Educational pluralism and vulnerable children
Pluralismo educativo y niños vulnerables

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Abstract:

Once again Spain has adopted a comprehensive education law. It is not my place, nor am I competent, to comment on the controversial process leading to this legislation, nor to its changes in the framework for the provision of schooling. The legislation offers an appropriate occasion, however, to seek answers to several questions relevant to every free society: What are the appropriate scope and limit of any government's role, in a free society, in the formation of its citizens? How have these changed in a time of growing cultural conflict? What arrangements for schooling are best suited to accommodating deeply-rooted cultural divisions while nurturing the qualities that citizens should possess? How can these arrangements serve as a vehicle for both freedom and justice, especially for those children who are most vulnerable?

Keywords: pluralism, conflict, civic, disabilities, trust, immigrant, minority, Islamic.

Resumen:

España ha adoptado una vez más una ley de educación integral. No me corresponde —ni tengo las competencias adecuadas para ello— comentar sobre el controvertido proceso previo a la promulgación de esta legislación, ni sobre los cambios que conlleva en el marco de la escolarización. No obstante, la legislación brinda una ocasión apropiada para buscar respuestas a varias preguntas relevantes para cualquier sociedad libre:

¿Cuáles son el alcance y el límite adecuados del papel de cualquier Gobierno, en una sociedad libre, en la formación de sus ciudadanos? ¿Cómo han cambiado estos aspectos en una época de creciente conflicto cultural? ¿Qué medidas de escolarización son las más aptas para acomodar divisiones culturales profundamente arraigadas al tiempo que se fomentan las cualidades que los ciudadanos deberían poseer? ¿Cómo pueden estas medidas servir de vehículo para la libertad y la justicia, especialmente para los niños más vulnerables?

Descriptores: pluralismo, conflicto, cívico, discapacidades, confianza, inmigrante, minoría, islámico.

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1. The role of government in a time of cultural conflict

Thirty years ago, sociologist James Davison Hunter popularized the phrase "culture wars," arguing that the divisions causing conflicts in American society were no longer economic, as had been the case earlier in the 20th century, but involved deep and sensitive differences, that these "are not just disagreements about 'values' or 'opinions.'

…Such language in the end reduces morality to preferences and cultural whim. What is ultimately at issue are deeply rooted and fundamentally different understandings of being and purpose" (1991, p. 131). This mutual alienation and mistrust has, if anything, intensified; according to a recent report by the American Psychological Association, "the future of our nation' is a bigger source of stress among average Americans than even their own finances or work" (Putnam, 2020, p. 16).

Many observers have pointed out that the rise of what could be called 'conservative populism' in Europe, as in the United States, is related to this growing conflict between the cultural norms promoted by societal elites through universities, public schools, and the mainstream media, and the norms with which most of people of these countries have grown up, like their parents before them, and which they hope to pass on to their children. Pankaj Mishara notes that

it has become impossible to deny or obscure the great chasm, first explored by Rousseau, between an elite that seizes modernity's choicest fruits while disdaining older truths and uprooted masses, who, on finding themselves cheated of the same fruits, recoil into cultural supremacism, populism and rancorous brutality (2017, p. 346).

David Goodhart has described the two parties in Britain and elsewhere as "Anywheres," the cosmopolitan elites who place "a high value on autonomy, mobility and novelty and a much lower value on group identity, tradition and national social contracts," and "Somewheres," those locally-rooted who continue to value "faith, flag and family." He warns that "if the value gulf becomes too deep — especially between the dominant class and the rest — we become vulnerable to shocks and back-lashes like Brexit" (2017, pp. 5-20).

This phenomenon of populist alienation from what is perceived as the elite's reckless over-turning of traditional norms and its insulting disrespect for those continuing to hold them takes somewhat different forms and reacts against different perceived aggressions. There is also, of course, a "populism of the Left" in Europe as in the United States, where ANTIFA and other radical movements employ violence on the streets to oppose the allegedly racist and fascist character of American society, and their political allies call for "defunding" the police.

Populist hostility to the established and emerging order, whether motivated by conservative backlash against cul-

tural change or radical determination to overturn political and economic institutions, made a strong appearance in Flanders three decades ago, then in the Netherlands; more recently there have been strong populist movements in Scandinavia and Germany, France, Italy, and in Hungary and Poland. Nor has Spain been spared, as *The Economist* described recently in an article significantly titled "From rage to disillusion" (2021).

Ominously, the gap continues to widen. "Across Europe, traditional parties of the left now find their backing primarily among the wealthy, the highly educated, and government employees" (Kotkin, 2020, p. 114), abandoning their former working-class supporters and concerns about wages and local communities. For Goodhart's "Somewheres" a special grievance is the perceived threat to traditional norms represented by immigration and the resulting introduction of unfamiliar customs into their communities. As a result, "immigration has become a metaphor for the larger disruptions of social and economic change, especially for those who have done least well out of them" (2017, p. 118).

In Western Europe an aggravating factor has been the increasingly-visible presence of Islam as the Muslim migration of the past half-century evolves into a self-conscious minority population with its own institutional expressions. Thus, Dutch populist leader (and 'martyr') Pim Fortuyn charged, in a 1997 book, that Dutch culture was being 'Islamicized' (Fortuyn, 2016). More broadly, "[a]cross the board, surveys indicate that Europeans consider Islam to be incompatible with Western values" (Cesari, 2013, p. 15).

While for a variety of reasons the presence of Muslims does not represent a comparable aggravation in the United States, there is similar resistance to massive immigration from Latin America as somehow threatening American culture and communities.

In short, "populist rebellions against establishment parties will likely continue and could become more disruptive. Elite disdain for traditions of country, religion, and family tends to exacerbate class conflict around cultural identity. 'Liberalism is stupid about culture,' observed Stuart Hall, a Jamaican-born Marxist sociologist" (Kotkin, 2020, p. 123). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this alienation by allowing those with access to government to set aside regular decision-making processes and enact their own agendas for change without the need to seek popular support.

