Learning *from* religions. Post-secular Schools and the Challenge of Pluralism

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Abstract. The postsecular notion highlights the increasing religious pluralism and the persistent public role of religions in secularized western societies. Besides, the concept recommends a way to deal with differences in social spaces, referring to mutual recognition and to Habermas's idea of *complementary learning*. Adopting the postsecular frame, the paper focuses on religion and education in public schools. An overview on the European scenario is drowned and solutions for the accommodation of religious plurality inspired by the 'postsecular school' idea are outlined. The paper refers to the concept of 'learning *from* religion' as not far from the suggested view, since it extends the '*about* religions' teachings to what students may learn about themselves and the others through religious studies. However, from the postsecular perspective the 'learning form religions' may also mean the possibility for schools to increase new forms of awareness, reflexivity and innovation implementing practices of cooperation with religious organizations.

Keywords: Pluralism; postsecular society; religious education; intercultural education.

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Introduction

'Religions and schooling' is a term used as a general description of different forms of religious education in schools, also with reference to policies concerning religious symbolism or observance and the relation between school institutions and religious communities. The ongoing theoretical and political debate concerning this theme in Europe – as elsewhere – reflects how dealing with religious differences represents a controversial point in Western societies.

Considering the European scenario, the paper focuses on religions and religious education in public schools[2], offering a sociological reading key inspired by the theoretical frame of the *postsecular*[3]. The attempt is to underline the contribution that this notion can give to the current lively reflection on the topic within the social sciences. Such a contribution concerns a way of considering religious traditions and groups in the public sphere of secularized and pluralist societies. The main thesis of the paper is that, if compared to the (near but not completely overlapping) intercultural perspective, the postsecular view better aids the consideration of differences – religious differences in particular – in their collective dimension and in understanding the kind of processes triggered by the simultaneous presence of religious and secular actors in the public sphere. Therefore, this perspective appears particularly fruitful in order to examine the case of schools challenged to find solutions that can be implemented in secular and, at the same time, multi-religious contexts.

In this contribution we will proceed as follows. First, a brief overview of the European solutions in religion and schooling will be outlined, showing how multi-religious solutions are gaining relevance at an

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[2] In this contribution the term 'public schools' is used referring to publicly funded schools which should be attended by all students (and teachers) regardless of their own or their parents' religious or philosophical beliefs; therefore, schools pervaded by multiple identities and belongings.
[3] As it will be argued later on in this essay, the postsecular notion is gaining relevance within the current scientific and political debate about religions highlighting the persistence of their role in the public space of secularized and pluralized societies (Casanova, 1994 and 2000; Knott, 2005; Habermas, 2006; Molendijk, Beaumont and Jedan, 2010; Rosati and Stoekl, 2012).

international and national level, although the scenario remains varied. Second, the postsecular notion will be argued in proper sociological terms and compared to the intercultural perspective on a theoretical level. Third, this comparison will be transferred to a practical ground, where the added value of the post-secular key in figuring ideal-types and solutions about religions and schooling will be showed.

Overview: religions and schooling in Europe

The space for religion in public education systems represents a field for ideological and political controversy which has played and still plays a major role in the foundation and current development of modern Europe (Zambeta, 2008). Naturally, the political solutions adopted in European countries reflect the complex historical and social development of relations between States and religious communities and more in general the role of religion in society and the traditional ways of dealing with differences, the specific structure of national education systems and the degree of propagation of religious schools.

Religious education in public schools is in some way provided in almost every European country, although in very different ways. Many criteria can be used to distinguish the main solutions which have been adopted. A macro-distinction is that of a denominational *vs.* non denominational approach towards religion as a specific subject in school curricula. These two different options can be named: 'education *into* religion(s)' and 'education *about* religion(s)' (Schreiner, 2005; Jackson, 2007; Ferrari, 2008).

The first one aims at introducing pupils to one specific religious tradition adopting a confessional (or a semi-confessional) approach. This teaching – whether through compulsory or optional lectures – generally regards   countries   where   the State and a   specific religion are closely related, as is in Italy[4]. In this group are also included

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[4] However, strictly speaking, there is a difference between a theologically based confessional religious education and a confessional religious education also based on the methodological rationality of the sciences of religion. In the latter case, the catechetical and

the majority of the post-communist countries, where religious education has been re-introduced in schools after 1989. The denominational teaching of religion is generally managed and controlled by the religious communities (frequently in cooperation with the State), often providing to the training and the selection of teachers.

