NAVIGATING RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES AT SCHOOL: FROM LEGITIMATE TO SPECIOUS RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS

ESTHER FERNÁNDEZ MOSTAZA
GLORIA GARCÍA-ROMERAL
CLARA FONS I DUOCASTELLA

Abstract – *The mere fact of talking about pluralism, be it religious or of some other type, as a way of characterising today's society may seem like a statement of the obvious. However, pluralism is not an exclusive characteristic of our times nor is religious pluralism evident in all contemporary societies. In this paper, we will concern ourselves with re-thinking a situation in which we move from an environment of religious monopoly to one of pseudo-pluralism; in which one religion is no longer capable of setting itself up as the one and only official one; while other religions appear alongside it. We will start from an investigatory study, not by looking deeply at the results but by questioning the need for tasks like the ones we will make reference to, and the one we have prepared. Our approach of this situation is within the framework of one specific institution, that of education.*

> Le bricoleur est apte à exécuter un grand nombre de tâches diversifies; mais, à la différence de l'ingénieur, il ne subordonne pas chacune d'elles à l'obtention de matières premières et d'outils conçus et procurés à la mesure de son projet: son univers instrumental est clos, et la règle de son jeu est de toujours s'arranger avec les « moyens du bord », c'est-à-dire un ensemble à chaque instant fini d'outils et de matériaux, hétéroclites au surplus, parce que la composition de l'ensemble n'est pas en rapport avec le projet du moment, ni d'ailleurs avec aucun projet particulier, mais est le résultat contingent de toutes les occasions qui se sont présentées de renouveler ou d'enrichir le stock, ou de l'entretenir avec les résidus de constructions et de destructions antérieures. L'ensemble des moyens du bricoleur n'est donc pas définissable par un projet (ce qui supposerait d'ailleurs, comme chez l'ingénieur, l'existence d'autant d'ensembles instrumentaux que de genres de projets, au moins en théorie); il se définit seulement par son instrumentalité, autrement dit, et pour employer le langage même du bricoleur, parce que les éléments son recueillis ou conservés en vertu du principe que « ça peut toujours servir ».
>
> Claude Lévi-Strauss; *La Pensée Sauvage*

Introduction: from engineering to *bricolage*

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962) in *La Pensée Sauvage* contrasts the tasks of *bricolage* to those of an engineer. In the case of *bricolage*, it is a question of re-using what is left (the 'residues' or 'leftovers') of previous constructions and demolitions; in the case of engineering, however, the elements and the tools are conceived and constructed according to the specifications of each problem. Continuing this same analogy, the 'engineering' work of which we shall take advantage of the 'residues' is a report sponsored by the Religious Affairs Department of the Generalitat of Catalonia. For this report we designed a number of instruments to ascertain and illustrate the main elements that were outlined as sources of conflict for the teaching staff in Catalan educational centres as well as for the various religious representatives. We gave special attention to those situations that are commonly seen as responses to certain religious practices or concepts. This investigative work was based on an exhaustive analysis of religious diversity in different educational fields. Equal emphasis was given to that which passed as collective evidence as to that which tended to go unnoticed. The information used came from a detailed analysis of 26 interviews with staff from different Catalan education centres. The interviewees were selected according to the following criteria: type of centre (infant, primary, secondary), the status of the centre (public, private, state assisted), territorial diversity, and a significant proportional presence of students from minority religious traditions.

Consequently, and keeping with the original analogy, our paper becomes a *bricolage* job due to the fact that we have sought to make use of pre-conditioned and specific 'residual materials' viewed from a sociological perspective. We set out by taking a step backward to see things from a different angle so that what is usually taken for granted or normal will be questioned. So, when we asked about the existence of religious plurality in educational centres, the staff, for example, often spoke of the collective immigrant group to refer to it, or to identify those who practised a religious confession *different* from what has been for decades taken as the norm, that is to say, the Catholic faith, although it is almost never actually named. It is a question of taking a step beyond the simple documentation of what is called 'common sense' and thus accepting that social reality is much more complex than we dared to imagine. We think, to a certain extent, that is what sociology is all about.

In order to understand the current situation, there is a need to briefly turn to: (i) the legislative framework that regulates the curricular situation of the subject of Religion; and (ii) the fact that Catalonia is today a geographical region in which more than 13 religious traditions are represented.

Legal context or what legislators imagined in 1979

The Spanish Constitution (1978) combines the non-denominational nature of the State with certain cooperation between religious confessions. Article 16.3 states, 'No religion shall have a state character. The public authorities shall take into account the religious beliefs of Spanish society and shall consequently maintain appropriate cooperation relations with the Catholic Church and other confessions'. This specific mention of the Catholic Church is interpreted in some sectors as being the remnant of undercover confessionality. Article 27.1 says, 'Everyone has the right to education. Freedom of teaching is recognized'. This announcement of the right to education, understood to therefore mean the creation of schools, the right for parents to choose their children's education and academic freedom, did not appear in the draft and was added to the document with an amendment agreed by various groups. This article is understood to mean the end of the classic struggle that from the early 19th century (cf. The Spanish Constitution of 1812 that was promulgated by the Cádiz Cortes) had been going on between those that defended the Church's monopoly on education and those that supported public and lay schools, like in France. The Constitution thereby guaranteed ideological pluralism both in the public and the private system. But this does not mean that as regulations have developed since, there have not been criticisms both of public aid awarded to private centres or the belief that it privileges in an unbalanced way the rights of the owner of a private centre, and the belief that it restrictively interprets parental rights. Article 27.3 says, 'The public authorities guarantee the right of parents to ensure that their children receive religious and moral instruction in accordance with their own convictions'.