How should public policy in Europe and North America address the strains that are making it increasingly difficult to work together to further the public interest? What should governments be doing, what instruments do they possess to promote, if not agreement, then at least the ability for us to hear each other and to find common ground across our differences?

Should they follow historical precedent? The development of systems of

popular schooling in the 19th century (and earlier in Prussia, Scotland, and New England) was never only about, and often not primarily about, literacy and numeracy; there was always a nation-building and citizen-building intention (Glenn, 1988, 2011). It was only through schools that governments could reach into every local community and family, seeking to promote loyalties and civic virtue in children whose habits and dispositions were not yet fully formed. Common public schools with mandatory attendance always had a political agenda, unlike the academies and other private institutions which preceded them.

It may be tempting to consider reviving the "nation-building" strategies that employed schooling to convert "peasants into Frenchmen" (Weber, 1976) or, having "made Italy" through the Risorgimento, to set out to "make Italians" (Soldani & Turi, 1993). The assumption behind these efforts was that government should, in its own protection, develop an effective monopoly of popular schooling; elite schools continued in many cases to preserve their independent character. This had the corollary that the State should not permit the competition of networks of popular schooling representing alternative, usually religious, perspectives. In France, the United States, and other countries, this meant that Catholic schools were seen as a threat to national unity and led to repressive legislation. In other cases the government simply incorporated Catholic and (where present) Protestant schools into its system.

It would, however, be unwise to attempt to employ such a strategy to address the cultural divisions that afflict our countries today; there is every reason to believe that an intensification of government's role in seeking to impose a single set of cultural norms on society would serve only to exacerbate the present tensions. Spanish readers will not have forgotten bitter controversy over the introduction of a required subject, in private as well as in government-operated schools, of a subject with the innocent title "Education for Citizenship and Human Rights" (*Educación para la Ciudadanía y los Derechos Humanos*). Many Catholics, in particular, saw this as an attempt to indoctrinate their children in perspectives to which they objected, imposing a vision of the nature of humanity, the family, sexuality, of life itself. The Tribunal Supremo de Justicia ruled, in January 2009, that neither the educational authorities nor teachers might impose upon pupils moral or ethical criteria about which there was disagreement in society; the content of the subject must be focused instead on education in constitutional principles and values (Galan & Glenn, 2012).

Far more troubling is the history of efforts by totalitarian regimes to use schooling as a means of suppressing even the desire for freedom of thought and action, to shape "the New Soviet Man" and similar puppets (see Glenn, 1995).

Educational policy, at national, regional, or local level, should of course seek effective ways to respond to deep

societal divisions, but take care not to do so in a way that creates new conflict. After all, schools are not only an important part of any strategy to rebuild a sense of shared citizenship, but also one of the major sources of political discord. There is a danger that efforts to employ government-controlled schooling to foster cultural convergence could in fact have the opposite effect, stimulating resentment and alienation. This has always been a potential source of conflict – consider the seventy-year *Schoolstrijd* in the Netherlands and the conflicts between Catholic loyalists and governments over schooling in France, Belgium, Austria, Mexico, Spain, and elsewhere – but the danger is even greater in a period of disorganized but fierce resistance to elite imposition of new values and mores. In the United States, for example, the Cato Institute maintains a "public schooling battle map" documenting several thousand recent conflicts at the state or local level over issues of values and identity in public schools.

It is of the essence of a free society that government does not possess absolute sovereignty; it fulfills its duties and exercises its authority within a context which it does not itself create. For those within the Abrahamic tradition (Jews, Christians, and Muslims), this context ultimately derives from divine Creation and the natural order established thereby. For them, as well as for those who do not share this belief, it finds expression in national constitutions and international covenants which governments are expected to use as the framework for

and limitation of any exercise of this authority. An essential feature of these basic norms is recognition of a variety of other sources of authority, including non-governmental associations and institutions of civil society, such as especially the family, that do not derive from and in a sense are prior to the State.

The result is *political pluralism*, an understanding of social life that comprises multiple sources of authority–individuals, parents, civil associations, faith-based institutions, and the state, among others – no one of which is dominant in all spheres, for all purposes, on all occasions. In a liberal pluralist regime, a key end is the creation of social space within "which individuals and groups can freely pursue their distinctive visions of what gives meaning and worth to human existence" (Galston, 2005, pp. 1-3).

In some spheres of national life, such as national defense and the enforcement of laws, government's authority is absolute, within constitutional constraints. In others, such as the internal affairs of families and of religious communities, government altogether lacks authority except in exceptional cases, such as child abuse.

Education and other provisions for social welfare occupy an intermediate position, where government and civil society (including families) must cooperate, and it is in defining the forms and extent of this cooperation that debates and even conflicts often arise. After all, schooling can provide, for the

State, unparalleled access to the vulnerable minds of children and thus exercise over an entire population an influence going far beyond the appropriate role of government in a free society.

Every society expects certain behaviors from its citizens (as well as visitors and resident aliens), and from the voluntary associations which make up the civil society. With the rights that these enjoy come responsibilities. This is true also of schools, including independent schools, whether or not publicly-funded, as well as homeschooling families. To assert these responsibilities for certain outcomes is not to diminish their rights or to give government broad license to interfere inappropriately with the role of parents and teachers.

In thinking about how far the writ of government in the formation of citizens legitimately extends, it will help if we make a distinction between *instruction* and *education*, terms used more inter-changeably in English than in Spanish, French, or Italian. Instruction we take to mean teaching of skills and information, especially those important for a successful life in a particular society, and education we take to mean the formation of character and convictions, the shaping of a human being. Of course these distinctions cannot always be untangled in practice (memorizing the times tables or Latin declensions arguably builds a work ethic), but the distinction is useful.

Government has a clear interest in ensuring that all of its citizens possess the skills and information that will enable them to work productively and to function under the complex conditions of daily life. It can thus legitimately expect that whoever is providing instruction demonstrate that this produces the age-appropriate knowledge and skills.

