of these madrasahs of Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa never felt the need for this sort of a thing [a separation between reason and revelation]. You can have an Al-Beruni, Ibn Hazm, Avicenna, you have an Averroes, you have a context in which reason and revelation were combined in a manner that the two could co-exist..., yes there were tensions, yes there were problems, but you know, it flourished, it coexisted, that was not necessary in those societies. Here [in Europe] there were tensions between the two [revelation and reason] which took place, once it took place it was fired by the industrial revolutions, it was fired by the growth of Europe, it was fired by the dominance of the Western paradigm on the international stage, I know I am simplifying ... but I just want to make the point that now you have a situation in which a once great tradition is a mockery of itself.."

Thus Muslims have great opportunities for learning from their own past educational history and develop a new epistemology relying on that history as well as take the needs of modern societies into account. So what may this new epistemology look like?

In order to delve into what the new epistemology may look like we need to examine and borrow from medieval Muslims' epistemology and approaches to education selectively and critically. As mentioned, there was a diversity of educational approaches *yet all* of them functioned within the overall paradigm of revelation. Most Muslim theologians and legal scholars would equate knowledge and faith whereas the school of Ikhwan us-safa and the Ismaili thinkers would separate the two. For Muslim philosophers, similar to the Aristotelian tradition, knowledge was the perception of things in their realities according to human capacity (Muborakshoeva 2013a). We may want to revive some of these diverse approaches knowing that all of them ultimately will be working under the tawhidic paradigm.

However, it is claimed that such diversity of approaches had its disadvantages even in the Middle Ages and too much plurality would bring about a disharmony in the society. The tenth century scholar, Abu l-Hasan al-Amiri (d.381/992) discusses how the plurality of approaches to knowledge brought about a crisis in knowledge back then (Heck, 2006). In defence though, we do not know the full history of such crises. In light of new developments in educational approaches and methodologies of conducting research we may need to revise some of the tools with which we have examined the historical past of the Muslim education and thought so far. Moreover, Ibn Rushd seems to have been able to create a harmony between these various approaches. He harmonised the existing

differences and propagated that both philosophy and revelation have a unity of purpose and both stem from virtue. For Muslim philosophers, philosophical and prophetic truth is the same, the only difference being that it is attained and expressed differently. The ultimate aim of knowledge is perfection and perfection is happiness, especially for Ibn Sina and those that follow his conviction (Inati, 1998). I think this is the point where almost all schools of thought in Islam agree, that the ultimate aim of knowledge is to get perfection. Once the soul is perfect and close to its originator it is then in the domain of eternal bliss. So why cannot Muslims have diverse approaches to knowledge acquisition when its epistemology and ultimate aim is the same? Critical scholarships on education in contemporary times, especially those who advocate for holistic education, also accentuate on happiness being the ultimate aim of education as opposed to modern education which prepares half educated human beings deprived of any spirituality or sense of beauty and happiness. The indigenous education among Muslims is therefore holistic, if one was to examine it with a more empathetic and creative lens.

## 6. The holistic roots of education in Muslim contexts

As it was demonstrated in the earlier section, the ultimate aim of education among Muslims has been to prepare a rounded individual who is capable to obtain knowledge via any means to reach perfect knowledge. The understanding is that the ultimate perfect knowledge is with God only, and once you perfect your knowledge you become closer to God. This is a holistic approach to knowledge that takes care of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual enhancement of human being. It is unfortunate that this kind of epistemology was marginalised as a result of the advent of modernity as we discussed earlier. However, it can also be argued that for Muslims especially not everything is lost and there is much evidence of such epistemology being kept alive at some institutional but also non-institutional settings. Some of this legacy is still alive and practiced in the indigenous institutions and is preserved by individual scholars, and by some communities. Back in 2002 when I worked on a project, I interviewed an old man of 85 years old in Tajikistan who could not read and write, but was highly knowledgeable about the prophetic narratives, the wisdom of life, and the ultimate aim of human being on earth. I found out that he obtained this knowledge by attending various religious ceremonies and by listening to and participating in the enlightening debates and discussions on the works and poetry of sages such as Nasir Khusraw, Rumi, Hafiz, Sa'di, and many others (Muborakshoeva 2013b). The man grew up and lived during the Soviet Union.

This indicated to me that if a culture could preserve its traditional modes of knowledge acquisition and transmission under the atheistic Soviet regime, then there is a lot of hope for Muslims to revive their heritage from the vibrant and creative cultures that exist up to date. In many Muslim societies up to date, knowledge is still obtained and transmitted in a plethora of ways ranging from visitation of sacred places and shrines to cultural gatherings, celebration of the Prophet's birthday, attending ceremonies for birth and death, and participating in the related rites and rituals. The modes of knowledge acquisition and transmission in such contexts therefore have remained various for centuries and are not confined to only reading and writing or memorisation, but include poetry, story-telling, literature, debates and discussions, calligraphy and other forms of art.

This approach to education and modes of knowledge acquisition and transmission is very close to what modern proponents of holistic education advocate. Indeed Muslim educationalists have to acquaint themselves with current scholarship on holistic education to appreciate the holistic roots of education in their own cultures and civilisations. Nava (2001) considers three main influences to be at the root and subsequent development of holistic education. The first influence is the various new paradigm shifts in science that challenged the dogmatic ones. The second is the perennial philosophy that refers to spiritual wisdom present throughout history, which is the non-dogmatic essence shared by all great religions. Finally influential educators such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Dewey, Krishnamurti, Montessori, and Steiner were also instrumental in this progression. Holistic education cannot be reduced to methodology only and as such it is 'a realm of inquiry into teaching and learning, based on principles relating to human consciousness and the relationship between human beings and their universe'. Its purpose is 'to nurture human potential' and it makes a 'transition from self-knowledge to knowledge of the world and from spirituality to society' (Nava, 2001, p. 32). This is very close to Islamic worldview about the ultimate purpose of being a human, how he/she should be educated so that he/she knows oneself first and then knows God, after which he/she is able to serve society. The most vivid summary of such purposes and aims are evident in the works of Muslim non-dogmatic philosophers, theologians, and mystics such as Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Nasir Khusraw, al-Ghazali, Ibn al-Arabi, Rumi and many others. In this sense Muslim heritage is a gold mine for holistic education which has not been fully discovered yet. Mark Halstead is the first scholar to emphasise the huge potential of the Islamic world-view of education. He invites us to carefully use the English terminologies related to education, since they may not always convey the same meaning in Arabic language, for example, there being three words for 'education' in Arabic (Halstead, 2004). There are other scholarly movements, especially in Pakistan, to which some of the interviewees referred to earlier. Muslim educationalists have an enormous task of recovering and reviving the best features of such holistic approach to education with the hope of enlightening our reform projects in the future.

## **7. Conclusion**

The findings of this research confirm the concerns raised by scholars of both the 'Islamisation of Knowledge' project as well as those calling for the integration of knowledge (IIIT, 2013; Sardar, 2015) about the dominance of dogmatic scientific paradigm and approaches in education. The notion of 'an educated person', for instance, has completely been transformed as a result of narrow understanding of the methods of teaching and learning in modern educational establishments. In this case it has been closely tied to formal reading and writing and other means of knowledge transmission practiced in Muslim cultures are largely neglected. Most university scholars in Muslim contexts therefore have a rather confused understanding of the imported western epistemology and educational paradigm. As a result scholars at secular universities very often dichotomise their lives and keep their academic affairs and religious identity separate assuming that the one does not affect the other. Scholars at the indigenous institutions, being marginalised and unable to understand and respond to these deeper epistemological issues, take a defensive position and sometimes exert their influences at the secular universities' level and impose the teaching of Islam often in a dogmatic way. Opening departments of

Islamic studies in and of itself is a positive affair, but without resolving the bigger epistemological questions these kinds of initiatives are fruitless and insignificant in terms of advancing the field. The governments too have to take a share of the blame since they often act for their own self-benefit and preservation of power and hence they make alliances with global powers to keep the population under control and obedient.

It is commendable that Muslim academics are becoming cognisant about these issues in education and are searching for the ways to address them. They are critical of the way knowledge is organised, acquired, and produced at universities. They understand that having a dogmatic scientific paradigm in education is part of the problem and further creates epistemological and methodological confusions in research too. The way forward, scholars agree, is coming up with a philosophy of education which unites and not divides knowledge. To achieve this goal Muslim educationalists have to revive the best features of holistic education the roots of which lie in the revelation to the Prophet and the spirituality he advocated.

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6



## *Developing critical realist comparative methods for researching religions, belief-systems, and education*

*Desarrollando métodos comparativos realistas críticos para investigar las religiones, los sistemas de creencias y la educación*

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## Abstract

Education is increasingly implicated in religious and other ideological issues, but contributions from comparative education have been surprisingly rare. From the definition 'belief-systems', this paper reviews relevant comparative methodologies, and proposes that a 'critical realist comparative' approach can reduce methodological weaknesses. It concludes that ontology and epistemology can apply current perspectives on 'fake-news' and 'fact checking'. The UNESCO 'disarming history' framework can encourage non-confrontational educational discussions and the participatory creation of curricula and teaching materials. Appropriate research frameworks entail locating studies in terms of *people, places, and/or systems*, and the methodologies for researching powerful people and organisations can improve data collection methods. *Crowdsourcing* research and online research, including *big data*, increase the scope of these methods. Diverse participation improves research, and the paper provides ideas for involving young people.

**Key Words:** Education; religion; belief-systems; ideologies; critical realist comparative studies; curricula; teaching materials

## Resumen

La educación está cada vez más implicada en cuestiones religiosas y otras cuestiones ideológicas, pero las contribuciones de la Educación comparada han sido sorprendentemente escasas. A partir de la definición «sistemas de creencias», este artículo revisa metodologías comparativas relevantes y propone que un enfoque «comparativo realista crítico» puede reducir las debilidades metodológicas. Concluye que la ontología y la epistemología pueden aplicar perspectivas actuales sobre «noticias falsas» y «verificación de hechos». El marco de la «historia desarmadora» de la UNESCO puede fomentar discusiones educativas sin confrontación y la creación participativa de planes de estudio y materiales de enseñanza. Los marcos de investigación apropiados implican ubicar estudios en términos de *personas, lugares y/o sistemas*, y las metodologías para investigar personas y organizaciones poderosas pueden mejorar los métodos de recolección de datos. La investigación de *crowdsourcing* y la investigación en línea, incluido *Big data*, aumentan el alcance de estos métodos. La participación diversa mejora la investigación, y el documento proporciona ideas para involucrar a los jóvenes.

**Palabras clave:** Educación; religión; sistemas de creencias; ideologías; estudios comparativos realistas críticos; curricula; materiales de enseñanza

## 1. Introduction

The influences of religion and ideology within education are becoming increasingly significant and contested in a globalising world (Davies, 2008; 2014). New technologies and social networks provide new ways to disseminate old narratives and anti-social messages, and diverse forms of religious ideology seem implicated in most present-day conflicts. Education, often in the form of ‘peace education’ (AJP 2018), is expected to respond. But an education response should be based on a critical development of appropriate research methodologies and reliable findings.

Public, political and academic perceptions of religion and education are usually bipolar according to the stance of the writer - good or bad - for or against. Positive views may see education as a way to reduce religious violence, as in Northern Ireland (O’Connor, 2002), or to inculcate the values necessary for living in a confusing world, perhaps through ‘character education’ (Sanderse, 2012). Critical analyses usually presents religion as implicated in harmful propaganda such as that from ISIS (Adonis, 2016), or as ‘poisonous’ (Hitchens 2007), ‘delusional’ (Dawkins, 2007), and contrary to mainstream science (Dennet & Plantinga, 2011). Alain de Botton (2012) provides a rare compromise is a chapter on ‘education’ in his book, *Religion for Atheists: A non-believer’s guide to the uses of religion*. Comparative education can contribute more balanced evidence-based approaches.

