

Teaching Religion as a Part of the Social Studies: Superstructures, School Structures and
Teacher Subjectivities

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ABSTRACT

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As of 2019, the study of religions still remains a relatively unexplored branch of secondary social studies education, particularly in terms of actual classroom praxis. Like the study of race, ethnicity, or gender, religion is often considered a “controversial issue” (Hess & McAvoy, 2015), and looking at religion presents a number of particular challenges for practicing teachers — even for those more advanced in their careers. In this study, I explore two questions related to the teaching of religions as a part of the secondary social studies classroom: 1) What broader forces, both in society at large and in the school setting in particular, influence teachers’ pedagogical and curricular choices around this topic? 2) How do the subjectivities and lived experiences of a teacher contribute to the way he or she teaches about religion as a part of the social studies? These two questions are interrelated. In essence, they can be summed up as follows—which curricular choices around the teaching of religion are a consequence of social forces and what curricular choices are a product of individual subjectivities? How do teachers think about the ways that their school settings and the broader cultural zeitgeist of contemporary America influence the content and methods used to teach about religions? How do they think about their own identities in relation to teaching about religion in the classroom? This qualitative study, using both interviews and classroom observations, examines secondary social studies teachers at three sites in the suburbs of a major metropolitan area in the United States.

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DEDICATION

In memory of

my four grandparents,

Patrick Carey, Sally Carey Mitchell, John Shekitka, and Barbara Shekitka,

who never went to college themselves, but saw to it that others would

and

my teacher and friend

Professor Wm. Theodore de Bary

Columbia College, Class of 1941

(1919-2017)

The Master said, "at fifteen, my heart was set upon learning; at thirty I had planted my feet firm upon the ground; at forty, I was no longer perplexed; at fifty, I knew what is ordained by Heaven; at sixty, I heard them with docile ears; at seventy I could follow the dictates of my own heart."

Confucius, The Analects, 2:4

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Back when I was in high school, I took a course on the history of the Holocaust at the public school that I attended. It was an eye-opening experience and was taught by an English teacher who was admired by students and colleagues alike. She was a great teacher then and is still a great teacher today. In explaining the Holocaust, she discussed its roots in European anti-Semitism and social Darwinism of the 19th and 20th century. She explained Hitler and the Nazis as being, in many ways, products of their time, whereby the climate in Germany and Central Europe fomented hatred for a group of people that was different from others. Later in the course, we discussed how genocide is still a problem in contemporary society, and looked at how tragedies unfolded in Rwanda, Bosnia, and other places around the globe. All the while, something seemed missing from the conversation, and yet, as a high school student, I was unable to precisely pinpoint exactly what it was.

Some years later, while beginning my graduate work at the University of Notre Dame, I had a hole to fill in my schedule and signed up for a course on the Holocaust. At the time, I was expecting to take a course that merely expanded on what I already knew, but when I arrived at the class, taught by the late Rabbi Michael Signer, I found the trajectory of this course to be quite different. Signer framed the conflict between Hitler and the Jews of Europe not only in terms of

19th century ideas of ‘race’ but also, and more significantly, in his estimation, the very fact that these ideas about race were predated by an intensely religious hatred of Jews by Christians. In Signer’s class, we read the writings of German bishops and the Pope, and discussed their occasional concern for, but often outright indifference toward, the persecution of European Jews. We read Jewish theology from the immediate post-war period, and attempted to make sense of, and find meaning in, the events of the Holocaust. Some Jews tried to make sense of the horrific events, while for other Jews, Signer argued, it meant losing their religion. In my experience studying the Holocaust in high school, I was exposed to the events from a particularly secular perspective. At Notre Dame, its religious dimension was instead emphasized. Since that point, I have been intrigued by the dichotomy between the two epistemological stances, and what it means for how one teaches about religions and, further, what that means for the social studies at large.

I know from conversations with my English teacher that both she and I had mostly secular educations, attending public high schools and secular private colleges. The rabbi that I studied with at Notre Dame attended a public college, at UCLA, but of course his later education and training was shaped by a robust interest in religions in theology. He and I had discussions about how religious people, places, and events were interpreted differently by people based on the contexts of their lives. Take, for example, the French Revolution. For King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, the French Revolution was a tragedy. It was a disaster, too, for the Catholic Church that lost much of its power and property. But for a French peasant that now acquired newfound rights under the law, or a young Napoleon Bonaparte who would one day rise to become Emperor, the revolution was a good thing after all. In Victor Hugo’s magnum opus *Les Misérables*, the central clashes of the novel deal with the perspectives that we have around

events, both common and historical. To a Conventionist, a supporter of the events of 1789, “the French Revolution is the greatest advance taken by mankind since the coming of Christ.” (Hugo, 1862, p. 39). Yet for those who were sent to the guillotine, such events were, both figuratively and literally, the end of the world. To Police Inspector Javert, Jean Valjean is a criminal who escaped from the hands of the law, while to Monsieur Myriel, Bishop of Digne, Valjean is a man who deserves the mercy and forgiveness of God.

At its core, this dissertation is about the stories that we tell and how we tell them, and the perspectives from which we share them. All stories are set in specific times, in certain places, to specific audiences, and have characters, plot, and a destination. Some of the stories that we tell involve religion at the front and center. Others have religion off to the side, or find it absent from the story altogether. Is religion to be seen in a heroic or villainous role in the stories that are told? Each of us brings our own subjectivities as human beings and our accompanying lived experiences to the stories that we tell, and this is true, too, for teachers in their classrooms. The six teachers that form the core of this study each had their own interactions with religions growing up, in school, in college, and in their own lives up to the present day. Their experiences with religion left an indelible mark on their own sense of identity and how they think about teaching religions in their classrooms.

In much the same way, each of the teachers who participated in this research is situated in the context of a unique school community, with specific orientations toward religious identity and the role of religion as part of the social studies curriculum. Similarly, just as the teachers’ individual stories shape the stories that they tell about religion, the social space of the school shapes and informs them as well. Schools themselves, with their own histories, and their own places in part of the larger social fabric impact the role of religion in the social studies classroom.

Likewise, the schools themselves and the corresponding culture are both shaped by the cultural context in which they are situated, as well as the broader social zeitgeist.

Along with the individual and the communal, the larger macro-American culture has an impact on the stories that are told as a part of this study. This study takes place in a post-9/11 world as well as after the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2016, which cannot, and should not, be underestimated. There is a certain zeitgeist of larger macro conversations that are in the air at this particular moment, from the role of Christianity and Islam in contemporary culture, to the growing fusion of political, religious, and social power, and the growing rise of fascism (Snyder, 2017). This study is rooted in this particular historical time, in this historical place of the suburbs of a major metropolitan city in the United States of America.

This dissertation explores the ways that one's individual experiences, on a personal level, in the locale of a school community, and in the wider world all affect the ways that teachers engage with questions about religion in their classrooms. Where does religion have a prominent role in the social studies classroom, and what roles does it play, and where is it absent?

Problem statement

Over the past twenty years, the study of religions has become a more robust and significant part of the social studies curriculum in the United States at the macro-policy level (Williams, 2010). A compendium of 703 state social studies standards from each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, ranging from Pre-K to Grade 12, suggests that religion ought to be an important part of the social studies curriculum (National History Education Clearinghouse, 2015). As of 2015, the word 'religion' is discussed in 356 (51 percent) of the 703 policy documents, which is a significant figure when compared to other areas of social studies. The

word “geography” occurs in 606 (86 percent) of the policy documents, “citizenship” in 408 (58 percent), with “gender” only being seen in 156 (22 percent) and “race” 159 (23 percent) of the documents. Simply put, in terms of course content, religion is a significant component of what teachers in the classroom are being asked to teach. Toward that end, *Teaching About Religion in the Social Studies Classroom* (2019) was published by the National Council of the Social Studies, arguably only the second guidebook, after Moore’s *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy* (2007), for teaching about religion in the social studies.

However, pedagogical methods for teaching about religion and the way a teacher’s own subjectivities and positionalities affect his or her teaching are still not sufficiently explored or understood (Burke & Segall, 2011; James, 2015). By subjectivity, I mean the lived experience and feelings of a person as he or she has constructed their own identity. By positionality, I think of this identity not only as it is defined by the self but how it is defined, interpreted, and redefined by the broader social context. Over the course of the twentieth century, there has been a long track record of history being put front and center, with other branches of social studies being marginalized from the curriculum (Evans, 2004). Aspiring teacher candidates and teachers themselves often lack the training, skills, and support to teach about matters concerning politics, ethnicity, race, gender and religion. In New York State, for example, of the 30 credit hours in social studies required to become certified in the subject, 21 of those credits can be fulfilled by taking American history, Global history and geography. Students are only required to have a single class in government and economics, and there is no mandate for students to have studied religion, or any other emergent sub-disciplines of social studies.¹ Though it is assumed that these other disciplines are integrated into these courses, in practice, this is not always the case. Despite

¹ <http://eservices.nysed.gov/teach/certhelp/CertRequirementHelp.do>

the fact that religion (or race or gender) appears throughout the social studies curriculum, how new teachers should engage with this particular material is often an afterthought at best.

Similarly, the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, first released by the National Council for the Social Studies in 2013, includes the study of sociology, anthropology, and psychology only as appendices, while religion was almost completely absent from the document altogether. In 110 pages of text, the word religion appeared only five times, and only once in a substantive way, used as an example to explain the limits of government, whereby “The United States government may not establish a religion because of a limitation contained in the First Amendment” (NCSS, 2013, p. 101). A 2014 position statement attempted to correct this oversight, but a full supplemental religious studies companion document was not released until more than four years later, in 2017, in large part to counter the notion that religion is marginalized in the standards. While Charles Haynes (2017) of the Religious Freedom Center contended the revised document demonstrates that “religious literacy is not an add-on or afterthought,”² the president-elect of the NCSS noted that still, even today, “politics and religion are two topics most people shy away from discussing.”

Just as religion has become an important part of social studies discourse, though not necessarily actual classroom practice, over the past twenty years, emergent neo-liberal market-based reforms, including voucher programs, have led to a proliferation of new religious schools in some states (Ravitch, 2010). In more traditional politically left-of-center states such as New York and Massachusetts, which do not allow religious charter schools, traditional Catholic schools “have been struggling to survive” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 128). However, other states have robust voucher programs and policies that are intended to bolster Christian schools specifically. Though these vouchers have helped Catholic schools, allowing for “increased enrollment or

² <https://www.socialstudies.org/news/c3-framework-supplement-academic-study-religion>

budget assistance,” some have worried that this may lead to greater oversight of religious schools by state actors.³

One unintentional consequence of these macro-level policy changes that were meant specifically to spur the growth of Christian schools, is that they have actually led to a proliferation of state-subsidized Islamic academies as well (Fagon, 2013). In 2016, of the top ten private schools to receive vouchers from the state of North Carolina, all of them were religious; this comes as no surprise for a state deep in the Bible Belt. However, of this group of ten, two were Muslim academies (Helms, 2016). Principal Widad Mohamed of the Greensboro Islamic Academy, which is second statewide in terms of education voucher subsidies “with 90 students receiving a total of \$373,800” noted that “all the families, they pay tax. I think it’s fair to take some of this.” She added that the “scholarship program opened the door to low-income Muslim families who couldn’t afford the full cost” (Helms, 2016).

Particularly in light of the appointment of Betsy DeVos as the Secretary of Education in February 2017 and her strident support of vouchers, questions about the role of public, charter, and private schools will become increasingly relevant, particularly for those with religious underpinnings (Pallas, 2016). Ultimately however, exactly how the educational finance structure in America will shift under the superstructure in Trump’s America as of 2019 still remains to be seen (even with the relatively recent but still unfulfilled plan to merge the Department of Education with the Department of Labor⁴). However, it is clear that there will be a more prominent place for questions of how public money is used to inculcate private values, both of a secular and religious character. While religious private schools were once funded only by private money, they now operate as quasi-public entities, entrusted with public monies for the public

³ <https://churchlife.nd.edu/2018/05/24/voucher-programs-problems-and-promises-for-catholic-schools/>

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/06/21/622189097/white-house-proposes-merging-education-and-labor-departments>

good but still at times with values and objectives that are of their own design. While social studies education exists at Catholic and Islamic schools, the propagation and advancement of the religion itself presents an additional, and at times, potentially competing objective. Although neither the Catholic nor the Islamic school in this study receive the kind of voucher subsidies that exist in the state of North Carolina, they still provide a new window into the diversity of social studies education in a newly redefined and reimagined ‘public’ system of education.

Looming over more recent political developments, since the events of September 11, 2001, and the accompanying U.S.-led invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq, both for the public at large (Lincoln, 2006) and in the American social studies classroom (Schweber, 2006b), the relevance of religion for understanding conflict and the fullness of human culture has increased exponentially. The superstructure (and here I use the term in the Marxian sense) of America in 2019 is such that the classroom is now seen as a site for exploring the religious motivations of non-state actors such as Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, especially as some have charged that the United States is engaging in a “clash of civilizations” predicated on the religious and cultural differences between Christianity and Islam (Huntington, 1992). Particularly in the age of transnationalism and globalization, these religious identities have had increasing political significance, and demonstrate the way that citizens of nation-states now have conflicting and often dueling allegiances (Selka, 2013). This is evidenced most recently by those individuals from various nation-states, including many young adults, who have joined to fight with ISIS in the Syrian Civil War (Wood, 2015). Though many, such as Anderson (1983), have claimed that the “nation-state” has completely supplanted the “religious community” as the dominant mode of cultural imagined community, it is increasingly clear that the demise of religion as a cultural superstructure was rather premature. From a variety of perspectives—Christian (Weigel, 2007),

Islamic (Ghobash, 2016) and secular (Harris, 2004)—there is a broad consensus that religion is an important part of the conversation of understanding the contemporary world. Religion exists as an important component of the larger national and international conversation about the present and future of humanity. Understanding how this larger conversation about religion impacts how it is taught as a part of the social studies curriculum is a critical and core facet of this study.

Research questions

I am interested in two essential questions concerning the study of religion as a part of the social studies: 1) How do the subjectivities and lived experiences of a teacher, both in public and religious secondary schools, affect the way he or she teaches about religion as a part of the social studies curriculum? In particular, how do notions of group membership and the teacher's status as an insider or an outsider affect the way that they teach? 2) What larger forces, both in the school environment and in the broader societal superstructure, shape teachers' pedagogical choices and positionalities around the teaching of religion, and how do they shape it? These questions boil down to exploring the ways a teacher's praxis is shaped internally and externally, and an investigation of the harmonies and tensions that emerge. After all, as John Dewey once noted, the "educational process has two sides - one psychological and one sociological" (Dewey, 1897, p. 77). On one hand, there are our own psychological and personal experiences of the world, and on the other our social experiences as we interact with others. Dewey believed "that the psychological and social sides are organically related and that education cannot be regarded as a compromise between the two, or a superimposition of one upon the other" (ibid.) In this same way, I see this dissertation as looking at the two key arenas of the lives of the teachers who are participating in this study. Namely, together we explored their own personal sense of self and

identity, as teacher, as teach of social studies, and as teacher of religion in the social studies, as well as the social forces both local and societal that affect their work. And like in Dewey's affirmation, the psychological and the social are at certain times engaged in a compromise with one another, while at other times they demonstrate the superimposition of which Dewey speaks.

These two questions are significant for the field of social studies education and allow us to more fully understand teaching praxis with respect to religion and social studies. Only once existing teaching praxis is more fully understood will I be able to move on to a second phase of my research agenda—that is, to improve the way that religions are taught both as a part of the social studies curriculum in secondary classrooms and in post-secondary social studies teacher preparation programs. These goals will be fulfilled in future projects based on my dissertation research, which will encompass both designing and redesigning coursework for pre-service teachers on the teaching of religion as well as professional development opportunities for practicing teachers. Already however, through the process of listening, transcribing, and writing, I know that the courses that I teach have been dramatically and indelibly altered by my research. This dissertation study is meant to serve as a thorough and detailed examination of the status quo, which heretofore has not been explored in great detail.

Theoretical framework

I. External superstructures

Cultural values, national/statewide educational bodies, the school administration, and parents have direct control over teachers and students, as well as indirect influence in the way that they standardize and mandate curriculum. But, as Ayers (2010) has suggested, teachers have the ability, despite external hegemonic forces, to shape the curriculum for their own classes. At a

core level, there is a tension between the individual and the social, although where one ends and the other begins is sometimes unclear. The teachers of this study often embodied Freirean (1970) notions of reciprocity in learning, seeing education as a direct encounter that is not so reliant on the curriculum itself, but rather the mutual dialogue between students and teachers. The ways in which teachers see themselves as agents of changes in respect to both the structures and superstructures is important in understanding their sense of control over their curriculum and ultimately if and how religions are discussed in the social studies classroom.

The work of both Karl Marx and Max Weber provides a basis for understanding the ways that the individual and the broader social milieu can be understood in relation to one another. Marxist notions of base (infrastructure) and superstructure permit us to understand the ways that external superstructures, school structures, and teacher subjectivity can each in their own unique ways affect the implementation of the social studies curriculum (Marx, 1859). For Marx, superstructures exist as “definite forms of social consciousness” (Marx, 1859, Preface). As a historical materialist, Marx believed in his own time that it was always the base, the economic foundation, that would lead to changes in the superstructure, but more generally, this relationship between base and superstructure is a reciprocal one. Changes in economic and other material conditions can, in his mind, lead to “an era of social revolution” and “sooner or later ... the transformation of the whole immense superstructure” (ibid.). Changes in superstructures involve transformations in the “legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.” Superstructures are modeled on the German philosophical idea of the *zeitgeist*. These are moments when the entire outcome of the future is in the balance and when one event has consequences that ripple into the future, changing both the material and ideological reality. As an example, Marx uses the

“discovery of gold in California and Australia,” historical events which had dramatic impact on the political, economic, and philosophical outlook of the Anglo-American order in the 1840s and 1850s (ibid.). The discovery of gold in these two places changed the economic reality, such that hundreds of thousands, and in times millions of people would flock to new places. New countries would be formed through blood and violence, and the historical course of California and Australia would be forever altered. The discovery of gold (and later oil) in California exist as superstructures because the entire region cannot be thought of otherwise; history is at those critical junctures forever changed. Besides the example given by Marx, other events such as the Renaissance, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution exist as superstructures. At least in the West, we live in a world, both consciously and unconsciously, that is aware of and forever shaped by those events.

The structure of schooling and the influences it has on curriculum can be divided into the teacher’s own subjectivities and the larger context of the school environment. While Marx uses the term base or structure to refer only to the economic organization of a system, by drawing on Freirean notions, we can see that traditional models of schooling feed into inherently capitalist and authoritarian understandings of the role of knowledge and its existence as a marketable commodity. At a more macroscopic level, the external superstructure, from the local school board, to state and national educational bodies, to broader normative cultural values, have their own influence on curriculum. The superstructure, in that it promotes “college and career readiness,” feeds the inherently capitalistic and profit-driven base. It is also important, for the purposes of this dissertation to understand that “curriculum” is meant not just in the explicitly stated sense, but rather that there is also a broad “hidden curriculum” which “consists of those things pupils learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational

objectives of such institutions” (Haralambos & Holborn, 1991, p. 702). This hidden curriculum is often more pervasive and sometimes even more comprehensive than the stated curriculum and “refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school” (Abbott, 2014). As noted by Hafferty (1998) who first explicitly explored the term, in his case as it related to graduate medical education, “the hidden curriculum highlights the importance and impact of structural factors on the learning process” (p. 404). Finally, it is worth considering whether the base and superstructure exert unidirectional influence on a teacher’s praxis, more in line with a banking model of education (Appendix A), or if following Freirean (1970) notions of reciprocity, the flow is more in both directions (Appendix B).

