THE ROLE OF RELIGIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY PROCESSES IN A GLOBALIZED SOCIETY. AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY IN THE SCHOOLS OF PUGLIA

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Abstract: *Religious diversity plays a significant part in relationships between cultures. They have a profound effect because religions have represented and still represent central factors in human history. Embodied in the various cultural contexts, they substantiate the traditions, the thought, the behaviour of the people for whom it is difficult to establish a positive and enriching inter-cultural dialogue even if it is not possible to establish an inter-religious dialogue. To achieve this dialogue it is necessary also at an educational level to have the commitment to work to develop new open attitudes and also new acceptance towards religious diversity. It is evident that the confrontation and conflicts between the different historical forms of religion does not derive so much from nature and content of religions but is due exclusively to an incorrect interpretation of religious education. Working on religious education in terms of interculturalism means precisely to highlight the strong categories, supporting and qualifying the human experience from a pedagogical perspective. For young people of today intercultural widespread skills are necessary to be able to interpret the pluriverse world in which relations between different religions are asked to live together. How can we configure relations between the various religions today? How are religions changing in our time, characterized by profound changes? How can we interpret the great transformations that shuffle cards, areas and identities, breaking the traditional ties between religion and culture? These are some of the most significant questions which the religious dimension poses today. On this basis the Laboratory of Intercultural Pedagogy of the University of Bari "Aldo Moro" in collaboration with the Multicultural Section of the Pugliese Regional Council Library has launched an experimental project involving 14 high schools from Puglia to monitor the perception that more than 400 young students have of the religious phenomenon and its effects at a cultural level.*

Keywords*: culture; religions; identity; globalization; migrations; intercultural dialogue*

1. INTRODUCTION

How can we configure relations between the various religions today? How are religions changing in our time, characterized by profound changes (Roy, 2009)? How can we interpret the great transformations that shuffle cards, territories and identities, breaking the traditional ties between religion and culture (Fornasari, 2010)? These are some of the most significant questions which the religious dimension poses today (Sabbatucci, 1990). The burst of cultures and religions of "the others" (Pannikar, 2008), in our daily lives is making necessary a process, that cannot be postponed, of understanding the value the sacred assumes in the lives of countless men and women; it also urges those involved in education to rethink for a training program that includes, beyond denominational or religious membership, or non-

membership, the knowledge of religion and religions (Saggioro, 2009).

The role of religion is in fact central to the construction of collective and individual vision of reality (Asad, 1993), as it is in the process of identification and distinction of individuals and groups throughout history and in different spaces. Religious differences have a large weight in relations between cultures. They have a profound effect because religions have represented and still represent central factors in human history (Salvarani, 2006). Embodied in various cultural contexts, they give substance to traditions, thoughts and behaviors of people, making it difficult to establish a positive and enriching cultural dialogue if there is not also an inter-religious dialogue (Fornasari, 2014). To achieve this dialogue it necessary a commitment to work, also on an educational level (Pajer, 2003) to

develop new attitudes of openness and availability toward religious differences. It is evident that the confrontation and conflicts between different historical forms of religion, do not come so much as a result of the nature and content of religions, but only due to an erroneous interpretation of religious education (Pedrali, 2002).

These are behaviors totally antagonistic to the dimension of good, to the availability to absolute which characterizes the religious dimension (Santelli, 2003). Working on religious education in terms of interculturalism means precisely to highlight the strong, supporting and qualifying categories, the human experience in pedagogical perspective (Sirna Terranova, 2007). Young people today need intercultural spread skills in order to interpret the pluriverse world in which they are called to live. The construction of these skills comes through the ability to emotionally and cognitively decentralize their own point of view, and recognize the others' equal dignity and right to exist (Bertolini, 2001). Only knowledge can deconstruct the stereotypes that often accompany the perception of another religion's acting and, at the same time, loosen the defense sometimes uncritical and dogmatic of their own religion viewed as opposed to that of others (Carozzi, 2008).