Parenthetically, this assumption has been challenged by ultra-orthodox Jewish groups (Haredi) in the name of freedom of conscience, insisting that government does not have a right to set expectations that conflict with their alternative understanding of the nature of a good life (Bedrick, Greene & Lee, 2020). To pursue this interesting question, which has arisen in Europe (Glenn, 2020) as well as in Israel and the United States, would take us too far afield.

2. Pluralistic provision of schooling

The goals of nurturing commitment to a common citizenship and reducing conflict arising from deeply-held cultural disagreements will best be served by strengthening structural pluralism in education. Pluralism in this sense is to be distinguished from diversity. The latter refers to differences along many dimensions present in any modern society, differences whose exploitation currently gives rise to "identity politics . . . both devoid of and hostile toward institutions. It attributes to people a place based on their biology or ethnicity, and so treats their unformed selves as nearly all there is to know" (Levin, 2020, p. 25). Pluralism, by contrast, is pre-

cisely based upon institutions and the role they play in giving form and context to human relationships: the family, voluntary associations, the whole rich panoply of civil society that, in contrast with government or the market, "tends to be best at performing tasks that generate little or no profit, demand compassion and commitment to individuals, require extensive trust on the part of customers or clients, need hands-on, personal attention… and involve the enforcement of moral codes and individual responsibility for behavior" (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992, pp. 45-46).

It is characteristic of authoritarian elites of whatever political coloration to distrust these independent civil society institutions and thus to resist pluralism, much in the spirit of Rousseau's insistence, in his *Social Contract*, that there be no partial society in the State. In the current climate of cultural mistrust, pluralism "becomes to the pure partisan mind an instrument of injustice and civil liberties a barrier to progress. Because when one is righteous, the very existence of dissenting communities is proof that justice is thwarted and evil exists" (French, 2020, p. 90). Unfortunately, such self-righteous intolerance has become all too common. This suspicion has extended above all to civil society institutions with a religious character.

It is precisely for their capacity to build morally cohesive and formative communities that our religious institutions have become increasingly con-troversial in contemporary America. The question at the heart of some of our most divisive cultural conflicts has been whether institutions that embody the religious convictions of their members, leaders, or owners will be permitted to embody those convictions when they are not shared by our society's cultural elites. Culture war now threatens the integrity of these essential forms of association, just when that integrity is most badly needed. (Levin, 2020, p. 155).

Structural pluralism in schooling rests upon a recognition, on the part of the State, that it possesses neither a monopoly on truth about life's deepest questions, nor a right to use its regulatory authority or its financial muscle to favor an official orthodoxy. While it may enforce reasonable expectations for behavior – obeying the laws, paying taxes, and so forth – it may not prescribe the worldview on which such behavior is based, and it should recognize that many of its citizens hold convictions about life that *go all the way down* and may disagree profoundly with some societal norms, such as shifting standards for sexual behavior. This in turn will cause them to resist the teaching of those norms to their children as unquestionable *official* truth.

Educational pluralism is a way to provide space for such profound disagreements about ultimate questions, not suppressing them but allowing them free expression, while providing a framework to ensure that every child receives effective instruction in the skills and knowledge required for life together.

3. Schooling vulnerable children

Every child is, in a sense, vulnerable and in need of protection, but we will here be concerned with three specific forms of vulnerability and how educational policy might best seek to address each of them. First, those children whose incomplete mental or physical development requires special educational interventions. Second, those whose family circumstances do not provide the emotional support and adult examples needed to attain a confident maturity. And third, those who belong to ethnic or other groups stigmatized in the wider society, especially the growing Muslim presence in the West.

We will ask whether (as many in what has been called the Educational Establishment insist) a robustly pluralistic educational service works against the interests and the rights of such vulnerable children, or whether instead it can serve them better than would a monopoly of schooling by government. We will ask also how it can promote in them the civic virtues, the settled dispositions so critically needed in our divided societies. Of course, our answers will, in the space available, be no more than suggestive, but supported by a rich and growing research literature, as well as by my own experience, for more than twenty years, as a state government official responsible for urban education and equity.

3.1. Children with developmental disabilities

The schooling most beneficial for children with disabilities will of course vary widely based upon their specific needs and abilities, the subject of a vast literature which we cannot begin to address. A common imperative, however, is that they be thought of and treated as *persons*, not primarily as challenging cases or objects of pity, as is too often the case.

The prevailing orthodoxy among American educators for the past several decades has been that children with a wide range of disabilities should, so far as possible, be integrated into regular classes with supplemental support. Sometimes this works well, sometimes it does not, leaving the disabled child isolated and feeling unwelcome, even if all the prescribed services are provided. To over-simplify what can be a very complex dynamic, much depends on whether the focus of the school, and thus of the classroom community, is overwhelmingly on academic achievement and competition, or whether it places equal emphasis on validating the personhood of each of its members.

Public education systems are under strong pressure to focus on academic outcomes, especially in fields important to national economies, a pressure intensified by the regular release of comparative achievement results by OECD and other organizations. Such outcomes are very important, as is the need to reduce disparities based on income and other factors, but pursuing *instructional* goals should not lead to neglect of essential *educational* goals. These include, for children with disabilities as for other children, validating their personhood.

It would be reassuring to believe that this point is too obvious to belabor, but unfortunately that is not the case. Even among advocates, the insistence on calling these children "differently-abled" persists in defining them by their abilities. Educational pluralism provides the alternative of offering schools that treat them, not as imperfect individuals to be evaluated and treated, but as persons with full human dignity.

Such schools are often informed by a worldview that sees each child as created and in the care of a loving God, whatever his or her apparent imperfections. As a leading American sociologist has put it, the "vision of the Catholic school contrasts sharply with the contemporary rhetoric of public schooling that is increasingly dominated by market metaphors, radical individualism, and a sense of purpose organized around competition and the pursuit of individual economic rewards" (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 11).