It might appear peculiar to consider Marx as a theoretical framework for a project that aims to study the teaching of religion in schools. After all, Marx is famous for his maxim that religion is the “opium of the masses” (Marx, 1844), and many communist regimes inspired by Marx were decidedly anti-religious, atheistic, and materialist in their orientation. However, in the same work that Marx critiques religion, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, he further suggests that the goal of philosophical inquiry must be such that “the criticism of Heaven turns into the criticism of Earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics” (Marx, 1844). For Marx, the problem of religion is that it denies the fact that it is deeply rooted in social, political, and economic circumstances. Religion, and particularly Christianity of the nineteenth century, tried to ignore the fact that, in the words of Aristotle, “man is by nature a political animal” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.1253a). Marx, clearly a sociologist of religion, sees religion as pernicious because it denies its own existence as a culture system rooted in the material world. Ultimately, Marx is valuable for

his keen understanding of how cultural systems function and the complex intersectionality between social, political, and economic demands. In particular, Marx provides the tools to think about how both educational and religious systems function as social hierarchies and how we can begin to unpack, understand, and one day, dismantle them.

Followers of Marx such as Fidel Castro likewise contend that Marx's "opiate of the masses" contention "cannot be, nor is it, a dogma or an absolute truth." Rather, Castro contends that Marx's words are a truth "in specific historical conditions" (Castro & Betto, 1985, p. 254-255). According to Castro, Marx's critique of religion must be understood in its proper historical context, whereby the church was a political and civil institution "bound and determined to prevent social change" along with "the landowners, the bourgeoisie, the rich, [and the] big businessmen" (ibid.). Even in Castro's own experience with the revolution in Cuba, the issues with the Catholic Church stemmed not so much from religion per se, but the alignment of Catholics with counter-revolutionary, right wing politics. Religion, for Castro and for Marx, too, he would argue, was problematic because of its social and political orientation, not something innate. At the end of the day both Christians and communists were loathed by "the reactionaries," so much so that Castro believed that "Karl Marx could have subscribed to the Sermon on the Mount" (Castro & Betto, 1985, p. 250).

Following much in this same line of thinking in his *Protestant Spirit and the Ethic of Capitalism*, Weber contends that most religious ideas and values often have social implications. He notes how "religious affiliation" can bring about "social stratification" and further how the entire notion of capitalism is connected to specific values latent in Protestant Christianity. The modern capitalist world, far from being secular, is deeply connected to Protestant theological beliefs that were a rejection of prior Catholic ones. For Weber (1930), there is an inherent

“connection between the fundamental religious ideals of ascetic Protestantism and its maxims for everyday economic conduct” (p. 102). Weber argues that it was the specific Protestant notion of pre-destination that led to the development of capitalism, whereby wealth is accumulated for no purpose other than for the future production of more wealth. In such a culture, there is no end to this production nor is there an end to the subjugation of, and domination over, the natural world. In practical terms, this means that rather than being banished from secular society, Protestant Christianity provides a superstructure on which American capitalism has grown. Some critics of course would contend that capitalism had already emerged in Catholic Europe well before Luther, and that European notions of slave-based imperialism, white supremacy, and the privatization of property are in fact the true foundations of capitalism. However, whether Weber is right or wrong, without the influence of Christianity generally, it is hard to imagine that our current capitalist society would exist as it does. It is impossible to think about the broader cultural forces that influence one teacher teaching in one school without being aware of the ways that Protestant Christianity has shaped the social, political, and economic realities of America in the twenty-first century.

II. The school base (or infrastructure)

Apart from allowing us to understand the ways in which Protestant Christianity provides the framework for capitalism in the West, the work of Max Weber provides additional important insight into both the nature of social life as well as the way that religion permeates modern society and gives us a framework to think about the sociological dimensions of the school as a site of the modern bureaucratic state.

In his 1921 work *Bureaucracy*, Weber writes that modern bureaucracies in the public and

private sector adhere to similar rules. First he notes that “a rigid division of labor is in place for the purpose of performing regular daily tasks as official duties in the functioning of the bureaucratically governed system” (Waters & Waters, 2015, p. 76). Schools, by their very nature, both subscribe to this division of labor, and at their core aim to sort students so as to perpetuate this division of labor. Weber writes that “occidental educational institutions ... are under pervasive pressure to produce a specific type of Bildung [education] for the modern bureaucracy” (ibid, p. 123). Weber argues, for modern bureaucracies to exist and function correctly, “in order to fulfill these duties the necessary chains of command are firmly established and divided up ... [with a] capacity to coerce (physical, sacred, or other)” (ibid., p. 76). Weber sees schools as an integral part of the creation of the capitalist bureaucratic society whereby exists “a strictly organized system of super- and subordination of government Behörde [overseers] with levels of authority, where the higher ones supervise the lower ones” (ibid., p. 77). In this way the Department of Education and a firmament of state boards of education supervise various local school districts, both directly and indirectly, and have analogous, albeit more indirect, regulatory control of the private schools in their domain. Schools are meant to produce children who can read and write English and have some fluency with mathematics, and then send some of their students off to college. Some are meant to be producers in the capitalist system; all are destined to be consumers. Within certain thresholds this is the measure of success, although some states also enshrine the right to civic literacy in the state constitution. Much further down on that list, mostly to our collective detriment, is the ability to understand what it means in a multicultural and pluralist society.

The bureaucratic society that Weber saw as becoming increasingly commonplace in modern post-Enlightenment, Industrial Age society is predicated on a certain hierarchical and

hegemonic power. These hegemonic forces of a school are particularly acute for those who do not conform to the dominant paradigm of the school setting. Research has been done demonstrating how queer (Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007) and minority voices (Mahrouse, 2005) are often particularly silenced in school environments. Even in spaces that “attempt to deconstruct traditional biases . . . body posture, tone, word choice, and so on” serve to “perpetuate those very hierarchies and biases” (hooks, 1994, p. 141). The infrastructure of a school rewards insiders, and those who position themselves as part of this dominant paradigm pass the “examination,” which as Foucault notes is “the normalizing gaze” that is an intractable and essential component of any hierarchical normative system (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). Those that are outsiders often face alienation and marginalization from the dominant paradigms.

Much in the same way that Foucault speaks of the normalizing power of the penal institution, the school can be a place that enforces similar conformity, through hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and examinations (Foucault, 1977, pp. 170-194). Understanding more fully how individual teachers navigate these competing forces is an important part of understanding the research question. Public schools impose upon teachers certain values of secularism, and teachers have certain obligations to uphold those values. Teachers in a Catholic or Islamic school are, in various ways expected, encouraged, and coerced into upholding the values of their particular school settings.

Individual teachers often have to navigate the normalizing gazes and examinations in their particular school settings (Foucault, 1977) by the administration, parents, and their students. Too, as Foucault famously notes, the teachers themselves can often become their own guards, restricting themselves to a state of complete conformity. The goal of the panopticon is such that it induces in the subject “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic

functioning of power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). In this way, the hegemonic and hierarchical aspects of the bureaucracy are such that it “is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action” (ibid.).

According to Parker Palmer (1998), however, as teachers grow and develop as teachers, “we learn more about who we are that reveal rather than conceal” our “personhood” (p. 25). This raises questions whether the normalizing gaze of the school environment dissipates over the course of a teacher’s career. Namely, is a more experienced teacher more or less likely to see themselves as existing within a normalizing system, or do they find and learn over the course of their career ways to find their own autonomy within this system?

The power that parents have over a teacher’s instruction ought to be considered separately from the more direct hierarchical control of the principal, superintendent, or local school board. According to the work of Rogers (2010), parents have fewer rights at the federal level in controlling what their children learn in the classroom. After all, as noted in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), “education...is not among the rights afforded explicit protection under our Federal Constitution.” While the United States Department of Education does provide oversight through Title IX, IDEA, and other federal legislation, it does not “develop curricula” or “determine state educational standards.”⁵ At the state level there is a good deal of legislation that allows parents to ‘opt out’ of objectionable curriculum. However, this is a far cry from being able to completely shut down the instruction of a teacher.

Weberian, Foucauldian, and hegemonic systems aside, there was, in this study, a strong embrace by the participants of a Deweyan notion of teaching as lived experience. While I did encounter teachers who refused to participate in a study on religion in the social studies classroom, those who chose to engage as participants, all in their own ways, spoke of their work

⁵ https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/focus/what_pg3.html

as trying to bridge differences, to dissuade students from “think[ing] in terms of extreme opposites” and instead “formulating ... beliefs in terms of *Either-Ors*” (Dewey, 1938, p. 17). Instead of seeing their schools only as sites of conformity, the teachers often saw ways, both implicitly and explicitly, to carve out sites of freedom and agency in their classroom. Freire, himself an admirer of Dewey, builds on the notion of teachers moving beyond the either-ors, and seeing teaching as a locus of liberation. He notes that good teaching “demands the dialectical unity between practice and theory, action and reflection” (Freire, 1978, p. 127). Instead of seeing oppositions in education, Freire demands that we bridge the divides. In this way “unity stimulates creativity, the best protection against the dangers of bureaucratization” (ibid.).

III. Teacher subjectivities and lived experiences

As Kristi Amatucci (2012) notes, there is a constant struggle “to resist the overdetermined, teacher subject” that envelopes and subsumes teachers and is reproduced in many “manifestations: movies, novels, news programs, church, family, school, to name only the obvious” ones (p. 271-272). Further, she argues, teachers, like all modern humans “[are] produced/ produce [ourselves] as human” and require us to play the part as it has been written for centuries, at least since the Enlightenment (ibid.). Like identity as a whole, teachers’ identities as ‘teachers’ are constructed in part by the social forces that inform them. This production of ‘teacher identity’ begins with student teachers, and the transformation of identity from ‘student’ to ‘teacher’ has been examined in some detail (Atkinson, 2003; Greenwalt, 2008). The formation of these identities frequently involves conscious choice-making, self-reflection, and sometimes tears and heartache.

Every day, teachers navigate their own identities as subjects in school systems described

by Amatucci, hooks, and Ayers, systems in which they are subjectivized. The process of subjectivization is, as the philosopher Jacques Ranciere (1992) notes, “the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to an other” (p. 60). By saying that teachers are subjectivized, it means that they “are made subject and subject to these classifications [they] can also interrogate, resist and attempt to imagine outside them” (Youdell, 2011, p. 27). The identities of teachers are created both by internal psychological forces as well as external forces. These external forces range from those with whom they interact: students, parents, and teachers alike, as well as the school administration and society at large.

Identity at large and teacher identity in particular are not static things. Instead as Judith Butler (2005) notes,

My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive story. I cannot explain exactly why I have emerged in this way, and my efforts at narrative reconstruction are always undergoing revision. There is that in me and of me for which I can give no account. (p. 40).

Our own identities evolve over time, and the stories that we tell about ourselves help in the formation and reformation of identity. As Butler writes,

...if I try to give an account of myself, if I try to make myself recognizable and understandable, then I might begin with a narrative account of my life. But this narrative will be disoriented by what is not mine, or not mine alone. And I will, to some degree, have to make myself substitutable in order to make myself recognizable. (p. 37)

Human identity is shaped by social forces as well as psychological ones, and this is certainly true in the case of the teachers who participated in my research. Their own experiences growing up—with school, with family, with religion, with community—all impacted their own sense of being,

and the memories of these events shape and reshape their subjective sense of self in the present. Instead of being fixed, we are instead constantly evolving. The guided interview questions that formed a large part of the data collection for this study provided a snapshot in time, a set of stories and vignettes that the teachers thought were important for their own sense of identity in the year 2017. But were this study instead conducted in 2007 or in 2027, there would have been an entirely different set of stories, though not completely incongruous with the stories offered herein. Some parts of the narrative would be new, others would have been reevaluated and reinterpreted, and still more would have been cut out altogether.

Butler notes that

...the narrative authority of the 'I' must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contest the singularity of my story. We can surely still tell our stories, and there will be many reasons to do precisely that. But we will not be able to be very authoritative when we try to give a full account with a narrative structure. (p. 37)

The stories that the teachers told were all rooted in the temporality of the present day, in the setting of the school, with their own sense of their role as teacher. They were context-specific in both time and place. Interviewing them at other times and places, or in other contexts, would likely reveal different aspects of their identities that demonstrate this sense of temporality and perspective. The stories we tell, in that they are told from a particular perspective, and through our own subjective lenses means that

...the 'I' can tell neither the story of its own emergence nor the conditions of its own possibility without bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present, which are prior to one's own emergence as a subject who can know, and so

constitute a set of origins that one can narrate only at the expense of authoritative knowledge. (Butler, 2005, p. 37)

There is an incompleteness to the ‘I’ that we seek to represent.

Our identities in the present are shaped by forces in the past, not only our own past, but the social past of humanity. As Butler notes, “there is no ‘I’ that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence” (p. 7). Many identities such as religions, nationalities, genders, and races all existed and were constructed and evolved long before I or any of the teachers of this study were even born. Others are newer, constructed in contemporary times and continue to be reconstructed and reinterpreted. Teacher-identity and identity writ large are shaped by social forces and individual understanding, in both conscious and unconscious ways. There are scripts and lines that have already been written, long before the actors that perform the parts were ever born. As the nobleman Jaques in *As You Like It* notes, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts” (Shakespeare, 1599, II.VII.138). This is however not to say that identity is static and fixed; rather individuals in their own social contexts reevaluate and reimagine their own selves in light of contemporary and future realities.

At the same time that societal superstructures mold teachers into the subjects that they would like to see, as Parker Palmer (1998) suggests, there is a “certain inner pluralism” of the “soul” and not a singular place of being (p. 25). (And Shakespeare, in his own way, alludes to this, with the suggestion that a person, in various contexts ‘plays many parts.’) bell hooks (1994) argues that because “teaching is a performative act,” there is always “space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as the catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom” (p.11). Much as identity writ large is constructed and reconstructed in each

moment, so too is the identity of a teacher. There is room, to continue with the metaphor of acting, for improvising, re-writing lines, and reacting to new developments as they emerge. The more we teach, hooks argues, the more our performance “changes” and so does “our sense of ‘voice’” (ibid.). Our own subjectivity allows, and often demands that “we communicate best by choosing that way of speaking that is informed by the particularity and uniqueness of whom we are speaking to and with” (ibid.).

The overall question of how teachers identify their own subjectivities within these notions of multiplicity, and of changes in identity based on audience, is crucial in understanding if and how they are willing to engage with the topic of religion in their curriculum. Looking at individual teachers and their own subjectivities is important because, as Shaver, Davis and Helburn (1980) long ago noted, “teachers’ views on [curricular] matters are frequently discordant with those of supervisors, professors, [and] curriculum developers” (p. 3). The views of teachers are important because “individual teachers have a great deal of freedom, often more than they recognize or wish to admit, in deciding what social studies will be” (ibid., p. 6). This argument has been advanced even further, namely with the suggestion that teachers themselves are the most critical ‘gatekeepers’ in deciding what topics students will study and what topics they ultimately will avoid (Thornton, 2005).

The work of Bill Ayers sees teachers as positive change agents and emphasizes the ability of teachers to “liberate the curriculum” (Ayers, 2010, p. 98). For Ayers, the set curriculum of national, state, or local standards at its core “feels like fast food” in that it is “available and a little addicting” but is ultimately “disappointing” (ibid., p. 99). Instead the true goal of a teacher must be to move beyond the standard approach, and to envision a classroom whereby “everything was subjected to scrutiny” (ibid.). Teachers must have students examine questions as

philosophers do, even if the larger structure of education discourages this. Such a notion, of examining one's world in a serious and concerted way, has roots as far back as Socrates' exhortation that the "unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato, 38a:5-6). In the classrooms that I visited as a part of this dissertation, there was very much this sense of pursuing the "examined" life, and what religion meant in terms of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, heresy, as well as the relationship between religions and contemporary life.

While scrutiny of claims has roots in the classical Greek philosophical tradition, it is most famously associated with the ethos of the Enlightenment, particularly Kant's claim that "nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance" and that the entire point of the Enlightenment was to cultivate the type of people who would "dare to know!" (Kant, 1784). Apart from the role of a careful scrutiny of claims as being an essential part of Enlightenment rationality, it is also a crucial part of living in a deliberative democracy. Weber noted how a democracy without the ability to question is hardly much of a democracy at all. He gave the example of "a democracy [in which] the people choose a leader in whom they trust. Then the chosen leader says, 'Now shut up and obey me.' People and party are then no longer free to interfere in his business" (Waters & Waters, 2015, p. 26). A democracy without dissent, Weber would argue, is hardly a democracy at all.

Ultimately, for Ayers (2010), echoing the words of his mentor Maxine Greene, educators must constantly struggle against the "harsh reality" latent "in many schools" whereby structures are formed that "disempowers and constrains our activities" (p. 31). In such hegemonic systems, he continues, "teachers are expected to become obedient, to conform and to follow all the rules" (ibid.). Ayers and Greene offer an alternative that teachers must be open to the radical "daring to know" advocated by Kant and must push back against the forces of schooling that disempower

and constrain. Teachers must explore the role of religion in contemporary political life, the role of religion as it relates to contemporary culture, and the role of religion as it relates to the formation of individual and group identity. For Ayers and Greene, teachers should use their agency to push back against structural and superstructural forces. Ultimately, teachers must be brave: brave to teach in a way that they are unafraid of ruffling a few feathers, and brave in that they speak openly and candidly about their work, exploring and unpacking both the curriculum and the hidden curriculum that underpins their work.

One final question related to the notion of teachers as subjects is the sense in which they think of their own subjectivity in a conscious way. According to the historian, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1994), “history, as social process, involves people in three distinct capacities: 1) as agents, or occupants of structural positions; 2) as actors in constant interface with a context; and 3) as subjects, that is, as voices aware of their vocality” (p. 23). Trouillot here draws the distinction between actors, who engage with the world through “capacities that are specific in time and space ... that rest fundamentally on historical particulars” as separate from “purposeful subjects aware of their own voices” (ibid, p. 24).

Religious identities are particularly interesting because they at times overlap with, but are often distinct from, other cultural categories. For Nongbri (2013), religious identities and subjectivities are created by the post-Enlightenment West while for Anderson (1983), religion represents a certain proto-imagined community, one that was later supplanted by the modern nation-state. Yet, there may be a subset of questions that are unique for religion and that demonstrate that it provides a unique framework of social analysis because it deals not only with questions of the existing social order and the here and now, but also seeks to ask questions about the supernatural, that which lies beyond time and space. What happened before we were alive

and what will happen after we die? What happened before the Big Bang and what will happen in the distant future?

Finally, it is also worth drawing on notions of “lived experience” in thinking about these teachers as subjects. Religion is a form of “cultural work” whereby human beings engage with “institutions and persons, texts and rituals, practice and theology, things and ideas” and interacts with them so as to engage in both “making and unmaking worlds” (Orsi, 1985, p. xix). In this way, religion can only truly be thought of in relation to a person and “to the life experiences and actual circumstances” of their existence (ibid.). The lived experience of religion involves embodied practice, whereby a person in their own corporeality provides meaning for religion.

Historical background

Since the arrival of Europeans to the Americas from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, religion generally, and Protestant Christianity more particularly, has had inexorable and deep connections to American ideas about education and the structure of schooling (Cremin, 1970; Nord, 1995). In one of the earliest laws relating to education in Anglophone North America, the Massachusetts School Law of 1647, it was noted that education was one of the chief bulwarks against “that old deluder, Satan” who “wishes to keep men from knowledge of the Scriptures” (*Massachusetts School Law*, 1647). The broader superstructure of New England Puritan culture saw education as a way to keep society from falling away from the true Christian religion and into the snares of the devil. Similarly, there was the sense that education needed to be an important and continuous part of social life, such that “learning may not be buried in the grave of our forefathers” (ibid.). In a fundamental sense, education saw to it that the Christian religion and culture were passed on to each subsequent generation, in that the structure of

education built the superstructure of Protestant Christian culture. Education was a tool for religious advancement and preservation and was deeply connected to and embedded within the broader cultural superstructure (Balmer, 1989). Religious and cultural preservation served as a core rationale for the entire educational program and as a means of social reproduction.

The Common School movement of the early to mid-1800s continued this same legacy, seeing an inexorable linkage between education and religion, between structure and superstructure. While the founder of the movement, Horace Mann, was critical of overt sectarianism, there was still the sense that “common schools were designed to preserve religious privilege, that is, Protestant culture and values, in the face of growing religious pluralism” (Nord, 1995, p. 71). Particularly in the face of growing Catholic immigration in the 1840s, “Protestants united behind common schools because of the growing flood of immigration” (p. 72). Though Horace Mann did not think that public schools should be affiliated with a specific church, he argued that schools must “earnestly inculcate all Christian morals” and “welcome the religion of the Bible” (ibid.).