2. THE ROLE OF RELIGIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY PROCESSES IN A GLOBALIZED SOCIETY

J. Delors, in *Education, a treasure,* writes:

the school should help young people to understand who they are. Only then they will be able to put themselves in the others' shoes and understand their reactions. Developing this empathy at school produces fruit in terms of social behavior for life (Delors,1997).

For example, by teaching young people to adopt view of other ethnic and religious groups, can help to avoid the lack of understanding the leads to hatred and violence among adults.

It should be assumed that many consider religion and religions an intangible heritage of humankind: against rumors about religion's end or crisis, advanced secularization, but also against impromptu sacred return fashion, we should keep in mind that historically each human group has had their own beliefs and symbolic systems, that every action is given but also refers to motives, ideas and tensions that do not necessarily relate to the political, economic and ideological sphere, but to what we could generally define the relationship

with the sacred (Saggioro, 2009). Neither philosophy or culture, but constant reminder of an irreducible transcendence to the world that founds the order of the world: how to think then of religion in the social order? Could it be brought back within the framework of other symbolic systems (the culture)? Could it develop in its own space (in private, or in a community of believers) without conflicting with other symbolic systems?

Samuel Hunghinton's theory of clash of civilizations (Hunghinton, 2011) does not help to understand these movements that shuffle cards, territories and identities breaking the traditional ties between religion and culture. What happens when, as claimed by Oliver Roy, religions come off from their cultural roots? Or more simply, how could it happen that religions have become the basis on which appear to be based the reclassification of identities (Roy, 2009)?

In the last quarter of the twentieth century two theses faced each other: one that saw secularization as an ineluctable process, a condition and at the same time a consequence of modernity; the other that saw and greeted the return of the religious, seen as a protest against an alienating and illusory modernity and also as different access to modernity itself. Should secularism be imposed against religion (as in France) even at the expense of individual freedom, if necessary, or the revival of religion should be seen as a manifestation of diversity, wealth and human freedom? It is however appropriate asking a preliminary question: do the increasing visibility of religion, its increasing influence on the media and politics match with a real increase of practice and devotion? If this dimension is undergoing a crisis, could we attribute the genesis of this weakness to a lack of commitment in intercultural education linked to learning the history of religions? And what should be understood by the history of religions? Definitely, it is not the series of facts or dates related to single religions; it is not a qualitative comparison between religions to decide which is better and which is worse; it is not an ideological thinking system designed to destroy religions or to attack places of worship.

The history of religions is a scientific discipline system and its field of study is the analysis of the religious fact in its context of rootedness, in definitions of identities and its relationship with what is different. It involves critical analysis, heuristic and philology of documents and thus the understanding of historicised dynamics and correlations, understanding of plots among peoples and values systems, of answers given through the story from various cultural backgrounds to different historical, social

and psychological needs, answers to life's questions concerning the reason why we are in the world, and also understanding how to relate to a natural reality felt as alien toward the human self, symbolically identified in personifications of divine or spiritual type, or generally sacral.

In the university the research has intercepted the many questions above trying to provide possible models of education to the teaching of religions that allows a plural vision, respectful of diversity. In the magazine "Method and Theory in the study of religion" of the North America Association for the Study of Religion (2005), there is a monographic section about teaching on religions in South America; in 2008, Numen, the magazine of the International Association for the History of Religion has dedicated a theme issue to the teaching about religions; in Italy, Studies and Materials of the History of Religions has entitled the 2009 theme section "Teaching the history of religions in Europe between school and university". In 2007 have been published the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools, the main purpose of which is to provide member states of the OSCE with legal and pedagogical policies to promote the knowledge and study of religions as part of intercultural education.

In 2008 the Council of Europe has published a white book on intercultural dialogue (*Living together as equal in dignity*) accompanied by a legal instrument in the form of a recommendation to Ministers of Education: Dimension of religions and non-religious convictions in intercultural education (Recommendation no. 12, Strasbourg, December 2008): another significant signal of european interest for these educational themes.