It is worth going a little deeper into the implications of educating on the basis of the perspective that the ultimate value of a person, and that person's rights, does not rest upon individual abilities. Legal philosopher Robert George of Princeton points out that "[o]rthodox secularists typically say that we should respect the rights of others... Ultimately, however, secularism cannot provide any plausible account of where rights come from or why we should respect others' rights" (George, 1993, p. 39). In consequence, a

society that does not nurture respect for the human person – beginning with the child in the womb and including the mentally and physically impaired and the frail elderly – will sooner or later (probably sooner) come to regard human beings as mere cogs in the larger social wheel whose dignity and well-being may legitimately be sacrificed for the sake of [the] collectivity (George, 2015, p. 1).

Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, reflecting on how he reached the conclusions argued in his *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (2010), points out how fragile an account of human rights based on abilities is, after all,

[s]ecular accounts can explain what it is about human beings who can function as persons that gives them rights, but they cannot explain what it is about those who cannot function as persons that gives them rights. Secular accounts of human rights typically ground the dignity that accounts for human rights in some capacity—for example, the capacity for rational agency. But human beings who are incapable of functioning as persons don't have the relevant capacities. So far as I could see, only a theistic account that appeals to God's love for every creature who bears the image of God can account for the rights of all human beings whatsoever (2019, p. 275).

After all, "[r]ights and dignity can be real only if human beings are more than biological matter." The implication for protecting the rights of disabled children in their schooling is that they may be best served in schools whose mission is shaped by "the belief that every human being is created in the image and

likeness of God" (Gregory, 2012, p. 381). This is what a pluralistic system permits, and it would be profoundly unjust to make such an affirming educational experience available only to those children whose parents can afford tuition for their schooling.

3.2. Children from unsupportive homes

A free society – and thus a democratic political system – cannot flourish without citizens who have developed the qualities of character, the settled disposition, that we call civic virtue. This is not news, of course; Montesquieu pointed it out in *The Spirit of the Laws* (I, 3, 3) nearly three hundred years ago, and America's second president, John Adams, wrote that its Constitution was made "only for a moral and religious people."

It is in healthy families that the seeds of civic virtue are planted; in such families

we receive our formative experiences, where the most elemental, primitive emotions come into play and we learn to express and control them, where we come to trust and relate to others, where we acquire habits of feeling, thinking, and behaving that we call character – where we are, in short, civilized, socialized, and moralized.

Today, unfortunately, as philosopher Gertrude Himmelfarb has pointed out, "many parents are as ineffectual in promoting and enforcing social order as are other authorities. And that miniature system [of the family] is as weak and unreliable as the larger social system of which it is part" (1999, p. 45). It has been said that the "cultural ocean in which American adolescents swim saturates them in the ethos of therapeutic individualism" (Smith and Denton, 2009, p. 172).

Nor is providing a nurturing environment that responds to the distinctive and evolving needs of each child a task that government can fulfill successfully. This is why, for example, properly-supervised foster care has replaced the earlier reliance on institutional orphanages.

The molding of character required during the early stages of a child's development can only be provided in the intimate sphere of the family. The state is simply incapable of assuming this responsibility, even though it may be compelled in emergencies to take children into care. Family life offers an experience of communal solidarity that uniquely prepares children for participating in other communities (Chaplin, 2011, p. 244).

But what of children whose homes, while not so dysfunctional as to require foster or institutional care, fail to provide the loving stability and models of adult character needed to develop essential qualities of character, including the ability to trust and to be trustworthy? Where will they develop the "autonomous moral self required for liberal democratic citizenship"? For the fortunate among them it will be through immersion in thick, dynamic ethical and religious traditions that offer concrete visions of what it means to be a good person and to live

in a just society, acquired both among people – parents and children, teachers and students, children and their peers – and between students and the traditions into which they would be initiated (Alexander, 2012, p. 160).

Unfortunately, the common public school is often incapable of providing the sort of "thick" community within which trust and other civic virtues are nurtured. This is certainly the case in the United States, where "community value dissensus is in the ascendancy. Much attention has focused on public schools and their failure to provide value reinforcement" (Popenoe, 1995, p. 83). By definition, the common public school serves pupils assigned on the basis of residence or some other formal criterion, not by a shared agreement on the part of school staff and parents about the perspectives upon which the life and mission of the school will be based. It is no longer (if it ever was) possible to assume that these perspectives and the practices which express them will cohere in a common public school, while democratic governments no longer possess the confidence of their predecessors that they can or should impose a state orthodoxy.

Under these conditions, schools freely chosen by parents and (equally important) able to choose their staff on the basis of commitment to the school's distinctive mission (whether religious or humanistic) have a distinct advantage in nurturing trust and the settled disposition to behave as responsible citizens.

The media have at last grasped the fact that test scores and graduation rates improve where schools are freely chosen by families. But what many people still fail to appreciate is that the case for choice in education goes much deeper than market efficiency...

Shifting educational authority from government to parents is a policy that rests upon basic beliefs about the dignity of the person, the rights of children, and the sanctity of the family; it is a shift that also promises a harvest of social trust as the experience of responsibility is extended to all income classes (Coons, 1992, p. 15).

Sociologists have found that "[m]utual selection by both students and staff has important consequences for the social environment within private schools because it assures [sic] general value consensus and mutual trust within the community" (Salganik & Karweit, 1982, p. 153). A leading educational policy analyst points out that a freely-chosen "school will be stabilized by its commitments and respond to the needs of a group of students and parents to whom it is committed rather than to the politically bargained preferences of society as a whole." As a result, "[s]ocial trust and community feeling are higher when schools are distinctive and families have choices" (Hill, 1999, p. 151). Or, "[q]uite simply, relational trust is more likely to arise in schools when both faculty and students wish to be there" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 142).

Of particular importance for nurturing the qualities essential for citizen-

ship is "an ethos of trust [which] opens space for teachers to feel comfortable introducing contentious issues into their lessons and allowing debate and discussion of those issues among the students." (Campbell, 2012, p. 244). This is more likely to occur in schools where staff and parents are in agreement about fundamental matters.