In terms of the 1979 Agreements between Spain and the Holy See, the state recognises the fundamental right to religious education, and the Church admits that it should coordinate its educational mission with the principles of public freedom regarding religious affairs and the rights of families and all pupils and teachers, avoiding any discrimination or situation of privilege. In fact, the agreements made the right to freedom in education a provisional right, whose organisation was entrusted to the ecclesiastic hierarchy and whose cost was financed by the State. The ecclesiastic hierarchy proposes the teachers that will provide this teaching, as well as its academic content.

What legislators imagined in 1979 was that there would still be Catholic Religion classes in schools, but they would no longer be compulsory. Absolutely no legislation was issued that considered the possibility that the alternative might have been another religion that was different to Catholicism. Later equivalent agreements were established with the Federation of Evangelical Entities, the Islamic Commission and the Israelite Community.

From the moment when the State signed, in 1992, a series of agreements with the Jewish, Islamic and Evangelical communities, we enter into what is to a certain extent a contradictory situation. It is the situation we find ourselves in today: in application of the agreements that have been signed with these communities, on the one hand it seems that the State has made it possible for there to be confessional religious teaching of all these religions at schools; but at the same time such a situation is not viable, because there are relatively few schools that have a large enough number of pupils that require it, and if there were a lot of these schools, then there would not be enough teachers with the right training or the resources to pay for it.

To summarise, the situation the Catholic Church finds itself in is one of unashamed privilege, in that the confessional teaching of the Catholic religion can be provided whenever a group of parents request it. And if this model continues we will find ourselves faced either by an unfair situation of inequality, which will become increasingly more patent, as in the future there will be many more schools at which the parents of Muslim children request the teaching of the subject of the Islamic religion, or otherwise by a situation in which pupils are segregated when it comes to Religion classes. Something that would make the subject of Religion not a unifying factor, but one that could cause segregation.

Minority religions within a majority Catholic context

The first indications of diversity go back to the early 20th century, when we find clear signs of a large number of Protestants and the opening of the first synagogue in Catalonia, founded in 1918 (Estanyol, 2002). However, the Franco dictatorship made it an obligation for minorities to become clandestine and it was not until the beginnings of the transition to democracy (1975) that many of the minorities now living in the country (such as Orthodox, Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus, etc.) started creating their own places of worship in our country.

Not until 1967, the year of the fist law on religious freedom, was it possible for the religious groups that had had to hide themselves during the Franco dictatorship to start coming out in public and not have to face any apparent obstacles to joining the religious 'market'. These groups were the posit for a diversity that would increase exponentially, partly as a result of the increase in international migration.

The migratory flows originating from outside of the State started increasing from the 1980s and have especially increased over the last 16 years (1992-2008). So, if we observe the data[1] we note how from 65,533 foreign residents in 1989, there was a rise to 183,736 in 1999, and more than 860,000 foreign residents in 2007. In other words, from amounting to 1% of the total population in the late 1980s, the foreign population resident in Catalonia is now almost 12% of the total.

This population comes from a very diverse variety of nationalities, the majority being Moroccans (currently making up 20% of the foreign population resident in Catalonia). Nevertheless, it has also been noted that in recent years this migratory group has diminished in Catalonia, while there have been increased arrivals of people proceeding from other countries. This change has been referred to as the 'tendency for the Latin Americanisation' of the foreign population (Domingo & Gil, 2006).

Catalonia today is a geographical region in which more than 13 religious traditions are inscribed (see Table 1). Of these, as indicated by Griera (2007), we can only show that two are the result of the arrival of newcomers: Islam and Sikhism; the other traditions already existed before, although they have been affected by the incorporation of new migratory flows. With the increase in immigration there has not only been an increase in religious diversity, but also diversity within the groups that make up the religious confessions.

TABLE 1: Number of places of worship per religious tradition

Religious Tradition	Places of Worship
Brahma Kumaris	5
Buddhism	41
Adventists Churches	16
Latter-Day Saints	13
Evangelic Churches	435
Orthodox Churches	21
Baha'i Faith	14
Hinduism	25
Islam	167
Judaism	4
Sikhism	6
Taoism	6
Jehovah's Witnesses	146
Others	5
Other Christians	12
Total	**915**

Source: Database of Religious Centres in Catalonia, ISOR, 2007

Two (re)constructions of hypothesis about religious pluralism at school

To understand the 'great theatre that is the world' is a difficult task, but such an understanding might be achieved, according to Mills (1987), by those who possess 'sociological imagination' with reference to the private life as well as the public life of a great number of individuals. With the idea of exercising sociological imagination, starting from the information collected in the sixty-odd interviews carried out, plus the bibliographical sources used during the initial research phase (Carbonell, 2000; Franzé, 2002: Montón, 2003; Terrén, 2004), we would like to make a note of several significant questions related to the Catalan educational sector.

Before enumerating and presenting the areas we refer to, it is important to bear in mind that each centre is a unique case, and that the singularities of educational centres are based on three interrelated factors. Firstly, despite the fact that all the centres interviewed share the same general intercultural context and religious pluralism, each one has one or more particular approach depending on the length of time that the centre has been involved with immigration or religious diversity; the type of immigration and/or religious diversity that affects the centre, and the density in which 'the others' have arrived at the centre, etc. Secondly, with regard to the specific situation of each centre, discussions and justifications are generated that help to legitimise the specific procedures and attitudes that the centre adopts. Finally, each centre responds in a different way to similar situations – a fact observed in each one of the areas presented – because each centre uses or has different tools on hand to manage religious and cultural pluralism.