This discussion therefore first examines relevant precedents and precursors of a comparative education approach to religion and ideology - the *formative methodologies*. For researchers, a central problem within this field of study is the validity of the data and integrity of arguments. The application of *ontology and epistemology* are therefore uniquely difficult and form a core aspect of this discussion. *Research frameworks* and *data collection methods* also present challenges, not least in addressing the power dynamics of interviewees and other data sources (Williams 2012). Relevant approaches must also now embrace emerging strategies such as crowdsourcing research and big data (Williams 2015: 103-7), and a fully inclusive participatory framework. The aims of the discussion are therefore:

(i) to encourage the development of ‘critical realist comparative’ methodologies (Bergene, 2007), to better understand education and religion, which minimise bias and are fit-for-purpose in the present-day context.

(ii) to relate academic research methods to teaching, learning and the participation of young people in research.

## 2. A review of formative methodologies

There are surprisingly few comparative texts on religion and education, and those that exist usually compare the teaching of religious studies in schools or colleges, and do not consider methods in-depth (e.g. Hinnells, 1970). A comparative education approach (Adamson *et al*, 2007. Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2008. Bray, 2007) to examining religion and ideology can be built on a number of other relevant comparative approaches:

- *Comparative history* helps to form a contextual understanding of the origins of relevant educational policies and practice (Lange, 2012), for example why are there many similarities between Jewish and Islamic teachings.

- *Comparative linguistics* compares languages to assess if and how they are related (Anttila, 1989), and whether therefore there has been a historical “educational” influence between peoples of the world, such as Buddhism across Asia (Janda & Joseph, 2004).
- *Comparative discourse analysis* provides ways to examine critically the political meanings underpinning written and spoken texts, such as education policy or messages about race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and physical and mental ability in religious and secular school textbooks (Agiro, 2009).
- *Comparative sociology of religions* focuses on the differences and interrelationships between religious elites and lay masses, and contextualizes how the relationships between religious systems fit within, and are influenced by, the wider socio-political environment including geopolitics and war (Sharot, 2001).
- *Comparative religion* contrasts practices and doctrine, but is usually restricted to the major text-based religions (Muhiyaddin, 1984).
- *Comparative theology* is usually rooted within one religion and compares that with other theological perspectives, but is similarly restricted and usually the ‘root’ religion is Christianity (Clooney, 2010).
- *Comparative ideology* examines lexical, semiotic, psychological and social data ‘within the social environment conditions influencing the selection and retention of specific ideological forms’ (Wathnow, 1982). This approach might examine, for example, why both Catholicism and Communism culminated in an excellent education system in Kerala, India.
- *Comparative anthropology* stems from Frazer’s famous tome, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (Frazer, 1922) (See below). His methods formed the basis for copious studies of ‘belief-systems’, religions (Bock, 1966), ‘mythology’ (Csapo, 2005), and present-day approaches (Bowie, 2005; Lambek, 2008). The *Internet Sacred Text Archive* now provides access to open source religious archives, across a wide range of belief-systems (2018 ISTA).
- *Comparative politics* assesses domestic politics, political institutions, and conflicts in relevant countries. (Mair, 1996. Cambell, 2004. Landman, 2008. Pennings, 2005). The approach may be relevant in theocracies that control educational practice such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Ireland or Britain. (In the UK, religious leaders have a constitutional right to sit in the House of Lords, as in other theocracies.)
- *Comparative social policy* can examine the practical outcomes of political decisions, including educational and religious practice (Clasen, 1998).
- *Comparative law* provides understandings of legal traditions – chthonic, Talmudic, Hindu, Asian, Islamic, civil (Roman), common (England, US), which are likely to have influenced educational policy and practice (Glenn, 2000).

- *Comparative media* is relevant in the broader context of public education, for example the BBC has a legal requirement to educate. Studies might focus on media systems, which could include the religious broadcasting channels on the radio and internet (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), or communication and content (Livingstone, 2003), for example the representation of secular opinion in theocratic states.
- *International research* embraces a wide range of comparative and other methods in relation to people and populations, places and mapping, and analysing world systems and official documents (Williams, 2015), for example the global spread of madrassas, creationism and other extremist curricula, and evangelical preachers or paedophile priests.

Most studies of education, religion and ideology are likely to adopt a mixed ('multi') methods approach (Cresswell, 2009) depending on the aims and potential outcomes of the research.

A critical realism comparative approach addresses traditional comparative weaknesses - false claims of causation and inductive methods - which arise from specific observations and complex conclusions. Bergene encourages an 'abductive' approach, which proceeds from incomplete observations, seeks the clearest and most plausible explanations, and takes full account of context (Bergene, 2007).

A familiar example of over-complicated conclusions is the labelling of museum artefacts, biased by 19th century missionary religiosity. If the use or meaning of an object was not known, it was common to use descriptors such as 'ritual' or 'religious'. Models of human beings and animals, especially if found in graves, were often called 'votive offerings'. Only later were simpler explanations discovered - that these were toys belonging to the young corpse (Baxter 2005). Is the 'Sacred Buckskin' in Figure 1 really a religious object? It could well be a precious map or game. Over time, objects may also change from, or to, being religious. A statue used for scaring away enemies or unwanted nocturnal intruders, or frightening naughty children, may only become a 'god' when a biddable local chief agrees with an eager missionary researcher who keeps asking, "You mean it's a god?"(Figure 2).



Figure 1. A 'Sacred Buckskin – Apache' artefact. Objects labelled 'sacred', 'religious', 'votive' may have had simpler uses such as maps or games. (Photo: Author. Pitt Rivers Museum).



Figure 2. 'Feathered god image, probably Ku the god of war'. (Late 18<sup>th</sup> century). Were so-called 'gods' really just to scare naughty children? (British Museum).

### 3. Ontology and epistemology – “Fake news” and “fact checking”

The world has become acutely aware of knowledge in the guise of ‘fake news’, and the scope of instant ‘fact-checking’ on the internet. The existence and sources of religious “facts” have become open to scrutiny and questioning at a speed and scale never demonstrated before. Israeli scholar Yuval Noah Harari (2018: 234) explains the problem, ‘When a thousand people believe some made-up story for one month – that’s fake news. When a billion people believe it for a thousand years – that’s a religion.’ This creates practical challenges within research and educational practice, especially with the children of our ‘post-truth species’ (Harari 2018:233). Religious texts only become ‘fake-news’ if people claim the ‘made-up stories’ are factually accurate, without sound objective evidence. Without the ‘fake-claims’, religious texts might provide wonderful stories, insightful human wisdom, and historical and archaeological clues about former ways of living.

Not least is the question of definition. In 1993 the *UN Human Rights Committee*, defined ‘religion or belief’ as ‘theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.’ (UN 1993), which seems to include everyone and everything. One of the many contemporary academic attempts is by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1993), for whom religion is a:

“...system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”

Correct or not, a definition proposing that ‘clothing...conceptions’ with an ‘aura’ so that ‘moods and motivations...seem...realistic’ does not seem to provide firm grounds for robust academic analysis.



Definition is further confused because there is no clear distinction between religious doctrine that is implemented as political ideology and educational policy, for example in Iran or UK, and ideological political systems that are quasi-theocratic ‘political religions’ (Gentile, 2006), as in Soviet Union and North Korea (Keller, 1936, p. 68.). Communist posters often initially portrayed leaders as among the people, but they are eventually elevated to a heavenly haloed position, above their “disciples” who carry the books of their teachings, like Christian icons. (Figure 3.& 7.).

The term ‘belief-systems’ is often more useful, and will be used throughout this paper. It embraces ‘the configuration of beliefs which exists in a society or culture...including scientific knowledge...[and] patterns of religious beliefs and values...which give distinctiveness and coherence to the modes of thought within a society or culture’ (Jary & Jary, 1991).



Figure 3. A poster with Kim Il-sung. The ‘eternal president’ of North Korea, in a heavenly pose above his followers with their books of his teachings. (Photo: Wikimedia commons. Mural outside Songdowon Hotel, Wonsan)

The lack of definitional clarity means that questions of *ontology* – the study of how we know that something exists – and *epistemology* – understanding how we, or others, know something (Evans 2012. Audi 1997) – is uniquely important when analysing belief-systems. In most fields, a simple distinction between “fact” and “opinion” is a generally clear and robust way to delineate evidence. But in religious and ideological discourse, the concept of “belief” often confuses and conflates the two, and is taken to mean anything from absolute certainty, to a guess or hope.

## 4. Ontology – Fact-checking existence

Mainstream *ontology* asks, how did something (an *entity*) come into existence, how do we prove it *is*, in what way does it *be*, how do we know it is *real*, and how can we *categorize* it? Philip Dick (1978) proposes a pertinent test of existence, ‘Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.’ And John Searle (2006) makes a useful distinction:

- some things are ‘*observer independent*’ – ‘brute facts’ that ‘exist independently of us’ (earthquakes, tides, weather);
- other things are ‘*observer-relative*’ – ‘institutional facts’ that ‘depend on us for their existence’ (citizenship, laws, moral values).

The Earth clearly exists ‘independently’, but nations only exist because of ‘us’. Harari (2015: 24-39) points out that Sapiens are the only animals that can create ‘imagined realities’, including financial systems, companies, and religions. Therefore humans exist objectively as a type of animal, but descriptors such as “nationality”, “race”, “ethnic group” or “religion” are ‘imagined’ distinctions. Places, if described as a “hill” or a “hall”, exist independently. But if these become “sacred sites” or “religious buildings”, they are ‘imagined’ places.

Inevitably, teachers have to address the question, “How do we know that god exists?” A simple strategy when addressing conflicting views is first to find agreements. There is likely to be agreement that gods exist in religious texts (stories, doctrine, ideology, laws, propaganda), the arts (music, performance, paintings, symbols), “sacred” places (religious buildings, shrines, statues), in certain people’s minds (beliefs, hopes, fears), and then eventually in museums. This leads to a discussion of what we mean by ‘exist’ using Searle’s (2006) distinctions (above), and then hopefully agreement that the existence of gods as we know them is ‘observer relative’ – dependent on humans and their activities. Harari provides a similar distinction when he talks of god ‘the cosmic mystery or the worldly lawgiver’ (2018:197). The former god is often conflated with, and used to legitimise, the latter - the ‘observer-relative’ ‘worldly lawgiver’ that creates the problems. The ability of the Roman Senate to turn living people into gods, and the old European ‘God Kings’, are obvious examples. The distinctions between the human and supposedly supernatural creation of gods should be clarified in any religious discourse.

Another conundrum for teachers is the simple “childish” question – “What was there before religion and the gods?”, and “What will be there after religion ends and the gods go?” Many creation myths solve this with the idea that previously ‘nothing’ existed, and the endpoint is addressed by the creation of ‘eternity’. But significant issues arise within the ‘ontology of nothing’, which examines whether nothing exists. In his book *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre explores, nothing (1958/2003). Nothing was the basis for many creationist myths, because the existence of nothing provided a void that needed a god to fill it - *Creatio ex nihilo* – ‘creation out of nothing’ (Lodahl, 2001). For many religious advocates, God was the creator who made the world out of nothing, but this requires them to prove that nothing existed. Jacques Lacan argues that nothing does not exist, and therefore a god as ‘the creator’ does not exist (Conor, 2002: 251-255).