Beginning in the early twentieth century, there were secularists who attempted to strike religion from the American public school social studies curriculum, most notably in the cases of the prominent history textbooks of Muzzey (1915, 1936, 1951) and the social studies textbooks of Rugg (1929, 1932, 1938). In a similar vein, Catholic schools themselves were under attack, with the state of Oregon going so far as to compel all students from ages eight to sixteen to attend public schools, and not Catholic ones (*Pierce v. Society of the Sisters*, 1925). In time, however, the state of Oregon lost its appeal to the Supreme Court (McGreevy, 1996), while Rugg and Muzzey faced backlash around their secular telling of American history and were accused of Communist sympathies (Evans, 2004). For the time being, the role of religion in the world of

education returned mostly to the status quo, whereby a Protestant-dominated superstructure continued to teach its religious values to an increasingly diverse and pluralistic American society.

However, a string of Supreme Court cases during the 1960s and 1970s, marked by an increasingly activist and liberal court under the Chief Justiceship of Earl Warren, (Rebell, 2009) truly cemented the divorce between religion and American public schools. While some scholars argue this drive toward secularization was an entirely new phenomenon, others suggest this was merely an outgrowth of “lower courts ... enforcing anti-Catholic legislation prohibiting state support for sectarian schools” (Nord, 1995, p. 96). These cases, most notably *Abington v. Schempp* (1963) and *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), on one hand banished both professions of faith in the classroom and the teaching of confessional theology, while on the other carved out the space for the teaching of world religions as a part of the social studies and English Language Arts curricula (American Academy of Religion, 2010; Burke & Segall, 2011; First Amendment Center, 2008; Nord, 1995; Moore, 2007; Segall & Burke, 2013; Williams, 2010). The Supreme Court majority in *Abington v. Schempp* (1963) banned “devotional Bible reading and the recitation of the Lord’s prayer in public schools” but at the same time also affirmed that “one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization” (p. 7). Here, instead of viewing religion as a unique phenomenon, the Supreme Court envisioned religion as deeply rooted in history and the wider cultural context (First Amendment Center, 2008). James (2015) takes a broader view and notes that the case of *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) has an equally important legacy, in that it employs three tests as

useful guides for assessing the constitutionality of the choices we make in schools... First we must ask whether the activity in question has a truly secular or civic purpose. Second we must evaluate the degree to which the primary effect of an activity either advances or inhibits religion. Third we need to consider whether [or not] the activity manages to avoid excessive state entanglement with religion. (p. 41)

While *Abington v. Schempp* (1963), cited by Moore (2007), the American Academy of Religion (2010), Williams (2010), et. al., narrowly considers the legality of teaching about religions in the social studies, *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) more broadly adjudicates if any religious idea, belief, or practice that is brought into the public school classroom has a wider secular purpose, and thus, consequently, would pass constitutional scrutiny (James, 2015, p. 40). Perhaps more importantly *Lemon v. Kurtzman* concerns itself not only with ideology, but also with funding and material resources, which is just as important in understanding the place of religion in American education, and the relationship between private schools and the state for much of the previous half century. In saying that the state of Pennsylvania could not provide “financial support to nonpublic elementary and secondary schools by way of reimbursement for the cost of teachers’ salaries, textbooks, and instructional materials” meant that in terms of financial resources, all private schools, both secular and religious alike, were on their own (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971).

Apart from ideological shifts in the jurisprudence of the United States Supreme Court there was a similar move, starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, both by those in the academy as well as policy makers, to promote a more inclusive idea of social studies, one that encourages diversity in culture, ethnicity, race, and religion (Evans, 2004, p. 149). With respect to religion in particular, this shift likely stemmed both from broader trends in the social studies field toward increasing diversity, but more importantly the fact that the ruling in *Abington v.*

Schempp (1963) specifically noted that the “study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education” was the only way that such studies could be considered constitutional. In some sense, religion became reimagined as more closely aligned with culture because ultimately, any other understanding of religion as a part of the social studies curriculum was constitutionally and legally untenable (Williams, 2010).

Others such as Burke and Segall have suggested an alternate reading of this period. While the Christian religion might now only be studied as a cultural system along with many others, Christianity was still embedded in the cultural praxis of schooling. For them, up to the present day, the Christian religion never really left the classroom. They argue that “while *de-jure* religion is indeed separated from education, it is very much embedded, de-facto, in current, public educational practices and discourses” (Burke & Segall, 2011, pp. 1-2). They cite Christian notions of time, chronology, the language of schooling, as well as the language surrounding children as alternately innocent and devious, as examples (Burke & Segall, 2011). Similarly, notions of “teaching as salvation and teacher-as-martyr” which have strong resonance in the popular imagination of teachers in the present day have a long and storied history in the Christian tradition, modeled on the life of Jesus (Burke & Segall, 2015).

In 1975, the education faculty of Florida State University unveiled the “Religion in Elementary Social Studies Curriculum” which was one of the first curricula that sought to teach children about religion in a manner that viewed it as a universal cultural phenomenon. By this, religion was seen to be something that existed in every society around the globe and was intimately linked with culture (Spivey, 1975). Over the next two decades, states, as well as the National Council for the Social Studies, grappled with the role of religion in the social studies curriculum. Generally, they have highlighted a lack of focus on religion as a part of the social

studies as well as a need to increase its inclusion, while at the same time highlighting the need to be careful as to how it is integrated as part of the social studies curriculum (NCSS, 1984; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1989; Williams, 2010). From the 1984 National Council of the Social Studies' official policy statement "Study About Religions in the Social Studies Curriculum" to "Teaching About Religion in National and States Social Studies Standards" from 2000 (Douglass, 2000), there is the common idea that religion occupies a surprisingly narrow segment of curriculum space and instructional time, particularly when compared to other topics, such as history, civics, economics, and geography. Even as recently as two decades ago, religion was seen to be, along with sexuality and sexual orientation, one of the last great "diversity taboos" in the social studies classroom (Wade, 1995).

Given the new realities of school funding mechanisms, increasingly, it is the case that religious school settings, now in many ways "quasi-public, yet still quasi-private" institutions, exist along with public schools in the education of America's students. My goal in this dissertation research is to explore the ways in which the individual subjectivities of a teacher, along with the local school setting and the broader contemporary climate, influences what and how they teach about religion as a part of a social studies curriculum. Identity and teacher identity on one hand have a certain fixity, while embodying a performative and fluid aspect. Identities and teacher identities change over time; they adapt to new social conditions and are constantly in a state of reformulation. Further they exist in social arrangements that, on one hand as Weber describes, demand conformity, but on the other as Kant, Greene, and Ayers note, demand our thorough analysis and critique. In some ways, this is the question of our modern age, but it is really a perennial question. What of the past is worth saving, worth remembering, and worth reproducing, and what should instead be discarded into the dustbin of history? What will

we carry with us as precious cargo, and what refuse will be left behind? This study assumes that social studies teachers to some degree help to determine what is kept and what is jettisoned, and the close examination of their praxis herein offers some insights as to how that unfolds.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Description, analysis and synthesis of scholarly literature

In reviewing the literature on the teaching and learning of religions as a part of the secondary social studies curriculum, I uncovered two main approaches. First, there is the category of those who defend the study of religions in the classroom in a way analogous to defenses of the study of culture. The most common trend in this category is to see it as a tool for increasing multicultural tolerance and understanding (Buckingham, 2007; Douglass, 2000; Gacis, 2003; Jackson, 1995; Moore, 2007). More recently, it has been argued that the study of religions is an important tool for developing global citizenship (James, 2015; Myers, 2006). Others still have justified the study of religions based on the need both to explore controversial issues and engage in culturally relevant pedagogy (James, 2010, 2015; Kunzman, 2015; Sjöborg 2013). Finally, there is also a more malevolent trend that has emerged, particularly since September 11, 2001, in that religions are now sometimes studied to advance sectarian religious or nationalistic ends, e.g., that in order to defeat the enemy, one must know the enemy. (Schweber, 2006a, 2006b). In general, the majority of these arguments focus on justifications that are closely aligned with reasons for the study of other cultures, and here religion, either implicitly or explicitly, is defined in anthropological terms. A second strand of literature, grounded in phenomenology of religion, goes beyond seeing religion as a subset of culture and continues in the vein of religious studies, whereby religion is something wholly different from culture (Gottlieb & Wineburg, 2012; Levinson, 2012; Mosborg, 2002; Schweber, 2006a, 2006b). This line of research looks at the way that the religious is quite different from the secular, in terms of cognition, worldview, and beliefs.

Ultimately, the big question in the field of religious studies is if religion as a phenomenon is merely a subset of and closely analogous to the broader notion of culture (Durkheim, 1915; Feuerbach, 1841; Geertz, 1973) or, on the contrary, if religion is a phenomenon unto itself, something altogether different, something *ganz anders* (Eliade, 1957; Otto, 1917). Is religion simply culture by another name? Many scholars of religious studies, particularly those rooted in the field of anthropology, contend that there is a broad overlap between religion and culture (Sullivan, 2012). According to Durkheim (1915),

a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practice relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (p. 47)

The word ‘Church’ notwithstanding, Durkheim’s definition could likely allow one to define most cultural systems as religions, be they organized on ethnic, nationalistic, or other ideological bases. It would not be too much a stretch to argue that the United States of America, or any other purportedly secular nation-state, is a religion based on Durkheim’s definition (Monbiot, 2003). Geertz (1973), who built upon the anthropological religious studies work of Durkheim, defines religion in a very similar anthropological way. According to Geertz,

A *religion* is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem so uniquely realistic. (p. 90)

Consequently, taking an anthropological view of religion, one finds that justifying the study of religions as part of the social studies is in many ways analogous to justifying the study of cultures.

While anthropological definitions of religion are popular, there are those who, rooted in phenomenology of religion, contend that religion is a category unto itself. Otto (1917) bases his definition of religion around the term “the numinous,” a feeling of awe and terror towards something greater than the self, as something that is a pre-rational part of religion and not based on belief or rationality alone. For Otto, the numinous can only be experienced and it is an irreducible feeling, one that cannot be expressed adequately in the written or spoken word, or any other form of human communication. In Otto’s mind, it is so essential for a scholar of religion to be able to connect with the “numinous” that he is describing, that he writes in the opening pages of his *The Idea of the Holy* that “whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no further” (Otto, 1917, p. 8). For Otto, one cannot really, in a truly authentic way, understand the religious experience without having had that experience for herself. He continues, noting that “it is not easy to discuss questions of religious psychology with one who can recollect the emotions of his adolescence, the discomforts of indigestion, or, say, social feelings, but cannot recall any intrinsically religious feelings” (ibid.). Here, Otto is clear to make the distinction that religion is a unique category unto itself. Religious feelings are not the same as social feelings, nor for that matter are they the same as the discomforts of indigestion or the emotions of adolescence. That said, although Otto calls the religious feeling “non-rational,” he makes an important distinction to not ascribe to religiosity “the tendency of our time towards an extravagant and fantastic ‘irrationalism’” (ibid., p. 21). Instead, he goes to great lengths to describe the constituent elements of the numinous, the so-called *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (tremendous and fascinating mystery) that comes to be associated with the divine (ibid., pp. 12-40).

Otto and his successor Eliade (1957) contend that religions make specific, unique claims about the nature of the world, and that the religious and secular minds operate in markedly different ways from one another. For them, it is not simply as Durkheim (1915) would argue, that religions clothe their worldviews with “an aura of factuality,” but rather that

...religious man’s desire to live in the sacred is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality, not to let himself be paralyzed by the never-ceasing relativity of purely subjective experiences, to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion. (p. 28)

This is in direct contradiction to Durkheim and Geertz, who primarily see religion as one subset of the phenomenon known as culture.

Justifications for the study of religion based on seeing religion as a part of culture

There is a large body of literature, though not rooted explicitly in the anthropology of religion, that clearly sees religion as a phenomenon that is closely analogous to culture. Myers (2006) is among this group and provides a potential grounding for religion as a vibrant part of the social studies using the current rhetoric about globalization. Myers argues that while lip-service is often paid to the concept of the global citizen, the reality is that “the weakening of the nation state under globalization has created favorable conditions for the emergence of global citizenship” (p. 375). He further articulates three curricular topics that are essential to teaching global citizenship: “1) international human rights as the foundation of global citizenship, 2) the reconciliation of the universal and the local, and 3) political action beyond the nation state” (p. 376). The study of world religions helps to unpack these questions. Religions, apart from secular traditions, have their own answers to questions involving human rights and the ethical dilemmas

between the universal and the local (Sullivan, 2012). Furthermore, some religious actors most acutely represent political group action beyond the nation-state (Wood, 2015). Further, Myers (2006) argues that a key component of global citizenship is the development of “‘perspective consciousness’ and ‘cross-cultural awareness’” (p. 384). In the field of religious studies, this idea of perspective consciousness is absolutely critical. While scholars of religion are not necessarily religious themselves, it is important that he or she sufficiently develop a sympathetic ability toward the centrality of encounters with the divine for the *homo religiosus*, the religious person (Otto, 1917; Proudfoot, 1985). This sympathy for the religious other allows scholars, using the power of the imagination, to more fully understand the power and efficacy of the religious experience in their real lives. Scholars are required, in this context, to validate those experiences but not necessarily verify them (Proudfoot, 1985).

The recent work of James (2015), drawing on the work of Parker (2003), sees the study of religions as a tool aimed at bringing forth democratic living and learning in the classroom. By listening to a variety of voices, be they religious, secular, or atheist, teachers are bringing about a sense of mutuality and authentic listening in their classrooms (pp. 27-29). They are, as James quotes Parker, “listening as well as talking, striving to understand points of view different from one's own.” By excluding religious voices, teachers and students miss out on engaging in that mutual conversation with a large segment of America's citizenry.

James (2010), however, is keenly aware of the fact that certain types of religious students might be less open to the social studies broadly and, by extension, to learning about religions other than their own. At first glance, this might seem to undercut her belief of the importance of the study of religion in bringing about a more robust democratic society. James discusses an experience observing a social studies class that was about to have a debate about the merits of

keeping the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. One student remarked that “I am not going to participate in this discussion.”” The student continued by noting that “my faith in God means that, for me, there is one right answer to the question you’re asking” (p. 619). James characterizes the student’s remark as one espousing “theological certainty” that makes the learning of controversial issues in the social studies a more difficult and sometimes impossible process. Latent in James’ analysis is the sense that only those of certain religious upbringing are prone to this type of narrow thinking. This may indeed be the case, though James’ evidence here is merely anecdotal. Are religious students more prone to this type of closed thinking, as James (2010) suggests, or is “theological certainty” a manifestation of a larger, culturally-based problem of “epistemological certainty” that can occur whenever students embrace a radical point of view?

That said, James is correct in suggesting that “a refusal to participate in cross-cutting dialogue, then, results in greater rigidity of one’s position, which in turn diminishes one’s felt need to hear contrasting points of view” (p. 619). This is indeed a problematic standpoint for students, student-teachers, and teachers alike. Instead, as James succinctly articulates when engaging in controversial issues, particularly those dealing with religion, “listening while engaging in public democratic dialogue ought to be both humble and cautious” (p. 620). In some ways, the challenges presented by those with theological or epistemological certainty seem to mirror the challenge first raised by Karl Popper and the so-called “paradox of tolerance.” In his 1945 work *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper writes that “if we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them” (p. 226).

The work of Kunzman (2015) takes up the challenge laid down by James and her “theological certainty” student. Kunzman suggests that “theologically certain” students allow us to think more deeply about calls in the social studies to produce “democratic citizens.” First, he notes that “civic humility does not require ethical relativism or revision of core beliefs” (p. 121). In addition, Kunzman contends that “civic deliberation doesn’t require consensus but rather ongoing deliberation” (p. 124). For Kunzman, ongoing deliberation—this ability to continually confront controversial issues—is a piece that Jennifer James initially missed out on when dealing with her “theologically certain” student. For many others who refuse to engage with religious questions, they continue to lose out on that “ongoing deliberation” that for Kunzman is an essential part of democratic citizenship.

Besides the idea of creating global citizens, advocates for the study of religions are quick to cite studies that support the claim that an increased study of religions leads to increased multicultural tolerance, both at the high school (Buckingham, 2007) and college level (Gacis, 2003). The idea that studying religion could engender tolerance is analogous to a long line of literature in the social studies that suggests that increasing students’ cultural and racial literacies leads to an increase in their overall level tolerance (Banks, 2008; Merryfield & Subedi, 2006; Smith, 2014; Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor, 2014). One of the most comprehensive policy documents analyzing religion in the social studies curriculum, “Teaching About Religion in National and States Social Studies Standards,” published jointly by the Council on Islamic Education and the First Amendment Center, advocates this reason for the study of religions. In the foreword to the piece prepared by Susan L. Douglass, she notes “the importance of teaching *about* religion – as distinguished from religious indoctrination – in the curriculum” (Douglass, 2000, p. 6). Douglass is even more methodical in tracing how standards about religion entered

the curriculum and delineates four models of cultural education, each of which incorporates religion into the curriculum in a variety of fashions. The four models place social studies, historical eras, historical civilizations, and Eastern/Western hemisphere geography as dominant lenses (Douglass, p. 84). For Douglass, nearly every state ascribes to one of these four models, with only a handful of them diverging from these paradigms.

For Douglass, the ‘historical eras’ model is the most robust and fair because it accomplishes a few important tasks. First, it disrupts the Hegelian/Enlightenment master-narrative whereby the West and Christianity are equated with the unfolding of progress and freedom. Given the nature of strong teleological narratives both implicit and explicit in Christianity and the secular West, a focus on historical eras puts forth the notion that all cultures and civilizations develop over time. Further, this focus also tries to dismantle a situation in which non-Western cultures and religions are seen as unchanging, primitive, and ahistorical, whereas those in the West are couched as evolving and advancing through history. In essence, Douglass is de-Orientalizing and decentralizing common Western tropes about progress and modernity and at the same time arguing for the saliency of Eastern religions. Overall, Douglass paints the state of education about religions in the social studies as a “half full or half empty” type of question (Douglass, 2000, p. 93). Douglass suggests that while the material on religion is getting better particularly in social studies textbooks, in other areas of social studies education, there is still much work to be done. In Douglass’ estimation, very few pre-service social studies teacher training programs require their students to grapple with religion as a unique phenomenon. Even fewer require coursework that focuses on the topic or offer such coursework as an optional part of their graduate studies.

Moore (2007) similarly lays out a case for the secular study of religion in the American context and, in particular, sees the multicultural tolerance afforded by studying religions to be especially valuable in combating Islamophobia. Moore details various ways that religion might be integrated into the social studies, including “the phenomenological approach,” “the literary approach,” “the historical approach,” “the cultural studies approach,” and an approach based on “multicultural education” (pp. 63-88). In Moore’s view, not all approaches are equally palatable in the public school setting. For example, though the “phenomenological approach” provides “a sympathetic introduction to religious traditions that is accessible to the novice,” it is overly sympathetic to the reality of religious phenomenon. Further, it has the major flaw of “reinforcing the common and deeply problematic assumption that religions somehow exist outside of their social/historical contexts” (pp. 68-69). Here, she is directly pushing back against Otto (1917) and Eliade (1957) and their phenomenology of religion. Perhaps Moore’s greatest contribution to the existing literature, besides placing herself very clearly in the anthropological camp, is her recognition that religion, like other cultural categories, has inherent normativity. She notes how “as a white person who has grown up in a society that values whiteness, it is difficult for me to recognize the ways that social norms, customs, and values privilege whiteness in our culture as normative” (p. 77) For Moore, teaching about religion as a part of developing multicultural tolerance is about dismantling privilege, much in the same vein as Peggy McIntosh’s classic work “The Invisible Knapsack” (1990). Just as McIntosh (1990) attempted to make others aware of racial privilege, Moore hopes to raise awareness of the privilege that is inherent in religion, specifically the Protestant and Catholic faiths of Western Europe and the United States. Consequently, one must spend time both building, but more importantly, deconstructing the

category of “religion” particularly as it relates to categories of normativity and ethical judgements imposed upon it by Christians in the West.