From 'it's always been done like that' to 'things can be done in a different way'

> **Hypothesis 1:** It is common to translate literally and apply the term 'religious pluralism' to most present day societies to the point of making modern society synonymous with 'plural society'. A plural society is one where diverse systems of legitimation exist in equality of conditions, and where none may succeed in imposing themselves absolutely, thereby establishing a monopoly. A plural society is one then in which there is no totalitarian ideology, no single party and no single official religion. *Given that the Roman Catholic Church has ceased to hold its position of protected religious monopoly that has always typically represented our country, we may describe Catalonia as pluralist. But if by 'pluralism' we mean a formal open market embracing competing religious systems, then we have to opt for the term 'pseudo-pluralism'.*

(i) School calendar and Catholic celebrations

The development of school activities throughout the course includes diverse celebrations and festivities that take place in the centre. Apart from the celebrations that mark the end of a specific scholastic period (end of term, beginning of a holiday period, etc.), there are others that do not relate to the school calendar *per se*, but take place every year and all members of the school community are expected to take part in them. From a generalised set of norms, each centre chooses the content and the manner of doing things. Nonetheless, the majority of these festivities have a Catholic foundation, both historically and culturally. Most probably, therefore, those students who have been socially nourished in Catholicism will experience these celebrations with greater ease and comfort and would not question them taking place in their centre. Whereas those students who, by family or cultural tradition, have no Catholic roots will simply have to adapt to the situation. So, on the one hand, we can state that it is not normal to consider the possibility of non-attendance at class for religious reasons. On the other hand, we verify that there is discrimination provoked through ignorance or lack of attention to the customs of certain student groups. A case in point could be, as occurs in many other countries, that it is not considered justifiable for a Muslim child to be absent from school during the Celebration of Sacrifice or the End of Ramadan, but at the same time, for example, the centre tolerates the lack of active participation in the Shrovetide celebrations of a Jehovah's Witness child.

(ii) Sporting activities and related scenarios

With regard to sporting activities there are basically two areas of conflict. One concerns the fact that it is obligatory to shower sponge bath in shared spaces after taking part in physical activities, especially swimming classes, and the student simply does not wish to show his or her naked body in public. The other area of conflict is related to the norm that requires participants to dress in a certain way in order to take part in games and sports. This second conflict is particularly relevant to girls from Islamic traditions. What usually happens will be that some of these students either do not reconcile themselves to wearing a short-sleeved vest as recommended by the centre, or because the student wants to wear a veil during the physical education class and the centre considers this inappropriate. In short, we wish to underline two aspects: firstly, the physical activity in itself is not the cause of the conflict, but rather aspects related to it. Secondly, the point is that the conflicts resulting from the physical activity have more to do with cultural traditions than with religious precepts.

(iii) <u>Dinosaurs in Eden</u>

One common feature of almost all the interviews carried out with the staff of public educational centres was to consider normal an understanding of the origin of human life based on the Theory of Evolution and with the resultant feeling that it needed to be explained. At the same time, a common feature of most of the religious representatives interviewed was their interest in informing the children in their centres about the different theories regarding the origin of human life. They were thinking, of course, of an explanation in class of Creationism[2], Intelligent Design[3], and the Theory of Evolution[4]. Therefore, it should be mentioned that it appears to be an aspect that does not generate conflict *per se*, but has indeed many religious implications. (It would not be irrelevant to point out that Charles Darwin concluded his *The Origin of Species* with this famous sentence: *I see no valid reason why the opinions expressed in this book should hurt anyone's religious feelings*. Obviously, if he saw 'no valid reason', the sentence was superfluous. But no doubt he wanted to be ready for the criticisms and counteract possible accusations, as far as he could. Darwin was right when he said that the opinions expressed in his book should not hurt the feelings of anyone, however, the problem was not what he said – and Darwin knew it – but rather at what he was hinting: the biological origins of man).

(iv) <u>That which cannot be eaten</u>

In most cases, the alimentary precepts contemplated by religious traditions are not obligatory for minors. In spite of that, however, it is quite normal to find students in educational centres who follow some type of alimentary prescription related to their beliefs, for example, vegetarianism for Hindus. These prescriptions appear in the centre in very diverse ways. For example, when the students need or want to stay in the school dining-room; when they take part in activities that require them to eat away from home (school trips, camps, celebrations, etc.); when some students are not present at the centre due to fasting periods, as in the case of Ramadan for Muslim students; and when birthdays are celebrated, as in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses. Although all this is true, it is also true that questions related to alimentation have a very important cultural element. To a certain point it may be said that the process of adaptation of newly arrived students also passes through a period of adaptation to different culinary tastes and family models which are not necessarily related to religious precepts.

(v) <u>From compulsory to optional out-of-school activities</u>

When we speak of out-of-school activities we refer to those activities that take place outside the centre's physical space or outside the normal school timetable.

School trips, cultural visits or certain types of games could be examples of this. The educational centres consider these out-of-school activities to be part of the formal or implied curriculum and that participation is 'normal' and expected. This 'normality' is considered the main justification for the efforts the staff makes to convince families that all students should take part in them. Although our field work showed that many students from different cultural or religious backgrounds – and not necessarily newly-arrived ones – do not take part in these activities, it proved to be impossible to identify any religious confession that had prescriptions or regulations relating to participation in these events. The non-participation of the newly arrived student in these activities, therefore, could be for other reasons, such as, economic inequality, differences in interpretations of what is considered 'educational', questions of social class, or lack of trust in the staff assigned to control activities outside the centre. If the activity lasts for more than a day it means the child will be spending the night out of parental control. Thus, we confirm that the fact of non-participation in the out-of-school activities is very often due to the family model, and *not* belonging to a certain religious confession.