Young people can become very engaged when discussing the existence of nothing, without needing to know they are “doing ontology”. A child might ask, “If zero is nothing, but  $0 - 1 = -1$ , then zero must have been something, otherwise  $0 - 1$  would = nothing.” “What do you get if you take ‘nothing’ from a vacuum?” (Savorelli 2018). These “childish” questions also interest some very grown-up academics (Kaplan, 2000), especially how zero shaped religion (Seife, 2000, p83-106). The deployment of nothing goes beyond creation myths and amusing arguments, and sometimes underpins major disputes, such as the false application of the *terra nullis* doctrine by early Zionists who talked of the return of ‘a people without a land [the Jews] to a land without a people [Palestine]’ (Harari 2018: 233).

The concept of the existence ‘eternity’ can be equally fascinating (Eire 2010). Religions shroud their endpoints in phrases like “eternal father”, “eternal law”, “immortal”, and “for ever and ever, Amen”. A child might ask, “So what comes after that?” A similar circumstance arises with the “childish” question, “What comes after infinity? Or, “What is the last number before infinity.” (BBC 2012a.). Political ideologies have similar

problems. In North Korea, the ideology of *Juche* (self-reliance) is explained as an ‘eternal truth’ (*yongsaeng pulmyol ui chilli*) that is ‘not meant to be fully comprehensible’ (Oh & Hassig, 2000:16). The late Kim Il-Sung now exists as a mummy and the ‘eternal president’. Not least, this raises the question, Should new ambassadors to the DPRK present their credentials to a corpse?

This level of questioning must start with cognisance that belief-systems have constructed and controlled major world languages - Latin, Arabic, Hindi, Chinese – to favour the myth-making of their religious ideologies. This means that major assumptions go unchallenged. When non-believers call themselves ‘atheists’, they are trapping themselves into implying that god exists. The word ‘atheist’ comes from the Greek *atheos* - ‘a’ meaning ‘without’ and ‘*theism*’ meaning ‘god’. *Atheist* therefore implies an acceptance that a god exists, because we cannot be ‘without’ something unless it exists in some form. (There must be a ‘*theism*’ to be ‘a’.) The term ‘secular’ is more useful, provided we clarify that it does not mean anti-religion, but simply ‘of the world’. Its early use included ‘secular Abbots’ - those who left the shelter of the monasteries and worked with people in the world outside. That understanding also clarifies that ‘Secular Jews’, and websites entitled ‘Secular Islam’ are not based on an oxymoron (Williams in Archer *et al*, 2006, p667).

Recognising how religions shaped language should lead to better educational discourse about religion. Instead of stating, “Osama bin Laden said that God...”, we should say, “Osama bin Laden said that *his* God...”, and similarly, “The Pope said that *his* God...”. Not least this avoids the inherent contradiction that Catholics and Muslims both aim to create a world of one ‘nation’. There is not room on one planet for more than one universal ‘nation’, or god. In multi-cultural London, children might discuss whether royalists should be singing “God save the Queen”, or “*Our* god save *our* Queen.’ Curiously the discredited verse 3 (below) uses ‘our God’.

Philosophers have now moved on from the age-old questions about whether gods exist independently of human existence, and whether the human mind exists independently of its body (Effingham, 2013). The increasing global influence of violent religious or quasi-religious ideologies prompts new discussions. Real-world problems are often rooted in educational processes that persuade people to believe that certain things exist objectively, without objective evidence. And when people accept, on the basis of belief but not evidence, that gods, heavens and hells exist, it becomes easy to extend that claim to persuade them that this ‘god’ wants them to kill others, that the reward will be anything they desire in a ‘heaven’, and if they don’t comply they will suffer eternal punishment in the other ‘imagined’ world of ‘hell’. Without the “existence” of gods, heavens, and hells the latter argument would appear as a baseless and wanton provocation to violence.

Scriptures can be misused to build on this myth-making. In Hebrew literature, a new thought is often prefaced by ‘Amen’, meaning ‘I tell you the truth’. In Christian and Muslim teaching, ‘Amen’ often follows a claim. Shouldn’t we be able to assume, without frequent reminders, that religious writers and teachers tell the truth? Political religions use the same device. The main propaganda newspaper of the Soviet Union was called *Pravda*, meaning ‘truth’.

Evangelical churches teach that the Old Testament is the word of their god and must be taken literally as “the truth”. A child might ask why Genesis (1:3-2:3) declaims that light, water and earth were created before the appearance of the sun and stars on day four. Surely suns and stars must appear *before* light and the geological and biological planet. Judo-evangelical totalitarian beliefs can also lead to serious outcomes. The edict

that the Gibeonites should forever be ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ (Joshua 9:21) was used by the *Dutch Reformed Church* to teach that ‘black’ and ‘coloured’ citizens should be subservient classes and so the South African apartheid system was legitimate.

Numerous other edicts encourage violence. These include the killing and torture of animals and humans (Judges 1:2–6. Numbers 25:8.), genocide (Deuteronomy 20:16-17), killing people who hold different views including family members who try to challenge religious views (Deuteronomy 13:1–5, 12:30, 17:2–7, 13:6.10), rewarding victorious soldiers with virgins to rape from the defeated enemy (Deuteronomy 20, 21; Numbers 31), and the ethic that children can be punished for the sins of their grandparents (Numbers 14:8). The ‘political religions’ (above) are very similar. The idea that children should be punished for the sins of their parents, and that family members who dissent from the prevailing ideology should be exposed and killed, also pertains, and is practised, in Communist North Korea. Edicts like these underpin the religious abuse of children, not least sexual abuse by Catholic priests. In 2017 a private Islamic school in Johor, Malaysia, a boy died as a result of being beaten by a teacher, after then having both legs amputated to try and save his life. His sin was making a noise in an assembly hall (BBC, 2017c).

All ideologies, religious or political, are open to ontological questioning, including familiar grand world theories. Barbara Ward (1966: 121) provides a realistic perspective on Marx’s rhetoric:

"Karl Marx derives his critique entirely from Western ideas and sources... Dialectical materialism, the scientific secret of man’s history...has the grandeur and excitement of a great work of art – the sombre force of a Verdi opera, the flashing vision of Goethe’s *Faust*. But like them, it belongs to the world of imagination, not of fact..."

"The Marxist vision of history, with its cosmic sweeps from slavery to feudalism to capitalism to communism, is not true in the sense that a scientific experiment or a plain record of dates and happenings is true. It cannot be tested. No predictions can be based on it. And it is contradicted by a large variety of facts".

Comparing the ontological bases of religious doctrine and quasi-religious political ideologies provides a way to question and analyse both.

## 5. Epistemology – Fact-checking sources of knowledge

Similarly, understanding how we, or others, know something is important within studies of belief-systems. *Epistemology* – the study of theories of knowledge (Audi, 1997; Evans & Smith, 2012) – asks questions such as:

- What is the *origin* of the knowledge?
- How did the *empirical research* (and other experience) and *reasoned arguments* contribute to creating the knowledge?
- How *certain* (valid and error free) is the knowledge?
- Was the knowledge created *critically* (sceptically)?



- How has, or might, the knowledge *change* as other knowledge and understandings change?
- To what degree would the knowledge be seen as *generally true* (as ‘a theory’). (Blackburn, 1996)

A comparative perspective also raises questions about *cross-cultural* understandings of knowledge. Anthropologists report that “traditional” or indigenous knowledge might come more from practical experience, dreams and the spirit world, elders and other authorities (Aikman, 1999).

The obvious problems were recognized long ago by Islamic writers. In his comparative study of Muslims and Hindus, *India* (circa 1030), Persian scholar, Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (Sachau, 2002), warned:

"We must distinguish different classes of reporters.

One of them tells a lie, as intending to further an interest of his own, either by lauding his family or nation, because he is one of them, or by attacking the family or nation on the opposite side, thinking that thereby he can gain his ends.

Another one tells a lie regarding a class of people whom he likes, as being under obligations to them, or whom he hates because something disagreeable has happened between them.

Another tells a lie because he is of such a base nature as to aim thereby at some profit, or because he is such a coward as to be afraid of telling the truth.

Another tells a lie because it is his nature to lie, and he cannot do otherwise, which proceeds from the essential meanness of his character and the depravity of his innermost being.

Lastly, a man may tell a lie from ignorance, blindly following what others told him.

Similarly, around 1377, Egyptian historian Ibn Khaldūn complained about ‘Reliance upon transmitters’:

People as a rule approach great and high-ranking persons with praise and encomiums [tributes]. They embellish conditions and spread their fame.

Students often happen to accept and transmit absurd information that, in turn, is believed on their authority". (In Williams 2018: 130, 15)

Religious and ideological knowledge is often based on an ‘argument from an *authority*’ (Salmon, 2006), such as a theologian or despot. The credibility of expert views assumes that:

- the expert is usually correct about the subject,
- there is a professional consensus that the expert is usually correct, and therefore,
- any further opinion from the authority on this subject is likely to be correct.

The views of religious experts are susceptible to the (aptly termed) ‘halo effect’ (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). We might judge an authority to be correct because the ‘halo’ of one particular above-average trait – wealth, tradition, position – can generate a perception that other qualities are above average – honesty, intelligence, diligence. This is one of the reasons why the paedophile Catholic priests went undetected for so many years. If a priest believes, as the Bible claims, that, “Every high priest chosen from among



human beings is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf ..." (Hebrews 5:1), and that he is God's representative on Earth, then he and his followers are likely to be uncritical of the choice to sexually abuse children in school settings (Robinson, 2012). Religious texts often start with phrases such as, "It is written that..." or "According to...", which gives an impression the source is an unassailable authority. To the researcher, this discourse should represent a warning – the text is *only* 'written' 'according to' someone who is probably unknown and may perhaps have never existed.

The (supposed) views of US Secretary of State, Donald Rumsfeld, provide a surprisingly relevant checklist for religious and ideological studies: 'There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.' The further questions is, whose 'knowns' count most, and why? (Williams, 2012, p57).

## 6. Validity – When is religious knowledge 'fake news'?

In Europe and the US, religion is in decline, and so the traditional sources of wisdom and knowledge are increasingly questioned, not least by young people. In 1984, there were 854,000 regular churchgoers in Scotland; there are now 390,000 (BBC 2017a.). A quarter of congregations have no children (BBC 2017b.). In 1983, 31 % of British people described themselves as 'no religion'. By 2017, *NatCen's* British Social Attitudes survey found that it is 53 % (NatCen 2017). Before this, in 2014, a former Archbishop of Canterbury described Britain as a 'post-Christian' society that is no longer 'a nation of believers' (Ross 2014). The *Pew* surveys in US indicate a religious decline of around 1 % per annum. Half of the present 'nones' abandoned their childhood religion, and 1 in 5 now positively 'dislike' organised religion (Pew 2017). Gallup research concurs, with more than 33 % of those born after 1981 declaring 'no religion'. In 1957 that was 1 %. Increasing numbers (26 %) consider the Bible as 'a book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts recorded by man', and only 24 % believe it is the 'actual word of God, and is to be taken literally, word for word' (Saad 2018).

Disciplines such as archaeology are beginning to "speak truth to religion", and much of the reasoning is based on simple logic and common sense. Keller's book *The Bible as History* is a seminal example (1983). Keller questions, for example, whether the apparent birth of Christ was in winter. He points out that the freezing temperatures in a desert during winter, after sun-down, would almost certainly have killed any shepherds who 'watched their flocks by night'. More recent texts include the use of new technologies, which challenge beliefs about dates and genetic links (Insoll, 2004).