The particular notion of combating religious intolerance in the form of Islamophobia is explored in further detail by Moore (2007) in her chapter entitled “A Case Study: Teaching About Islam” (pp. 139-163). Islamophobia is also explored in the writing of Haynes and Thomas (2007) who note that

almost weekly now, United States citizens read in newspapers or see on television reports of “Muslim terrorist” threats or attacks aimed at some “enemy of Islam.” The news-media drumbeat has led many of us to the false impression that the Muslim faith is a religion built on a foundation of violence and fanaticism. Nowhere have most of us been taught about the history of Islam or what Muslims today actually believe. (p. viii)

Haynes and Thomas go on to suggest that their words were important even in the pre-September 11th world, but are particularly relevant today.

Though it is most accepted as a significant rationale for the study of faith systems (Barnes, 2006, pp. 395-411), there is some dissent about the idea that teaching religions can bring about multicultural tolerance. Anderson (2014) has suggested that, in fact, when not given proper training, teachers who were allowed to simply teach about religion often over-promoted Christianity generalized about other religions and harmed the ability of students to develop tolerant attitudes (p. 17). Many other studies have found that teachers lack proper training in religion (Burke & Segall, 2011; James, 2015; Marks, Binkley, & Daly, 2014), lending credence to the argument that the wrong kind of teaching will actually leave the students worse off than no teaching at all, and perhaps intensify rather than ameliorate intolerance.

Jackson (1995), whose “Religious Education’s Representation of ‘Religions’ and ‘Cultures’” presents a detailed case for why religious study is important in the context of the secondary school curriculum, holds a similar pessimism for using religion to increase multicultural tolerance. He notes that

I do not think that any approach can solve the problem of deep seated racism. However, I do think that having an understanding of the religious culture of people in our societies might be a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for reducing racial and cultural prejudice. (p. 272)

Jackson grounds his argument in the Orientalist framework of Said (1978) and the cultural anthropology of Geertz (1973), and argues that the impact of religious study on promoting tolerance and acceptance of diversity is diminished by essentialized definitions of religion and culture. Here Jackson squarely aligns himself with the general Orientalist critique of Western education as well as the critiques of Moore (2007), in that they are all critical of a process whereby “the exotic, the other, the different, perpetuating the approaches of early social and cultural anthropologists” is emphasized (Jackson, 1995, p. 276).

Though Jackson is concerned primarily with problematizing the study of religions as it currently stands, he does offer a few suggestions for how the curriculum might be improved. Drawing on Geertzian notions of culture, Jackson suggests that religion is “internally highly variegated” and as such, these distinct forms must not be so readily conflated with one another (p. 282). Practically speaking, this means that “ethnographic studies of religious communities,” namely, focusing on the actual lived religious experience of contemporary practitioners, must be a more significant part of the public secondary curriculum (p. 284). In doing so, the varieties of religious experiences might be more fully transmitted to students, in that they will come to

understand the true diversity both in religious praxis and belief. This notion has been echoed by Barton (2015), who noted that the social studies field needs to “move beyond the ‘major religions’” to “explore the diversity within religions” and to explore the “changes in religion over time” (pp. 64-68). In addition, social studies education is so steeped in an anthropological approach to religion that religion is often seen as coterminous with culture (Buchardt, 2010). Barton (2015) notes that “it is common to refer to Muslims as Arabs, Indians as Hindus, or Americans as Christians, but ethnic and political boundaries rarely coincide neatly with religious ones” (p. 99).

In many ways, the need for specificity in understanding religious and cultural differences as outlined by Jackson (1995) and Barton (2015) can be seen in practice in the work of Gaudelli (2003), in which he recounts a moment whereby a Guyanese student of Indian descent who was religiously Muslim revealed her religious identity to classmates. When her classmates expressed surprise at this reveal, the student herself noted that “this just goes to show you that they don’t have a good idea of what is happening in the world.” She continued on, remarking how “they just assume everyone who is Muslim is either Arabic or black” (p. 117).

Apart from grounding the study of religions in building global citizens or increasing tolerance, there is also the argument that learning about other religions and other cultures is inherently beneficial for students. Moore (2007) grounds her desire to create a vibrant learning community centered on the study of religion with the notion that “religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses” (p. 56). In essence, religion fills out and illuminates further what is meant by the social studies—that is, studying culture both here in America and internationally. In addition, Moore suggests that the study of religion allows students to

understand the worldviews of religious people and thus prevents the students from falling into the trap of believing that “religious worldviews” are inherently “unsophisticated and irrational” (p. 34).

The critiques of Moore (2007), Douglass (2006), and Jackson (1995) about essentialized and ahistorical renderings of religions other than Christianity are clearly needed, especially when one looks at the New York State social studies curriculum. Though the 2014 Common Core aligned standards have attempted to address problems with this ahistorical approach (New York State Board of Regents, 1998, 2014), the previous curriculum still lingers. In it, religions are often presented together as a single unit, rendering them as ahistorical and unchanging relics of the pre-modern age, not unlike the dioramas of indigenous cultures that can still be seen at New York’s American Museum of Natural History (AMNH, 2014).

There is also a body of literature that sees the study of religion in the social studies as contributing toward culturally relevant pedagogy. In the work of Sjöborg (2013), he looks at the religious education programs in Swedish high schools and attempts to isolate the factors that influence individual students’ interest in the subject, including gender, socio-economic status, personal religiosity, among others (pp. 35-54). Sjöborg, a sociologist by training, uses a pool of 1850 student surveys, and his findings reinforce existing research in Sweden that suggests that females are more interested in religious education than males, and that the individual religion of the student had little bearing on whether or not he or she was interested in the subject. Most significantly, Sjöborg notes that “religious students seem to have more positive attitudes towards religious education” because they “are more likely to think the subject is about them and their experiences” (p. 49). A positive attitude does not necessarily equate to academic success, but it certainly raises that possibility. Sjöborg’s work raises a sense that teaching about religions might

constitute culturally relevant pedagogy, particularly if the local community has an interest in the subject. The findings of Sjöborg (2013) and James (2010) are in tension with one another, but it may very well be that the types of “religious” students and that the attitudes that they possess vastly differ in the two studies, leading to diametrically opposed conclusions.

Justifications for the study of religion based on phenomenology of religion and as a *sui generis* phenomenon

While there is a large body of literature that uses an anthropological definition of religion in line with Durkheim (1915) and Geertz (1973), there is likewise a compelling case to be made for seeing religion as a unique phenomenon. A phenomenological definition of religion presents different reasons for why religion is an important part of the social studies, and in addition, raises a new set of challenges. While Levinson (2012) focuses broadly on civic education, she devotes a few pages to the way that religion can and should enter the social studies classroom. In a vignette that mirrors the larger debate between anthropology and phenomenology of religion, she recalls a moment when a student teacher was organizing a debate on same-sex marriage. At the time, “throughout 2005 and 2006 ... legal tussles over this initiative were in the news frequently” and the issue was very much an “open question” as understood by Hess (2010) (p. 201-202). While the student teacher had planned the debate, she refused to allow students from “attacking same-sex marriage as sinful, not just as policy mistake.” By this, the student teacher allowed for political arguments but not religious ones. The student teacher reasoned that “religious arguments didn’t have a place in ‘citizenship projects’” (Levinson, 2012, p. 203-204.) According to Levinson, the student teacher was drawing on Rawls (1993) who suggested that individuals engaged in public debate “must rely solely on public reason, which among other characteristics

should be ‘independent of the opposing and conflicting philosophical and religious doctrines that citizens affirm’” (Levinson, p. 205). Levinson ultimately was skeptical of the reasoning both of Rawls and her student teacher, noting that the “hegemonic character of public reason” refuses to allow certain types of arguments, which only serves to “obscure or even misrepresent their true beliefs” (pp. 204-206). Anthropological definitions of religion see religions as simply a subset of culture, when in fact religious beliefs and motivations are quite different from their secular counterparts (Eliade, 1957; Otto, 1917). Levinson’s work (2012) raises the possibility that theological arguments might in fact be a necessary part of discourse around controversial political issues. If these religious arguments are excluded from the public square for not adhering to Rawlsian notions of public reason, is there not a danger that they will then go uncontested and un-interrogated by the broader public?

In a comparable vein, in documenting the way in which Islam was discussed by students in the classroom and then surveying personal opinions about the religion privately, the work of Gaudelli (2003) reveals a similar divide. During class, Mary, a Coptic Christian from Egypt, “made no comments, evaluative or otherwise, about Islam” (p. 115.) Gaudelli does not speculate on the reason for Mary’s silence, but it may well have been on grounds outlined by Levinson (2012), namely that public reason does not allow for the open expression of such opinions. In the classroom, Gaudelli notes, “teachers approached religion gingerly, trying not to offend students of various denominations, abiding closely to the principle of cultural relativism.” Despite the tolerance of the classroom, “students, however ‘polite’ in the public sphere of the classroom, often revealed their utter disdain for religious groups other than their own in the private setting of an interview” (p. 75). This was the case for Mary, who privately expressed her intolerance of Islam. In creating a safe space to discuss religion, teachers had perhaps afforded too safe a space,

where the real issues, the real points of religious conflict and discord could not be engaged and perhaps, reformed.

These illustrations from Levinson (2012) and Gaudelli (2003) suggest not only that religious individuals have different perspectives from their secular peers, but more importantly, that they sometimes accept different axiomatic facts about the supernatural and the natural world and permit different questions to be asked about these facts (Abrahamson & Smith, 2000). Cognitive research (Corriveau, Chen & Harris, 2014) suggests that the divide between religious and secular individuals exists even from an early age. Not only do students of religious faith believe in the realness of religious stories more than their secular counterparts, but they also have less of an ability to discern fact from fiction in stories that involve general supernatural plot devices like magic and spells. The work of Gottlieb and Wineburg (2012) continues this line of research with adults, charting the impact of religious identities on the historical thinking of experts in various fields. Most importantly, their work helps in understanding how those with religious convictions read history differently from their secular colleagues by employing a series of categories to describe how these experts navigate their positions as both scholars and members of a faith community (p. 84). For those with religious identities, the concept of membership was very important, as they would much more frequently qualify their reading with “‘as a historian’ or ‘being a Christian,’” demonstrating that their religious perspectives altered the way they read and interpreted the historical narrative (p. 92).

Gottlieb and Wineburg extend the discourse one step further by explaining exactly how religious experts read history differently from their secular colleagues. Religion is not simply a cultural phenomenon but rather impacts individuals’ understandings of history far differently than if individuals were simply from two cultural backgrounds (Barton & McCully, 2004).

Instead, religious individuals must grapple with a set of dueling identities. Gottlieb and Wineburg employ a series of categories to understand how experts with religious convictions navigate their positions as both scholars and members of a faith community. Gottlieb and Wineburg invoke “the term *epistemic switching* to describe how participants dealt with the multiple memberships evoked by these texts,” and come up with four discrete categories of dealing with these conflicting identities (p. 98). Here, religious individuals must constantly make choices regarding priority—privileging one identity over another—and synchrony—the decision of whether or not to engage with both identities simultaneously. Some individuals refuse to privilege one of the two identities, and instead either attempt to balance both identities at once or choose to wear different epistemic caps at different times. The 1) simultaneous-parallel type switches seamlessly between the two modes while the 2) serial-parallel type would claim it depends “on what day of the week” it is (p. 102). Those that do privilege one identity over the other either do this simultaneously or serially, with Gottlieb and Wineburg referring to the last two types as 3) Simultaneous-hierarchical and 4) Serial hierarchical. Of these last identities, some see themselves as historians first and members of a religious community second while others take the exact opposite stance.

Although Gottlieb and Wineburg have covered a tremendous amount of new ground in their work, plenty of room still exists for further research. First, Gottlieb and Wineburg lay out four types of epistemic switching, yet they do not attempt to determine if all four types are equally common and evenly distributed among various faiths. More significantly, Gottlieb and Wineburg have focused solely on Judaism and Christianity, two religions that have been deeply shaped by, and evolved along with, the European Enlightenment. Not a single Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or member of any other faith participated in this experiment, which certainly permits

charges of ethnocentrism. The categories for dealing with secular and religious narratives, the so-called use of “epistemic switching,” though it might seem universal, may very well in fact be a product of a particular set of circumstances borne out of the secularization of European society which started in the late eighteenth century. The question of the religious scholar navigating between dueling identities, both as an independent thinker and a member of the faithful, emerged in Europe at least as early as Immanuel Kant’s “What is Enlightenment” (1784), and continues to the present day in the West (O’Brien, 1998). For Kant in particular, one might have certain obligations as clergyman and others as a scholar. He notes that:

A clergyman is obligated to make his sermon to his pupils in catechism and his congregation conform to the symbol of the church which he serves, for he has been accepted on this condition. But as a scholar he has complete freedom, even the calling, to communicate to the public all his carefully tested and well-meaning thoughts on that which is erroneous in the symbol and to make suggestions for the better organization of the religious body and church.

Yet, in that Gottlieb and Wineburg have only examined the Judeo-Christian tradition, much work remains to be done when considering if “epistemic switching” still holds for those of other religious traditions. Expanding such a study to include Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and other faiths would certainly be a rewarding and fruitful undertaking, particularly in our increasingly globalized world. The possibility that other religions deal with the secular/sacred divide in alternative ways certainly exists.

The work of Mosborg (2002) “Speaking of History: How Adolescents Use Their Knowledge of History in Reading the Daily News” compares the ways that religious and secular students read current events. Here Mosborg attempts to translate the work of Wineburg (1991a,

1991b) on historical thinking and apply it to the reading of current events. Mosborg found that, between the religious and secular schools that she studied, when they looked at issues both religious and non-religious, it was “not simply that students interpreted the same events differently. Rather, the two groups’ background narratives featured different historical events and ideas in the first place” (p. 341). In many ways, Mosborg concludes the opposite of Gottlieb and Wineburg (2013). For Gottlieb and Wineburg, though experts with religious identities read historical events that contained a religious dimension much differently than their secular counterparts, they read secular stories in a very similar manner when compared with their non-religious peers. For them, religion, except perhaps in extreme cases, only intrudes on the historical narrative when it encounters explicitly religious topics, whereas for Mosborg it is ever-present.

In addition, Mosborg brings up the concept of the ‘outlier’ and suggests that when speaking of a “Catholic school” or a “Muslim school,” the internal or external cohesiveness that we assume there to be is not necessarily present. Rather, schools, like societies at large, tend to be dynamic institutions comprised of unique individuals each with their own cultural and epistemological perspectives. As the work of Katznelson and Jones (2010) has noted, societies are generally not completely religious or completely secular. Rather, the pair argues that secular societies are often a blend between the secular and the dominant religious modes. Mosborg spends some time devoted to unpacking the thought process of a student named Ted at the religious school, whom she calls as “an outlier” (p. 346). Unlike others, Ted was “straddling the two groups’ background narratives,” which she explains as a consequence of his family choosing a religious school “for its academic offerings and social climate” (ibid). Though framed as an outlier by Mosborg, given that the sample size is only 20 students, it suggests that there is at least

a percentage of students whose own religious identity does not match the stated identity of the school. Thus, when discussing how students think about history at a Catholic, or Jewish, or Muslim, or secular school, the fact that individual students might not ascribe to these religious orientations is an important consideration. Individual identity may in fact be sharply at odds with the religious identity of the school. New evidence based on the research of Pritchard (2012) on how Christian parents choose schools for their children demonstrate that their thinking is oftentimes less than truly rational or coherent. Instead, parents choose schools based primarily on their own prior experience with private and public schools. Academic reputation was a secondary factor, with religion serving merely as a tertiary factor. This suggests that despite a school naming itself ‘Catholic’ or ‘Islamic’, these values may not win out if they come into conflict with competing secular values. In both the Catholic and Islamic schools that I observed for this dissertation, I saw these tensions play out. Ali, at Kaaba Academy, noted that while studying the Koran and learning Arabic are important, equally as important is for the students to get good jobs in a STEM field.

As a scholar of Jewish studies who focuses on Holocaust pedagogy in both Christian and Jewish schools, Schweber (2006b) notes that “the role of religious narratives in orchestrating teachers’ and students’ historical understanding is still underdeveloped” (p. 395). Schweber, over the past decade, has looked at how religious identities affect the teaching of history in the classroom. She focuses her work mostly on Christian and Jewish perspectives mainly with respect to the Holocaust but also in some cases the events of September 11th, 2001.

Schweber’s work at Christian schools has generally focused on those of the conservative evangelical variety, unlike their relatively more liberal, mainline Protestant and Catholic counterparts. While this makes for an interesting narrative, Schweber’s decision to focus on that type of

school for her investigation is problematic in that it represents a very small minority of Christian schools in America. In doing so, Schweber is likely engaged in a certain Orientalist gaze (Said, 1978), highlighting the foreign and the exotic at the expense of the ordinary and familiar. The Jeremiad rhetoric of this particular school, whereby “the tragedies of September 11” are a consequence of “throwing God out of the public square, out of schools” and “the abortionists have got to bear some burden for this, because God will not be mocked and when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad” certainly raises the ire of the reader, but is not typical of Christian education in America (Schweber, 2006b, p. 392). Quite the contrary, the television interview of Jerry Falwell by Pat Robertson (Goodstein, 2001) that Schweber cites earned the pair widespread condemnation in the immediate aftermath of September 11th, and very few groups, save for the Westboro Baptist Church, dare to espouse such rhetoric (Britt, 2010). That is not to say that her work on these groups is not of any value, but only to suggest that her work leaves relatively unexamined Christian views on September 11th in more mainline Protestant and Catholic schools. Perhaps most interesting about Schweber’s work on this type of Christian school is their appropriation of the Holocaust. This event is transformed from merely an experience of Jewish persecution into a more general one of “historical significance” and particularly “the persecution that we, as Christians, may someday face” (Schweber, 2006b, p. 397).

In examining pedagogical praxis related to the Holocaust, Schweber (2004, 2008) looked at how the topic was taught in secular, Christian, and Jewish schools. There is a detailed literature on Holocaust pedagogy both at the secondary (Totten & Feinberg, 2001) and post-secondary level (Totten, Bartrop & Jacobs 2004). What makes Schweber’s research unique is that her work initially focused on moral lessons from the Holocaust in a public school setting

(Schweber, 2004) and now concentrates on how religious schools deal with this history (Schweber 2006a, 2006b). Her move toward focusing on “Holocaust education at religious schools” came only after she had studied “Holocaust education at public schools” (Schweber, 2008a, p. 158). Through the context of studying the Holocaust in American public schools, Schweber became aware that “the Holocaust is in some ways ‘Americanized’ – that is, when actually taught, Holocaust content is molded to fit particularly American master narratives, even at the expense of its historical integrity” (p. 158). Schweber then surmised that, if secular schools “Americanized” the experience of the Holocaust, schools that upheld other values, namely religious schools, would inscribe their own narratives onto the event. Much as was the case in my own education growing up, for secular schools, the Holocaust is often presented as a secular story, with ethnicity and race serving as dominant cultural lenses. In studying how the Holocaust is taught at the elementary level, Schweber encounters this same secular narrative, describing it in her 2008 piece, “‘What Happened to Their Pets?’: Third Graders Encounter the Holocaust.” In Schweber’s study, a third-grade teacher named Mr. Kupnich teaches the Holocaust to his students. In the entire text, the only explicit mention of the word ‘religion’ comes from a student, a young Jewish girl named Lila, who dismisses the suggestion that those who hide their concentration camp tattoos are somehow not “proud of their religion” (Schweber, 2008b, p. 2094).