(vi) <u>Pink veil versus blue turban</u>

One of the most visible distinguishing characteristics that mark the increasing diversity in Catalan classrooms is attire that responds to religious precepts and recommendations. This is as much owing to its nature as an external sign as to the fact that it becomes a characteristic feature that identifies and indicates the singularity of one community with respect to others. It is precisely because it makes the differences visible and at the same time holds ideologies together, plus as well as echos the subject causes in the media, that this behavioural area is distinct from the rest. It is important to underline, firstly, that wearing the traditional veil or headscarf (*hijab*) should not be seen as fundamental obedience of a religious precept. It is one interpretation:

> 'Children of Adam, We have sent you down clothing with which to conceal your private parts and to dress up in. Yet *the clothing of heedfulness is best*! That is one of God's signs, so that they may bear it in mind.' (Surah 7, verse 26; emphasis added)[5]

In fact, it is worth mentioning that the veil was, and in certain parts still very much is, an unmistakable feature of the Mediterranean tradition, whereas in the majority of Islamic countries women are under no obligation to wear it. (Legislation in certain countries, however, such as Iran or Saudi Arabia do require women, Islamic or not, nationals and foreigners, to cover their heads.) Secondly,

this problem does not only involve girls wanting to wear the headscarf. As one teacher informed us, '*Some students ask why they cannot wear caps, hats and hoods*'. Thirdly, and quite curiously, we do not know of a single case where Sikh boys wearing turbans were involved in such difficulties. It would seem that problems arise exclusively with adolescent girls. And lastly, those who interpret the veil as a symbol of male repression would be well-advised to refrain from dissuading the girls from wearing it. For would not those well-meaning discourses prove to be another type of repression?

Some further views on the question of women and veils

> **Hypothesis 2:** Two results of religious 'pseudo-pluralism' in the Catalan context are as follows: (i) *From the viewpoint of religious convictions, the emergence of pluralism in the Catalan/Spanish society has supposed a significant increase in religious indifference*; and (ii) *From the viewpoint of religious culture, the religious indifference brings Catalan/Spanish society closer to religious illiteracy (especially in the younger generation).*

Now we will dedicate a deeper look at the issue by referring, firstly, to the interpretations that the educational centre staff makes of dressing differently: whether the interpretations are uniform and critical … whether they try to convince and justify why students dress in certain ways, and/or to determine whether they are doing so for religious reasons or not.

Before entering into sociological interpretations of these matters, we consider it appropriate to report the classification of positions taken by educational centres when refering to the 'question of the veil'. The first case to attract public attention in Spain was in San Lorenzo del Escorial (Madrid) in 2002, when a state-assisted school refused to admit Fatima, a Moroccan student, because she wore a *hijab* (Moreras, 2007). Five years later, in Catalonia, the Generalitat compelled a centre to re-admit Shaima, an eight-year old student who had been expelled in Girona for failing to comply with an internal norm that prohibited the use of the *hijab*. Along the same lines, but arriving at different conclusions, Terrén (2004) showed that for Moroccan girls in Catalan schools, the *hijab* could be considered a religious symbol, or as a sign of maturity, responsibility, and indeed, coherence. Thus it may be said that the *hijab* should not necessarily be interpreted as an imposition – either directly (by father, elder brother or mother) or indirectly (by the imam or the community) – but may be understood as an environmental imposition or a differentiating symbol of identity. These questions clearly have been amplified and made problematical through echoes and reverberations of similar situations in other European countries like France or Great Britain. Although different from

each other (Molokotos, 2000), they have helped to create a climate of alarm due to the high likelihood of a repetition of such cases.

When it came to citing cases we found a range of views from those radically opposed to the use of the veil and also, though to a lesser degree, those opposed to the use of the Sikh turban, to those in favour. Far from considering this question to be problematical, the latter felt the veil to be a differentiating characteristic which might even foster the integration of the collective since it demonstrates the singularity of certain communities with respect to others. In the following text we shall refer exclusively to the interpretations that the centre staff gave to the use of clothing with religious connotations though, however, not only religious. A classification of attitudes emerged that: (i) directly forbid it; (ii) openly criticise it as discriminatory; (iii) try to establish a dialogue to convince; or (iv) justify it as part reinforcement of identity, be it Muslim, Sikh or other. (We shall take a number of excerpts from the interviews carried out to illustrate these attitudes, knowing that an understanding of these phenomena is elusive and irksome, but unavoidable. From the sociological perspective that runs through this document we maintain that a proper understanding of the situation calls for descriptions that are non-judgemental and not over-eager to qualify as exhaustive and final.

(i) *As an obstacle to integration the veil should be forbidden*

In a number of the cases collected there is justification of prohibition of the veil on the grounds that certain ways of dressing are an obstacle to the integration of students of that religion. The arguments in support of this view and the cases that illustrate it are quite diverse. However, we could point out that a young Sikh's turban, though often considered to be an 'ostentatious' element, is curiously respected and problems seem to be avoided. On the other hand, the adolescent Muslim's veil is interpreted as 'problematical', and consequently, it is in many cases explicitly forbidden. This dissimilar attitude is paradoxical since the Sikh youth wearing a turban and the Muslim girl with a veil are of course identical actions, that is, they are covering their heads with a piece of cloth. Here are a few excerpts from our interviews.

> *The first Sikh to arrive came as a shock: The students didn't know whether it was a boy or a girl, but now he has integrated well with his companions and nobody takes any notice of it [the turban].* (Director, public infant and primary education centre, Olot)

> *It's a difficult subject [i.e., Muslim girls and the veil], because ethically everyone is free to do as they want, but when you are in a centre with 600 adolescents, it's often difficult to stick to your principles. Actually, this*

could finish up as a source of conflict for the girls themselves. It could end up as a too strongly differentiating feature that does not encourage integration at all, and might produce the opposite effect. Integration is not possible when there is such an obstacle. This is the big problem. (Director, public compulsory secondary education centre and centre of high school level, Terrassa)

In fact, more than a few centres, when referring to conflicts directly or not related with religious pluralism, place all the blame on the 'the question of the veil'. They present it as a 'complex and confounding' matter to deal with. For sure, questions related to Muslim children and adolescents cause dilemmas and debate among the centre staff themselves revealing the contradictory nature of the issue. Obviously, this diversity of opinion among staff can make it more than difficult to establish a clear consensus of opinion on the matter. Some members of staff consider it to be a characteristic that 'exaggerates' the difference with regard to other students. A closer look at the following extracts from interviews should be helpful:

Personally the question of the headscarf is a subject that annoys me, and it annoys me because at sometime or other it will provoke conflicts, won't it? (Headmistress, public secondary and higher education centre, Terrassa)

… because that person faces an integration problem. When you look up at the group [she gesticulates as if looking panoramically at students in a class] it doesn't matter whether they are white or black, does it? But when you are faced with the headscarf, you stop, you analyse and you look. (Headmistress, public secondary and higher education centre, Terrassa)

In short, most of the school staff members interviewed considered the question of the young Muslim girl's veil to be perplexing in the extreme. Practically, half of them are against its use in the classroom. The inference is that the veil is seen as a symbol of restriction, and only in a few exceptional cases is it considered a possible symbol of belonging, a reinforcement of identity, and indeed a symbol of liberation.