The combination of new technologies and common sense provides fascinating new understandings. Europeans, religious or not, believe that crucifixion was a common punishment across the Roman Empire, with crucifixions killing thousands of victims at single events. So there should be numerous remains of crucified bodies, not least because nails and suitably damaged bones would be preserved. In fact, there is only one archaeological example. It also now seems likely that most crucifixions were not executions, but humiliating acts of public torture and display, by tying captors to trees and stakes, designed by state terrorists (Tzaferis, 1970). The findings also indicate that the cross was a T, not the familiar 'crucifix' that countless Christian believers present as their logo. And common-sense concludes that victims could not have been nailed though their palms,

because their body weight would have torn their hands off. Our knowledge of crucifixion comes from ancient Greek and other writings, and writers have always been prone to exaggerating death and violence to attract a readership.

Most religious texts were compiled many years after the events they describe. The Bible's New Testament seems to have existed in a rudimentary form only from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, but the form that we now recognise appeared a century later. The oldest known version of the New Testament was written in first-century Koine Greek, which was not the indigenous language of Jesus' community. This presents the likelihood of errors in copying and translation. For example, the paradox of the virgin birth might become less puzzling through knowing the Hebrew word in Isaiah (7:14) is '*almah*', which simply means 'young woman' not a virgin.

The methods of critical discourse analyses are relevant (van Dijk, 2014). If we look carefully at the children's Hymn 'All things bright and beautiful', sung by countless little children in European and American churches and primary schools, since 1848, it becomes blatant propaganda to preserve the power relationship between the rich and the poor. The chorus conflates the concept of a heavenly 'God' and earthly 'Lords', praising: *All things bright and beautiful/ All creatures great and small/ All things wise and wonderful/ The Lord God made them all*. And verse 3. legitimises the desired power relationships that the 'Lord God' 'made': *The rich man in his castle/ The poor man at his gate/ God made them high and lowly/ And ordered their estate* (Alexander 1848).

We can also ask a simplified 'deconstructionist' question, what is missing or hidden? Where, for example, are the women writers and heroes in religious texts? Why is the *Book of Judith* (Goccaccini, 2012) omitted from Jewish texts and sidelined to the Apocrypha in Protestant Bibles? Is it perhaps because her story tells how she helped her soldiers to win a battle by seducing the enemy general, Holofernes, getting him drunk and having sex with him, and cutting his head off during their love-making. Perhaps that does not fit well with the ethos of a male-dominated clerical profession.

Similarly, where are the newly invented regions in theological discourse? How many people are aware, for example, of the Hòa Hảo religion in Vietnam, created in 1939. Uniquely, it tries to unite Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian belief-systems, under the symbol of a global "eye" (Figure 4.). (Islam was virtually unknown in Vietnam at that time.) Hòa Hảo was also a nationalist political force against French colonial rule. Yet it is now prevented from teaching its ideology by the communist government whose existence was aided by the work of this religio-political movement among peasant farmers (Nam, 2004).



Figure 4. A newly created religion. The global eye of the Hòa Hảo alter and temple windows, Vietnam. (Photos: C.Williams).

The conundrums of ontology and epistemology, can also be addressed through simple comparisons, and questioning illogical claims. The BBC provides a useful checklist for fact-checking religious reports and other potentially biased information through comparisons, for example the apparent dates of photos with weather data (Williams 2015: 120). Logically, countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia must still have witches and sorcerers, because they have laws against witchcraft and sorcery, sometimes resulting in execution (BBC, 2012b.) But to what degree is the ideology of witchcraft just used for political control, as throughout Europe until recently? Similarly, sexuality is sometimes accompanied by ontological claims, which are contested cross-culturally (Herdt, 1991). In 2012, the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, claimed, 'In Iran we don't have homosexuals like in your country...In Iran we do not have this phenomenon.' He forgot that Iranian law formally addresses homosexual acts by men (*lavat* – sodomy) and women (*mosahegheh*), and his courts executed people for breaking these laws (BBC 2012). If there were no homosexuals in Iran, why would there be a need for laws and punishments to deal with homosexual behaviour (Taylor, 2011, p.32)?

These issues of truth and validity are not just a concern in academic spheres. They create practical challenges in classrooms, and are often addressed within the framework of 'teaching controversial/sensitive issues,' within citizenship education (Cowan, 2012). The key strategies are about creating safe spaces for truthful and constructive discussions. In terms of curriculum, the UNESCO *Disarming History* project is evolving useful methods from diplomacy which can be applied to classroom discussions, but also to creating documents, including textbooks and educational materials, about contested issues. In general:

- At first, only include things that everyone agrees about, using basic language ("Japanese military in Nanjing", not "Nanjing Massacre").
- Circulate initial drafts widely for comment, in relevant languages, and discuss responses openly.
- Build acceptance of the process.
- Identify international norms as a basis for discussing contentious material (Children's Rights Convention, ICC Statute).
- Use international terminology from relevant and objective glossaries and lexicons (WHO, IPCC).
- Then work incrementally to agree and phrase contentious material.
- If agreement cannot be reached, explain why, and present all views.
- Do not trade facts politically, only use agreed material.

Although slow, this all builds support for the eventual outcomes (Williams 2015, 233).

The further aspect is how to engage children of the internet age who may dismiss opposing views without thinking about changing their own views. So 'internet literacy' is another vital aspect, which includes trying to link what children are learning at school with how they are using electronic devices and social networking sites beyond

the classroom (Evans, 2004). Young people are more likely to contribute to productive discussions about religious and political ideology through thinking about engaging questions, reformatted from ontology and epistemology, for example:

- How can we fact-check ‘nothing’ and ‘eternity’?
- Why do Christians tell poor men sit at the gates of rich men in their castles?
- Why does the Iranian government kill homosexuals as a punishment for their non-existence?
- When the Punk Rock group the Sex Pistols sang ‘I am an antichrist’, did this mean they believed that Jesus existed, in order to be ‘anti’ him? What would be a better line?

Framing questions as counterfactuals can also be effective:

- If some Islamic countries still have witches and sorcerers, should the next Harry Potter story be set in Saudi Arabia?
- What if crucifixion stories were mainly ‘fake news’?
- What if Judith had married Holofernes – would she be seen as a heroic feminist or a deceitful whore?
- If there were no religions, should we invent one and what would it be like?

The point of these approaches is not to ridicule believers, but to teach “common-sense religious history” based on data and ideas that are credible and interesting. Whatever the method or type of engagement, it is clear that care should be taken to avoid repeating questionable discourse, and thinking about the origins of what we think we know can help. Where did the US idea of an ‘axis of evil’ and ‘good and evil’ come from? The source can be traced back to the Persian prophet Mani (circa 216–276AD) (Richard, 2004). So when, (then) US president G.W. Bush deployed his ‘good and evil’ rhetoric about the ‘axis’ of supposed US enemies, including Iran, he was just repeating an Iranian ideology.

## 7. Research frameworks and data collection

*Research frameworks* (Beissel-Durrant, 2004) (also called ‘strategies’, ‘approaches’, or ‘designs’) provide a structure within which different, or similar, data collection methods are used. In the past, research design often started with a decision to use either a *quantitative (positivist)* or *qualitative (interpretive)* framework, but mixed methods are increasingly common (Cresswell, 2009). A starting point for choosing a framework is to decide if the focus of the study is on *people*, *places*, and/or *systems*, (Williams 2015, p, 95). Standard frameworks and data collection methods are discussed at length in numerous methods books, and so this discussion only outlines some of the less-familiar aspects that may be particularly relevant to researching belief-systems.

A significant aspect is the need to understand *power*, *elites*, and *leadership*, as these dynamics created, maintain, and often defend, belief-systems (Williams, 2012). Not least



is the question, what persona should an outsider researcher adopt when interviewing or observing other religions. Is dressing appropriately for the religion respectful, or is it deceitful (Figure 5). It is also not easy to access busy powerful people, which may require planning and opportunism. Korean PhD researcher Yun-joo LEE explains (Figure 6):

"At first, the security staff would not let me in. I asked for a glass of water, and started talking to them in Arabic, which they liked, and they started asking me about Korea. I then asked to use the toilet, and so they let me enter the building. I came back and they seemed relaxed, perhaps because I had been in and not made a problem. They told me to go where the Pope walked back after the mass. If I saw him then, that was apparently not their responsibility! I could only ask him one question, but it was a very interesting answer which showed that the pope had insight into local circumstances, and was aware of a hidden gender problem that affected men" (Lee, 2010).



*Figure 5.* The persona of the researcher. A Korean researcher, Yun-joo Lee, wearing Muslim dress to interview an Islamic leader, Professor Muhammad S. Tantawy, Grand Sheik of *Al-Azhar*. (Photo: Yun-joo LEE).



*Figure 6.* Accessing powerful people. Yun-joo Lee does an opportunistic interview with Baba Shinuda, Coptic pope, Cairo, Egypt. (Photo Yun-joo LEE).



*Ethics* (moral philosophy) is a central part of researching belief-systems. Research compares the behaviour of people against ethical norms – international law, human rights agreements, traditions, codes, professional standards (Sidgwick, 1981).

- *Theoretical* studies assess and provide the bases for ethical claims.
- *Normative* studies consider the ‘normal’ pragmatic bases of moral behaviour.
- *Applied* studies identify how ethical standards should be used in particular circumstances.
- *Descriptive* research discovers how moral standards are actually applied.
- *Psychological* studies assess moral capacity and agency.

*Global ethics* considers macro-issues such as distributive justice, religion, and the conduct of international organizations. Contrasting *stated behaviour* (what they say), with observed *demonstrated behaviour* (what they do), is a useful analytical tool. Why, during the Arab Spring in 2012, did a fatwa from *al Azhar University* say that it was un-Islamic for clerics to take part in protests, yet in Tahrir Square *al Azhar* clerics were busy protesting in their Islamic dress (Islamopedia, 2012)?

*Ethnography* is usually associated with anthropology, and aims to provide a holistic account of peoples or other groups, including their languages, history, and belief-systems (Hamersley, 2007). *Fieldwork* and *participant observation* have been central (DeWalt 2002). *Endogenous* perspectives consider things that come from within a cultural group (food taboos, shrines); *exogenous*, concern external views (nutritional standards, symbolism). Similarly, *emic* accounts come from someone inside a group (“our gods say...”), and an *etic* account comes from an outsider (“their moral values are...”). *Ethnomusicology* (Myers, 1992) (cultural/comparative musicology) now extends to urban music, busking and religious forms such as gospel. Songs, especially national anthems, can provide interesting evidence about beliefs and ideologies. Verse 3 of ‘God Save the Queen’ helps to explain the lingering neo-colonial attitudes in Britain: *O Lord our God arise/ Scatter her enemies/ And make them fall/ Confound their politics/ Frustrate their knavish tricks/ On Thee our hopes we fix/ God save us all*.

*Linguistics* may be part of an ethnographic study, and can be applied to songs. It investigates the meaning, form and context of languages, how languages evolve, and intercultural communication (Wiseman, 1995). Comparative/historical linguistics (Beekes, 1995) can help to track the migration and interaction of peoples, and the spread of religious ideas. Language can explain power structures within castes structures and religions through phrases such as ‘ritual pollution’ (Harper, 1964). *Lexicography* – using or creating dictionaries – may form part of a linguistics study, and can help to analyse religious encyclopaedias and dictionaries (Cornell, 2017).