A widespread variation of this solution is a *pluri*-confessional education involving various religious traditions (education *into* religion*s*), as occurs in Finland, Austria or Germany. In Germany, for example, religious groups are constitutionally allowed to establish their own courses, meaning that in public schools classes for Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and, more recently, Muslim students, are usually available (Reuter, 2006). Forms of bi-confessional teaching are also attempted in Countries with a mixed denominational tradition such as Switzerland.

The second solution, education *about* religions, refers to school teachers providing religious studies and knowledge about traditions and systems of belief from various geographical and historical contexts. The model of a religious education as a separate school subject is currently adopted for example in Sweden, Norway, Switzerland (Canton of Zurich) and Denmark. But its most complete implementation is probably found in England, in accordance to the traditional multicultural approach towards

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pastoral character of teaching is mitigated in order to open up to the pluri-religious and secularized composition of the classrooms (Pajer, 2007). In Italy we found this tendency in the historical evolution of the IRC (*Insegnamento della Religione Cattolica*) [*Catholic religion's Teaching]* and in its recent updating on behalf of the Catholic Church (Giorda and Saggioro, 2011). The IRC currently aims at offering a guided reflection on the great issues of human condition, in comparison to the answers given by the Christian tradition. With regard to this, please refer to the official documents: *Indicazioni didattiche per l'insegnamento della religione cattolica nelle scuole dell'infanzia e nel primo ciclo [Didactic recomendations for the Catholic religion's Teaching] (*2009), *Indicazioni sperimentali per l'insegnamento della religione cattolica nel secondo ciclo di istruzione [Experimental Didactic Recomendations for the Catholic religion's Teachin in the upper secondary education] (2010)* and *Intesa tra il Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca e la Episcopale Italiana per l'insegnamento della religione cattolica nelle scuole pubbliche [Agreement between Ministry of Education, University and Research - MIUR, and the Italian Bishop's Conference - CEI - on the Catholic religion's Teaching in the public education system] (2012).*

civil society proper of the Country. Government indications[5] and a considerable amount of background studies and researches, mostly from pedagogy and social sciences (amongst others, the University of Warwick studies directed by Jackson since the 80's)[6], have been supporting Religious Education (RE) since decades. However, for Jackson himself (Jackson and O'Grady, 2007), the development of reflections and experiences in today's RE is more necessary than ever, in order to deal with the recent political fluctuation or even criticisms towards multiculturalism[7]. This may be taken as evidence of how sensitive is this field with respect to controversial issues in the political sphere.

Figuring a geo-religious map (Schreiner, 2005, 2009; NEF, 2009), one may say that mono-confessional education characterizes mostly Southern and Eastern Countries, a mixture of confessional (*into*) and non-confessional (*about*) approaches is adopted in central Europe and a multi-religious/non-confessional education is widespread in the North-West and North of Europe. However, this is not a fixed scenario. In countries with a strong confessional tradition (Ireland, Iceland) the role for multi-religious learning is currently increasing. There are also examples of lively attempts to incorporate more elements of interreligious learning in the South

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[5] We refer to: QCA, 2004. On the implementation of RE activities in the United Kingdom see: OfStEd, 2010.

[6] A wide experience of research can be found in the activity of The Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU), which has gained a great relevance in the theoretical and empirical study of the implementation of RE in the UK. A number of Warwick (completed and current) projects concerns the study of young people's attitudes to religious diversity and the evaluation of the impact of specific teachings on the understanding, attitude and learning of students from secondary schools (for what concerns findings from the 'Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity' project, see: *Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion & Education*, Special Issue: Religion in Education: Findings from the Religion and Society Programme. Volume 33, Issue 3, 2012). Moreover, the WRERU has offered a relevant contribution to the current debate about the RE aims and contents in England developing both interpretative and dialogical approaches to religious education aiming at enabling students to make the link between their studies of the different religious traditions and their own perspective and experiences (www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wie/research/wreru/).

[7] Think for example of the statements of Prime Minister, David Cameron, during the recent years.