(ii) Permitting the use of the veil is discriminatory against those who are not Muslims

One situation that occurs quite frequently in centres that allow the use of the veil is, strangely enough, the question of possible contradictions or complaints about the differential treatment that this tolerance creates within the classroom. We were able to verify that in several educational centres some students, alongside

classmates wearing veils, claim the right to wear caps or hoods. We also found cases where mothers and fathers of students justified their children's claims as a re-affirmation of equal treatment for all. The most frequent remark posed by the teaching staff and picked up by some students and their parents may be expressed as follows:

> *Why does one student have to take off his cap, whereas, a Muslim girl can wear the veil?* (Headmistress, Infant and primary state school, Canovelles)

Behind this question then lies another: Is there any justification for prohibiting everyone the use all clothing that covers the head in order to avoid differential treatment? If we accept this solution in order to treat everyone equally, are we not being discriminatory toward the religious minority?

In other cases, the use of the veil is interpreted as a patriarchal imposition, as pointed out by De Botton, Puigvert & Taleb (2004)[6], and not as a personal choice made by a Muslim girl. From this angle the veil is seen as a symbol of male chauvinism and oppression of women:

> *The question is really not whether they wear the veil or not, but whether they want to wear it or not. What they see as a sign of identity is seen by us as a sign of machismo. This is a question of mental attitude that we should all try to change. That is to say, not to change their beliefs but, in this case to respect the dignity of the women in question.* (Headmaster, public compulsory secondary education centre, Reus)

This interpretation is clearly relative to the age of the girl. If she is quite young, the staff of some centres (mainly in primary education) tends to think that the use of the veil is not a personal choice, but a result of family imposition. In other centres, however, this same interpretation is applied to all cases where girls wear the veil, regardless of age, and even when the girls themselves express the wish to wear it freely of their own will.

(iii) *Has open discussion on the use of veil favoured deification of the dialogue?*

Equally significant, although not representative, are the cases where there is an attempt to convince female students to 'decide' not to wear the veil. Sometimes this is undertaken by the course tutor, at other times through the figure of a mediator or by a person in charge of student reception duties (it should be added that this person is not usually a Muslim).

Up to now we have not had any student wearing a veil. We have been able to convince them that it would not be appropriate. Nevertheless, it is a question that presents teachers with the dilemma of deciding whether they approve of the veil or not. (Headmistress, public centre of compulsory secondary education, Terrassa)

However, there are cases, of course, in which these attempts to convince female students 'do not work' or only work partially from the perspective of the teaching staff. For example, we might illustrate the situation with the case of a girl who refused to follow the centre's recommendations and so wore the veil. As a result, all the other girls who had previously opted not to wear the veil, in accordance with the centre's criteria, decided to wear it again. On other occasions, the use of the veil has become a question of negotiation where priority is given to finding intermediate 'solutions'. It could be rules applying to different places within the centre itself (veils may not be worn in the classroom, but may be worn in other places such as the centre's playground). Other centres made their regulations according to age, explaining that it could only be by personal choice after a certain age. This meant that it could not be worn by the young ones in primary, but would be allowed in secondary levels. As a result of these negotiations arose the notion of 'peaceful veils' that Massignon (2000)[7] writes about. This is a reference to intermediate agreements made between the educational centres and the Muslim families or students (the girl wears it everywhere except in sports class; or the girl wears it to school, but takes it off when she arrives at class). Moreover, it should be pointed out that the justification for convincing a Muslim girl not to wear the veil is, in certain cases, due to reasons of safety or hygiene.

So, in some educational centres the veil is allowed in the centre and in the classrooms, but with restrictions such as in the case of sporting activities where it is explicitly forbidden. It is argued that because of the very characteristics of the physical activity the veil should not be allowed for reasons of hygiene and that, in some cases, it could be detrimental to their health. In this respect there are centres that have opted for the use of a wide ribbon for physical education classes instead of the veil. This solution has been widely accepted as opposed to leaving the head uncovered.

Finally, in our re-interpretation of the subject there is the underlying idea that dialogue demands reciprocity: There cannot be a dialogue if one party does not wish to take part. Dialogue also calls for respect – it should not be used to nullify or neutralise the other. At times, dialogues are used to exclude, to marginalise or shame the other party; that is to say, using all ways imaginable for what Bourdieu & Passeron (1969) so accurately call *symbolic violence*.

(iv) <u>The veil is the vindication of an identity (or it will end up so being)</u>

Although this situation does not occur too frequently, it should be pointed out that some educational centres evaluate the veil as the most visible sign of a vindication of identity. Of course, these pieces of clothing are divisive and restrictive, but, at the same time, they integrate members of a community whether the origins be cultural or religious or both. The following examples illustrate M'Chichi's (2004) interpretation that '… the use of the veil is not a sign of integration rejection. In fact, it could be just the opposite. It may represent the desire of the girls to integrate by living peacefully and at the same time participating in a movement that reaffirms their community's values' (p. 30). In a wider context, Arab-Muslim women are presented in society as being reduced to male submission and oppression. From this perspective, the Muslim woman is represented as being associated with obligatory maternity and exclusive dedication to the family while remaining fully dependent on the male. She is a person to whom fate has attributed this division of labour. Perhaps for this reason, the teachers usually give their personal support, either implicitly or explicitly, to the successes achieved by Muslim girls, and especially to those who have adopted the model of 'invisibility'.