Jarad Diamond’s (2010) comparative approach to *historical natural experiments* provides an pertinent approach to researching long-term belief-systems, without necessarily engaging directly with the participants. This examines *similarities* or *differences* in:

- *initial conditions* – relevant starting points. (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church)
- *perturbations* – *endogenous* (internal) or *exogenous* (external) influences (see below). (e.g. Martin Luther. The Reformation)
- *outcomes* – factors that can be shown to have a *causal* link to *initial conditions*. (e.g. The Protestant Church)

Comparisons may be of cases with similarities and differences in *initial conditions* or *perturbations*. The approach needs to be aware of ‘*Confounders*’ - alternative explanations that may interfere with identifying a causal link.

*Crowdsourcing research* (CS) can relate to all frameworks, and is probably the most exciting development in world research. It entails: ‘an organising entity that outsources research tasks, which that entity could not achieve alone, to large groups of self-selected people (lay and expert)’ (Williams, 2013). CS research may be organized by civil society organizations, companies or governments. Experts may contribute by systemizing and presenting complex data in easily searchable formats and analysing particularly interesting findings. Volunteers and others can be organized to contribute to data collection, data management, evidence testing (triangulation), analysis, the development of relevant technologies and dissemination.

But CS need not depend on the internet, and understanding non-digital methods can inform modern strategies. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (Frazer 1890) (above) was based on questionnaires sent through missionary and colonial networks in many countries including Japan, China, Africa and the Americas. In modern terms, Frazer used social networks for a snowball survey. *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* (1563) is another pertinent example. This documented ‘persecutions and horrible troubles’ perpetrated by the ‘Roman Prelates’. It included testimony evidence from ‘both men and women, whiche can and do beare wytnes’, including prisoners. The 1583 edition was three times bigger than the first, and four times bigger than the Bible.

*Online research* (Ford, 2011) can also relate to all frameworks, and includes using the internet,

- as a *research tool* (email, *Skype*, search engines, internet surveys, remote viewing of real-time videos), which can increase the inclusiveness of research.
- as a *source of data* (websites, blogs, social media).
- for *methodological research* – online research about online research – transmission speed, nodes, specific patterns, data blocks, data management and storage.

Methods for using online data fall into two categories – researching *knowns* and *unknowns* – but there are overlaps. When searching for *knowns*, researchers know broadly what they are looking for. They know the likely data sources, or how to find those sources (Ford, 2011), and use data that is collected specially for a particular study. They are usually trying to understand *why* specific things happen, through in-depth analyses of online content for example of extremist groups (Donelan, 2005), and often include researching specific people, or groups such as faith organisations and children (Lobe, 2008).

Online studies about people are usually small-scale, feasible for single researchers, and are explained under headings like ‘digital anthropology’ (Horst, 2012), ‘virtual ethnography’ (Hine, 2000), ‘online ethnography’ (Miller, 2001), ‘netography’ (Kozinets, 2009), and ‘social media research’ (Vis, 2014). Studies might focus on behaviour that is uniquely online, such as online grooming. Data collection may simply entail capturing relevant material for later analysis using screen shots, or researchers may make notes like traditional fieldwork notes. Open source software is increasingly available, in specific fields such as international development (Sowe, 2012).

Searching for *unknowns* entails ‘big data’ research – ‘big’ in terms of volume, velocity and variety. Researchers often do *not* know exactly where to look, or even what or who they are looking for, and their studies usually concern *populations*. The data is often by-product or ‘exhaust data’, which was collected initially for a non-research purpose (location of mobile phones, IP addresses). Big data research may occasionally provide answers to research questions, but more often identifies where to look for those answers. Researchers are often searching for *patterns* (clusters, outliers, associations), *networks* (who ‘shares’ with who) and *trends* (frequencies, data flows), perhaps based on keywords in mass *content*. They look for indications of *what* is happening (interest in religious sites, concern about events), and *how* large groups of people organize themselves (social networks, the leaders of religious e-chat), but not *why*.

Simple searches of *big data* can sometimes provide clues for further in-depth research, and can be very easy to do. A name search on *Google Trends* or *Ngram* may indicate periods of online activity or media interest. Looking at the meta-data for simple searches on Google should show the number of internet hits for a particular name and phrase. Sometimes, studying the *human networks* around online networks may be more significant for addressing particular research questions, but these may be hard to access and understand. Some user groups, such as hate-groups, may use chat rooms as a perverse game, but the content may reveal little about what they actually think or do.

However the research is designed, it is particularly important to get different viewpoints about belief-systems. Outsider researchers are inevitably shielded from certain data sources, and so a study design should aim to *triangulate* views from:

- *elites* – select people, often decision-makers, who can provide an *overview* of something – senior religious/political leaders, managers, administrators. But they may present a politicized or self-promotional perspective.
- *experts* – people who can explain *objective knowledge* gained through professional endeavours or specific skills – scientists, historians, artists, musicians, educationists. But their view might reflect a specific school of thinking or disciplinary outlook.
- *representatives* – people who identify themselves with a certain group and may explain *group-related experiences* – tribal or nomadic groups, young/old, male/female, professionals or manual workers, local religious leaders. But they may only represent a partial, perhaps self-interested, viewpoint.
- *locals* – people (including visitors) who know about a particular *location* – town, village, coast – or *setting* – shrines, temples, schools. But they may not be able to explain their circumstances in a broader context.

- *transitory* – people experiencing a movement from one circumstance to another – geographical, political, personal, cultural – who have knowledge about that *change*. But during the period of change they may not fully understand what is happening.

*Elites* and *experts* are likely to provide *exogenous* or *etic* data; *representatives*, *locals* and *transitory* people will probably provide *endogenous* or *emic* accounts (see below). The same individuals may have different personas or roles in different circumstances. Images, such as political or religious murals or friezes, may indicate a relevant range of human data sources (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Identifying sources of human data from a political frieze. 1. elites – ideological leaders, often elevated to godlike positions. 2. experts – military scholars. 3. representatives – ethnic minorities. 4. locals – villagers. 5. transitory – prisoners. Army Museum, Da Nang, Vietnam. (Photo: C.Williams)

## 8. Conclusions

Education is implicated in contemporary religious and ideological issues, often now under the headings conflict, child abuse, extremism and terrorism. Sound research is necessary to inform related education policy and practice, but relevant contributions from comparative education have been surprisingly rare. This is in part because of a lack of clear methodologies, yet related comparative methodologies (e.g. comparative religion / ideology / policy / media) can help to form relevant approaches. The starting point is clear definition. The term ‘belief-systems’ - to include faith-based and political religions, and other ideological systems such as aggressive capitalism, communism and neo liberalism – provides a good basis for comparative studies and assists a broader account of relevant data, insights and analysis.

An obvious difficulty in relation to belief-systems, especially religious, is the creation of unbiased ontological and epistemological bases for a study, to ensure a robust academic



framing, and to avoid “for or against” bias. A ‘critical realist comparative’ approach (Bergene, 2007) helps to reduce the traditional weakness of comparative studies, particularly false claims of causation, and leads to simpler and more plausible conclusions.

In educational settings, discussions can be honed to lessen confrontation by first seeking areas of agreement about where gods only exist because of human imagination (e.g. sacred sites, heavens), clearly exist because of human activities (e.g. books, buildings and museums etc), or only exist in terms of personal hopes and beliefs (i.e. in people’s minds). Discussions can be deepened by asking if ‘nothing’ and ‘eternity’ can exist, analysing the construction of religion through language, and comparing the promotion of harm and hatred within diverse forms of ideological texts.

Epistemology might be discussed through exploring current arguments about ‘fake news’ and ‘fact checking’ systems such as that used by the BBC, philosophical approaches such as counter-factual analysis, and non-western historical advice such as that of al-Bīrūnī and Ibn Khaldun. The UNESCO ‘disarming history’ framework helps to create safe spaces for non-confrontational educational discussions and the participatory creation of curricula and teaching materials. ‘Internet literacy’ provides a relevant way to base these approaches on present-day communications skills.

Appropriate research frameworks for international and other comparative research can proceed from locating the aims of the study in terms of *people*, *places*, and/or *systems*. ‘*Historical natural experiments*’ provide a way to frame retrospective analysis. Understanding how to access data from or about powerful people and organisations can inform and improve data collection methods. Ethics, ethnography and linguistics may contribute further insights. *Crowdsourcing research* has a long history in the study of belief-systems and the *online research*, including *big data*, increases the scope of this method. Comparative analysis is likely to be more plausible if based on triangulated views from *elites* (e.g. religious leaders), *experts* (e.g. museum curators), representatives (e.g. community leaders), *locals* (e.g. disability and gender rights groups), and *transitional* people (e.g. refugees, tourists).

Most importantly young people and minority groups are invaluable partners in this area of study, especially if including internet users in other countries. Cross-border and cross-cultural ‘fact checking’ is especially valuable. The outcomes, for any group, can be both educational and analytical, and inclusive border-crossing participation is the best way to enhance balance, and check, validate, and then disseminate research.

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## *The Reformation as a Religious, Political, and Educational Project*

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*La reforma como proyecto religioso, político y educativo*

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### **Abstract**

This year, five hundred years ago, Martin Luther according to the legend nailed his 95 Theses on the church door in Wittenberg. The Theses, originally written in Latin, were translated into German. Thanks to the invention of the art of printing, "My Theses were truly through all of Germany" Luther later suggested. In a few years they triggered a religious and political transformation in the northern part of Europe, including Scandinavia. This transformation was later termed the Reformation. Today Christian churches rooted in the Reformation are spread all over the world.

*Key Words:* Reformation; Religious Project; Political Project; Educational Project

### **Resumen**

Este año, hace quinientos años, Martín Lutero, según la leyenda, clavó sus 95 tesis en la puerta de la iglesia en Wittenberg. Las tesis, originalmente escritas en latín, fueron traducidas al alemán. Gracias a la invención del arte de la impresión, «Mis tesis fueron verdaderamente a través de toda Alemania», Lutero sugirió más tarde. En pocos años desencadenaron una transformación religiosa y política en la parte norte de Europa, incluida Escandinavia. Esta transformación fue más tarde llamada la Reforma. Hoy en día las iglesias cristianas enraizadas en la Reforma se extienden por todo el mundo.

*Palabras clave:* Reforma; Proyecto religioso; Proyecto político; Proyecto educativo

## 1. Introduction

This year, five hundred years ago, Martin Luther according to the legend nailed his 95 Theses on the church door in Wittenberg. The Theses, originally written in Latin, were translated into German. Thanks to the invention of the art of printing, “My Theses were truly through all of Germany” Luther later suggested. In a few years they triggered a religious and political transformation in the northern part of Europe, including Scandinavia. This transformation was later termed the Reformation. Today Christian churches rooted in the Reformation are spread all over the world.

## 2. Some first beginnings

In the wake of the Renaissance, which is primarily described as a secular and humanistic movement, efforts aiming at religious reforms of the Church and Christianity also appeared. However, such reform efforts were not new. The English theologian and dissident within the Roman Catholic Church, John Wycliffe (c. 1325-84), had advocated translation of the Bible into the vernacular. In 1382 he completed a translation directly from the Latin version of the Bible, *Vulgata*, known as the Wycliffe Bible. In Bohemia he was followed by John Hus (1365-1415) who suffered the fate Wycliffe had avoided: Hus was burned at the stake as a heretic. From the Hus movement – but two centuries later – the famous Czech educationist Jan Amos Comenius (1592-70) embraced a democratic and universal educational ideal: to teach everyone everything thoroughly (*omnes, omnia, omnino*) with the overall aim preparing for life after death. He belonged to a small Protestant sect, called “The Bohemian or Moravian Brothers”, which had developed as an offshoot of Johan Hus’ opposition to the Church of Rome.