Instead of embracing such a secular narrative, whereby religion is pushed to the margins, like Moore (2007), Schweber argues that religion significantly adds to an understanding of how the Holocaust came about and is essential to understanding how “deeply imbedded forms of anti-Semitism clearly played a significant role in lending legitimacy to the social, cultural, and political marginalization and subsequent persecution of Jews” (Moore, 2007, p. 135). Just as

religion helped to brew a deep-seated anti-Semitism that took root in Nazi Germany, Moore contends that “religious influences also profoundly shaped cultures of resistance to Nazism by Jews and Christians alike” (ibid). The perpetrators, collaborators, victims, and resisters involved in the Holocaust often had religious motivations, and to not try to fully understand these religious motivations, Moore argues, makes that horrific event all the more incomprehensible and inexplicable.

However, Schweber takes a more nuanced approach when compared to Moore in that she sees religion as unique phenomena and does not so readily buy into the ‘cultural’ definition of religion advanced by Moore (2007). For Schweber (2006a, 2006b), adding religion into the equation when studying the Holocaust is not necessarily a good thing. At Christian schools, the study of the Holocaust can be, and often is, transformed into a parable about Christian suffering more generally, and sometimes even the specific persecution faced by Christians who attempted to rescue Jews (Schweber, 2006a, pp. 25-26). Instead of Jews being identified as unique victims of the Nazi regime, their suffering is combined with other religious faithful, including the small minority of Christians who resisted the Nazis and suffered for it. Instead of seeing the Holocaust as the history of Jewish murder, the events are transmuted as a parable for Christian suffering both historical and contemporary, real and imagined.

In describing how the Holocaust was studied at a Lubavitch girls’ Yeshiva, Schweber (2008a) felt that the theological unanswerability of questions surrounding the Holocaust (e.g., why God could let bad things happen to good people) ultimately translated into a certain and unfortunate historical inexplicability. The article, entitled “Here There is No Why,” focused on a teacher who, when confronted with questions from her students about “why Hitler specifically chose to persecute the Jews” or “why the German people chose to follow Hitler,” simply said

that such questions were unanswerable. This created a baffling situation for the students, where events were simply without reasonable cause. In her conclusion, Schweber notes that she objects “to this orientation toward history in general and the Holocaust in particular” and yet at the same time realizes that her objections “run counter to both ultra-Orthodox beliefs about school and ultra-Orthodox schooling for belief” (p. 178). For Schweber, such a way of teaching about history is problematic, but she would argue unavoidable, given the pedagogical and social underpinnings of this type of school.

While Schweber’s work does a fine job of exploring what the Holocaust meant in a Lubavitch girls’ Yeshiva and Christian schools of the evangelical variety, it is misguided to suggest that these experiences represent all of the Jewish and Christian schools in the United States. Ultra-orthodox Lubavitch is only one of a wide variety of Jewish day schools, and while Orthodox schools constitute the largest segment of Jewish day school enrollment, there is “much diversity among the Orthodox.”⁶ Much in the same, the Christian school described by Schweber is hardly representative of the vast majority of Catholic and mainline Protestant schools in the United States. Of the Catholic and Islamic teachers that I observed in the classroom and interviewed, I found them to be quite different from the teachers in Schweber’s study. Teachers, atheists, Catholics, and Muslims alike, also seemed concerned with historical truth and historical perspectives, and looking back through my data I cannot find a single instance of raising the question of inscrutability toward a historical question. Our sample sets may be different, but at the very least, the question of over-generalization must be raised.

⁶ <https://avichai.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Census-2013-14.pdf>

Does religion even really exist?

Apart from the question of the relationship between religion and culture, and this is a no doubt a fundamental question, there is also the latent assumption that there exists a category of cultural phenomenon named “religion.” Further, by defining this category, and using dominant Judeo-Christian praxis and doctrine as a starting point, “religions” are invariably evaluated vis-à-vis their homological similarities to Christianity (Nongbri, 2013). Schoolchildren in public schools are exposed to this normativity from an early age. Every winter season across America, millions of them are introduced to Hanukkah (and Ramadan when it was during the winter) as the Christmas equivalents of religious and cultural others.

Recent writings of Barton (2015) have questioned this inherent Christian normativity in which other religions are made to look more like Christianity and the differences between various sects of a religion are ignored. Barton argues that ‘religion’ should be explored as a categorical phenomenon, so as to expose the ways that ‘other’ religions have been shoe-horned into the (consumerist) Christian mold. Nongbri (2013) disputes these same problematic axiomatic assumptions in the field of religious studies in suggesting that ‘religion’ is a construct of Christianity and the West; yet besides his work, real critiques have not yet permeated the mainstream of the academy. This presumption of religion as a *sui generis* concept is particularly problematic for phenomenologists of religion like Otto (1917) and Eliade (1957). After all, though Otto and Eliade are writing for the purposes of showing the universality of religion as manifest in a variety of religious traditions, they begin with categories and notions that are particularly understandable to post-Enlightenment Protestant Christians.

The very idea of religion as a ‘phenomenon’ strips religion of its link to its cultural, social, and historical roots. Particularly in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Christianity,

belief is more important than praxis, in which orthodoxy, or proper beliefs, supplants orthopraxy, or proper worship. By assuming religion to be a universal phenomenon, conceptual categories derived from Christianity, like the *axis mundi* and the divide between the sacred and profane, are more likely to be inscribed upon religions that bear only a passing resemblance to the Christian tradition. In discussing the *axis mundi*, that is, an object imbued with sacred power, a so-called hierophany around which the profane world revolves and organizes itself (Eliade, 1957, p. 12), one sees this process in action. For Eliade, religions form around these *axes*, foundational centers around which one can have constancy and order in a complex and volatile world. This foundation is formed through the repetition of ritual, in the cycles of days, weeks, and years, as well as through the social community that makes up a religion. Eliade posits that all religions have places and objects around which their respective world revolves. For Muslims this is the Kaaba in Mecca toward which all of the faithful pray five times daily, and for Jews this is the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Eliade's notion of the *axis mundi* is convincing because of the variety of examples he uses to "prove" its universality. He unpacks Indian and Greek myths, describes rituals of Polynesia, and quotes the writings of the early Christian Church and a host of other sources from various times, places, and cultures to bolster his case. Yet ultimately, Eliade's "universal" concept fits particularly well with Christianity, as the person of Jesus Christ and the cross represent the Christian *axis mundi*, the point at which the heaven joins the earth, and around which life and ritual is organized (Eliade, 1957, pp. 61, 136-138).

In short, Barton (2015) contends that religions are made to look more like Christianity than they actually are. Barton's point here is germane, seeing how the cultural systems most distinct from Christianity, be it Nazism (Stowers, 2007), Scientology (Kent, 2003) or American football (Haidt, 2012) are most akin to being evaluated as to whether or not they are, in fact, a

religion. Religions most unlike Christianity are understudied by the field (Taylor, 1981). Conversely, the question “Is Christianity a religion?” is one almost never asked in academic circles. Problematizing any cultural category such as nationality, ethnicity, race, or gender, is an important part of any pedagogical experience of teaching and learning in the social sciences (Buchardt, 2010; Daniels, 2011; Johnson & Repta, 2012). Problematizing religion is an important piece of content that is often left out of the equation, not only in the post-secondary academy, but also in the secondary social studies classroom.

Significance of extant research and areas that deserve further attention

A significant amount of research stills remains to be done concerning the role of religion in the secondary social studies classroom. Though two main strands of literature emphasizing anthropological (Durkheim, 1917; Geertz, 1973) and phenomenological (Eliade, 1957; Otto, 1917) approaches permeate the current body of literature, the extent to which these theoretical justifications have permeated actual classrooms remains to be seen. In fact, very little of the existing literature in the field of social studies education around the study of religion explicitly reference these two foundational religious studies paradigms. While the existing literature engages with them implicitly, very rarely are they truly explored overtly. Further, there is still the need to address the question of both how and why practicing teachers integrate religion into the social studies curriculum. What are their justifications for the study of religion and what approaches are actually used? Do practicing teachers define religion to their students more as a cultural phenomenon or as something that is altogether different from culture? These are important questions for a number of reasons.

Literature from other fields in social studies suggest that there is often a strong disconnect between theorists (VanFossen, 2000), administrators (Hendstrandt, 2006), and the praxis of actual classroom teachers. Important frameworks such as legal questions (*Abington School District v. Schempp*, 1963), teaching religions for global citizenship (James 2015; Myers, 2006), multicultural tolerance (Buckingham, 2007; Douglass, 2000; Gacis, 2003; Jackson, 1995; Moore, 2007), learning about other cultures (Moore, 2007), and for culturally relevant pedagogy (James, 2010, 2015; Kunzman, 2015; Sjöborg 2013), have all been outlined and explored but the sense to which they permeate the day-to-day pedagogical praxis of real classroom teachers remains understudied. Further, relatively little, aside from recent studies by Anderson (2014) and James (2015) includes any consideration for how this research might be applicable to the education of pre-service social studies teachers.

There is also an inherent normativity in many of these studies, particularly the body of literature that looks only at Christian or Jewish individuals when talking about ‘religion’ and sees the ‘religious’ as a monolithic group (Gottlieb & Wineburg, 2013; Mosborg, 2002; Schweber 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b). This lens tends to enforce a Manichean dualist notion of seeing a religious/secular divide, which vastly oversimplifies complex identities for individual students, teachers, schools, and the American nation as a whole. The recent work of Jennifer James (2015) provides a model for problematizing these assumptions, and instead of the Manichean dualism that is currently projected, there is a grey-area between these two worlds, a vast interstice of negotiated identities that is worth further exploration. What this means is that one must explore the shared ways that teachers in a variety of circumstances manage their own subjectivities and their relationship to broader structures and superstructures in common ways.

Of course there will be differences in disparate social settings, but finding the shared values is important too.

One of the major issues when studying religion is that even the most readily accepted definitions of religion fail to precisely pin down what religion *is* in a way that possesses real and unique meaning. From the anthropological perspective of Geertz (1973), one can find very little in Geertz's definition⁷ that distinguishes religion from culture, and in fact, anthropologists of religion (Durkheim, 1915; Geertz, 1973) see religion as one among many other cultural systems that provide order to society through a series of symbols and rituals. How can students understand what religion means if some of its leading proponents can hardly distinguish it as something separate from culture?

Phenomenologists of religion, (Otto, 1917; Proudfoot, 1985) focusing more on the individual believer than on the larger cultural milieu, alternatively contend that religion is best defined on the basis of its unique and irreducible character. Religion is not simply analogous to national or ethnic culture, although there might be overlaps. Yet for the phenomenologists, there is a similar ontological vagueness. Otto describes religion as inherently being about the “numinous,” a feeling that cannot be expressed adequately in the written or spoken word, or any other form of human communication. It is so essential for a scholar of religion to be able to connect with the “numinous” that, as Otto notes in the opening pages of his *The Idea of the Holy*, “whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no further” (p. 8). Phenomenologists leave non-believers on the outside, as for them, true understanding and certain types of religious experiences are inexorably linked.

⁷ Just to reiterate, Geertz defines religion in the following way: A *religion* is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [*sic*] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seems so uniquely realistic (p. 90).

Recent work (Nongbri, 2013) contends that the reason scholars, both anthropologists and phenomenologists of religion alike, have failed to come up with a comprehensive definition of “religion” is because religion *per se* does not really exist as a generalizable and coherent concept. Instead, he argues, “religion is not as natural or universal as it is often assumed to be” and was instead “born out of a mix of Christian disputes about truth, European colonial exploits, and the formation of nation states” (p. 154.) Religions are often judged based on their similarity to Christianity, with those that look the most like Christianity passing as “religions,” while the others are variously called “philosophies” or “cultures.” Seeing that “religion” is an inherently Western, post-Enlightenment notion is important, particularly as teachers are either explicitly or implicitly, as Burke and Segall (2011) would argue, embedded in this larger superstructure.

Much of the recent work about the teaching of religion in secondary social studies attempts to deal with the objections raised by Nongbri, and points out that there is an extremely strong need to include authentic voices when teaching about “other” religions in the American context, as there is a tendency to over-essentialize other religions and assume that these “religions are uniform and simple versus diverse and complex” (Moore, 2007, p. 154). Religions are complex cultural systems, rooted in history, constituted by groups of people that make real demands on political and social life. In Moore’s view, speaking of “Islam” is extremely misleading and does not allow students to understand the multivalent and deeply complex tensions inside any particular religion. The crisis with ISIS in the Middle East makes little sense unless a student first learns the complex details, and the interrelationship between religion, ethnicity, nationality, social, political, gendered and other relationships. Keith Barton argues from a very similar perspective, noting that social studies needs to “move beyond the ‘major religions’” and instead “explore the diversity within religions” (Barton, 2015, pp. 64-65).

Fundamentally, this means exploring the nuances of religions, and not painting them with the broad strokes that are ever common in today's soundbite cultural landscape.

This dissertation study, drawn from qualitative methods such as interviews and observations among teachers in a purposefully diverse set of schools, attempts to break the binary between the religious and the secular, beyond the simplistic narrative that posits a dualism between these two camps, a divide that is particularly acute among phenomenologists of religion. Although some existing research explores the individual religious subjectivities of teachers and the teaching of social studies, it is often very narrowly considered in terms of the topics engaged, the religious persuasions of the participants, and the perspective of seeing only points of difference rather than commonality. The most complete work on dealing with religion in the social studies classroom comes from Simone Schweber, who has conducted research into the ways that secular, Christian, and Jewish schools study the Holocaust (Schweber, 2006a), as well as the ways that students in a Christian school engaged with the events of September 11th (Schweber, 2006b). Her work, by her own admission, is limited to this topic, which would be considered a controversial issue (Hess, 2010), and employs a Judeo-Christian religious paradigm as a lens. Her findings often emphasize the way in which both Christian and Jewish schools explore these topics differently from their secular counterparts. In a certain sense this is the major critique of Schweber, namely that her work looks at the strange and the exotic, employing a certain Orientalist gaze (Said, 1978) and does not also document and explore that which is common and shared. Pivoting from the work of Schweber to other topics and including other religious perspectives is an essential component of this study.

The strand of literature grounded in the phenomenology of religion sees religion not as a subset of culture but rather something that is wholly different from culture, and participates in

this same act of exotification (Gottlieb & Wineburg, 2012; Levinson, 2012; Mosborg, 2002; Schweber 2006a, 2006b). This line of research looks at the way that the religious mind is quite different from the secular mind, in terms of cognition, worldview, and beliefs. As noted by Levinson (2012) and Gaudelli (2003), religious individuals have different perspectives from their secular peers, but more importantly, they sometimes accept different axiomatic facts about the supernatural and the natural world and permit different questions to be asked about these facts (Abrahamson & Smith, 2000).

Much in this same vein, recent cognitive research (Corriveaua, Chen, & Harris, 2014) suggests that the divide between religious and secular individuals exists even from an early age. Not only do students of religious faith believe in the realness of religious stories more than their secular counterparts, but they also have less of an ability to discern fact from fiction in stories that involve general supernatural plot devices like magic and spells. The work of Gottlieb and Wineburg (2012) continues this line of research with adults, charting the impact of religious identities on the historical thinking of experts in various fields. Most importantly, their work helps in understanding how those with religious convictions read history differently from their secular colleagues, by employing a typology of ‘epistemic switches’ that experts employ to navigate their positions as both scholars and members of a faith community (p. 84). Both of these studies, however, occur outside of the secondary classroom space, and it is important to continue grounded, experimental, and qualitative research in the dynamic, communal space of a secondary classroom so as to understand how the religious subjectivities of teachers play an essential role in how religion is taught as a part of the social studies curriculum. Only then, once the status quo is fully understood, can changes be made to the pedagogical praxis of teaching about religion, and

the way that future student teachers are trained to educate students about religion in their very own classrooms.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

Overall design

This dissertation takes the form of a qualitative descriptive study that employs ethnographic tools such as observations in the classroom and interviews with practicing social studies teachers. It seeks not to be a proscriptive account of the “ought” for content and pedagogical praxis, but rather a descriptive and interpretive exploration of the “is,” namely the lived experiences of teachers as they grapple with religion as a part of the social studies in their respective school settings. Experience, in the Deweyan sense, is meant to be at the core of this study. This is a look into the lives of six teachers as they explore teaching about religions in their social studies classrooms. In the concluding chapter, some general recommendations are made, though there is a certain qualified rejection of notions of generalizability.

Rationale

I like to think that every piece of writing reveals a great deal about the author, and I would hope that is true for this dissertation as well. When I first came to Teachers College in the fall of 2012, I brought with me an undergraduate degree in history and religious studies as well as a master’s degree in Catholic systematic theology. Yet neither, I would come to find, were really all that relevant or particularly useful in my work as a social studies teacher in a public school, in which I was conscripted to teach a predominantly historically-focused curriculum. Sure, there was the world religion unit that I taught to my 9th graders, but beyond that, religion often existed at the margins in the courses that I taught.

In my first semester of doctoral seminar, my advisor, Bill Gaudelli encouraged me to think further about how I might bring my own experiences with religions to bear on the field of

social studies education. Around that time, in 2013, a classmate of mine at Teachers College noted that she taught “in an Islamic school.” I had no idea what this really meant, nor did I know that Islamic schools existed in the New York Metropolitan area. A few visits later as part of a course paper, I knew that in some way, I would try to bring Islamic schools into my dissertation research. The first Islamic school I visited was a welcoming, wonderful place, far different from the divisive and hurtful rhetoric that appears so often today in both social and mass media. A brief detour as the principal of a K-8 Catholic school (which looked quite a bit different from the ‘Christian’ schools I read about in the existing social studies education literature) made me believe that I had two types of field sites that were truly worth exploring. Finally, my own experience as a public school teacher told me that teaching about religions in a public school was actually much more complex than the “do not talk about religions/do not worry everything will be fine” camps of advice. I found that there are very few studies that look at public, Catholic, and Islamic education in any comparative way, putting their varied environments in conversation with one another.

Site and participant selection

For this dissertation, I located three school sites, one public and therefore nominally secular, one Catholic, and one Islamic, that would be willing to permit my dissertation research. In searching for sites, I originally looked for a certain pragmatic convenience, namely schools with which I had prior existing relationships, either as a former faculty member, prior research sites, or through informal networking, as well as sites that were close to my home. However, the realities of getting signed institutional IRB approval meant that two sites had to be completely changed from my pilot study. While a trusted former colleague was able to facilitate IRB

approval at the public school site, a change in administration at the Islamic school I had previously worked with left me feeling that the project would be more challenging to complete there and led me to cast a wider net. I e-mailed a few of the principals listed on the website for the Islamic schools association in the major metropolitan area that served as the location for my study. I received a few replies and eventually found a principal who seemed interested in my research, at least interested enough to schedule me in for a meeting. When I first met her in spring of 2017, she had a few faculty members in mind for the project and after meeting with that teacher, we agreed to begin observations and interviews that following September.

Despite my prior tenure as a Catholic school principal, finding a Catholic school site proved to be the most challenging task. I do not draw any particular conclusion from this fact, or suggest that Catholic schools sites are somehow more challenging to navigate (I suspect my difficulty was simply a matter of luck or lack thereof). I would only use the experience to suggest that site selection is a two-step negotiated project, first with the school “gatekeeper,” usually the principal in the case of Catholic and Islamic schools, which generally operate quasi-independently from any overarching body, or with a superintendent or director of curriculum in the case of public schools. However, having a willing “gatekeeper” is not unto itself sufficient for finding willing participants, particularly for the type of in-depth qualitative research project that I undertook. The first Catholic school I emailed, where the principal had once offered me a teaching job years prior, still remembered me and was more than enthusiastic to participate in the project. She was happy to reconnect and recommended a few teachers that might be interested in participating, and she specifically noted that “Stephen would be perfect for this.” However, although I conducted a few interviews with Stephen and we had some great conversations, the conversation fizzled out with other potential candidates, and ultimately Stephen stopped

responding to e-mails to set up some classroom observations. At the time, I did not know the reason for his decision to drop out of the project.

I wondered if he got nervous about being observed, or felt it would take too much time, or most simply just was not getting my e-mails. Maybe he found me annoying. There were a million reasons why Stephen could have dropped out of the project. After concluding my fieldwork, and typing up my field-notes, interview transcripts, and compiling a draft of the dissertation, I reached out to him via e-mail again, just to note that his interviews had been important in the beginning stages of the project, and that I found there were many shared experiences between him and the two teachers at Saint Patrick's Collegiate, where I ended up completing my research. Stephen responded right away, noting in an e-mail that he was "extremely sorry that we lost touch." He said that so much of the 2017-2018 school year was filled with "sports programs and family obligations" that "came together as a 'perfect storm.'" He closed by saying he was "grateful" to have had "the opportunity to participate in" the research.