Consequently, our proposal has been to demonstrate how multifaceted the problem of the veil is and suggest that it would be better to stop talking about religious pluralism at school as problematic. In this way we recognise implicitly that the question that most interests the sociologist does not necessarily coincide with what others usually consider to be a 'problem' and that, even supposing they do coincide, the sociologist does not usually create 'solutions', but rather tries to understand how the whole system works; to understand the foundations on which it is based, and what it is subject or tied to. Nevertheless, we coincide in the interpretation that places the Islamic veil or *hijab* as one of the most evident elements of religious pluralism in educational centres. This is due to its very nature as an external sign as well as the fact that it has been converted into an identity feature that differentiates and recognises the singularity of certain communities from others.

According to what has gone before, we cannot doubt that use of the *hijab* makes certain differences visible. This in spite of the fact that there are numerous types of veils and headscarves, and choices can be made. In addition, the evidence of the social construction of an Islamic threat, in relation to the division between 'conflictive cultures' and cultures that can be integrated, becomes visible through external symbols and give rise to a stereotyped Muslim woman.

In conclusion, from a sociological perspective we must not reproduce and repeat other people's interpretations, but rather force ourselves to construct

paradoxes and this is why we consider that *the issue of women using veils reaffirms the 'modernity' of western societies.*

Concluding comment

The results of the above mentioned hypotheses have led to a singular state of affairs in the case of Catalonia/Spain: *The indifference in respect to religious convictions and to religion in general has brought about a society that is less antagonistic, less unkind to all aspects regarding religion.*

Tools for a sociological investigation of *other* religions

A century ago anthropology was dedicated to finding the ordinary aspects of what was considered exotic. In fact, we could say that this discipline and sociology were created to look in an understanding way at what could be considered unusual and strange. But the distance between what is strange and what is normal is the same as that between an observer and what is observed. In short, it is a question of accepting that the exotic (meaning strange or incomprehensible) can be in one sense just the ordinary. For the purpose of our article we are going to adapt the question of what is 'normal' and what is not.

When a man's finger points at the moon, the idiot looks at the finger
(Chinese proverb)

For a start, it is clear that we cannot simply define as normal the 'common acts of the majority' if we do not first designate them to a certain group or society and to a particular time in history. This statement of the obvious leads us to the main characteristic of a norm, of any norm, namely its relativity. That is to say, just as social concepts of abnormality are relative, so too are 'normal' social concepts. Normality, just like deviation, is a question of social definition. Moreover, between behaviour that can be socially condemned and that which is socially approved, there is a very wide zone of permissiveness. Therefore, deviation can only be present when, with regard to a particular social situation, there is a high degree of consensus about how 'things should be' and what is 'correct'. It may be because 'God decrees it', reason dictates, it is the way of 'good people', it is fashionable (or not), and so on. In short, one characteristic of the concept of deviation is that it depends on what is considered the norm.

There is another and more significant characteristic of social deviation that, remote from the sociological perspective, could appear to be contradictory; if

social deviation provokes social alarm – being seen as an attack on the socially acceptable norm – it is at the same time upholding and reaffirming the norm. There is no doubt that certain forms of conduct, behaviours, ideas, etc., at a particular moment and in a defined society, provoke unrest as they question what is considered to be 'normal' behaviour and the right way of doing things. Nevertheless, at the same time and paradoxically, the action that is considered to be a deviation carries within itself the implicit function of protecting the feelings of reality of members of that society, and in that sense, holds together those who follow the norm. Another way of expressing it would be: Defining what is not normal reaffirms our sense of what is normal (Cardús & Estruch, 1981, p. 29).

Who defines an action as deviation? From what point of view is this definition made? And to what end? In order to answer these questions we turn to the Theory of Labelling (Goffman, 1989). We would like to briefly examine Goffman's inversion, which proposes that in order to understand differences, we should not look at what is different but at what is current and routine, what is obvious and is 'naturally so'. And even when stigmas have, for Goffman, an important general function (i.e., that of achieving help for society among those that are not helped by it), and at this level are extremely resistant to change, there are also additional functions, which vary depending on the type of stigma being dealt with, and that can also function as a means of formal social control.

From the perspective we adopt, the importance and significance of the rules appear much more evident when these are transgressed and interactions are consequently seen to be threatened, than when they are observed and when adhesion to the same means everything goes ahead normally. For Goffman, deviation, violation or transgression of rules is something endemic; it is the normal condition of the habitual framework of interactions. In this respect, he warns us that rules always involve what is 'normal' and its 'deviations', and even when widely accessible norms are implied, their multiplicity has the effect of disqualifying many individuals.

So, the handling of the stigma is a general feature of society, a process that arises anywhere where there are norms regarding how one should be. From this approach, stigma does not imply a set of specific individuals separated into two groups, those that are 'different', 'strange' or 'deviant' on the one hand, and those that are 'normal' on the other, as a penetrating social process composed of two roles in which each and every individual represents one or other, at least in certain contexts and some phases of life. As the Goffman stresses, 'normal' or 'different', what presents in a certain context a difference on the basis of which it is considered 'distinct' or 'strange', are not people, but perspectives.

This theory does not interpret deviation as a set of particular characteristics of groups or people, but as a process of internalisation between those who wear

the label of deviators and those who do not. From this perspective it is more important to know who are the ones who stick on the labels, and on whom they stick them, and why. Or, what amounts to the same thing, the labels we use to designate or name the 'marginal' groups say more about those who have the power to stick on labels than it does about those who have been labelled.