Schools that have this capacity to foster trust are also sources of the hope on the basis of which individuals become engaged citizens. History has shown again and again that such engagement, and the positive change which it can bring about, do not arise from despair and alienation but from the hope that can be nurtured in the most difficult circumstances by communities of mutual trust. Thus, for example, the Freedom Movement of the Fifties and Sixties in the United States grew out of the local Black church and, in turn, degenerated into frustration in the following decades when it abandoned that connection and the way of life supported by the Black church had broken down. As sociologist Christopher Lasch put it,

> [h]ope implies a deep-seated trust in life that appears absurd to those who lack it… It derives from early memories… in which the experience of order and contentment was so intense that subsequent disillusionments cannot dislodge it. Such experience leaves as its residue the unshakable conviction… that trust is never completely misplaced (1991, p. 80).

Every child should experience such security in a loving family but, for those who do not, the opportunity to attend a school forming a coherent and loving community based on a shared understanding of the nature of a flourishing human life – often these will be schools with a religious character – is even more important than it is for other children.

3.3. Children from stigmatized groups

Concern that the presence of a large number of unassimilated (and perhaps unassimilable) foreigners will somehow alienate a society from itself is by no means new in Western nations. Maurice Barrès raised the alarm in France in the late 19th century that "the foreigner, like a parasite, is poisoning us" (Todorov, 1993, p. 247). The theme has become increasingly common in recent decades, long before the crisis created by the refugee and migrant wave in 2015-16 and the jihadist attacks in Paris, San Bernadino, and Brussels. A half-century ago, German and Swiss policy-makers responding to popular fears of *Überfremdung* (which might be translated as "over- foreigning") sought to distinguish between those foreigners who were compatible with their society and could be integrated selectively, and those who were not.

Muslims are perceived as more troublesome in heavily secularized Europe than they are in the United States in part "because they express their individuality through religious postures that for most of Europeans are not compatible with the idealized secular civism"

(Cesari, 2013, p. 144). Europeans need to remember, as Jürgen Habermas and others have pointed out, that deeply-held religious convictions, if listened to respectfully, can be a solid basis for participation in a pluralistic democracy. Indeed, "vital and nonfundamentalist religious communities can become a transformative force at the center of a democratic civil society–all the more so when frictions between religious and secular voices provoke inspiring controversies on normative issues and thereby stimulate an awareness of their relevance" (Habermas, 2011, p. 25).

On the other hand, fundamentalist religious groups in a hostile relationship with the surrounding society represent a danger to the majority as well as to its own members, and the periodic jihadist incidents in Europe as in the United States are a reminder that the peaceful co-existence of Muslims with the non-Muslim majority cannot be taken for granted. The challenge for social policy is how to deal respectfully with the convictions and practices of the majority of Muslims who wish to fit into their host societies while taking appropriate measures to isolate and neutralize the militant minority.

When, thirty years ago, I researched how a dozen countries schooled the children of immigrants (Glenn, 1996), the prevailing concerns were language and culture, and it was confidently assumed that these would largely lose their significance in the second generation. Today the concern about immigrants seems overwhelmingly to be about their religion, and the children of immigrants often cause more concern than their parents. As philosopher Charles Taylor has pointed out, ironically, "[e]ven French atheists are a trifle horrified when religion doesn't take the standard Catholic form that they love to hate" (2007, p. 529).

In the context of widespread secularization in Western Europe, "the demand by Muslims not just for toleration and religious freedom but for public recognition is... taken to be philosophically very different to the same demand made by black people, women, and gays. It is seen as an attack on the principle of secularism" (Modood, 2007, p. 70). One ironic consequence is that the sympathies of European political progressives shifted away from Muslim immigrants as the latter increasingly asserted their claims in religious rather than in cultural terms. So long as the religious practices of Muslim immigrants could be seen as cultural survivals, these were tolerated, but such practices "became unbearable when they take their place definitively on the stage of French society as the affirmation of a faith detached from any foreign culture." Members of the secular Left who, "in the 1980s defended the rights of immigrants against the *Front National* [are] indignant that the children of those immigrants display a Muslim identity and sometimes [they hold]... positions that were those of the *Front National*, but with the clear conscience of those who still see themselves as antiracist" (Roy, 2007, p. 5).

Meanwhile, Muslims themselves have sought other allies: "defending values more than a culture, conservative Muslims find themselves in the camp of the conservative Christians, and they use the same formulation: defense of family values" (Roy, 2007, p. 101). In this connection, it is significant that the first Islamic school in the Netherlands was sponsored by a Protestant school association, as was an Islamic secondary school in 2014 (Dronkers, 2016, p. 11), and that the right of a Muslim girl to wear the *hijab* in an American public school was successfully defended by a Christian legal advocacy group in 2003 (Moore, 2007, p. 244).

As the Muslim population in the United Kingdom continued to grow in the 1960s, its leaders expressed increasing concern about the effects that the "open society" and especially its schools would have upon children whose families lived by entirely different assumptions. The Muslim Educational Trust was established by immigrants, with one of its goals being to protect a distinct Muslim identity among children exposed to a permissive society and schools where they would encounter "the materialistic Western culture, broken families, sexual promiscuity, alcoholism, and the relaxation of morality" (Kepel, 1994, p. 153).

The younger generation of Muslims may seek a more 'pure' and fervent Islam as the basis for identity and for anchoring in an often-baffling host so-ciety, an Islam consciously chosen and affirmed. In contrast with the homelands of the immigrant generation, where individuals were Muslims by birth and without any conscious choice, under conditions of Western modernity "[o]ne has to prove one's faith and commitment. The community is not a given but a reconstruction" (Roy, 2004, p. 37).