The lesson learned in attempting and failing to work with Stephen at Saint Joseph High School as part of my research was that, particularly with in-depth qualitative educational research, finding a willing institutional sponsor is only the first step in the process. Data in this sort of qualitative research project is not just about checking boxes and completing surveys, but rather listening to the lives of others and forming genuine relationships with the teachers who choose to participate in my study. Just as important, if not more so, one must find willing teacher participants, ones who are willing to open up their hearts, minds, and classrooms, and be ready to speak their truth.

Both school administrators and teachers, in their own ways, needed to be convinced that my project had a certain value to it, or at the very least, would not be too much of a bother and an

intrusion on the school day. Ultimately, we live in a capitalist society, and for the subjects of my study there were few material incentives for their participation. Instead, like in many communist societies, research often relies on “moral incentives” to encourage voluntary participation in research. Much in the way that Ernesto “Che” Guevara was particularly fond of moral incentives for labor, noting that “public recognition of voluntary efforts [was] a way of overcoming alienation and of encouraging others to emulate the ‘communist spirit,’” I appealed to the inherent value of “research” as a social good in recruiting subjects for the project (Linger, 1992). I hope that one of the outcomes of this project is simply allowing for their stories, at least parts of their stories, to be told and shared with a wider audience.

Site contexts

The public school site, William H. Taft High School, is a grade 9-12 high school in a suburban setting of a major metropolitan area. The racial composition of the school is approximately 67 percent white, 18 percent Hispanic (both white and non-white), 8 percent black or African-American, and 6 percent East and Southeast Asian. According to Dave Jones who has taught at Taft for nearly two decades, “when I first started here it was solid ninety percent and change [white] ... so you’re starting to see a greater diversity in the school as well.” Twenty-six percent of the student body is eligible for free or reduced lunch. Approximately 90 percent of the students go on to college, with roughly half choosing a four year institution and half beginning their studies at the nearby Maple Community College.

The school is mostly Christian in terms of its religious demographics, though there are students of the Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, and Sikh faiths as well. Some students at the school identify as atheists or agnostics. In the state that Taft High School is located, 60 percent of

people identify as Christian, with just over half of those (31 percent) identifying as Catholic. Jews represent 7 percent of the population state-wide, with Muslims at 2 percent, and Hindus at one percent. The religious “nones” are 27 percent of the population; within that category 5 percent identify as atheist and 5 percent agnostic. Religious demographic information for Maple County shows a higher percentage of both “nones” and Catholics than the state averages.

One of the challenges of finding precise religious demographic information about a public school is that neither the state education department nor the United States Census collect information about religious affiliation. In fact, the census has not collected data about religious affiliation since the 1950s.⁸ However, the Pew Research Center does collect data on a state by state basis,⁹ while the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies collects data on a county by county basis.¹⁰ However, one of the challenges of the ASARB’s data is that their “counts are based on the people associated with specific congregations in each county or county equivalent.” They note that “this is different from asking people what religion they identify with. Self-identification is certainly a valid sociological factor. However, participation has also been shown to be an important indicator, and our count focuses on that dimension.”

The Catholic school site, St. Patrick’s Collegiate, is a suburban private high school located in a county near the public school. The neighborhood where Saint Patrick’s is situated is more affluent than the location of Taft High School. However, according to the state education department, St. Patrick’s Collegiate is located in the far corner of a school district where 48 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, with 68 percent of the students being black or Hispanic and 27 percent of the students being white. Yet, approximately one-quarter of a mile away from St. Patrick’s Collegiate is a school district with quite different

⁸ <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/01/26/a-brief-history-of-religion-and-the-u-s-census/>

⁹ <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-stud>

¹⁰ <http://www.usreligioncensus.org/faq.php>

demographics: 70 percent of the students are white, 14 percent are Asian, with only 11 percent of the students Hispanic, and only 2 percent black. Only one percent of the students in this district is eligible for free and reduced lunch.

The racial composition of St. Patrick's Collegiate is more in the middle of the two districts whose boundaries it straddles, with approximately 75 percent white, 8 percent black, 8 percent Hispanic (both white and non-white), and 6 percent East and Southeast Asian. The Catholic school is all-boys as I was unable to find a co-educational Catholic school in the diocese that had teachers that were willing to fully participate in the project. (Though there was some interest, I was unable to get a full set of data from a local co-educational Catholic school, Saint Joseph High School. I actually reached out to all of the roughly dozen co-educational Catholic schools in the region before moving onto a single-sex school site. Beyond the school mentioned above where I collected a partial data set from one teacher, there was an additional school with both an interested principal and department chair, but no teachers that were willing to sign on to the project.) The school is mostly Catholic in terms of its religious demographics, though approximately 20 percent of the students are non-Catholic Christians. There are a handful of students of the Jewish, Hindu, and Islamic faiths as well. Data of the religious composition of St. Patrick's Collegiate was collected by discussions with both the principal of the school as well as the teachers involved with the study.

The Islamic school site, Kaaba Academy, is a private K-12 school in the same metropolitan area, though some distance from the other two sites, in an area that can be classified as "suburban," and serves a predominantly, though not exclusively, Muslim population. At Kaaba Academy there is a lower school serving grades K-8 on the first floor and a high school branch serving grades 9-12 on the second floor. Of the three sites, the Islamic school was located

in the least affluent community, though there are fairly affluent communities nearby. Of the Islamic schools in this metropolitan area, however, it was in a community with the highest per capita income. Still, the students are mostly from a mixture of professional and working class families that “care about education” and the school community includes not only students from the Middle East, but also Southeast Asia, Africa, as well as children of families that have recently converted to Islam that are of European-American or African-American heritage. In short, Kaaba Academy belies the Orientalist stereotype latent in American culture and politics that conflates Arab and Muslim identities (Beydoun, 2014).

There are even some students who would not identify as Muslim but were simply coming to the school for “a good education.” The local Oak Tree School District, in whose borders Kaaba Academy is located, was, starting in the 2015 school year, one of only about 100 schools statewide that was under receivership for poor academic performance and management. The ethnic and racial demographics of the local Oak Tree High School are 56 percent Hispanic (both white and non-white), 42 percent black or African American and 1 percent white. In Oak Tree School District, 70 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. In interacting with the staff, there was a strong sense that, despite American public perceptions of the homogeneity within Islam, there was an incredible amount of racial and ethnic diversity.

Participant biographies

For this study, I observed and interviewed six teachers, all of whom are educators in one major metropolitan area of the United States. All of the interview subjects had between ten and forty years of teaching experience and qualify as ‘veteran teachers’ (Ben-Peretz & McCulloch, 2011). That said, I did not evaluate the teachers beforehand for the quality of their pedagogical

instruction, i.e., I was not looking for so-called “master teachers.” Instead, my goal is to present an authentic sample set and not necessarily educational exemplars. There is, however, a certain self-selection bias in that the schools at which these teachers work and the teachers themselves were willing participants in this study. The voices of those who were uninterested in participating or who actively refused to engage in on-the-record conversations about the teaching of religions in the social studies classroom (and I encountered more of a few of these during my pilot study and search for suitable field sites for this work) do not enter the conversation.

Two of the teachers work at a nominally secular site while the other four work at religious sites, one Catholic and one Islamic. However, as the work of Katznelson and Jones (2010) has suggested, societies and institutions are generally not completely religious or completely secular. Rather, the authors argue that secular societies are often a blend between the secular and the dominant religious modes. Further, as prior research suggested, it was the case that teachers working at public schools had prior experience working at religious schools, and that those teaching at religious schools had experience in public schools earlier on in their careers.

Ultimately, six individual teachers were the focus of my investigation, including their subjectivities and their experiences both in life and as teachers. The way they relate to the larger structure and superstructure is important, but this work concentrates particularly on them as the focus of the investigation and how they navigate these structures. Stated another way, it would have also been interesting to interview the department chairs, principals, and members of the boards of education/trustee to gain alternate perspectives about the teaching of religion in these schools sites. But given the volume of data generated by interviews and observations with only

six teachers (approximately 600 typed pages of transcripts and notes), I decided to limit my data gathering for the purpose of expediency.

Taft High School – Jean Grey

Jean Grey has taught at Taft High School for the past decade. Before Taft, Jean taught a few years at a more “urban” school district closer to the major metropolitan area where the study takes place. She identifies as a Catholic, noting a few minutes into our first interview that “I was baptized. I think I might have left that out.” That said, Jean remarked that growing up she “never went to CCD or any of that” and only “sporadically attended church.” She noted that early on she “kind of had a nomadic childhood” and weekly church attendance was not really in the picture. That said, Jean very much grew up in a Christian milieu and remarked that her “father read the Bible a lot and he would have [her] read the Bible and ... kind of talk about and he taught me prayers.” But for her, those experiences with the Bible, while it did involve her father “instilling the belief that God is important and you want to go to heaven and I guess all that kind of stuff,” were more important because it meant “spending time with my father.” More than any religious lessons, she “remember[s] him ... my father is very important to me.” For Jean, her early experiences with religion were important because it meant simply spending time together with her father, and specific doctrinal lessons were far less important.

It was not until her twenties that Jean “really started going on a regular basis” to church and she “really liked it.” Around that time she met her future husband and since she had not been confirmed or received her first communion, had “basically adult CCD” for a whole year. “That wasn’t the fun-est,” she added. However, “part of that was going to church which I was doing anyway and I found I really liked that part and being ... I don’t know if it was the “religion” part

which I liked or just about being a part of something bigger than yourself.” Jean was unsure if she was an insider or an outsider at Taft High School. She teaches 9th grade world history and in some years teaches 10th grade world history as well.

Taft High School – Dr. David Jones

David Jones is entering his 20th year of teaching high school at Taft High School. A few years ago he earned a PhD in African history and sees the teaching of both Latin American and African history as two of his great passions. Besides his work at Taft, he is an adjunct professor at Mary College, a nominally secular college with religious roots in a neighboring town. Dave also sees research as an active part of his life as a teacher and a scholar, and he travels to Africa every few years as part of his academic research. This past summer, he made a trip to Zambia and Mozambique. Dave teaches electives at Taft in African history, Latin American history, and philosophy as well as sections of Honors global history. He taught Advanced Placement World History for many years but gave it up a year ago to take on a preparatory class for students who had failed the statewide final exam in social studies multiple times. In this class, he noted that it was his singular goal to get the students to pass the exam so they would not have to take his course anymore. He particularly saw their passing as important because successfully completing this exam is required for high school graduation.

Like Jean, Dave identifies as coming from a Catholic home in that his “parents were Catholic [and] I was raised Catholic.” Yet, “even as a child” he felt that he was “going through the motions” but not necessarily comprehending the “bigger picture going on.” Dave noted that he was “a very questioning child” and that his “human nature allowed me to say ‘what is really going on here?’ Not that I thought it was all bunk but I also ultimately thought that there was

something else that was at work here .. this is [not] the way the world actually is.” While Dave was confirmed in the Catholic Church, and his family was an “every Sunday go to church” family, the ability to drive in his teenage years allowed him the ability to have more autonomy with respect to decisions around religious practice. At that point for Dave, “religion really had lost a lot of traction.”

Dave noted at that point his parents permitted him to drive himself to church, and for Dave that sometimes meant he would actually go, but “usually I would just drive around town. It was an excuse to drive around on a Sunday. So that was it. Cruising the town if you will.” Dave has two daughters of his own in grade school. Though Dave noted that he is “not religious,” he also remarked that

There is a certain value to inculcating that to children, not religious values, but religious form of instruction. So one of my daughters actually does go to CCD and part of this I feel like ‘grrr, I’m not thrilled about this.’ I questioned my judgement about whether I should let this happen.

While Dave noted that some of his reluctance to have any involvement stemmed from the “current scandals of the Catholic Church and sexual abuse and everything else you have to be concerned about, which is very tragic” there was also just a more general sense of “whether or not this was the appropriate thing.” Initially Dave felt that part of his decision to allow his daughters to attend CCD was about “appeasing family members that are way more religious than I,” but now he says that instilling the “real cultural values” is also part of the equation.

Dave reiterated that he was “not religious” and not of the type that “I’m not going to give you the typical other answer ‘like I’m spiritual, but I’m not religious.’” However, Dave noted that his

... exposure to Catholicism, Christianity in general giving me at least a basic overview of the structure of the faith, and what the faith believes, does help me to provide context in a lot of ways for understanding not only other religions but teaching it through that lens. Not having been raised with a religious upbringing, Dave contends, people would be less likely to understand the experiences and be sympathetic toward the *homo religiosus* (religious person). As Myers (2006) notes, global citizenship is inherently based on the ability to have both “‘perspective consciousness’ and ‘cross-cultural awareness’” which might be lacking for those raised in entirely secular environments (p. 384).

Dave recalled the story of his “niece and a nephew that were not raised with any religion” and while he does not cast any judgement on that, “to each their own,” he noted that they have told him that “they felt that there was a missing component to helping them understand the bigger picture of religions.” This revelation, which they made only recently as they are “in their twenties now,” was important for Dave. He said that instead of his niece and nephew seeing that “these [religious] folks are all crazy,” some exposure to religions earlier in their lives might have given them more context. In light of that conversation, Dave noted that he “was grateful as much as I lamented having to go to CCD every week. It did provide me a lot of opportunity to sort of reflect differently on contemporary religions [and] the contemporary role of religions.”

Besides allowing his daughters to attend CCD, about which he still has reservations, Dave plans to bring his elder daughter “to Buddhist temples” and to have her learn about Judaism from “some Jewish family members.” Dave noted that his daughter “has actually been to a Jewish service before. She’s been to a bar mitzvah” and that he and his wife “would like her to go see a Jewish temple.” Ultimately, Dave hopes that by giving his two daughters Deweyan experience with a variety of religions, they might “ultimately ... decide what is the best course of

action, or none, if they choose.” As with his students, Dave says that it is fundamentally up to them and not necessarily about following “exactly what I believe.”

St. Patrick’s Collegiate – Michael

Michael was born and raised in the working-class town of Lock Haven, near the more affluent town of Greenport where he now teaches. Growing up, he said that religion and education were very much intertwined. He “enjoyed grammar school” because “it was very social” at Christ the King Grammar School in Lock Haven. He said that he was amazed at how there were “65 kids in a class” and that “school was connected with your life because you were part of the parish.” He spoke fondly of the nuns who ran a tight ship at the school as well as being an altar boy in the pre-Vatican II era. Michael remembers that he had to learn the mass in Latin, and that “I didn’t really know what I was saying in Latin, but I had to memorize it and I knew it at a very young age. I think at the age of 10.” According to Michael, Vatican II brought a number of changes in the church, which for him were “of course a good thing.” Still, Michael admits he was rather young when Vatican II came about, so his perspective might be a bit limited. It was around that time that he went to his “first folk guitar mass,” but “the big thing was that the priest turned and faced you. That was the big thing, remember that? He faced you, rather than seeing his back.” Michael said this might not seem like a lot today, but it really was this sign that “the church became a little more friendlier” with “more reaching out to the people, rather than the people reaching out to the church.”

Though parish life in the Catholic Church was a central part of life growing up, Michael also spoke to the diversity of the community in Lock Haven. Michael noted that he “grew up in a totally integrated neighborhood” which was “interesting because it was a microcosm.” Two

doors down was a Baptist Church, with the Pentecostal Church just a few houses down the other way. Michael noted that “Jews, Italians, Irish, blacks,” he would play ball with all of them “right in the streets.” At that time, unlike today, in which Lock Haven is predominantly Hispanic, there were “not many Hispanics” in the 1960s and 1970s. That said, despite the relative mixing in terms of play time, there was “always a little bit of a distance thing. I was Catholic, they were Protestants, and he was Jewish... we respected each other tremendously and we didn’t kind of cross over.” Overall, Michael noted it was “more territorial than anything else. No matter if you were a Jew, you were a black, or an Italian or Irish. If you were part of the neighborhood, you were part of the neighborhood.” That said there were neighborhoods in which “you did not go in there. And everyone would look at you kind of differently.” However, Michael contended this was true not just in Lock Haven, but in the more urban city of Torshavon as well, and really “all over the metropolitan area.”

Michael graduated from college in 1977, attending a college run by the order of Catholic brothers who run St. Patrick’s Collegiate to this day. Michael did not become a teacher right after attending college, proud of the fact that instead, for thirteen years, he “went into business ... and for 13 years ... was into routing trucks and actually ... had a very lucrative bread business. [Michael] had a couple of bread routes; worked out really well.” But, “everyone always said” that he was “such a freaking know it all.” And he “had a passion for history; a passion for politics.” The final straw was that he “got bored with what [he] was doing and [he] already had a degree.” Michael has been teaching at Jesus High School for over 25 years now, and though he looks back fondly on his business career, he has truly enjoyed teaching. Besides ninth grade Global History, he also teaches AP Government. Michael served for many years as the high school football coach.

St. Patrick's Collegiate – Brother Thomas

Brother Thomas is a lay Catholic brother of the religious order that administers St. Patrick's Collegiate. Brother Thomas was born into an Irish Catholic family in the Bronx, and spent many of his teaching years in another state. He is a relative newcomer to St. Patrick's Collegiate but all told has completed thirty-six years as a social studies teacher. His stories of growing up shared lots of similarities with Michael, who also believed that Vatican II marked a huge shift in the life of the church and for the Catholic faithful more generally. It was around this time “probably freshman year, high school” that “I came in contact with the ... brothers, my guys. And at that time if you wanted to join the ... brothers you would go in to be a teacher.” Br. Thomas studied to be a teacher, but he noted “the reality of it didn't actually set in until the bell rang. When class was over, other kids started walking in. ‘I was like oh man, I got to do this again.’” However, Br. Thomas shyly admitted that he “was good at it, I mean, from a young age.”

Br. Thomas started teaching right after graduating college in January and “the reality of it, I think I missed college for about a day. And then once I got into the school environment, I was very motivated to do a good job.” In some ways, he said, since then, “teaching in high school ... has been like reliving my high school experience for the last thirty-six years.” Brother Thomas is one of only a handful of religious brothers who teach at St. Patrick's. There were once many more, however, as with most religious communities, there has been a decline in vocations over the past 50 years or so. Br. Thomas lamented this decline, and noted that “the teaching brother in a classroom is a very, very small minority right now. [There are] probably 2000 brothers in the world [but] maybe 40 of us that are actually teaching full time.” Br. Thomas sees his work as a teacher as an important part of his identity, but he lamented that “you're not

supposed to think that way anymore,” as his order has somewhat de-emphasized the central role of the teaching brother in the order. Br. Thomas was not super hopeful for the future of the order. He noted that “they don’t have new vocations... There aren’t young guys coming up. They’re just not there. You know. In places like Australia. Even Ireland.” Coupled with mandatory retirement ages at 65 or 55 in some countries, whereby “they’re not going to pay you if you’re older than that,” he sees the decline as an inevitable fact of life. Br. Thomas noted that while he knows the principal, a fellow member of his order, would like to see more of the young men at St. Patrick’s Collegiate become brothers; Br. Thomas ultimately does not feel that this is his job. When I asked Br. Thomas if he saw getting new vocations as a part of his work in the classroom, he replied that “to be honest with you, no... I have people that jump all over me for saying that... I mean, I don’t feel as if I can encourage these guys to think about joining the ... brothers.” When I asked for his reasoning, Br. Thomas noted that “it’s everything that is going on in the Church. I would say.... and teaching is more difficult.” That said, despite Br. Thomas’ pessimism of the future of his order, I found his classes to be just as well run and lively spaces as were the others that I observed.

Like Michael, Br. Thomas also coached sports for many years; however, unlike him, coaching was not as large a part of his identity. While Br. Thomas admitted that his soccer team had won the state championship one year, he added, with a certain humility, that “I just never thought I was very good at it.” He said that sometimes his colleagues joke with him about his lack of interest in sports. For him, sports now means going to “fish and hunt” and spending “whatever time I can out in the woods.” On the contrary, “professional sports ... has totally lost its meaning.”