In conclusion, social divergence is interpreted as the label hung on certain people and/or their actions. The acceptability of this label will depend on the power of those labellers to define a specific situation as *abnormal* and the impetus they have to define it. In these cases, those that are presented as divergent, that is to say those *stigmatised*, will strive for a level of acceptability, both socially and psychologically, to preserve their identity. It is in this respect that our study raises many more questions than it answers: If being an immigrant cannot be considered as a hereditary characteristic, why is the label of 'immigrant' used so often to refer to second generations? Does immigration necessarily contain *per se* diversity or pluralism? How can diversity be treated at school if the school system aims at a homogenous solution as a means of solving what is considered problematic? Should it be the school system to provide 'solutions' to society's problems? And referring exclusively now to the 'problem of the veil': Does the pressure over the *hijab* at school transform it into a sign of identity for Muslims girls? How can it be interpreted that some girls who wear the veil here do not use it in their families' native villages? And finally, should the religious pluralism of immigrants be considered a problem at school? Perhaps the core problem is the uncertainty created by that pluralism.

Religious pluralism in Catalonia: yes, but…

We live in a society where social classes, ethnic groups, nations or religions unite and at the same time separate. In fact, many solutions may be applied to our dilemma that might range from a desire to eradicate any sign that would suggest that one religion is alien to another[8], to the opposite extreme of maximum permissiveness represented by what some have termed 'management of diversity'.

Although it may seem obvious to characterise today's society using the term pluralism – be it religious or of another sort – pluralism is not a characteristic exclusive to our times, neither is religious pluralism evident in all contemporary societies. In this respect it is essential to point out that in Catalonia there exists, on the one hand, an increase in expressions of religiosity distinct from Roman Catholicism, and, on the other, the generalised view that religion has been losing its influence among the general public. It is not our intention to reproduce the debate on theories of secularisation or, de-secularisation as Berger (1999) pointed out with reference to Europe. We want to point out what we consider the special

features of pluralism in our times: (i) *Some social institutions are greatly strengthened, but others, as Religion, are very much weakened*; and (ii) *Different religions compete with each other in a more or less open market context, but the hegemony over the rest is still held by the Roman Catholic Church*. This will help us to present the situation of religious pluralism in Catalonia today.

Regarding the first appraisal above, it is clear that there is a gradation between strong institutions and weak ones, and as one approaches either of the extremes, the differences become ever more visible. Examples of the first would be the great structures of a modern state and its economy or its school system; while in the section of the 'weak', or, more accurately, of 'those that are weakening', we would find religion. Moving further along this line may help to argue that a plural society can be properly represented as that in which there is no ideological totalitarianism, no single party, and no exclusive model of religion. Such a representation should be accompanied by a warning: liberation from any type of totalitarianism in society does not of course necessarily imply liberation, or anything like it, for the individual.

To clarify the second assessment, we will follow Berger's idea which maintains that pluralism may be understood as co-existence among different groups in civic peace, within a single society. It may be important to point out that the term co-existence 'does not only mean abstaining from reciprocal carnage; it denotes rather a degree of social interaction' (Berger, 1994, p. 54). It is true that throughout history there have been numerous periods in which different groups have succeeded in coexisting. However, in general, this desirable state of affairs was maintained by raising barriers on social relations between these same groups (it was not normally the result of tolerance and high ideals, but rather of restriction on power). But, the pluralism we are interested in studying in this section is of another sort; the one that appears when the barriers are broken: 'The neighbours look over the fence, speak to each other, and have a reciprocal relationship' (Berger, 1994, p. 54). After this, and in an inevitable way, what Berger has called 'cognitive contamination' starts to occur, which is to say, the different life styles, values and beliefs begin to intermingle.

It should be clarified following Berger's thesis that this sort of pluralism is not exclusive to the modern world. It has appeared periodically throughout history, but what characterises modern pluralism is the fact that people belonging to radically different cultures find themselves compelled to live shoulder to shoulder with each other over long periods of time. Moreover, urbanisation has been transformed into a mental phenomena and not just a physical one, and this peculiarity is certainly exclusive to our day. Furthermore, by virtue of enormous advances in mass literacy and through modern mass communication, people come into contact with different cultures and concepts of the cosmos without necessarily abandoning

their geographical place of birth. Obviously, it is clear that the consequences of 'pluralising' factors in modern times are intensified even more by market economies and democratic systems.

We adapt these reflections to our more immediate context when we affirm that the religious situation existing in Catalonia is plural, given that the Catholic Church no longer professes to be (at least in theory) the unrivalled protected religious monopoly that was formerly the case in our country. There is no religious pluralism, however, if by that we mean the existence of a formally open and competitive market of legitimate religious confessions.

Another special feature in the Catalan case is that the *appearance* of pluralism has given rise not only to a very significant increase in religious indifference, but this mentioned indifference is turning Catalan society into one approaching religious illiteracy. For example, the euphemism of speaking of 'African children' when those interviewed referred to black Muslim children, indicates, firstly, that being an immigrant is considered hereditary when it is not and, secondly, that 'Muslim' is a label which, generally speaking, is not used by the teaching staff, but when used, it is applied pejoratively. Moreover, the adjectives employed to replace it ('Moor', 'Magrebi' or 'Arab') either reflect ignorance or show little respect for origins which can only be understood when viewed from a western standpoint. (Thus, we would confirm the argument of the Labelling Theory presented previously, that is, that labelling tells us more about the labeller than about the one who has to wear it).

Hence, according with the above, we are facing a situation in Catalonia in which we move from an environment of religious monopoly to one of pseudo-pluralism, where one religion can no longer stand up firmly as the exclusive one, that is to say, the official one, because alongside it (although not in direct competition) *other* religions exist and are practised[9]. However, this exposition should not leave us with a binary interpretation (the 'others' versus 'us') in which the *others* with their diverse religious manifestations give meaning and reality to the 'us'; and even more so when it is advisable to escape from expressions like 'natives' as opposed to 'foreigners'. The important point, however, is that what has become twisted or has been lost in 'us' remains right or valid in the 'others'. Consequently, under the shadow of the self-invented other, not only ethnic-centralism and xenophobia, but also, and in an ambivalent way, there may be present self-criticism and even *xenophilia* (i.e., a kind disposition toward the foreigner).