Of course protests had occurred before Luther too. For example, in Italy the Dominican friar Girolamo Savanorola (born 1452) was shaken by the scandalous conduct of Pope Borgia. He was arrested, tortured, hanged and then burned at the stake in Florence in 1498. Some of his writings impressed Luther but, unlike Wycliffe and Hus and Luther, Savonarola never objected to the theology of the Roman Church. His protest was purely moral.

Such heretical movements were for a time successfully fought against by the Roman Catholic Church but it became more and more difficult for the Roman Church to preserve its authority and integrity. Its inner secularization during the Renaissance weakened the respect for it by sincere Christians and opened the way for further critique and accusations from the outside of not living up to its own religious and moral norms.

Critique from the inside inspired by Renaissance humanism was well-known as well. The insider critics, however, were not aiming at a rupture with the Catholic Church, they only wanted to reform it. Such critics included Erasmus of Rotterdam and the Danish Carmelite friar Poul Helgesen from Elsinore who was accused of preparing the way for the Danish Reformation although he was a prominent and tough critic of Lutheranism. The whole body of his work was published recently, among them the so-called *Skibykrønike* (Skiby Chronicle). The Chronicle was a “historical work in which he describes events from Christian I (1448-81) onwards. In hard and merciless terms he portrays the spokesmen of the Lutheran Reformation – some of whom were his former students; but just as hard and merciless are his portrayals of the leading figures of the Catholic Church because of their incompetence in church matters and in their lust for power” (Laustsen, 2011, 24). The Chronicle was not found until the seventeenth century. It had been walled-up behind



the altar in the church of Skiby on Zealand. It stops in the middle of a sentence about the year 1535 and maybe it was hidden then because of its content – undoubtedly dangerous – in the middle of the civil war before the Danish Reformation in 1536.

Compared with the Renaissance, the chief point about the origins of the Reformation is that they were purely religious. Later developments, however, added a strong political side which meant that the universal Catholic Church in parts of Europe was replaced by national churches. For these parts of Europe the Reformation also meant radical changes in education and for mentality in general. But how profound these changes were is still being discussed. For example, how strongly did Protestant education influence protestant mentality? In *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, 1904/05) the sociologist Max Weber put forward the thesis that the Protestant work ethic was an important factor behind the emergence of capitalism. If true, the idea seems to apply better to Calvinism than Lutheranism. A certain connection, however, might be seen in the circumstance that Protestantism compared with Catholicism represents a religious individualism while capitalism represents an economic individualism.

An exploration of the relation between Protestantism and society in general might begin at Wittenberg in Germany where the Reformation started.

### **3. Wittenberg**

Today Wittenberg is part of Saxony-Anhalt but in the sixteenth century it was part of the Saxony Electorate in the Holy Roman Empire and a small city with about two thousand inhabitants. It happened however to contain not only the main figure of the Reformation, the famous member of the Augustine monastic order, Martin Luther, but also a constellation of persons and institutions that made possible the success of the religious doctrines behind the Reformation.

One of these persons was the local Elector Friedrich III (Friedrich “the Wise”) and Wittenberg was one of his residences – that is, it was politically under his control. Although Friedrich remained a Catholic all his life he nevertheless turned out to be an important supporter of Luther and the Reformation. When the Pope in 1518 demanded Luther be handed over for prosecution because of the 95 theses Friedrich refused and argued instead for a public debate to settle the religious questions. In the middle of these conflicts the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I – a German – died which was fortunate for Luther. As one of the seven Electors, Friedrich was a central person in the election of the new Emperor. The Pope and the future Emperor Charles V needed his support. This meant a pause in the prosecution. When the case was taken up again in 1520 Friedrich claimed – probably to gain time – the new faith could no longer be stopped. It had already been adopted by too many both inside and outside the Church. And when Luther in 1521 refused to withdraw the Theses at the Diet of Worms it was again Friedrich who hid him in Wartburg castle until the danger was over. Luther spent his time in Wartburg translating the New Testament from Greek to German.

Martin Luther himself was born 1483 in Eisleben where he also died 63 years later, in a house not far from the one in which he was born. He joined the Augustine monastic order, was ordained as a priest in Erfurt Cathedral in 1507, defended his doctoral thesis at the new university in Wittenberg and was shortly after appointed *Lectura in Biblia*, i.e. teacher in biblical studies at the university. He held this post to his death.

According to Luther, man was not justified in the eyes of God by prescribed merits or by good deeds but by faith in God's word alone (*sola fide*) as preached by the Gospel alone (*sola scriptura*), and testified as salvation by God's grace alone (*sola gratia*).

The three principles form the essence of Lutheranism. *Sola scriptura* became the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation. First of all it called for translations of the Bible into the vernacular, secondly for improved reading skills among all citizens. The Reformation can be seen as the start of a gigantic educational project, a recasting of whole populations, that came to last several hundred years although at the start it was far from promising.

Removal of monasteries and monastic orders threatened to destroy the schools, mostly attached to the monasteries. References to the importance of education are therefore to be found throughout Luther's production. Most urgently in *An die Ratsherren aller Städte deutschen Landes, dass sie christliche Schulen aufrichten und halten sollen* (To councilmen of all cities in Germany that they establish and maintain Christian schools, 1524) but later also in *Eine Predigt, dass man die Kinder zur Schule halten* (A Sermon on keeping Children in School, 1530) as the effect of the first appeal did not come up to his expectations. Together, the two appeals form Luther's classic statements on the subject of education. In an intense and often heated language he tried to make it clear for all authorities that education is a matter of vital importance for "if the Scriptures and learning disappear, what will remain in the German lands but a disorderly and wild crowd of Tartars and Turks, indeed, a pigsty and mob of wild beasts" (A Sermon...p.3)

As a reformer, Luther was a hardworking writer and an inspiring lecturer. Many were attracted by his teachings, among them a young man who was appointed Professor of Greek in Wittenberg at the age of twenty one. His name was Philipp Melanchton (1497-1560). Even more than Luther he is an illustration of that the Reformation was not only a religious but also an educational project. In his career he combined the reconstruction of learning with the reform of the church and deserved the title *Praeceptor Germaniae* (Teacher of Germany) because of his influence on the development of the German education system, especially the School Ordinance for Saxony. Ordinances were legislative documents of regulation for the organization and operation of schools in German Protestant realms. He was also the author of many textbooks, grammars, and handbooks of education mostly in relation to reform of the Latin schools.

In the educational programme, which he already announced at his inaugural lecture, *On improving the Studies of the Youth* (1518), he combined development of humanistic inspired skills like reasoning, eloquence and fine writing with study of the sources, especially the Scripture. In the demand for a return to Scripture as the true source of study he was in full agreement with Luther.

A lifelong friendship developed between Melanchton and Luther and Melanchton became a strong supporter of Luther's new doctrines though there were differences:

"The alliance between the two minds of Luther and Melanchton, who between them moulded the Lutheran reform, is a fascinating story, for they were unequal yoke-fellows. The vehemence of the one versus the pacific nature of the other; the pastoral soul versus the scholar and intellectual; the apostle of the poor and simple versus the apostle of higher education; the pilgrim marching to his God through clouds of demons and temptations versus the moderate student of truth; rough peasant manners versus gentle courtesy; courage versus timidity; stand for truth though the Church fall versus the reasonable thinker ready to meet opponents half-way if he could; the enemy of Erasmus versus his friend – both of them found the alliance embarrassing and painful" (Chadwick, 1990, p. 66)

Johannes Bugenhagen (1485-1558) was also important. As vicar at the city church and professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg he became Luther's confessor and spiritual advisor. In their younger days he and the later Danish King Christian III had met each other. A lifelong friendship had developed between them which might be one of the reasons why he became an important player in creating the intellectual foundation of the Danish-Norwegian Reformation.

Many students from Denmark and Scandinavia in general went to Wittenberg whose fame gradually spread outside of Germany. Among the Danish students was no less a person than Hans Tausen. After studies in Copenhagen, Rostock and Leuven he finished his studies abroad in Wittenberg and later he became a main figure in the process that finally resulted in the introduction of the Reformation in Denmark. He is also spoken of as "the Danish Luther".

Without the help of painters and printers the new teachings would probably never have got off the ground. Not far from the university in Wittenberg was the painter Lucas Cranach's big workshop (Today it is a museum). From this workshop a stream of woodcuts were sent out which showed the difference between Christ and Antichrist (i.e. the Pope). Like Melanchton, Cranach became a friend of Luther and worked closely together with him. You may now and then see him referred to as the "the reporter of the Reformation".

Of course, the Roman Catholic Church also made use of the new printing techniques, e.g. printing large numbers of the controversial Letters of Indulgence that were sold to save souls from Purgatory – and to finance, among other things, the building of St. Peter's in Rome.

There is no doubt that Wittenberg - with its specific constellation of political interests, intellectual power and new media that both protected and supported the young, radical movement - functioned as an effective machine for the Reformation and lasted long enough for the new movement to gain a foothold in big areas of northern and western Europe (Arentoft, 2016). But had it not been for Friedrich III, (insert comma) Luther would probably have suffered the same fate as the previous reformers mentioned above. He only just escaped the stake. When finally serious steps were taken to stop him it was too late. The Lutheran ghost had already slipped out of the bottle and his extensive writings together with documents like *The Augsburg Confession* (1530)<sup>1</sup>, and *The Religious Peace of Augsburg* (1555) established the new faith. But it all started with the 95 Theses in 1517.

## 4. The 95 Theses

Although the Theses today are looked upon as a historical document and in a way seem only to attack a specific church practice of that time (the selling of Letters of Indulgence) they nevertheless inaugurated a radical break with some of the ideas put forward by the "old" church, i.e. the Roman Catholic Church.

Studies of the Bible, Paulus, and Augustine had convinced Luther, as he declared in Thesis 62, that the true treasure of the Church is the Holy Gospel and God's grace. Also, God's grace is unconditional and given by God only: "Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters" (Thesis 36). Selling Letters of Indulgence is the Church's own invention and will free no one from the

1 <http://www.stpls.com/uploads/4/4/8/0/44802893/augsburg-confession.pdf>

torments of Purgatory: “Thus, those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal Indulgences” (Thesis 21).

The Theses also contained a social critique as they claim that the money spent on Letters of Indulgence would find better use if it were given to the poor: “Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences” (Thesis 43).

Readers today might be surprised that the Theses, relatively moderate as they are, gave rise to so much resistance from the authorities. Especially two of the theses were seen to be contrary to the doctrines of the Church. In Thesis 58 he denied that the merits of Christ are the property of the Church and in Thesis 7 he claimed that the sacraments can only be received rightly through faith and belief in God: “God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive to the vicar, the priest”.

Although Luther probably only had a reform of the church on his mind when he formulated the Theses they nevertheless provoked the clerical and secular authorities. He was asked to withdraw them but refused to do so at a Diet in Augsburg September 1518. Two years later in June 1520, he was declared a heretic, excommunicated, and banned by the Pope (Tomlin, 2004, p. 83).