Kaaba Academy – Ali

Ali has been teaching at Kaaba Academy for more than 15 years and teaches social studies to all students in grades 8 through 12. By the time they graduate, students will likely have been students in his class for five years in a row. It is a tradition in many Islamic schools in the United States to use the honorific “Brother” or “Sister” for faculty, staff, and students alike. Students therefore called Ali “Brother Ali,” although the title did not confer any specific religious title except for membership in the “ummah” of Muslims. However, because it does not have precisely the same meaning for most American readers, I will refer to Brother Ali simply as Ali, and Sister Aqsa simply as Aqsa. After I became a presence in the classrooms of the Kaaba Academy, students mostly called me ‘John’ because I was not a Muslim, although Ali told them “you probably should be calling him Mr. S.”

Ali was born in Pakistan and lived there until middle school, when during the seventh grade he and his family moved to the United States. Ali noted that he “did not enjoy school” growing up and “had always been a struggling student.” He found that he especially did not like school in Pakistan and that “it was very difficult for me [there] because their ...teaching style is very different from the teaching style here in the United States.” Ali liked school more in the United States but still felt that throughout middle school, high school, and even college “one of the biggest barriers was English, not speaking a word of English” when he first arrived. He noted that he “may have known a few phrases here or there,” but for the most part, he was in a brave new world in America. Despite Ali having picked up a rather pronounced local accent, such that I was sure he was born near Kaaba Academy, Ali remarked that “I still feel I’m learning and still processing” because “English is a very tricky, a very difficult language.” However, Ali was

happy that when he asked me to guess where he was born, I replied, “based on your accent I thought you were born here. You must have come here at like one or two, or been born here.”

School in Pakistan had religion as a prominent part of the day’s instruction. He noted that of course “we would have prayers in the morning ... and we have prayers in the afternoon,” and there would be a “religion teacher” who would “come and teach us Koran every day from Monday to Friday” in the evening. This involved learning the Arabic text of the Koran as well as a secular period exclusively for Islam during “secular education” in the daytime. This was Islamiat class. Besides learning about Islam, Ali noted that learning about other religions was somewhat limited. He mentioned how they discussed “idol worshippers in pre-Islamic Arabia” and while “Hinduism isn’t taught but the basic concept is to differentiate [how] we believe in one God; the Hindus believe in many gods and goddesses. They believed in, they were idol worshippers and what not.” Ali noted that this was particularly because of the geopolitics of the region whereby “India and Pakistan are neighbors and we share a cultural history. So we were taught that.” However, “Christianity and other faiths like Judaism were not taught.”

Ali attended a secular private school in Pakistan because “public schools are rather run down” there and not as good. In the United States, Ali attended the local public high school. He noted that, in his experience with public schools in America, they talk about religion “maybe for about forty minutes and that’s about it.” There is such a rush to “move on” because we have “got to finish the curriculum” that Ali felt his real education with religions did not come until college. This period though was still an academic struggle for Ali, having only started learning English about six years prior, with “remedial classes” to boost “proficiency in reading and writing” as well as “math skills” that were “horrible.”

Though Ali had family members, including his mom, who are teachers, his first idea was to be a “fashion designer.” However, family members talked him out of it not only because it was “too expensive” and “very competitive,” but also because they told him that he would have “stuff to deal with that is so un-Islamic.” His uncles in particular remarked that “they’re touching women and sewing bras and panties.” Ali said he was a bit frightened off from the idea of being a fashion designer based on what his family told him about the profession and instead thought about channeling the things he was good at. He noted that he “had a love for history” and, despite struggling with his studies in primary and secondary school, he “always admired teachers in public school here and of course in Pakistan as well.” Not only did Ali admire his teachers, but he was impressed by “the way they carried themselves and the way they taught their classes.” Once the idea got into his head, Ali told himself that “this is something I want to be. Something that I want to do. Because I want to do what they’re doing.”

Kaaba Academy – Aqsa

Aqsa teaches Islamic studies classes at Kaaba Academy and, along with Ali, forms the core of the social studies team. However, there are a handful of other teachers who fill in for an occasional history, social studies, or Islamic studies class in the middle school because Ali and Aqsa have only so many hours in the day to teach sections for grades 6 through 12.

Like Ali, Aqsa was born outside of the United States. However, Aqsa did not come to North America until she went to graduate school. Aqsa was born in Indonesia in the state of West Sumatra. Traditionally, according to Aqsa, this is a very matriarchal society, though she made sure to point out that “though women kind of have power” they still “follow sharia.” Growing up, Aqsa attended the public schools for elementary school, studying Islam and Koran

later in the day at the local madrasa attached to the masjid. For middle and high school Aqsa attended an “Islamic boarding school” because “the curriculum is different in the public school.” Aqsa attended college in Indonesia and studied Islamic law as her major. Afterwards, she got a scholarship to earn a Master’s in Islamic Studies from one of the best universities in Canada. From there, she came to the United States. She has two sons who grew up in the United States, and her husband teaches at a local college.

Saint Joseph High School - Stephen

As mentioned in the section on site selection, finding a Catholic school for this project initially was the most challenging. I assign no specific significance to this fact other than to show the often complex and multi-layered negotiations that take place in securing a field site. Though I was unable to visit the classroom of Stephen who works at Saint Joseph High School during the 2017-2018 school year, I was able to complete a full complement of interviews with him in the spring of 2017. Like Michael, Stephen was a career changer who started teaching later in life. Stephen had previously taught in a local public district, at Calvin Coolidge High School, but decided to teach at Saint Joseph because he believed in the Catholic mission and had gone to Saint Joseph himself many years before. Saint Joseph High School had once been located in downtown Waterburgh but had since moved out of the city to a more suburban area of town.

In many ways, Stephen’s interviews dovetailed with the experiences of Michael and Brother Thomas. Like them, Stephen knew a pre-Vatican II Catholic Church and emphasized the communal but also ethnic nature of parish life. Stephen described with great fondness his own parish, St. Anthony’s, noting that “this is great. I love this. It really is,” in reflecting on his childhood and adolescent memories. He also distinctly remembered how Saint Anthony’s was

the local Italian parish and school, while “St. Paul’s School was mostly Irish,” even though it was no more than 200 yards away. Each Catholic Church, no more than a quarter mile between them, served a distinct ethnic group. Stephen noted that “there was an Irish part of that neighborhood. There was a German part of that neighborhood. St. James’ which was off Commonwealth Street was the Polish church.” Today, with the spate of church closures in the community, the German Catholic Church no longer exists, the Polish Catholic Parish of St. James is only used for mass on rare occasion, and St. Paul’s and St. Anthony’s parishes have since merged. All of the schools that he spoke of have long closed, with at least two completely demolished.

Data collection

I looked at the ways that individual religious subjectivities on the part of teachers and the greater hegemonic forces of the school affect their teaching of social studies in the classroom, particularly around topics related to the study of world religions, through a series of interviews and classroom observations. Using the template of Bogdan and Biklen (2007), I conducted both a series of interviews and observations of each teacher. The interviews and observations occur over a roughly seven week cycle, alternating week by week as per Appendix C, and culminating with a final reflective interview. However, given the realities of the school year, the timeline was sometimes expanded or shrunk based on the practical needs of the teachers’ schedules.

I used a “phenomenological approach to in-depth interviewing” as outlined by Seidman (2006), and engaged in a “three interview series.” These interviews were meant to get at the lived experiences of real teachers. After all, as Seidman notes, interviews allow one to hear “other people’s stories,” and stories are at their core “ways of knowing” (p. 7). The three interviews, which occurred ideally a week before each observation, consisted of a “focus life history” (ibid.,

p. 17). Here, guiding questions (see Appendix D, Visit 1). were asked of the participants to “reconstruct their early experiences in their families, in school, with friends, in their neighborhood, and at work” (ibid.). As Malcolm X noted in his autobiography, in order to truly and fully answer the question of “why am I as I am?” and really “to understand that of any person,” it is essential to review “his whole life, from birth” (X, 1964, p. 153). He continues, noting that “all of our experiences fuse into our personality. Everything that ever happened to us is an ingredient” (X, 1964, p. 153).

Questions were diverse, from “what was their experience with schooling at large?” to “how has religion played a part in their lives?” Ultimately, following in line with Seidman, the goal was “to have them reconstruct and narrate a range of constitutive events in their past family, school, and work experience that” inform their work as a social studies teacher who engages with questions of religion as it relates to “the context of their lives” (ibid.). Each week’s interview focused on one of three themes. Week 1 focused on their experience with religion and religions in their lives and the way in which it was a part of their education. Week 3 focused on their own identity as teachers in the classroom, and Week 5 focused particularly on the teaching of social studies. The questions were asked with an eye toward the working theoretical framework that I had at the time that the questions were designed. By this, I mean that the questions were made to elucidate responses and shed light on the three conceptual categories of the theoretical framework, exploring the superstructures, structures, and subjectivities of the individual teachers. However, I wanted my participants to lead the discussion, not the theoretical framework, and instead used the more open language of questioning employed by Seidman.

Approximately a week following the first interview, I conducted an observation of a full classroom lesson using the procedure outlined in Appendix D (Visit 2). I told the teacher that I

wanted to observe a lesson that explicitly involved religious content and “demonstrates how they teach about religions in their classroom.” While there is value in observing a random class session, and from that finding the implicit ways that religion permeates school culture (Burke & Segall, 2011), a class session that specifically involved religion and explicit engagement with the topic provided more useful results. That said, I wanted my prompts to be as short as possible, so as to not lead the teacher into a normative sense of what I was “looking” to see. If a teacher asked for more direction in terms of either content or pedagogical style, I simply said that the choice was “up to them.” That said, I am aware that the content of the prior week’s interview based on Seidman (2006) might have led the teachers in a certain direction, and that was interesting to examine during the period of data analysis.

I made an audio recording of the interviews, first using my phone and iPad and then switching to a cheaper audio recording device once I realized that the phone and iPad files were eating up the storage on my hard drive. I had planned to audio record the classroom sessions, but after learning from the IRB that this would require an additional 150+ signed consent forms for students, I instead chose simply to take hand-written notes of the class sessions and then transfer these notes to the computer later on. I did not plan on engaging in any form of participation in the classroom, except if a student asked who I was or why I was visiting. The goal here was to “be discreet” and blend into the environment, and not have my observation be seen as a “disruption” or “special event” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, pp. 98-99). However, Ali and Aqsa were particularly inviting towards me, and I attended a number of additional classes and events at the school and in the local community. For a few minutes, I also took over teaching an American history class when Ali spilled coffee all over his shirt, rushing off to the restroom while telling me that I “was in charge.” After finishing my observation for the day, I completed

the notes, adding in any details I might have missed (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Still, at this point, I tried to refrain from normative judgements but instead simply was concerned with filling in the holes of what my senses (especially, but not exclusively, my eyes and ears) were able to capture but my written notes were not able to sufficiently record.

Following the observation, in the next available free period of the school day, or immediately after school, I conducted a post-observation interview with each teacher, using questions based on the work of Spradley (1979) and following the outline of Seidman (2006). This lesson de-brief interview had the goal of concentrating “on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience in the topic area of study” (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). In addition to the set questions listed, I also employed other follow-up probes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) that further unpacked what the teachers were trying to convey. Though I tried to stick to my scripted questions, this did not always prove possible. Instead, I followed the maxim that the interview should try to be an authentic experience, despite the obvious reality that “persons under the eye of an avowed researcher may well act in ways knowledgeable of this fact” (Van Maanen, 1991). This question of the authenticity of the observed individual’s actions and words is a perennial problem in the social sciences, and one that cannot be totally eliminated. Getting to know my subjects, such that they feel comfortable about being open and honest with me, and making them aware that their responses would be properly anonymized, went a long way toward ensuring, as much as possible, a certain authenticity.

Alternating weeks of Seidman-type interviews and observations followed in weeks 3 through 6. Finally, in week 7, I reconvened with the teacher to conduct a closing interview. This final interview was the time for the teacher to make any addendums about the questions asked in the Seidman interview series, the observed lessons, and also left time for reflection and

consideration about the teacher's future work. In addition, while this final interview was the one that "focuses on the participants' understanding of their experience, through all three [prior] interviews participants are making meaning" (Seidman, 2006, p. 19). The template for this interview can be found in appendix D on page 240.

All questions were generated with an eye toward not leading the interview subjects in one particular direction or another. Particularly in the Seidman interviews, the questions are meant to be open-ended, such that the meaning-making comes from the participant as much as possible, and less from my intrusive gaze as a researcher. In creating research questions, I tried to avoid the formulation of "how" and "why" and replaced those questions with a yes/no binary followed by explanation. In this way, I was consciously trying to avoid leading teachers down the path that a certain experience for a teacher is normative, trying to divorce myself from expectations in my observation.

Finally, to ensure triangulation, I asked teachers to provide me with any lesson plans they have available that dealt with the teaching of religion, as well as any sites or sources they use to teach about the topic. Using this larger data set I was able to confirm the relationship between the observed lesson, the interview, and a more authentic holistic sense of the way the teacher engages with this topic. One of the longstanding challenges in qualitative research is the observer effect, in which the presence of a researcher can cause a response bias from the participants. Ultimately, following the recommendations of Bogden and Biklen (2007), I sought to "interact with [my] subjects in a natural, unobtrusive, and nonthreatening manner" (p. 39). The more that a researcher can be unobtrusive, the less likely that "the presence of the researcher [will] change the behavior of the people he or she is trying to study" (p. 38). In a number of ways, my experimental design sought to minimize this observer effect, of which triangulation was an

important part. By conducting my research over a number of weeks, teachers were more likely to feel more comfortable with me, and would be more likely to be “authentic” both in their answers to interview questions and their teaching styles in class. That the teachers were willing to share stories of failure, conflict, or self-doubt, and the occasional use of swear words in their interviews, were all signs of a growing sense of trust, and a more authentic and richer set of data.

Given my own subjectivities particularly as a former teacher in a public school, I still found it difficult to observe the public school from an outsider’s perspective and see the way that religion was handled in the classroom as anything but normative. At the same time, as a current field supervisor, it was difficult to stop value judgements from creeping into my mind, and rating the lessons on their overall quality. Instead of thinking if a specific lesson was “good” or “bad” I instead forced myself to focus on recording what I was seeing in a specific classroom, and forgoing judgements in terms of what a specific pedagogy meant in terms of some grander narrative. As the work of Corsaro (1981) and Reagan (2002) demonstrates, capturing the essence of the lived world of one’s observation subject is often a challenging undertaking, particularly when the observed is culturally “other.” In observing the classrooms of the private Muslim school, I was concerned about viewing the experience through an “Orientalist gaze” (Said, 1978) and privileging that which is foreign and strange at the expense of that which aligns neatly with the dominant educational paradigms in the United States. From prior research and over the course of my field work, I found in practice, however, my fears to be rather unfounded.

With the current political climate of the United States, particularly in the aftermath of the 2016 United States Presidential Election, I remained ever mindful that not everyone shares “the middle-class American’s definition of research or researcher” and for “some it may conjure up images of what is done in a laboratory or an instrument of government repression” (Bogdan &

Biklen, 2007, pp. 93-94). This is not simply a theoretical or historical concern (Caldwell, Price, et al., 1973; Haney, Banks & Zimbardo, 1974; Milgram, 1974) but is one that has had a real impact on the lives of individuals over the past months, years, and decades, with implications for organizations that are entrusted with maintaining and developing professional ethics (American Psychological Association, 2016).

In light of these realities, I was particularly mindful not only of my race, gender, class, and religious identities and my unique role as a researcher, but also that contemporary circumstances impact how these roles are understood by others and the way that they are a part of a larger American superstructure. That said, in many ways I cannot divorce my research from my own sense of self, being white, male, a college instructor, and a sometimes lapsed Catholic. My whiteness and my status as a college instructor no doubt provided me easier access to school sites than it would have if I were not afforded such privileges. It is often in my work that I have to write letters on behalf of the undergraduates that I teach such that they can have access to sites for student teaching observations. My business card, my .edu e-mail address, and the fact that I study at Teachers College carry with them a certain imprimatur that certainly would not otherwise exist.

I have no doubt, too, of the way that gender played a role in the data that I uncovered. In discussing with my mother the research that I was doing, and in particular the detailed life histories that Michael and Brother Thomas provided to me, she remarked that “they probably wouldn’t have told you all that if you were a woman.” In a number of ways, I felt that I tried and still try to use my own identities to give others the space to reveal their authentic selves, selves that exist as complex and modern. For Ali and Aqsa, and the principal and students at Kaaba Academy, I wanted them to feel that I would give voice to American Muslims in a white

America that increasingly sees them as other. For Brother Thomas and Michael, and the Catholics who have memories of pre-Vatican II, I felt I was giving voice to the notion that Catholicism is perhaps different than portrayed in the media; it is more than and quite different from conservative values and the sexual abuse crises that have dominated political headlines in discussions of Catholicism over the last decade or so. And for Dave Jones and Jean Grey and other teachers, I hope to relay the sense that the study of religion is still quite an important part of the public school social studies classroom, and not the fearful hellscape depicted in cinematic portrayals like *God is Not Dead 2*, starring Melissa Joan Hart.

Data analysis

After collecting the interview and observation data, which was then transcribed, I conducted “qualitative data analysis.” Following the recommendations of Horvat (2013), data analysis was viewed as “an ongoing process and not an event” (p. 106). The transcription of data began as soon as possible after an observation or interview, and data analysis started after the first observation and continued up until the final interview was completed and the dissertation was in draft stage. In addition to looking for themes that emerged both as the points of commonalities and strangeness between these three school environments, I also looked to see if theory matched practice—that is, if what the teachers said about their teaching corresponds with what was observed. Finally, the analysis of the data was connected to existing theoretical frameworks and how the data might support or refute the findings of Schweber (2006a, 2006b) and Gottlieb & Wineburg (2012). So as to ensure the validity of the collected data, I primarily followed the procedures as outlined by Cho and Trent (2006). First, I ensured transactional validity through member checking and triangulation. I sought transformational validity both in

that I used “thick description” to understand how social studies teachers understand the teaching of religion in their classrooms as well as holding a praxis and social change orientation in the way that religions are seen as part of the curriculum for teacher preparation programs. There is also a question of “truth” in qualitative research, particularly in the data-driven educational agendas that were started under NCLB in 2001 and continue under President Obama’s Race to the Top. I am particularly struck by the words of Luttrell (2000) who noted that

it is possible to be a ‘good enough’ researcher – that is, a person who is aware that she or he has personal stakes and investments in research relationships; who does not shy away from frustrations, anxieties, and disappointments that are part of any relationship; and who seeks to understand (and is able to appreciate) the difference between one’s self and another” (p. 515).

I engaged in a “thematic analysis” (van Manen, 1990), though I attempted to resist “neat narratives” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I followed the procedures outlined by LeCompte (2000) in that I first set to “tidying up” the data I gathered and then proceeded to go about “finding items,” particularly those that appear with great “frequency” as well as items that involve “omission” or “declaration.” While I did this manually, I also used the embedded “word frequency count” and “word cloud” operations in NVivo¹¹ to give both numerical tallies and visualizations of frequently used words. In particular, with the word cloud feature, I excluded generic words, and continued to refine the data such that each participant had their own unique word cloud. In this manner I hoped to capture in my analysis data that appeared with great frequency and data that appeared almost never, while at the same time privileging the specific voices of my interview subjects. The creation of a set of NVivo codes, as described by Maxwell was useful in the

¹¹ <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-product>

process of “understanding ... the *meaning* that ... things, actions, and events have for the people who are involved in them” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 67). NVivo coding is the notion that the researcher will attempt, whenever possible, to use the words and phrasing of the interviewees, to let their voices and their analyses shine through. In doing so, the words “are taken from or derived directly from the language of the substantive field” and are therefore “essentially the terms used by actors in that field themselves” (Strauss, 1987, p. 33). These codes were not viewed as fixed, but open to additions, deletions, and reinterpretations as I continued to view and review the data. It is important to “not become too committed to the first codes ... since initial codes can seem highly relevant when they are actually not” (Strauss, 1987, p. 32). The point is not to let prior research, a pre-set theoretical framework, or neat narratives serve as the structure to which the data is tied, but instead to let the data build an organic structure of its own. I engaged first in “open coding” I placed the data into broad buckets answering the questions of “who, what, when, where, why, how, and for what.”