(Turkey, Greece and only starting off in Italy)[8] and East of Europe, though countries that have been under a socialist regime until 1989 are experiencing difficulties and tensions (Valk and Schihalejev, 2007). Moreover, as occurs in the Netherlands, in some cases we find a coexistence of different solutions in public schools (Pépin, 2009): the presence of a non confessional teaching about religions in the curriculum, and at the same time the possibility to set up courses on the Christian (or another) religion, if requested by families (in such case, the teachers are trained and paid by the churches). Finally, even in cases where, for a variety of reasons, religious education is almost completely absent in public schools (as in France, Montenegro, Slovenia and Albania), new considerations are surfacing, such as the broader French debate on the so-called 'intelligent *laïcité*'[9].

To draw such a map of religions and schooling in Europe is certainly not a fully satisfying exercise as it minimizes contextual specificities and overlooks differences across countries, starting from the used terminology;

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[8] In Italy we are observing an increase of literature on the topic by scholars coming from social and religious sciences, mostly suggesting the adoption of a non-confessional and plural teaching of religion in public schools (Pedrali, 2002; Canta 2005, 2006, 2011; Mentasti, Ottaviano, 2008; Ferrari, 2008; Salvarani, 2011; Giorda and Saggioro, 2011). Some experimental practices currently rising at the local level are also monitored (Giorda and Saggioro, 2011; Fabretti, 2011). In contrast, the national jurisdiction still remains crystallized, since the broad legislative project on religious freedom started in 2007 has stalled and the more specific purpose regarding religious education has not been successful (we refer to the Bill C371, *Istituzione dell'insegnamento dell'introduzione alle religioni nella scuola secondaria di primo grado e nella scuola secondaria superiore [Institution of the official course on Introduction to religions in the lower and upper secondary education]*, submitted to the Parliament on September 2010). However, the point has recently been explicitly faced in the public and political discourse. In summer 2012 the Italian Minister of Education, Francesco Profumo, made public declarations about the desirability of a 'history of religions and ethics' subject, better answering the need of dealing with the present plural society (these concerns are echoed by many articles in national newspapers).

[9] Initiatives focused on implementing more religious knowledge in the existing curriculum have begun, mostly since Debray's governmental Report (2002) which traced a meaningful shift in French policies. In this document, required by the Minister of instruction Jack Lang, the study of 'religious facts' (*fait religieux*) was recommended not as a separate subject, but rather as a theme integrated into a range of subjects including history and philosophy. With regard to the French approach towards religions in education see: Pajer, 2007 and 2009; Estivalèzes, 2008.

as Schrainer highlights (2009, pp. 5-6), the term 'confessional education' means very different things from case to case. Despite the differences, there are some convergences or at least shared features in the traced scenario. Almost all European countries have some sort of religious education in public schools and many of them have rejected – or are starting to reject – the *mono*-confessional solution in favor of a pluralistic one. Considering educational systems strictly related to the situation of societies, two main phenomena can be easily recognized as crucial in conditioning the role accorded to religion in public schools: the process of secularization, on one hand, and the increase in pluralism, on the other. Almost all countries taken into account are secularized and almost all are facing a more and more evident differentiation in people's social, cultural and religious belongings. Moreover, religions – far from draining their relevance merely on a private level – are an increasingly exercising *voice* in the public sphere (Davie, 2007; Casanova, 2000), questioning classical configurations of the nation-state and indicating the co-presence of elements that can be adequately caught by the postsecular category, as we will try to outline later on.

At the same time, the changes expected locally should be considered in the light of evolving indications coming from the main international institutions. After an initial appearance in the renowned UNESCO Report signed by Jacques Delors (1997), the matter has seriously made it to the agenda only in recent years. The lack of an international *voice* – likely to be interpreted as a cautious attitude towards a very delicate issue – ended after the 9/11 events of 2001. This date has forced and symbolically determined the entrance of religious education amongst the priorities of European public policies (Jackson, 2009). The Council of Europe, in particular, initiated a series of activities addressed at the valorization of religion as a dimension of intercultural education[10], resulting in a reference book for schools, 'Religious diversity and intercultural education' (Keast, 2007); its key points have been included in the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* (Council of Europe, 2008). In the same period, the Organization

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[10] A crucial step of the Council's work is the 'Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education', adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 10 December 2008 at the 1044th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.

for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) published a guide for the arrangement of curricula for religion and different faith studies, the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* (OSCE-ODHIR, 2007). The principal aim of this crucial document was to provide OSCE member States with a set of legal criteria and pedagogical knowledge in order to promote the inclusion of religions into intercultural education (Saggioro, 2011).