Notes

1. Source: Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. Permanent immigration observatory.
2. Opinion, philosophical or religious doctrine that upholds an explanation of the origin of the world based on one or more acts of creation by a personal God, as found, for example, in the case of the Great Book-based religions.
3. A belief that states that the origin or evolution of the universe, life and man, or of creation was the result of rational actions deliberately undertaken by one or more agents.
4. Biological evolution is the continuous process of transformation of the species through changes taking place in successive generations and is seen in the changes of genetic frequencies in a population. The theory of evolution is the scientific model that describes evolutionary transformation and explains its causes.
5. *The Noble Qur'an* (in Arabic; translated with commentary by Dr Thomas B. Irving in 1992). Amana Books.
6. The *hijab* worn by Muslim women is always viewed with suspicion. It is reduced to being considered as an imposition by man, whether this is the head of state, the father, the husband or the brother. It is an imposition on women to hide or silence their voices (De Botton, Puigvert & Taleb, 2004, p. 102).
7. 'Cependant, les affaires de voile permettent le mieux de mettre en évidence l'existence d'une prise en compte négociée des expressions religieuses à l'école publique. Notre enquête nous a permis de voir qu'il existe des "voiles tranquilles", qui n'entraînent aucune crise dans les établissements, très différents des exemples médiatisés. Des accords sont mis au point, portant sur la forme du voile (plus petit, coloré, coiffe alternative sans signification religieuse: bonnet, large bandeau, turban) et les lieux de son port (interdit dans les salles de classe, voire dans la salle de documentation et à la cantine, mais autorisé dans la cours de récréation)' (Massignon, 2000, p. 358).
8. We agree with the interpretation of Lurbe & Santamaría (2007) for whom immigrants can be seen as the incarnation of the alien. They state this with a double meaning: Firstly, they give them a distant, external character of inappropriateness or social inadequacy; and then secondly, they show how the effects of this alienation are incorporated subjectively so as to be perceived as out of place or living as if out of place.
9. This pluralistic dynamic applied to religion can also be traced in language; in the Catalan case a person is 'a believer' or not, and in this context one can be 'practising' or 'non-practising'. They are expressions that, in the end, serve to underline the peculiarities of this pluralism in which the Catholic Church no longer has a monopoly, but whose influence is still felt.

_____

Esther Fernández Mostaza *is lecturer in Sociology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain, and is member of the ISOR investigatory group (Investigations on Sociology of Religion). Her e-mail address is: MariaEsther.Fernandez@uab.cat*

Gloria García-Romeral *is a graduate in Political Science and Sociology from the University of Granada, Spain, and is a member of the ISOR Group. Her e-mail address is: Gloria.Garciaromeral@uab.cat*

Clara Fons i Duocastella *is a graduate in Sociology from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain, and is a research member of ISOR Group. Her e-mail address is: Clara.Fons@uab.cat*

References

Berger, P. (1994) *Una Gloria Lejana. La Búsqueda de la Fe en Época de Credulidad*. Barcelona: Herder.

Berger, P. (1999) The desecularization of the world: a global overview. In P. Berger (ed.) *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1969) *Los Estudiantes y la Cultura*, Barcelona: Labor.

Carbonell, F. (coord.) (2000) *Educació i Immigració. Els Reptes Educatius de la Diversitat Cultural i l'Exclusió Social*. Barcelona: Mediterrània.

Cardús, S., & Estruch, J. (1981) *Plegar de Viure. Un Estudi sobre els Suïcidis*. Barcelona: Edicions 62.

De Botton, L., Puigvert, L., & Taleb, F. (2004) *El Velo Elegido*. Barcelona: El Roure.

Domingo, A., & Gil, F. (2006) L'evolució recent de la població estrangera a Catalunya. In M. J. Larios & M. Nadal (eds.) *L'Estat de la Immigració a Catalunya, Anuari 2005. Anàlisi Jurídica i Sociodemogràfica, Vol. I*. Barcelona: Fundació Jaume Bofill.

Estanyol, M. J. (2002) *Judaisme a Catalunya, Avui*. Barcelona: Pòrtic.

Franzé, A. (2002) *Lo que Sabía no Valía. Escuela, Diversidad e Inmigración*. Madrid: Consejo Económico y Social.

Goffman, E. (1989) *Estigma. La Identidad Deteriorada*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.

Griera, M. M. (2007) Diversitat religiosa i immigració a Catalunya, *Via*, Vol. 3/2007, pp. 103-119.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1962) *La Pensée Sauvage*. Paris: Agora.

Lurbe, K., & Santamaría, E. (2007) Entre (nos)otros … o la necesidad de re-pensar la construcción de las alteridades en contextos migratorios, *Papers, Revista de Sociologia*, Vol. 85, pp. 57-70.

Massignon, B. (2000) Laïcité et gestion de la diversité religieuse à l'école publique en France, *Social Compass*, Vol. 47(3), pp. 353-366.

M'Chichi, H. A. (2004) Los jóvenes inmigrantes construyen su identidad, *Afkar Ideas: Revista Trimestral para el Diálogo entre el Magreb, España y Europa*, Vol. 3, pp. 27-30.

Mills, C. W. (1987) *La Imaginació Sociològica*. Barcelona: Editorial Herder.

Molokotos, L. (2000) Religious diversity in schools: the Muslim headscarf controversy and beyond, *Social Compass*, Vol. 47(3), pp. 367-381.

Montón, M. J. (2003) *La Integració de l'Alumnat Immigrant al Centre Escolar*. Barcelona: Graó.

Moreras, J. (2007) *Els Imams de Catalunya*. Barcelona: Editorial Empúries.

Terrén, E. (2004) *Incorporación o Asimilación. La Escuela como Espacio de Inclusión Social*. Madrid: Libros la Catarata.