The next step was to have him declared an outlaw by the Emperor Charles V. He was granted safe passage to a Diet in Worms and resolved to go although it was a risky journey to undertake - Hus was granted safe passage to Constance but was burnt. But Luther decided to go. On April 18, 1520 he was asked, in the presence of the Emperor, whether he would recant the Theses with other of his writings like *Resolutions Concerning the 95 Theses*, *On the Papacy at Rome*, *Address to the Christian Nobility*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *On the Freedom of a Christian*. As is well known, he refused to recant with the following famous statement: “Unless I am proved wrong by Scriptures or by evident reason, then I am a prisoner in conscience to the Word of God. I cannot retract and I will not retract. To go against the conscience is neither safe nor right. God help me. Amen” (Chadwick, 56). Shortly after, he was declared an outlaw by the Edict of Worms issued by Charles V.

In a last attempt to reconcile the followers of Luther with the Roman Catholic Church Luther was ordered to arrive at a Diet in Augsburg in 1530. As an outlaw he was not able to go there himself. Melancthon went instead. In consultation with Luther he prepared beforehand a founding Evangelical-Lutheran confession, later called the Augsburg Confession, which he presented to the members of the Diet.

## 5. The Augsburg Confession 1530

The confession, originally a description of belief and church system in the principalities and cities that had joined Lutheranism, consists of 28 articles. The first 21 “Articles of Faith” deal with the ways in which the preaching takes place in “our churches”, i.e. the Lutheran communities.

The last seven articles deals with “Eliminated misuses” such as the celibacy of priests, monastic vows, the Mass etc.

The Confession was offered in a conciliatory tone and concludes “that there is nothing that differs from the Catholic Church or from the Church of Rome as known from its early writers”. The Lutheran criticism, however, that the Roman Church since its



early days has left the true teachings of the Bible is obvious to the reader and such criticisms were not surprisingly rejected by Charles V and the Catholic majority at the Diet in Augsburg. But had the members of the Diet listened more carefully to what Melancthon had to say and been ready to seize the opportunity, a split in the church might have been avoided.

The Confession later came to be the basis of the Reformation in the North. In Denmark it has functioned as the official belief of the church since the Reformation in 1536.

## **6. The Peace of Augsburg 1555**

In 1546, the year of Luther's death, Charles V started a war against the Lutheran princes and a year later he defeated their armies. In consequence the princes were forced to sign a peace declaration, the so-called *Augsburg-Interim*, in which the Emperor demanded Catholicism restored in all Lutheran areas. Priests were still allowed to marry, though, and the Lord's Supper could still be given as bread and blood to the laity. But time had run out for the Charles V. The fortunes of war shifted. He now lost on the battlefield to the German princes and the Pope did not support his idea of a compromise between Catholicism and Lutheranism. Disillusioned, he left his younger brother Ferdinand to chair the peace negotiations in Augsburg in 1555. It was decided that Catholicism was still the religion of the Holy Roman Empire but those who acknowledged the Augsburg Confession were also tolerated. According to the principle of *Cujus regio, ejus religio* (Whose realm, his religion) the faith of the ruler dictated the religion of his subjects. Those subjects who could not subscribe to their ruler's religion were permitted to leave the territory with their possessions. The principle reduced the risk of civil wars but the Declaration also gave legitimacy only to two forms of religion within the Empire: Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism, leaving out other Reformed versions of Christianity such as Calvinism. The reformed versions were in fact legalized only with the Westphalian Peace in 1648 which ended the Thirty Years' War.

In other words, already from the beginning differences in religious understanding were embedded in the Reformation. It might therefore be more to the point to talk of Reformation in the plural instead of in the singular.

## **7. The Reformation in Switzerland and France**

During his years of study the Frenchman Calvin got into contact with Luther inspired circles in Paris and Orleans and after intense readings of the Bible he converted to Lutheranism. In 1541 he was called to Geneva as a priest and created here an independent reformatory church, an act which had effects far outside Europe. Although influenced by Luther he interpreted the Gospel differently on certain points. Faith and forgiveness were not so much a question of absolute trust in a merciful God but in God as an elevated majesty with the Bible as the great law book for church and life of Christians. What he imagined was probably some kind of theocracy, i.e. a system of government in which the laws of the state are believed to be the laws of God.

But the crucial characteristic of Calvinism undoubtedly was the Doctrine of Predestination claiming that some are "preordained to everlasting life", others "foreordained to everlasting death". As an individual you do not know which of the two groups you are preordained to. From a superficial consideration this might be taken as a sign to



sit back. It is already decided to which of the two groups you belong. In practice, however, it had the opposite effect. A pious and active life was seen as the most certain sign that you belonged to the chosen.

From that perspective also education became a matter of great importance. Calvin's principal work *Institutio religionis christianae* (Instruction in Christian religion, 1535) carries a half educational title. In his school plan, all forces were mobilized to uphold his view on Christianity. Prayer, hymn singing, Bible reading, and church attendance played an important role and were maintained as duties no one should avoid. At his Academy and gymnasium in Geneva discipline was strict and school life was marked by gravity and temperance in relation to worldly pleasures.

In Calvin's schools those men were educated that brought Calvin's doctrines to France, to Puritans in England, and to Presbyterians in Scotland. At the same time they initiated schools in their countries. It followed naturally that these schools were maintained by the church not by the state.

In Germany Calvin's followers were given the name "the Reformed" and they were, as such, excluded from the Peace of Augsburg. In France they became subject to severe persecutions but at a synod (meeting) in Paris in 1559 the French Protestants succeeded in agreeing on a Calvinistic confession and an order of the church modelled after the church in Geneva. Since then, this so-called *Presbyterian Church Order* has been a conspicuous characteristic of the reformed churches. The independent congregations are governed by a consistory, i.e. a court of presbyters (elders) to deal with church business and with a General Synod as the highest authority.

From France, Calvinism spread to The Netherlands where it was fought against by the Spanish King, Philip II. The result of the resistance against Spanish control was that the fight for national freedom and for Protestantism went hand in hand. In 1581 the Netherlands were declared an independent state with extensive religious freedom but in reality with Calvinism as the official religion.

## 8. The Reformation in England and Scotland

In England the ground was prepared for a Reformation because of the stir caused by John Wycliffe's activities. Later, in the 1520s there was a growing awareness of Luther's writings and in 1525-26 William Tyndale published a translation of the New Testament, a linguistic masterpiece which became one of the most effective means in the spread of Protestantism in England. The Catholic Church reacted strongly to this new development but it was the King, Henry VIII, and not the Church that came to influence it. Although a Catholic himself – earlier the Pope himself had conferred on him the title 'Defender of the Faith', the acronym of which can still be seen in Latin on coins in the UK - Henry nevertheless saw himself as head of a national Church which in terms of economy, administration and law was independent of Rome. He confiscated Church properties and succeeded in making his new church independent of Rome without breaking the balance between Catholicism and Protestantism. It was not until the Pope denied his divorce from the Queen, Catherine of Aragon, that the balance was broken. In consequence of the denial Henry appointed as Archbishop in Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, who was a leader of the English Reformation and close to German Protestantism. Cranmer helped preparing the annulment of Henry's marriage and in 1534 Henry was declared "the only supreme head on Earth of the Church of England" (First Act of Supremacy). The year 1534 is often taken as a mark of the beginning of the Reformation in England.

It was the hope now that Henry could be won for the Reformation but he later returned to a sharp anti-Lutheran policy which led to the execution of a great number of Protestants as heretics. Cranmer survived, though, and kept his position as Archbishop in Canterbury during the reigns of Henry and Henry's son Edward VI but after the accession of the Roman Catholic Mary I, daughter of Henry, he was put on trial for treason and heresy and finally executed. Life was dangerous in those days.

In 1558, another daughter of Henry, Elisabeth, ascended the throne. In contrast to her sister she apparently had a more relaxed and pragmatic approach to religion. But like her father she wanted an English national church independent of Rome and with herself as "supreme governor" (Second Act of Supremacy, 1559) (Chadwick, 1990, pp. 129-132). She realized that the only way in which she could reach that goal was to base her power on the reform movement.

During the reign of Elizabeth the final consolidation of the Anglican Church took place. The so-called *Common Book of Prayer*, the first edition of which was written by Thomas Cranmer (1549), now came out in a new edition showing greater respect for the Catholic tradition in liturgy, i.e. the fixed form of public worship used in church, while the reformatory influenced doctrines of the church were committed to paper in the *Thirty-nine articles* and incorporated in the *Common Book of Prayer*. The articles were in fact the result of former versions with roots back to both Lutheran (Augsburg Confession) and especially Calvinist doctrines (Cranmer). Although the *Common Book of Prayer* did not put an end to religious conflicts between Catholic and Protestant monarchs and citizens it formulated the English reformed doctrine including and at the same time moderating the conflicting views.

No wonder therefore that the Anglican Church has been characterized as a version of the Reformation different from Calvinism as well as Lutheranism. "In quite a different way from the churches on the continent it saved the continuity with the church of the Middle Ages. It applies above all to the organization of the church which is Catholic apart from the fact that the Pope is not recognized. The English church is a typical bishop church in which the authority is due to the ordination inherited in an unbroken line from the Apostles until today. But also the service has saved the continuity...What was wanted was a Catholic Church independent of the Pope and with the reformatory understanding of the Gospel" (Koch, 126).

The Anglican Church developed as a compromise between the Catholics who wanted to restore the "old" church and those who wanted a "pure" church. Indirectly out of this comes the name 'Puritans'. As the state demanded uniformity and that service to be practised in accordance with the *Common Book of Prayer* the Puritans were faced with a difficult choice. Some ended up accepting the state church and its service. Others were caught in a bitter fight with the result that state policy was tightened up against all forms of separatism.

In consequence of this, emigration started from the beginning of the seventeenth century - first to Switzerland and the Netherlands - later to America where the emigrants created a number of states with Presbyterian-Calvinistic churches or free churches. Emigrating from a nation where they felt their beliefs had been oppressed they wanted the new churches established without state interference. Part of the result was the still existing separation of state and church in the United States.

Back in England, however, the indignation at the coercive measures led to new considerations on the relation between state and church. The so-called Independents

advocated that the only way out of the conflicts was to leave it to the single congregation to decide on its own matters and to let them to be independent of each other and especially of the state. The Civil War (1642-51) between Parliamentarians and Royalists which ended with Parliamentary victory also meant that the monopoly of the Anglican Church on Christian worship was broken. Under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell and the Independents a new regime was established in which religious freedom was taken for granted and persecution because of belief was banned.

The dramatic events in England formed the Reformation in England in a specific way and resulted in a service and church organization that differed considerably from the protestant churches on the Continent. In a strange way and in spite of conflicts and civil wars England succeeded in muddling its way through to a Reformation with greater religious freedom but also without breaking fully with older traditions.

The English Reformation affected education in different ways. Like in other reformatory countries, first of all through Bible translations. But also through re-foundation of older schools or conversion of them into free schools. Furthermore, the abolition of former monasteries also meant a foundation of a number of new grammar schools. The new and re-founded schools provided the greater part of English education till the eighteenth century.

The development in *Scotland* also differed from the one in England. During a stay in Geneva, John Knox (1505-72), originally a Catholic priest, had become committed to the Calvinistic spirit. On his return to Scotland he was a decisive influence on church matters in strong opposition to the Royal dynasty. "The result was that Reformation was introduced quickly in all Scotland and practised in a strictly Calvinistic form within a Presbyterian Church arrangement so that Scotland in many ways became the Promised Land for English Puritans..." (Koch, 127).

He (Knox), in his *Book of Discipline*, (had) suggested a church-controlled plan of education for all, for rich and poor, and from primary to university level. "The plan, however, was too expensive to carry out but the spirit of it seems to have had some effect as education has always been of a relatively high standard in Scotland and been appreciated in all social classes". (Grue- Soerensen, 1956, vol. 1, p. 229-30).