The guidelines which emerge from these documents can be resumed in the following points. In conceptual terms, religious beliefs represent a 'source of identity' like others, such as ethnicity or cultural background, and it is thus possible to consider them a phenomenon which transcends doctrinal opposition. In didactic terms, the curricula should respect different displays of religious plurality existing in the territory schools serve, providing the pluralistic and non-confessional delivery of notions regarding all religions and their diverse cultural origins through non conventional methods aimed at facilitating the comprehension of diversity.

Interculturalism and religious education in the *postsecular* framework

In general terms, even if national solutions remain greatly heterogeneous, it appears that multi-religious education is becoming a crucial area of public learning by European national and international institutions. This perspective has to be read in connection to the wider idea of *interculturalism*, which is largely accredited in social and philosophical sciences[11] and has gained importance in orienting educational policies in multicultural contexts. Moreover, the mutual effort that intercultural education and multi-religious education are able to give in facilitating students' interpersonal understanding, personal development and attitude towards the otherness is largely recognized not only from a political point of view but also from a theoretical one (Jackson, 2007; Gundara, 2011; Knauth, *et al*. 2008). In particular, a sort of leading thread connects the idea of intercultural education (Baraldi, 2006; Portera, 2008) and those visions

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[11] Between the most influential positions in favour of interculturalism, see the recent contribution from Charles Taylor: http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000022267.

of religious education developed in pedagogical and social science in adherence to an interpretative, phenomenological and hermeneutical approach (Nesbitt, 2004; Jackson, 2004, 2007; Jackson and McKenna, 2005; Miller *et al.,* 2013). One can refer, for example, to the influences pervading British literature, starting from Grimmit's pedagogical view of religious education, mostly focused – as for intercultural education – on students' judgment and search for meanings through experience of the self and the other. To this regard, a relevant step is signed by Grimmit's theorization of 'learning *from* religions' that shifts the aim of religious studies from 'learning *about* religion' – merely knowledge based – to a deeper one concerning student's development of awareness, reflexivity and understanding of them-selves and the others (Grimmit, 1987; Jackson, 2007; Engebretson, 2008; Ferrari, 2008; Teece, 2010)[12]. In this view, not far from the intercultural one, religious pluralism in education represents a resource that grants not only personal knowledge but also individual development and the critical nurturing of a set of values and beliefs. Intercultural learning, as well as 'learning *from* religions'*,* is a process based on the representation of individual identity as intrinsically plural and flexible, therefore open to differences and change.

This general view of religious education has gained much relevance, as proven by several theoretical and empirical based works (Engebretson *et al.*, 2010; Knauth *et. al.,* 2008), and it could easily be recognized as able to determine the implementation of specific practices all over Europe.

The aim of the present contribution is to re-consider this target in the further frame related to the notion of *postsecular*, which is a key term in the current discourse on religions in philosophical, political and sociological sciences. While the old theories of secularization[13], which have been put into question since several decades, have progressively shown their inadequacy in offering adequate answers to issues regarding religions and

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[12] In the words used by Jackson (2007, p. 29): "Educating from religion involves pupils in considering different responses to religious and moral issues, so that they may develop their own views in a reflective way. Here the main objective might be seen as enabling pupils to develop their own point of view on matters relating to religion and values".

[13] Roughly speaking, the traditional paradigm of secularization concerns the idea of the functional differentiation, privatization of religion and decline of religious beliefs (Casanova 2001).

school in secularized and pluralized societies (Skeie, 2008), the postsecular frame offers a particularly fruitful contribution towards reorienting and sustaining the debate in the field. The link between the postsecular idea and the religious education is actually beginning to be pointed out in current literature[14]. We will argument below that the postsecular frame can integrate the intercultural discourse in the attempt to address the issue of religious pluralism and education in proper sociological terms.