In fact, intercultural education cannot avoid dealing with religions, nor give up the proposed models of education toward religious pluralism. An example for all is the Syllabus of Bradford (Salvarani, 2006). Since September 1995 the Interfaith Education Centre, in collaboration with the school council, has initiated the promotion of a common course of religion in about 200 city schools, based on the comparative study of 6 religions, those most present on site.

3. THE NAMES OF GOD: TEACHING INTERCULTURAL ROUTES FOR THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE OTHER. AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY IN THE SCHOOLS OF PUGLIA

Puglia, a land of exodus and landing, has always seen as a priority in its territory to raise awareness of cultural diversity, by promoting intercultural dialogue (Fornasari, 2014). The action-research project here reported comes from the commitment and planning capacity of the multicultural section of the Puglia's Regional Council Library, Laborator of Intercultural Pedagogy (coordinated by this writer), University of Studies "Aldo Moro", of Bari, and its research group "Religions in Dialogue" in agreement with the Regional School Office for Puglia.

The projects that involved 14 High-school Institutes of the region and 400 students, represents the continuation of a series of intercultural activities carried out over the years. Following the round table on the theme: "The names of God: the Islam contribute toward interreligious dialogue", held in December 2008 to close the european year of intercultural dialogue; following the course entitled "Educational Research Methods: the research-action", held at some schools during the 2008-2009 academic year, having as its object the development of a host agreement and IFLA-UNESCO directions for School Libraries, Multicultural Services and set up of the Multicultural Shelf.

Following the Protocol of Understanding between the Regional School Office for Puglia and the University of Studies of Bari – Laboratory of Intercultural Pedagogy – Department of Education, Psychology, Communication, and the Regional Council of Puglia – Library and Documentation Service, Council of Institutional Communication on issues related to the enhancement and promotion of multi-intercultural message throughout the region.

The research-action project illustrated aimed to consolidate the network with the parties presented so far, in order to continue what has been materialized till now.

The project proposal was created with the intention of emphasizing certain core themes in various religious traditions and to develop appropriate educational tracks in favor of interreligious dialogue for schools, referring to the opportunity to consult the Multicultural Shelf available at the multicultural section of the Regional Council Library, constantly updated to magazines and foreign newspapers. The aims of the project were to exploit the following core themes (meeting the difference as richness and resource, deconstruction of ethnocentric and xenophobic views, intercultural awareness and openness to interreligious dialogue) present in various cultural and religious traditions, in order to develop appropriate intercultural educational routes for schools participating in the project.

The project's aims are to: encourage student interaction to "enrich each other" and prepare the future citizen of the world; understand the richness of the contribution of religions in social and cultural development; recognize the value of texts and reference journals for the correct interpretation of the facts; strengthen the sense of belonging to their ethnic community and deepen their cultural specificity.

The project's objectives are: developing the understanding of conceptual elements of the thought of various religions; developing the understanding of the role of religion in social and cultural development in different social groups; developing the ability to recognize the contribution of religion in its values system; understanding the richness of the contribution of religions on the cultural level; comparisons between cultures, to grasp the different and common elements in multiplicity; analyzing the similarities and differences between religions in order to develop respect for their own and others' religions and cultures; education to the concept of cosmopolitanism; socialization in the group-class through chosen texts.

The Methodology of the project (Dottrens,1991) has been the following: for the secondary school classes, grade II, the project proposed: reading and analysis of thematic printing review, of journal articles and monographs of interest (about integration, migration, relations between different faiths) through an updated thematic dossier "Terminus"; lectures, workshops, film forums; meetings with field experts, compiling an on line anonymous questionnaire trying to understand … How can we configure relations between the various religions today? How are religions changing in our time, characterized by profound changes? How can we interpret the great transformations that shuffle cards, territories and identities, breaking the traditional ties between religion and culture?