The Western country with the largest number of government-supported Islamic schools, between forty and fifty at any given time, is the Netherlands. The situation of these schools has been difficult as a result of the low social status and education level of most Dutch Muslims. According to the government's education advisory board, the weak academic performance of many of these schools is attributable in large part to the inexperience of their boards (Onderwijsraad, 2012), though, as a result of strenuous efforts, "[b]y early 2013 two Islamic primary schools had been awarded the title 'Excellent School 2012' by the Ministry of Education" (Merry, 2013, p. 102).

In North America as in Western Europe, although most immigrants place a high value upon the schooling of their children, some of them regard the form available to their children in public schools as a threat to their cultural and religious identities (Gibson and Bhachu, 1991, p. 88). What accommodations to make for religious convictions – a fundamental human right – in common public schools is a question that has troubled education policymakers. Schools may

remove or grant excusals from practices that the devout find offensive (as some Muslims do coeducational physical education classes or field trips) and may modify the curriculum to give more recognition to the significance of religious belief, for example by teaching about world religions.

These accommodations within a "common school" are often unsatisfactory to all involved. Muslims, for example, have sometimes expressed opposition to allowing non- Muslims to explain their faith to Muslim pupils, believing they would not do so adequately (Zaki, 1982).

Jasmin Zine, in her research in Ontario, found "students who felt that being in public school was more isolating in many ways for Muslim students who are living a faith-centered lifestyle." (2009, p. 57). She also found that in "Islamic schools, being able to fit in and be accepted was a significant theme in students' narratives. They reported feeling less social differentiation on the basis of race, class, or culture in the Islamic school environment in comparison with public schools" (2008, p. 99).

It is often charged that Islamic schools in North America and Europe tend to undermine, in their students, the qualities that will make them good citizens of the host society. Thus some critics assert that many "are run by Islamists who teach children that their primary loyalty is to Islam rather than to their countries of citizenship" (Baran with Tuohy, 2011, p. 195).

There is now a legal requirement in the Netherlands that Islamic (and other) schools provide democratic citizenship education, and a similar requirement has been adopted in Britain (Niehaus, 2009, pp. 121f).

Of course, as with other religious groups, such as Catholics, Evangelical Protestants, and Orthodox Jews, it is quite common for Muslim educators to teach that a primary loyalty is owed to God, but that this need not compete with the requirements of good citizenship; indeed this emphasis can arguably contribute to being the sort of engaged and critical citizens that a healthy society requires. Princeton political scientist Stephen Macedo, though not an advocate of faith-based schooling, concedes that there may be costs to displacing educational institutions that reinforce and deepen children's commitments to particular communities: the liberal social goods of self-critical reflection and choice themselves depend upon a clash of significantly different conceptions of the good life.

Conversely, the

homogenizing effects of a public school system may…promote not the preconditions of a lively, and deeply reflective public life, but a flattened social order without much at stake.

Some might say that the shallowness of discourse and the blandness of public life in America testify to the overweening success of a common educational regime (2000, p. 249).

As we have seen, the robust virtues upon which family life, social life, and political life depend do not float in thin air; they require roots in a nurturing soil. Philosopher Leszek Kolakowski has argued that

> educating people to be tolerant and unselfish, to overcome tribal customs in favor of universal moral standards, cannot be done without the strong base of a traditional authority which up till now has derived from the great universal religions. Very often, though not always, the net result of education freed of authority, tradition, and dogma is moral nihilism (1990, p. 172).

Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Jewish – and Islamic – schools can, on this theory, do a better job than neutral public schools in providing a solid basis for the qualities required by good citizens, and it can be hypothesized that "the Muslim school is serving as a pathway for students as well as adults to cultivate social trust, leadership skills, and community values commonly associated with citizenship and civic engagement" (Cristillo, 2009, p. 79).

Concerns about the effects of Islamic schooling, however, continue to be one of the common themes of those who warn of Islamist subversion of Western societies and their democratic values, of what is sometimes called "civilization jihad." An on-line petition in the United States in 2007 sought to gain signatures calling for a total ban on Islamic schools, "charging that such institutions are imposing religion and backward traditions on children" (Haddad & Smith. 2009, p. 3). While such a measure would not meet American constitutional standards, it suggests the suspicion prevailing in some quarters. A recent British example is Ed Husain's book *Among the Mosques* (2021).

On the other hand, widespread evidence suggests that few Muslim parents turn to Islamic schooling as a way to prevent their children from successful participation in the host society, albeit on the basis of distinctive religiously-rooted norms. That this is not widely recognized may be attributable, in large part, to the fact that, among societal opinion-makers, all too often a religious world view is held in contempt, as illegitimate, because of false dichotomies that privilege the 'rationality' of secular knowledge over the 'irrational' and 'mystic' knowledge that flows from religious or spiritual sources. Religious schools are often

> associated with intolerance...and they are often viewed as anachronistic in matters relating to women or sexuality... I would...argue that religious schools – in this case Islamically oriented ones – should not be dismissed as intrinsically intolerant or inherently misogynistic sites for educating impressionable youth. Islamic schools are part of the Canadian landscape, and they need to be examined as viable, growing alternatives that many Muslim families are choosing for their children (Zine, 2008, p. 7).

It may in fact well be that, as has been argued in the Netherlands, "Is-

lamic schools nurture and develop an Islamic identity which helps Muslim children to be assertive and confident when they engage with the wider society and contribute to the integration process" and that "Islamic schools make Muslim children better citizens by 'providing a moral compass, and instilling a new sense of morality into society'" (Niehaus, 2009, p. 117). David Hargreaves has argued that "specialised schools enhance social cohesion within a sub-community (e.g., of a shared religion or culture) and in a pluralistic society there can be no national cohesion that fails to foster and build upon more local and specific forms of social cohesion" (1996, p. 20).

The priority of moral formation in faith-based schools can involve practices that would be considered inappropriate in a public school. "Whereas secular school educators must generally keep private their deepest inspirations, understandings, and concerns related to the child and the curriculum, the religious schoolteacher *understands these things to be a vital aspect of the curriculum.*" (Engelhardt, 2013, p. 186, emphasis in original). Such self-revelation contributes to the formation of a trusting environment, as discussed above.