The notion of 'postsecular' is largely compatible with that of 'intercultural'. Elements in common have to be found in the recognition of differences and their equal dignity, as a starting point, and in the aims of integration, dialogue and exchange rather than isolation, domination, conflict or exclusion. In this both notions show a normative component. They do not only move from *plurality* 'as a fact' – as multiculturalism does –, but affirm *pluralism* as the direction to follow by western secularized societies in dealing with differences[15]. At the same time the two concepts seem to differently balance the weight on the interpersonal and the collective dimension in managing pluralism. Interculturalism more markedly focuses on the fist level, foreseeing the development of *intercultural competences* (Giaccardi, 2005; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008; Deardorff, 2009; UNESCO, 2013) to enable individuals to appropriately interact in intercultural situations; although, such a focus does not necessarily preclude the attention towards the cultural and socio-political contexts in which intercultural competencies may show their potentialities (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008). On his behalf, the postsecular offers a thicker conceptualization of the collective dimension of diversity, being centered on groups in dialogue within the public space; moreover, it reveals a more explicit link to vision of societies, jurisdictions and political frame adequate to pluralism exploitation, such as forms of secularism, types of modernity, etc..

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[14] See the recent issue of Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion & Education (33:2, 2012).
[15] Precisely the normative component inner to the intercultural and the postsecular ideas is one of the main reasons explaining the scepticisms by some scholars on the theoretical and empirical uses of the two concepts in social sciences.

In particular, according to sociological literature (Casanova, 1994 and 2000; Knott, 2005; Molendijk *et al.,* 2010; Rosati and Stoekl, 2012), the postsecular can be translated by disclosing at least five basic conditions, which have a descriptive and normative character: 1) an increase in religious pluralism of societies (a postsecular society is a *multi*-religious society, in which no particular religions have the monopoly); 2) the persistency of a way of living religious practices and creed that is not only inner to individuals' consciousness but also visible within the collective and public life (a postsecular society is not a de-secularized society, but a society where religion cannot be considered a merely privatized experience[16]); 3) the consequent co-existence within the public sphere of secular and (*pluri*) religious world-views and groups (the postsecular characterizes the public space as a 'space in common'); 4) the capacity of secular and religious actors to be highly reflexive and to bring their own logics – respectively, public reason and principles inner to own traditions – in dialogue and exchange[17]; 5) the presence of sacredness also understood as a heteronomous transcendent force (in other words, a postsecular society requires the presence of a marked difference between secular and religious traditions with regard to a sacred dimension, that has an immanent and civil form in the first case, a transcendental form in the second).

The post-secular refers not to de-secularized contexts, but to contexts in which there is an increased consciousness about the dialectic and not merely oppositional relationship between the 'religious' and the 'secular' (Knott 2005, p. 125). Dialectic relationships and 'interpenetrations' (Göle, 2005) in principle raise the possibility of new configurations both of secular and religious viewpoints and practices (Rosati and Stoekl, 2012). A proper normative indication is implied, mainly to be found in Habermas' notion of *complementary learning*. Using this formula Habermas defines

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[16] The idea of the individualization of religion and the representation of religiosity as a private experience and choice (think for example to the expression 'invisible religion' coined by Luckmann) in opposition to a collectivistic and institutional view of religion (Casanova, 2000) has been considered for a long time consistent with the broader thesis of secularization (Davie, 2007). The postsecular puts into question exactly such an interpretation, focusing on the persistent public role of religion in secularized societies.
[17] About the reflextivity of religious traditions as a inner resource in terms of 'principled tolerance' see: Seligman 2004; Rosati, 2009.

the post-secular as a process engaging religious and secular social actors in a dialogue through which 'both sides can, for cognitive reasons, (...) seriously take into account each other's contributions regarding controversial themes in the public sphere' (Habermas, 2006, p. 258).

What stands out is the collective and institutional dimension of pluralism, as shown in the social and public arena. In this direction, the use of the post-secular as a frame has precise implications for the sociological analysis of issues linked to religious pluralism in education. It requires to go beyond the level of individuals (students, teachers, etc.) actions and interactions to point out secular and religious institutions' and groups' public behavior; it means to consider schools as institutions in which secular and religious set of representations, norms and practices may meet and change in the relationship, allowing the identification of new educational solutions to pluralism. As it will be stressed later on, the post-secular idea is far from implying a top-down vision of social and cultural change; the latter is rather considered as a result of the lively confrontation of the religious and the secular in specific contexts.