3.1 Methodology. The semi-structured questionnaire built on research based on data matrix has provided, through the closed multiple choice answers, a series of quantitative data successively analyzed with the SPSS software (Barbanelli & D'Olimpio, 2007). SPSS is a software package used for statistical analysis in social science. It is also used by market researchers, health researchers, survey companies, government, education researchers, marketing organizations, data miners, and others. The original SPSS manual (Nie, Bent & Hull, 1970) has been described as one of "sociology's most influential books" for allowing ordinary researchers to do their own statistical analysis. In addition to statistical analysis, data management (case selection, file reshaping, creating derived data) and data documentation (a metadata dictionary was stored in the datafile) are features of the base software (Vertecchi, 1992).

SPSS Statistics places constraints on internal file structure, data types, data processing, and matching files, which together considerably simplify programming. SPSS datasets have a two-dimensional table structure, where the rows typically represent cases (such as individuals or households) and the columns represent measurements (such as age, sex, or household income) (Wright, 1997). Only two data types are defined: numeric and text (or "string"). All data processing occurs sequentially case-by-case through the file. Files can be matched one-to-one and one-to-many, but not many-to-many (Fox, Long, 1990). SPSS Statistics (Aragona, 2013) can read and write data from ASCII text files (including hierarchical files), other statistics packages, spreadsheets and databases. SPSS Statistics can read and write to external relational database tables via ODBC and SQL.

Instead, the texts relating to open-ended questions were analyzed with the Atlas.Ti software. ATLAS.ti is a computer program used mostly, but not exclusively, in qualitative research or qualitative data analysis (Vardanega, 2008). The purpose of ATLAS.ti is to help researchers uncover and systematically analyze complex phenomena hidden in unstructured data (text, multimedia, geospatial). The program provides tools that let the user locate, code, and annotate findings in primary data material, to weigh and evaluate their importance, and to visualize the often complex relations between them. As regards the qualitative dimension, this writer has made reference to the grounded theory (GT). Grounded Theory (Tarozzi, 2008) is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the construction of theory through the analysis of data. Grounded theory is a research methodology which operates almost in a reverse fashion from social science research in the positivist tradition. Unlike positivist research, a study using grounded theory is likely to begin with a question, or even just with the collection of qualitative data. As researchers review the data collected, repeated ideas, concepts or elements become apparent, and are tagged with codes, which have been extracted from the data. As more data are collected, and as data are re-reviewed, codes can be grouped into concepts, and then into categories. These categories may become the basis for new theory. Thus, grounded theory is

quite different from the traditional model of research, where the researcher chooses an existing theoretical framework, and only then collects data to show how the theory does or does not apply to the phenomenon under study. Once the data are collected, grounded theory analysis involves the following basic steps: coding text and theorizing. In grounded theory research, the search for the theory starts with the very first line of the very first interview that one codes. It involves taking a small chunk of the text where line by line is being coded. Useful concepts are being identified where key phrases are being marked. The concepts are named. Another chunk of text is then taken and the above-mentioned steps are being repeated. According to Strauss and Corbin, this process is called open coding and Charmaz called it initial coding. Basically, this process is breaking data into conceptual components. The next step involves a lot more theorizing, as in when coding is being done examples are being pulled out, examples of concepts together and think about how each concept can be related to a larger more inclusive concept. This involves the constant comparative method and it goes on throughout the grounding theory process, right up through the development of complete theories (Baldacci, 2001).

Grounded theory method does not aim for the "truth" but to conceptualize what is going on by using empirical research. In a way, grounded theory method resembles what many researchers do when retrospectively formulating new hypotheses to fit data (Trinchero, 2004). However, when applying the grounded theory method, the researcher does not formulate the hypotheses in advance since preconceived hypotheses result in a theory that is ungrounded from the data. The questionnaire was structured in eighteen questions, in addition to social-graphic data, and has been compiled online using a Moodle platform.

4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Reported below the results of the research for the qualitative part:

Gender	
Male	61%
Female	39%

Age	
15	33,4%
16	9%
17	38,3%
18	19,3%

High School Typology	
Liceo	38,3%
Technical	61,7%

Do you think that religions affect cultures?

Yes	92,5%
No	7,5%

Do you think our country (Italy) is secular or religious?

Secular	29,5%
Religious	70,5%

In your opinion, in Italy, to profess a religion other than Catholic or being atheist, results in social exclusion?