A nationwide survey in the Netherlands measured components of citizenship among primary school pupils; pupils attending Islamic schools were found to score higher on acting democratically, acting in a socially respon-

sible manner, dealing with conflicts and dealing with differences than pupils in other kinds of schools. Only with respect to civic knowledge did the Islamic school pupils, no doubt reflecting their socially-marginal families, score significantly lower than the average in Dutch schools. The late sociologist Jaap Dronkers commented that these "findings directly challenge the assumption that pupils at Islamic schools are less likely to cultivate the relevant civic virtues for Dutch society at large" (Dronkers, 2016, p. 15).

In a multi-year on-site study of seven Islamic secondary schools across the United States directed by the author, the

> most striking finding was that, contrary to our expectations, staff, parents, and students did not have a great deal to say about the difficulty of reconciling their religious beliefs with life as active participants in American society. The students we interviewed, indeed, seemed rather taken aback by the suggestion that this would be a major problem for them. They did, of course, identify a variety of aspects of American life, and especially in popular youth culture, about which they had strong reservations, as did their parents and their teachers. One of the most valuable aspects of their school experience, it seemed, was the conversations about such matters that occurred in Islamic Studies classes and other contexts (Glenn, 2018, p. 192).

The students interviewed fully expected to go on to university and to

careers in business or the professions. Several volunteered that one of their goals was to change American perceptions of Muslims and of Islam. Many families that chose these schools told us they were concerned to protect their children from what they see as the corrupting influence of youth culture, prevailing unchallenged in most public high schools. Ibrahim Hewitt, in an English context, has described this as "bridging the ever-widening gap between traditional values in the home and peer-group pressures found in a secularist state school system" (1996, p. 120). One mother told us, "before, we didn't have Islamic school and Muslims used to put their kids in Catholic schools. Why? because Catholic schools teach them the same rules, manners, you know?" A student told us, of his former experience in a public high school, "It's more like a peer-pressure type thing, it has its own atmosphere, and they have their own image, like our school has their own image of, 'hey, everything has to be good,' and then like in public schools it's like, 'hey, you want some drugs?'"

The students we interviewed, alone or in focus groups, evinced none of the alienation so evident in accounts of young men or women who turn to terrorist acts, and indeed school staff spoke often of warning their students against gaining a distorted view of Islam through jihadist sites on the Internet. For the team from Boston University visiting these schools repeatedly, it was especially notable that

the students we talked with saw themselves as engaged through their classes – especially Islamic Studies – in thinking critically about American society, but also about the Islamic tradition and the cultural assumptions of their families, and how these would have to be re-thought for application to their lives in the United States. Contrary to the canard that faith-based schools are less capable than schools informed by secularistic materialism of developing critical thinking, our interviews suggest that these young men and women are keenly aware of how much in their lives cannot be taken for granted (Glenn, 2018, p. 197).

We should not assume, of course, that the Islamic secondary schools across the United States that were open to academic researchers are representative of all such schools, nor that the largely middle-class Muslim immigrants to the United States are comparable to the larger and less prosperous Muslim minority in Western Europe. At least, however, our research provided abundant evidence that, under the right conditions, Muslim youth can be educated into a "culture of engagement" with the host society which does not require repudiation of their religious tradition or community. It also suggests that this can be done particularly effectively in a school that makes this its primary mission, rather than an afterthought in the name of a banal "multiculturalism".

The successful Islamic schools that we visited were able to flourish because of state policies that permitted

such alternatives–thus structural pluralism–and in the case of two of them provided public funding to offset tuition costs. Rather than encouraging a dangerous separatism, these schools are in fact serving to enable transition to life in the American host society, as did the much-criticized Catholic schools for millions of immigrants over the past two centuries.

There was some evidence that students attending the Islamic schools and their families were actually more open to societal diversity than were Muslim youth attending public schools, where they might suffer alienating experiences. This is by no means implausible. Youth whose identity evokes mistrust may be more alienated from the host society if attending a public school where they are constantly reminded of their minority status, and exposed to insults and social exclusion, than if attending a school in which their identity is highly esteemed and they do not encounter hostility. Muslim girls who wear the *hijab* may be especially sensitive to marginalization in the context of a large public high school (Sarroub, 2005).

What seems to occur at the schools in our study is that the school itself mediates to some extent the contact between its students and non-Muslims, providing a context that reduces anxiety and promotes openness. Students in the Islamic school who might otherwise be isolated and awkward in relation to non-Muslim peers can thus develop the 'bridging' social capital that fosters social cohesion

and trust" (Smith and Denton, 2009, p. 230). An aspect of their school experience that they spoke of with particular enthusiasm was the regular community service projects in which they partnered with and befriended peers from Catholic, Jewish, or Evangelical schools in serving the homeless or cleaning up a public park.

These reactions suggest that we should not be concerned that well-organized and confident schooling based on religious convictions, including Islam as it is evolving in the West, will produce narrow-minded citizens unable to think for themselves or unable to collaborate with those who differ from them. Patrick Wolf, reviewing a very extensive body of research in American schools found, contrary to some expectations, that the

> private school advantage over public schools in nurturing the democratic values of young Americans is far greater than any advantage private schools have in boosting students' test scores. The myth that public schools are necessary for a stable democracy is not only unfounded, but the data suggest it is perverse. Access to private schooling is more conducive to civic flourishing (2020, p. 47).