From this point of view, still recalling the meaningful suggestion of the 'learning from religions', the aim of a thicker recognition of religions' contribution to public education can surpass the level of a student's personal – human or even 'spiritual' (De Souza *et al.*, 2008) – development and be extended to the level of a cooperative and democratic participation in school governance and purpose. This broader perspective confirms and extends the potential of multi-religious education in offering an arena for dialogue involving collective actors (not only pupils but also communities representatives) belonging to different religious and secular backgrounds (Canta, 2005; Jackson and O'Grady, 2007; Castelli, 2012). Central to the post-secular idea is the possibility for schools and religious organizations to learn from each other in living the same public space and taking part to shared practices. The main point is that through cooperation both parties are expected to develop awareness and reflexivity[18], arriving to 'think of

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[18] Reflexivity is a crucial character own of professionals' behaviour in the educational field, as several contributions on teachers' work have highlighted moving from constructivism (Colombo, 2005; Colombo & Varani, 2008).

themselves differently', which is in turn a starting point for innovation and change.

Obviously, such a perspective also requires considering schools as potentially 'contested spaces', in which social categorizations of religions and the unequal distribution of power between groups may work in selecting the actors entitled to join the dialogue. The critical consideration of this point must be taken as a further, crucial sociological tool underlying the postsecular frame (Göle, 2005, 2011).

Imagining a 'postsecular school'

Shifting our considerations to practical issues, the attempt is now to identify possible ways for, implementing the contributions of multiple religions in public schooling. What follows is a set of features referring to an ideal-typical 'postsecular school', drawn from the purposed frame.

If the *mono*-confessional solution, *de facto* still widespread all over Europe, cannot be taken in consideration (in a postsecular school no religion could enjoy a monopoly), the *pluri*-confessional religious education, adopted for example in Germany, could be controversial too. In principle, this model can grant the organized presence of religious groups in public schools and an autonomous settlement of curricula segments without the mediation of school actors. It is an option that, on a theoretical level, reflects the Spinner-Halev' (2000) idea of the accommodation of religious beliefs in public schools, or the of *joint-governance* formula suggested by Shachar (2001, pp. 154-160) as best social-legal way to deal with cultural and religious differences. However, this solution is only partially coherent with the postsecular perspective. It meets the recognition of diversities in their own specificities as a starting point as well as the criterion of co presence of secular and religious actor – the third of the five points mentioned before –, but it doesn't necessary implies neither a dialogue between them nor a real reflexive exercise (Canta, 2006) – as assumed in the fourth point –.

On its behalf, still moving from the notion of postsecular, the 'objective' transmission of merely cultural contents inherent to the different traditions (education *about* religions) displays some limitations too. There is a consideration of pluralism as a way to address traditions "from the outside"

rather than "from the inside" (Schreiner, 2002) and it can be done without the actual presence of religious actors in schools, as it relies on teachers who are supposed to be adequately prepared to deliver these trainings[19]. Consequently this time the criterion that can't be satisfied is that of the common participation of secular and religious actors to the space of school. Such a criterion represents, if not an essential condition with respect to the possibility of putting intercultural education practices into place, an indispensable factor in carrying out complementary learning processes, as we defined them previously.

A greater closeness to the perspective of the postsecular may be found in the 'learning *from* religions' approach, committed to enrich the exclusively culturalist oriented educational proposition (learning *about* religions) gaining intersubjective dynamism and reflexivity in the approach to different traditions. As suggested, according to the framework proposed, the implementation of the latter approach could be addressed following a conceptual shifting: from a strictly individual level (the possibility for students to learn about themselves through learning about the others) to a collective one (the possibility for school actors and religious groups to learn from each other in living the same public space and taking part to shared practices).

In principles, a postsecular school is a school in which the State and religious communities share the responsibility of religious education and the broader managing of religious differences. One can imagine how, in this case, conditions for complementary learning are provided and opportunities to valorize pluralism are open. It could entail the direct participation of religious communities to the classroom practices of education *about* and *from* religions, through a non-confessional approach. Solutions based on cooperation satisfy the criteria of the co-presence of different worldviews in the space of school, implying an effort of reflexivity on behalf of both the religious and the secular actors involved. On the one hand, schools are called upon to recognize religious groups'

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[19] Moreover, teachers' training is broadly identified as a crucial point in order to an effective implementation of non-confessional religious education all over Europe (Carr, 2012). With regard to Italy, a relevant and detailed contribution to the – still immature – reflection on teaching methods is offered by Giorda and Saggioro (2011).

contribution to education allowing them to represent their own traditions, in their own vocabulary, not only with regard to strictly cultural elements, but also in the claim of truth and in the implications in terms of daily collective and individual behaviors. On the other side, religious communities should take part to the 'fair play' of democracy, excluding forms of proselytism, as required by the secular lexicon of State schools[20].