Yes	24,8%
No	75,2%

In today's society, in your opinion, how important is the role of religion?

Much	10,8%
Fairly	41,8%
Few	39%
Unimportant	8,4%

Do you know people of other religions or atheists?

Yes atheists	59,3%
Yes of other religions	35,3%
No	5,4%

Do you know the difference between the concept of religion and that of religious fundamentalism?

Yes	66,3%
No	33,7%

Do you think that the recent events related to the attacks of Paris and violence against women registered in Germany should be considered as phenomena caused by religious beliefs or religious fundamentalism?

By religious beliefs	26,3%
By religious fundamentalism	73,7%

Do you think it would be interesting to study the history of religions in school, or you feel better to study the history and the doctrine of the Catholic religion?

History of religions	84,8%
Hist. and doctrine of the Catholic Relig.	15,2%

Do you think that it is appropriate for sacred symbols to be displayed in public places? (ie. schools, courts, offices)

Yes	50,7%
No	49,3%

How would you define your family?

Believers that practicing	44,3%

Believers that not practicing	51,7%
Atheist	4%

If you practice a religion, how much its values affect your behavior and your lifestyle?	
Major impact	8,8%
Fairly	31,8%
Little impact	34%
No impact	25,4%

Do you consider our country (Italy) as one open to religious pluralism?	
Yes	61,5%
No	38,5%

5. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

From research and quantitative analysis emerges that young teenagers (aged 15-18 years old) selected as champion of the research (400), have parents of Italian nationality in 93,7% of cases. In 92,5% of cases, they believe that religions influence very much cultures, primarily by transferring the values of religions in lifestyles (48,5%) and also defining what behaviors are considered just or not just, therefore affecting ethic. Among the 7,5% who say that religions do not influence cultures, 59% think that one thing are values transmitted by religion, but another thing are rules and values of the society. For 70,5% of the selected champion, Italy is a Country defined as "religious" (where religion is the main component of identity) and not secular. The students participating in the research claim that Christian and Islamic are the main monotheistic religions spread on our national territory, that for 75,2% to profess in Italy a religion other than Catholic or to be atheists is not a cause of social exclusion, that for 52,6%, religion has a role of a certain importance in the society and of little importance for 39%. 59,3% know people that profess to be atheist and 35,3% know people of other religions. 66,3% know the difference between the concept of religion and that of religious fundamentalism; they also think (73,7%) that recent news media related to the attacks in Paris and violence against women in Germany should not be considered motivated by religion, but caused by religious fundamentalists. For 84,8%, in the Catholic religion the role of women is more equal to that of man compared to that (7,3%) of women in Islamic religion. For 84,8% of the selected champion, it would be interesting studying at school the history of religions, and only for 15,2% it would be interesting studying the history and doctrines of the Catholic religion. For 50,7% it is appropriate to display sacred symbols in public places (such as schools, courts, hospitals, offices); it is not appropriate for 49,3%. This is a signal of how this issue essentially "split" into two parts the selected champion. 51,7% define their own family as believer but non-practicing, while 44,3% define it as practicing believer, and only 4% as atheist. For 34% the values of the professed religion (if any is professed) have little impact on their behavior and lifestyle, no impact for 25,8%, enough for 25,4%, and major impact only for 8,8% of the selected champion. For 92%, people who profess a religion other than Catholic have the right to pray in special places of worship. At the conclusion of this project emerges a particularly interesting picture of how young people in Puglia perceive the religious dimension and how, in their opinion, it affects the cultural dimension. A series of responses provide a picture of an increasingly secularized youth, aware of historical processes that shaped the current framework of our Country but less attentive to the intercultural dimension desirable in a globalized society.

The distrust toward "the other" religions and the fact that a third of the selected champion ignore the difference between religions and religious fundamentalism, appears to be a matter on which we should meditate and, above all, operate through educational processes that (Pourttois, 2007), with increased incisiveness, may build those basic intercultural skills necessary to become cosmopolitan citizens (Mounier,1962) with a 'well done' head, as Morin hoped.

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