## 9. The Reformation in Scandinavia

After the notorious Massacre of Stockholm in 1520, organized by the Danish king Christian II (1513-23), Sweden left the *Kalmar Union* between Denmark, Norway and Sweden and appointed Gustav Vasa as King of Sweden. He carried through the Reformation in Sweden and replaced Catholicism by the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in 1527.

In Denmark-Norway (including also at that time the Duchy of Slesvig-Holstein, the provinces Skåne (Scania), Halland and Blekinge in Sweden, and Iceland) the transition to Lutheranism was carried through in 1536 by Christian III and adopted three years later in Norway. At the age of seventeen Christian III (1534-59) had attended Luther's defense at the Diet of Worms (1521). From that day on he had been a convinced and devoted Lutheran. Therefore, in his capacity as the Duke of Slesvig and Holstein he had already introduced a Lutheran church order in his realms before the election as King.

In Iceland the transition proved more difficult. Lutheranism was not implemented by King Christian III until 1552 after the execution of the last Catholic bishop Jón Arason.

Today the Scandinavian churches, the Church of Sweden, the church of Norway, the

Church of Denmark, and the churches of Greenland and the Faroe Islands are all rooted in Lutheran church orders established during the Reformation.

It was not obvious that a Lutheran should be elected as King of Denmark-Norway. When the previous king, Frederik I (1523-33), died the most obvious choice would be his oldest son Christian, Duke of Slesvig and Holstein. However, as a convinced and devoted Lutheran he was an unacceptable choice for the majority of the *Rigsråd* (the Council of the Realm) whose task it was to elect the new king. The Council, consisting of about 25 powerful members from Church and Nobility, could not come to an agreement as most nobility members and all bishop members, preferred a Roman Catholic king on the throne. Instead the election was postponed, all Protestants were declared outlaws, and a trial was started against Hans Tausen. On his return from studies in Wittenberg he had begun preaching the gospel in Viborg in Jutland and was now considered the most prominent Lutheran in Denmark.

What happened next is yet another example of how religious and political matters were intermixed. (Danmarks historie, vol. 6, pp. 11-195). The Hanseatic town south of Denmark, Lübeck, wanted to regain its former position as the most important commercial city in the Baltic area. The Netherlands stood in its way and the *Rigsråd* was asked for support. But the request was refused, probably because Holstein had already allied itself with the Netherlands and because the members might have been frightened by Lübeck's reputation as a stronghold of Lutheran ideas.

Lübeck reacted by landing an army of German mercenaries on Zealand under the command of Count Christopher of Oldenburg. Members of the nobility in the *Rigsråd* now realized that a leader was needed to defend their properties and restore peace. It was finally decided – under public pressure and to the despair of the Catholic bishop members – to elect Duke Christian as King Christian III.

What followed was a brutal civil war between two parties - both of Lutheran observation - called *Grevens fejde* (The Count's Feud - after Count Christopher). In fact it now became more a class than a religious struggle between on the one hand commoners and farmers and on the other hand the King and the nobility. In Jutland citizens and farmers were defeated by Christian and his commander Johann Rantzau. The leaders were executed and the farmers punished economically so harshly that the effects were felt for years. After Jutland, Funen and Zealand were conquered. The citizens of Copenhagen were the last to surrender after a one-year siege. The sufferings were appalling; it was a miserable sight that met Christian III in August 1536, when he rode into an exhausted, beaten and starved city.

The surrender prepared the way for a coup d'état. Within the next 24 hours all Catholic bishops were arrested and imprisoned and the remaining members of the *Rigsråd* were confronted with an *ultimatum* either to sanction a total secular regime, i.e. a regime with no bishops taking part in matters of government, or go to prison (Hørby 1990, p. 29) and further, not to oppose the Lutheran doctrines being preached from now on. At a Diet in October the same year the new arrangements were settled. The Catholic bishops should be removed "because of their misdeeds" and replaced by so-called *Christian* bishops able to promote among people the holy gospel, the words of God, and the holy Christian faith (Laustsen, 1990, 101). The bishops' properties were confiscated "for the support of the Crown and the King" and "for the common good of the kingdom". The king was also given the right from now on to appoint persons to all posts in the church. Monasteries and convents were maintained till the king "with wise and erudite men" had arranged for



a new church order. Monks and nuns were at liberty to leave or allowed, if wanted, to stay until they died and the monasteries were shut.

Melanchton was invited by the king to come and prepare the new church order but it was Johannes Bugenhagen who was sent. He (and probably Luther as well) approved and added the finishing touches to *Kirkeordinansen* (The church ordinance)

“One year later (August/September 1537) the final implementation of the Reformation was marked by four events: 1) Johannes Bugenhagen crowned and anointed in a fine “reformatory” celebration the royal couple in Our Lady’s Church in Copenhagen. 2) He ordained in the same church the seven new Lutheran bishops. 3) The King signed The Church Ordinance, and 4) the University of Copenhagen was reopened, now as a Lutheran institution” (Laustsen 1990, 103).

Concerns about learning and education in the Danish church during the Reformation were similar to those in the evangelical parts of Germany but these concerns played themselves out under quite different circumstances. “German princes and cities had to cope with the intricacies of imperial law and with the constant threat of political intervention, whereas Christian III had a free hand as soon as he had put an end to the civil war and removed the only obstacle to the Reformation worth mentioning – the episcopacy of the national Catholic church. Already his father Frederick I (1523-1533) had, to all practical purposes been head of the church, although this fact was not stated in an official way that could be compared with the Act of Supremacy of Henry VIII. Many problems that worried German magistrates simply did not exist on Danish or Norwegian soil. The King could combine his sovereignty over the church with a very clear program for its functions” (Grane, 1990, p. 164) and fully, you might add, in accordance with the “*cujus regio, ejus religio*” principle.

The new program was writ down in a church law, *the Ordinance of 1537/39*. The law dealt with not only matters of church but also with education and care of the poor and sick. From the beginning, introduction and maintenance of the faith was seen in combination with education. “The royal Danish Reformation was not only an attempt to reshape church government and religious ceremonies, but even to remodel the mind of the Danish people”. (Grane, 1990, p. 164).

Hans Tausen and other Danish theologians who had studied in Wittenberg made the first draft of the law and it was sent by the King to Luther and Bugenhagen for approval. Bugenhagen came to Copenhagen in July 1537 and later the same year a Latin version was signed by the King. A Danish translation made by one of the seven new bishops or “superintendents”. Peder Palladius, was approved by *Rigsrådet* two years later. Bugenhagen spent two years in Copenhagen before he returned to Wittenberg.

The law might well be seen as an example of the extent of the influence that went out from Wittenberg in those days but also as one of the most typical examples of how Lutheran reformers imagined the relation between state (king), church, and education. Probably, Bugenhagen went farther, though, to please the King than Luther imagined. Luther’s idea was that church and state were two separated “regiments” or “kingdoms” but in the *Ordinance* the King was trusted with power and full responsibility towards both “regiments”.

Until the Constitution of 1849 the Danish church, *Folkekirken*, was a state church in which the inhabitants became members by birth, today by baptism. The present Constitution of 1953 still states that “The Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the Established Church of Denmark, and as such, it shall be supported by the State”. Up to



the 1930s the vicar was ex officio Chair Person of the School Board but school and church are now fully separated

The state support is no hindrance for religious freedom and diversity, but does not indicate equality of religions either. Folkekirken is backed by about 77 % of the population, in Copenhagen less than 60 %. The remaining 25 % consists of a large number of Christian, non-Christian church societies, and non-members. Ca. 5 % of the population are Muslims.

## 10. Conclusion

The described cases seem to justify the above mentioned statement that instead of talking of the Reformation in singular it might be more to the point to talk about Reformation in the plural. The cases also point at the importance of historical background to understand and maybe even to explain why a movement like the Reformation took on different forms and influenced education in different ways as it spread through parts of Europe. In fact, the cases deserve a more systematic comparative analysis by, say, a set of 'unit ideas' like space, time, state, educated identity, transfer, praxis. (Cowen, 2009, p.1285).

On the other hand there are many similarities that point at the Reformation as a unified movement although the understandings behind differ. One such recurrence, total rejection of the Pope as the highest authority of the church, is a very conspicuous one.

The church reformers wanted a break with what they saw as a centralized, authoritarian and corrupt institution and the political leaders - kings, monarchs and princes – had an open eye for the church as the owner of big territories and gigantic fortunes.

Church reformers and secular authorities, therefore, could meet in a common agreement to establish on the one hand national churches set free from the idea of the Pope as an indispensable station between God and individual man and on the other hand a take-over of church properties in order to strengthen the Crown. This is a weighty argument as well for the point of view that the Reformation was just as much a political and economic movement as a religious.

It is a point of view also well in step with Luther's own thoughts. The church should preach the Gospel only and not reach out for economic and political power. The duty of the state on the other hand should be to take care of political and social affairs and to protect the church without interfering in its internal affairs. The state was welcome to seize big parts of the church possessions but they should be used for social purposes. "In this way Luther's theology had profound effects on social life. In many ways the ground was here prepared for a modern understanding of society and it is obvious too that many non-religious factors came to play a role in the spread of the Reformation in Europe" (Laustsen, 2011, p. 21).

The central position ascribed to the Bible is another shared element in reformatory theology. The Catholic Church was accused of for centuries to have made established practice like indulgence, purgatory, sacraments, pilgrimages etc. superior to the Bible.

Of great educational importance were Luther's Small and Large Catechisms. They were published in 1529 and have until recently been basic textbooks for religious instruction in the countries that adopted Lutheranism. Translations of the Bible might be seen as one of the most lasting educational effects of the Reformation because of the importance they had for the development of national languages. The first translation into Danish was Cristian III's bible (1550).

## 11. Today

Since Luther put up his theses more than 800 million people out of the 2.2 billion Christians in the world belong to a religious community related to the Reformation. And not only have the number of followers increased. The same applies to the number of churches of which several thousands have been identified all over the world. In South Korea alone you can find about eighty different protestant churches. In other words, today the Protestant churches are characterized by great diversity. From one point of view it signals freedom in matters of belief. The Reformation set man free and was a necessary step against a powerful church that had gone astray. From another point of view the conflict between Pope and reformers led to a regrettable split of the church. Although it was the Pope himself who kicked Luther out of the church by excommunicating him, the split was nevertheless unhappy and led to a lot of bloodshed. Now, there is no way back but it is still a question for discussion whether a diversified or a unified church is the best suited to meet the challenges of today. And how, indeed, should a unified Christian church be organized today?

Another question for discussion is the relation between church and state. In the Scandinavian countries the number of members is declining. Globalization and immigration make it difficult for the traditional Lutheran churches. In 2000 the Swedish church was separated from the state and at the beginning of 2017 the Norwegian Evangelical church was declared an independent religious community but still state supported economically and included in the constitution. In Denmark the question is still on the political agenda. In Sweden the separation has resulted in a distinct politicization because the political parties want to be represented in the parochial church councils. Against which many have reacted by resigning their membership.

As always, it is a question of finding the right balance between diversity and unity, between state and church etc. But one thing is for sure: the religious instinct is too strong to be left alone. History, but also the world around us today, still tells us how important it is to have it canalized into civilized and tolerating forms.

Europe has experienced two great educational projects: The Reformation and the Enlightenment. There were two hundred years between them. More than the Enlightenment, the Reformation prepared the ground for democracy through education. More than the Reformation, the Enlightenment prepared the ground for science as a challenge to revelation and religious doctrines. But in combination, the two educational projects formed the present face of Europe.

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