At a broader level, both education *about* religions and *from* religions have to be linked to a school governance inspired by "democratic" and "net" patterns (Hirst, 2000; Apple, Beane, 2007; Serpieri, 2008) allowing for the creation of an institutional space based on mutual contribution. We can thus imagine an articulated system which varies from case to case, also depending on the cultural composition of students, where different religious communities – but also, potentially, students themselves and their families – are called upon in schools to partially share decision making, administration and teachings.

Although highly heterogeneous, the European scenario is not completely devoid of examples. The growing attention of European policies towards participation of students, families and communities, particularly started from the Nineties, has lead to some attempts by Countries. In the UK, Czech Republic, Portugal and the Belgian Flemish Community can be found solutions reflecting the tendency to include representations of civil society and religious communities in school governance (Eurydice, 2007 and 2009). In the UK particularly interesting is the systematic and institutionalized activity of the Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACRE) in the determination of the RE syllabus, the daily worships and other practices/projects concerning religions in state schools[21].

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[20] Particularly close to the suggested solution is the project 'Tavolo Interreligioso' [Interreligious Table] realized in Italy and carried on for a period of ten years (1990-2008) with the aim to provide students of secondary schools a non denominational and multi-religious education whit the direct involvement of religious representatives in teachings. For a reconstruction and a sociological analysis of this experience, see: Fabretti, 2011.
[21] See: www.nasacre.org.uk/.

However, an increase of sociological researches covering the current experiences across Europe and the particular role played by religious organizations is certainly needed.

Final remarks

The previously drawn features of a 'postsecular school' do not pretend to suggest a one-way solution. The point is not to identify a valid model for the old continent as a whole. Such model would certainly be blind to the range of historical, social and economical conditions in which school systems are embedded and that largely explain the diverse solutions (Schreiner, 2008), as literature picturing national situations shows well (Jackson *et al.,* 2007; Engebretson, *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, exactly the tendency to generalize characters of one pretended secular modernity to western and non western societies can be considered an error in which the old theories of secularization have largely incurred; on the contrary, religions have to be considered a crucial element that accounts for the differentiation of pathways to modernity (Rosati and Stoekl, 2012)[22]. Interpreting educational solutions through a postsecular lens is an exercise leading to the exclusion of a logic aimed at the mere replication of policies and experiences in different cases[23]. Being a sociological category with heuristic value, the postsecular cannot be addressed in abstract terms, but must be related to contexts and translated in examples.

The attempt to portray a postsecular image of school offered in the previous pages rather intends to offer a broad representation of a school facing religious pluralism by translating postsecular parameters into possible practices. Such a representation should be read as more or less close or 'sympathetic' to the various contexts and therefore more or less

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[22] At this regard, particularly fruitful is the theoretical and empirical use of the concept of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt, 2003) in analyzing the relationship between different religious traditions and modernity and in focusing the different ways in which secular modernity has been interpreted (Rosati and Stoekl, 2012).

[23] Moreover, the avoidance of a mere 'transfer' logic is clearly suggested by the so called 'new thinking' in comparative education (Cowen, 2009; Larsen, 2010).

useful in analyzing local processes and practices. The postsecular frame can precisely help in the understanding of cultural dynamics through which societies come to think of themselves differently starting from a local level, as it highlights the role of social actors in creating new accommodations of shared spaces and practices. In this sense, it is not policies or institutions, but the various groups in dialogue that constitute the 'control room' of pluralism. In the case of religion and schooling, those actors are not only religious communities and school teachers, but also students, families and other potential stakeholders from civil society in the territories schools serve. At this level the increase in awareness and reflexivity that the cooperation involving secular and religious actors potentially trigger out may lead to new shared meanings and categorizations of cultural elements such as pluralism, religions, education, and so on.

In other words, the postsecular view highlights the *bottom up* process of change. At the same time, as mentioned above, inequalities amongst groups in accessing to the public sphere and the potentially struggling dimension of pluralism must be considered. In this sense, the understanding of social power in educational forms constitutes one of the points at stake.

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