When, however, schools and other institutions that serve a bridging function between the immigrant community and the host society are not encouraged, or even actively suppressed, the children of immigrants often turn to radicalized sources of information about Islam. Boston's 'Marathon bombers,' the man

who assassinated Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, the London bombers, and the great majority of young men and women seeking to join ISIS in Syria have received a public school education. A study of hundreds of individuals arrested for terrorism-related offenses in the name of Islam noted that

> people assume that the jihadis are well educated in religion. That is not the case...The majority of terrorists come to their religious beliefs through self-instruction. Their religious understanding is limited; they know about as much as any secular person, which is to say, very little. Often, they have not started reading the Qur'an seriously until they are in prison, because then it is provided to them and they have lots of time to read it. (Sageman, 2008, p. 51)

As Olivier Roy has pointed out, when religion, and thus Islam, is expelled from the public domain, this delivers it and its powerful capacity for motivation into the hands of the radicals and those who invent their own interpretation of religion's requirements.

Thus French-style *laïcité* does not solve anything; chasing religion from public spaces, it confides it into the hands of the marginal and the radical (2016, pp. 116-165).

An appropriately-regulated structural pluralism can provide educational settings within which new identities and loyalties are reconciled with those of the family and its traditions, providing a solid basis for integration and civic participation. The fact that in most cases the countries from which Muslim immigrants come are intolerant of religious diversity is no argument for limiting support for pluralism; indeed, to the contrary, these countries offer a warning about the effect on healthy civil society and democratic institutions of suppressing alternative voices and convictions or undermining them by neglect and lack of respect.

4. Summing up

Government can and should, as an aspect of instruction for citizenship, ensure that youth come to understand their own rights and those of others, and the importance of protecting these rights. But it may not, in a free society, usurp the authority of families to shape the character and the deep convictions of their children. As Michael Ignatieff insists,

> [c]odes of rights cannot be expected to define what the good life is, what love and faithfulness and honour are. Codes of rights are about defining the minimum conditions for any life at all. So in the case of the family, they are about defining the negatives: abuse and violence. Rights can't define the positives: love, forbearance, humour, charity and endurance (Arthur, Gearon & Sears, 2010, p. 44).

As we have seen, the importance of nurturing such positive character is a sensitive task beyond both the capability and the legitimate reach of gov-

ernment. This makes it necessary that the role of the State in education be limited to oversight and general support without any attempt to claim a monopoly of schooling. Not only is this required in the interest of freedom, but a panoply of alternative forms of schooling are the best guarantee for the development of positive character and commitment.

Children with special needs and disabilities flourish in schools for whose staff and governance recognizing and nurturing their personhood is at least as important as measurable academic outcomes, and so develop confidence to contribute within their abilities to family and society.

Children from difficult and unsupportive homes can develop the ability to trust and the stability of character required for worthy citizenship in school where the staff share a common understanding of human flourishing and exhibit trustworthiness in their relationships with one another as well as with their pupils.

Children from marginalized social groups flourish in settings which provide an inter-active bridge between their families and traditions and the wider society. Just as thousands of Catholic parochial schools, supported at great sacrifice by European immigrants to the United States, gave the children of those immigrants safe spaces within which to become American Catholics, so well-organized Islamic schools can serve a similar role.

This means that they should be brought out of the shadows and expected to meet common expectations for instructional outcomes and civic engagement.

For each of these vulnerable groups of children, and for other children as well, a pluralistic system of education offers a range of positive options which provide supportive environments for their development into responsible citizens. Such a system

is best able to achieve the needed balance between teaching for specific commitments and also teaching for commitment to the common liberal values that are essential for the coexistence of peoples with various commitments in pluralistic liberal democracies. (Thiessen, 2001, p. 196)

American researchers, using national data-bases on civic and political participation, found that "the more politically homogeneous the environment within a high school, the stronger the norm linking voting with being a good citizen." In fact,

[t]o the extent that teachers, principals, and parents all have common preferences (values), school officials can feel free to act in loco parentis. The process is almost certainly self-reinforcing. The greater the trust among parents, teachers, and administrators, the more…teachers and principals are willing to enforce discipline, because they know that actions at school will be supported at home. And the more roles and norms are enforced, the more parents are satisfied with the disciplinary

climate in the school, and thus deepen their trust in the school's faculty and administrators. (Campbell, 2006, p. 113)

Thus, "[a]s suggested by [sociologist James] Coleman, the intergenerational transfer of social norms is easier to accomplish in social environments where values are held in common." In fact, "the reality is that when it comes to civic education the action does not appear to be in the formal curriculum" (Campbell, 2006, pp. 151-3), but in the overall life of the school and in the social capital that it develops (or fails to develop) in its students. Students learn or do not learn the civic virtues through what they experience in school. If, for example, both they and their teachers are essentially voiceless in the educational process, they may learn to keep their heads down and accept (albeit resentfully) whatever is imposed upon them. If, on the other hand, they experience school as a sphere of competition and self-seeking, they may learn to be cynical about any shared social purposes. Every school educates, it is well to remember, but a dysfunctional school – whatever the test scores it produces – may make its students *less* rather than more capable of a flourishing life.

At its best, in addition to the individual and group benefits that we have discussed above, the social capital developed by a school with a coherent and shared mission "makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy" (Putnam,

2000, p. 290), thus benefitting society as a whole as well.

Does attendance at an Islamic (or Jewish, Catholic, or Evangelical) school cut students off from the common public school experiences that will make them global citizens with the ability to function effectively in a diverse society and world? Stanford legal scholar Judge Michael McConnell argues that, to the contrary,

[i]n the cultural crisis of our time, solutions are not to be found in abstractions like cosmopolitanism, but in renewal of our various intact moral communities. I predict that those in the next generation who have the greatest knowledge of and respect for other cultures, as well as commitment to their own, will not be the products of an explicitly cosmopolitan education, but of home schooling, of religious schooling, of schooling in culturally and morally self-confident communities. They will be the students who learn to love the good and to recognize and respect visions of the good in others. (2002a, p. 84)

Indeed, in the social context of American life, he suggests, "home schools and religious schools (and other schools provided by morally coherent subcommunities) may be the best democratic schools we have" (2002b, p. 133). And, as Canadian philosopher Elmer John Thiessen points out, "[t]he best guarantee against institutional indoctrination is that there be a plurality of institutions" (1993, p. 274).

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