For thematic codes, I coded for times that various religions were mentioned, as well as social, political, gender and racial identities. Likewise, I coded for mentions of any persons, places or other concepts. As an example, Islam and Christianity were mentioned most frequently, with Judaism in third. Other religions were mentioned with decreasing frequency, though this was not necessarily universal. Ali, for example, in describing his own desi cultural upbringing in Pakistan, was far more likely to mention Hinduism than any of the others. And at Taft High School, Jean Grey and Dave Jones seemed particularly concerned about Judaism and a corresponding anti-Semitism.

Table 1: Thematic/Open Coding Schemes

People	Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Mansa Musa, Othello, Dante, British Raj, Louis XIV, Roman Emperors, Nero, Claudius, Caracalla, Tiberius, Peter the Great, Elizabeth I, Frederick, Maria Theresa, Phillip II, Henry VIII, Victoria, Abdul, the principal, board members, John Brown, Prince Albert, Bolsheviks, Barack Obama, JFK, the Cardinal, Charles Dickens, Charles Darwin, Jesus, Cromwell, Martin Luther King, Jr., nuns, George Washington
Places	Pakistan, pre-Islamic Arabia, India, United States, Sacred place, holy place, New York, Africa, Germany, Russia, movie theaters, Yemen, Iran, Cuba Syria, Palestine, Israel, Sumatra, madrasa, mosque, masjid, boarding school, Bali, Jakarta, Borobudur Temple, Mecca, Jerusalem, Night Journey, Bronx, Manhattan, New Jersey, Australia, Peru, China, CCD, North Korea, global history class, Freedom Tower, World Trade Center, 9/11 memorial
Religions	Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Shia, Hinduism, Sufi, Abrahamic, Trinitarian, Buddhist, Catholic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran, Evangelical, monotheistic, polytheistic, Zoroastrian, Vodun, Voodoo, Animism
Ideas	God, Supreme Being, Deity, Seen, Unseen, Education, Caliphate, Jim Crow, Allah, Oneness, Creator, Sharia, Pancaslia, Tolerance, respect, reincarnation
Identities	Way of life, Islamic, Arabic, Indian, desi, Muslim Students Association, Hindu, Christian, Conservative, Insider, Outsider, Kosher, Relaxed, Actor, Monarchist, Umayyad, Abbasid, Urdu Speaker, Language, Indo-Pakistani-Bangladeshi, Indonesian, Canadian, doctor, engineer, mom, dad, lawyer, British, French, Rohingya Muslims, theatrical, commoner, Scottish, Irish, Vatican II, pre-Vatican II, Hispanic, Latin, Canaanites, Levites, Italian, African-American, Western, Secularist, Marxist, White, Male, Democrat, Republican, Married, Jewish
Values	Beliefs, Cults, Reading, Scholarship, Conservative, Historical Knowledge, Elective Courses, un-Islamic, friendly, boring, interesting, science, jokes, empire, civilization, Christianize, wearing a head cover, hajj, prayers, modesty, Holy Communion, the Cross, local community, piety, open mindedness, No Child Left Behind
Things	Koran, Bollywood, Contemporary, First day jitters, Youtube, AP Exams, State exams, Ramadan, East, Christmas, Halloween

Following this, I engaged in axial codes, finding patterns using Spradely’s (1979) set of semantic relationships. From these semantic relationships, I set about “creating patterns” and “assembling structures.” My goal was not to let the theoretical framework lead the data, but instead to see how the framework related to the data as it was organically assembled.

Table 2: Axial Coding Schemes

Superstructures	<p>9/11 – Freedom Tower, WTC, 9/11 memorial, clash of civilizations Donald Trump – As Roman Emperor – Nero, Claudius, Caracalla, Tiberius As Mansa Musa, Relationship to Obama, George Washington Vladimir Putin – As God Leaders as religio-state actors - British Raj, Louis XIV, Peter the Great, Elizabeth I, Frederick, Maria Theresa, Phillip II, Henry VIII, Victoria</p>
Structures	<p>School principal, board members, parents, the Cardinal, AP Exams, State Exams, Ramadan, Christian Calendar, Easter, Christmas, Halloween, NCLB</p>
Subjectivities	<p>East and West – <i>Victoria and Abdul</i>, John Brown, Prince Albert, Koran, Bollywood, Contemporary, Conservative, movie theaters, Israel/Palestine, madras, mosque/masjid, boarding schools, Mecca/Jerusalem, Christianize, wearing a head cover, civilization, hajj, prayers, modesty, communion, the Cross, un-Islamic</p> <p>Teacher – First day jitters, showing Youtube videos, global history class, education, historical knowledge, elective courses</p> <p>Identities - Way of life, Islamic, Arabic, Indian, desi, Muslim Students Association, Hindu, Christian, Conservative, Insider, Outsider, Kosher, Relaxed, Actor, Monarchist, Umayyad, Abbasid, Urdu Speaker, Language, Indo-Pakistani-Bangladeshi, Indonesian, Canadian, doctor, engineer, mom, dad, lawyer, British, French, Rohingya Muslims, theatrical, commoner, Scottish, Irish, Vatican II, pre-Vatican II, Hispanic, Latin, Canaanites, Levites, Italian, African-American, Western, Secularist, Marxist, White, Male, Democrat, Republican, Married, Jewish</p>
Lived Experiences	<p>Age of Imperialism – Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens, Jesus, Cromwell Race – Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Lives Matter, Jim Crow Local community, piety open-mindedness</p> <p>Other countries/regions – Canada, Pakistan, India, United States, New York, Germany, Africa, Russia, Yemen, Iran Cuba, Syria, Palestine, Sumatra, Bali, Jakarta, Mecca, Bronx, Manhattan, New Jersey, Australia, Peru, China, North Korea</p> <p>Religious places - pre-Islamic Arabia, sacred places, holy places, Mecca, Jerusalem, Night Journey, CCD</p> <p>Religious ideas - God, Supreme Being, Seen, Unseen, Education, Caliphate, Allah, Oneness, Creator, Sharia, Pancasila, Tolerance, respect, reincarnation</p> <p>Religions - Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Shia, Hinduism, Sufi, Abrahamic, Trinitarian, Buddhist, Catholic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran, Evangelical, monotheistic, polytheistic, Zoroastrian, Vodun, Voodoo, Animism</p>

Ethical considerations

Sadly, even as late as the mid-20th century, the notion of considering ethical issues in medical research (Caldwell et al., 1973) and social science research (Haney, Banks & Zimbardo, 1974; Milgram, 1974) was far from universal, and science and social science are still in danger to this very day of being co-opted for nefarious purposes (APA, 2016). Further, even among researchers who attempt to conduct ethical research, a certain “pathology of power” often lends them to see their own experiments as innately ethical, even when the casual outside observer would immediately see otherwise (Haney, Banks & Zimbardo, 1974). As a consequence of this reality of ethical abuses in medical, psychological, and social science research, the United States Congress passed the National Research Act, which ultimately mandated that research conducted with human subjects needed the approval of Institutional Review Boards. I submitted my experimental design and questions to the Teachers College Institutional Review Board, following the standardized protocol that came out of the National Research Act. In addition, participants were only involved in the study once they had given informed written consent, as outlined by IRB guidelines. Furthermore, individual teachers, schools, churches, mosques, cities, and other social places were properly anonymized, following standard sociological research procedure. Details unrelated to the study, as much as possible, have been left out so as to prevent the revelation of the individuals and sites involved. Though teachers were recorded during the interviews to ensure the accuracy of transcription, these recordings will be destroyed after a time of one year, in accordance with standard IRB procedures. Finally, questions of reciprocity are important to me, and I offered to all the teachers whom I observed and interviewed a sharing of my knowledge and experience about the teaching of religions in the classroom.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that my own subjectivities related to religion as a part of the social studies are myriad, and my own perspectives will be unavoidable. Though I was baptized as a Catholic, I was a pretty ardent atheist by the seventh grade, though I had a warming to Catholicism in college as an undergraduate. During college, I studied religion as an academic discipline as one of my majors, but then went on to study Catholic systematic theology at the University of Notre Dame. Since then, I have been more ambivalent about my own religiosity though I recently worked at a Catholic school in an administrative capacity.

In some ways, I try to balance both etic and emic perspectives, but perhaps I am truly a foreigner in both worlds (Reagan, 2002). Though I have experience with both secular and Catholic schools, I have little experience with Jewish, Protestant, or Muslim schools, or the private schools of other religious traditions. In this way, there is an inherent bias on my part to read secular and Christian classrooms as “normalized” and classrooms of other faith traditions as “exotic” or “different.” I was particularly concerned with this potential for exotification when I first began conducting research at an Islamic school, and that my Christian cultural upbringing might render some parts of my visit unintelligible. This exotification of Islam is part of a general trend in America and sadly has most recently manifested itself in a virulent Islamophobia. In fact, when I told other academics in the world of higher education of my planned visits, some suggested that my visit would likely be “very controversial” and I would need to “brush up on my Arabic” to understand what was going on at the school. Quite the contrary, I found that the Islamic schools that I visited were quite typically “American” in many ways, and not the stereotype that existed in the minds of certain professed “open-minded” academics.

Finally, there is the question of generalizability. As qualitative researchers, we must caution ourselves against saying “all teachers in a certain type of school believe this” or “all teachers that perceive themselves as outsiders are less likely to do that.” In my research, I hope that I have uncovered a multiplicity of viewpoints, and wish that my data gathering and analysis does not put teachers into “neat” and “orderly” categories but instead reflects the complex and multifaceted lives that they live.

CHAPTER 4 – EXTERNAL (SOCIETAL) SUPERSTRUCTURES - What external forces outside the school shape pedagogy around religion in the social studies classroom, and how do they shape it?

In his 1992 work *The End of History and the Last Man*, the historian Francis Fukuyama posited the triumph of liberal democracy as the telos of human life (Fukuyama, 1992). During the same historical moment, Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities*, describes the ways in which nationalism had become the dominant ideological force in world history, extinguishing competing ideologies such as Marxism, dynastic realms, and various religious communities (Anderson, 1983). In the short term, of course, Fukuyama and Anderson were correct in that the great enemy of democratic capitalist nation-states, the specter of Marx-Leninism, was indeed dead (Marx & Engels, 1848). Yet, much to the surprise of many witnesses to the events of 1989 and thereafter, liberal democracy did not have an easy go of things. After all, history is not teleological; it is contingent and temporal. New events and circumstances can change the trajectory of our collective lived experience.

First, and most obviously after the events of September 11th, there has been a resurgence in the role of religion in understanding cultural phenomenon. In the most extreme cases, some such as Huntington (1992), have argued that the United States is now engaged in a “clash of civilizations” predicated on the religious and cultural differences between Christianity and Islam. Similarly, and most clearly evident with the election of Donald Trump in 2016, but dating back to Putin’s accession to the Presidency of Russia in 1999, there has been, according to Snyder (2017) and others, a resurgence of autocratic, strong-man style rule and a retrenchment from the liberal democracy that seemed so triumphant back in 1991. Coupled with autocracy, and Snyder would argue, a necessary component of proto-fascism, is the fusion of religious and state power

and the creation of a “post-truth” age. Ultimately, I sought to understand what these larger societal superstructures mean for practicing social studies teachers in their classrooms, particularly as they talk about the topic of world religions with their students. What does it mean to teach about religion in a social studies classroom in the United States of America in 2019?

Teaching Islam in the post 9/11 world – What does it mean for 9/11 to function as a superstructure and how does it shape the teaching of Islam?

Although my interview questions never ask about specific religions (and this was an intentional facet of the study), the challenge of teaching about Islam in a post-9/11 world was a theme that appeared throughout my interviews and observations. By living in a post-9/11 world, I mean that we live in a world where 19 hijackers from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Lebanon, inspired by their own versions of Islam, launched an attack on the United States on September 11th, 2001, destroying both towers of the World Trade Center, killing 2,996 people and injuring countless others in the process. In the weeks after, the United States would begin a war in Afghanistan which is still ongoing as of 2019, and has left approximately 70,000 dead. Within the next two years, the United States would likewise engage in a pre-emptive attack on Iraq, then ruled by Saddam Hussein (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2004). Just as we all live in history, the post-9/11 age is also defined by history, including significant turning points such as the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011, the proclamation of a world-wide caliphate by ISIS in 2014, the end of ISIS as a territorial polity by early 2019, and the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on October 26, 2019.

Yet, the post-9/11 world cannot be thought of only in terms of death and physical destruction. Just as our world has both physical and psychological components, so too does the

post-9/11 period. The post-9/11 world is marked by fear and anxiety, fear of terrorism, fear of the foreigner, and fear of those who look and behave differently from oneself. Security replaced freedom as the Patriot Act (2001) enabled the growth and permanence of the surveillance state. War became a perpetual condition, with a hazy rainbow of red, orange and yellow security alerts. Likewise, the post-9/11 period is one of increased hostility and violence directed both at Muslim-Americans and those perceived to be Muslims, most notably Sikhs.

This post-9/11 world is a superstructure that surrounds and shapes what all teachers teach about religion because students and teachers alike think about religions (and social studies and their lives more broadly) in relation to this historical event. Of course, there is a long lineage of natural and human calamities being seen as watershed moments in history. The events of 9/11 have the sort of impact, on religious, social, and political life and thought, in much the same way that the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 made those in the early Enlightenment truly question (Voltaire, 1759) if we lived in “the best of all possible worlds” (Leibniz, 1710). Seeing 9/11 as an outgrowth of the historical process means admitting that Fukuyama’s vision was wrong, a vision that saw the triumph of liberal democracy as the telos of human civilization. For Fukuyama, writing in the milieu of the early 1990s, there was a “remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government [that] had emerged throughout the world over the past few years” and this system was one that had “conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarch, fascism and most recently communism” (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xi). Instead, we are left with asserting that Huntington’s dystopian vision was the right one, in which human life is full of conflict and strife and can be “nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes, 1651).

It is in this Hobbesian view of the world that forms a set of lived experiences for students and teachers alike. This historical event shapes the world we live in as a whole, and our schools as they exist in our contemporary society. In essence, we breathe the air of a post-9/11 world and we drink its water. With that comes the ever-present fear of terrorism, paranoia about the outsider, and a mutual distrust among nations. At its core, there is a certain anti-globalization aspect of seeing the post-9/11 world, namely that religious and cultural differences are too stark and cannot be overcome.

Dave Jones observed that “no doubt, the teaching of Islam is a big issue that has come up over the years, especially since 9/11. Prior to that, most people could care less. Right, I mean, it was they didn’t think about it.” However, he noted that after September 11th 2001, “the sort of hysteria and the misunderstanding, and the lack of knowledge, and the perpetual sort of drifts we have in this country towards the right. I think, building upon these fears, [and] the othering of Muslims is a really big problem that we in our class do see.” Dave Jones particularly saw the othering of Muslim students, the broader Muslim-American community, and Muslims worldwide as a huge challenge for his curriculum. Not only did he feel that it was important to combat this xenophobia and Orientalism in his own classroom, but further he noted that “I would argue this to other Christians perhaps who may hear this one day, they should also know the context of all religions, especially Islam.” Dave Jones clearly believed that under the banner of teaching about religions, teachers needed to be educated about the nuances of the Islamic faith, including its various sects, and how this faith evolved over the course of history, and not just “dismiss it out of hand.” More than just teaching about Islam in an objective manner, Dave felt that teachers needed to actively combat the Orientalist stereotypes that have always existed about Muslims

and have intensified since September 11th. For Dave, the superstructure of the post-9/11 world is a dangerous one, and one that can encourage Islamophobia, racism, and violence.

Dave feels it is the duty, particularly of white, Christian teachers to “offer a corrective to” the negative portrayals of Islam in popular media. It should be these teachers’ duty to try to explain that this is ... another faith system ... It does not advocate violence any more so or less than any other religion in history. Are there violent Muslims? Yes. But let’s talk about the crusades conquering and violent Christians. Let’s go back and talk about Solomon and David.

While Dave did not believe Islam or any other religion was inherently “violent ... sometimes people become violent because of religion.” Dave here is clearly tapping into a certain double standard in American society, whereby when “evaluating religious violence,” Americans believe that “self-proclaimed Christians who commit violence in the name of Christianity are not really Christians” at a rate more than double those who would agree that “self-proclaimed Muslims who commit acts of violence in the name of Islam are not really Muslims.”¹² Despite his own firm ideological stance, Dave did not feel that it was necessarily his goal to make students think the way he did on the subject of Islam. “You can totally disagree. It’s fine.”

Dave expounded further on his point that Islam is more centrally focused in the global history and geography curriculum now than it was before September 11th, 2001. He remarked that “when I was in school, Islam, it was like we were at war with this religion,” echoing the clash of civilizations narrative that is popular in public discourse (Huntington, 1991).

Islam, he argued, was specifically taught through the lens of the crusader, and “we all thought we learned about Islam, this sort of understanding of what was happening in the Middle East as a result of the European crusaders showing up there.” He continued on, noting that:

¹² https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/07/tolerance-islam_n_951063.html

We had no idea that 400 years prior to this ...there were these massive empires ... emerging like everywhere else in the world, and I think that there was a sort of corrective to this. Not because they are trying to inculcate or they are trying to push Islam, dare I say this, they are not trying, I'll say this out loud, they are not trying to convert people to Islam. What they are doing is, they are trying to humanize the faith and historicize the faith. That is the real value of what we have to do with all religions, it needs more historicity, and it needs more context. Without that, you can't understand Islam in the modern world. You can't understand these terms or the way that these perceptions have evolved over time. And that's our ultimate goal.

Despite the willingness of both Dave Jones and Jean Grey to attempt a reshaping of students' views about the superstructure of contemporary American society, both have felt they have had pushbacks, particularly from parents concerning a newfound inclusion of studying Islam. Dave suggested that

some parents have noticed this and have complained about why is Islam getting more [coverage] than Christianity and Judaism? And I can understand their concern that it looks like there's this apparent bias, at least on paper. But I think that the issue here is that since 2001, there is so much misunderstanding about Islam ... Where Islam for a lot of westerners who were predominately white is sort of this bigger mystery, where, like, Jews are white, by and large, right, but Muslims, by and large, there are plenty of white Muslims. Our government doesn't realize that of course, but at the end of the day these stereotypes that have been built since 9/11, we have a lot more history.

Here, Dave was remarking on the way that race and religions are intertwined in popular imagination, and that Islam is perceived as a “non-white” religion. Particularly in the age of Trump, he argued, non-white cultural, religious and ethnic groups are targets for marginalization and inhumane treatment. The events of 9/11 and a Huntington read of those events push a Manichean notion of the world, whereby white=America=Christian and non-white=Middle East=Muslim. False as those Manichean narratives are, they persist.

Dave found that while he personally did not get significant pushback, his colleagues have, particularly when it comes to showing films in class, indicating the power of visual media in shaping and reshaping cultural perspectives. While Dave usually sends home permission sheets if he is going to show an R-rated film, he mentioned how a film made by *National Geographic* on Islam called “Inside Mecca” sometimes generates negative comments from parents, even though the film is not R-rated and has no obviously objectionable content.¹³ This did indeed surprise me, as I was familiar with the film and had used it in my own classroom a number of times. That said, the last year I regularly taught in a secondary classroom was in 2012-2013, during the second term of President Barack Obama and perhaps light-years away from current socio-political milieu. Dave described “Inside Mecca” as a “really decent film” that is a documentary about three Islamic pilgrims going to Mecca for hajj. One man is from Africa, the second from Indonesia, and the third is a woman, a “white Texas professor, blue eyes” who is a Muslim. Dave noted that he is pretty sure that it was the white American woman who converted to Islam from Roman Catholicism who “catches people’s attention.” But Dave contends the film is “not being provocative; it’s showing you the diversity of Islam.” Of course, it is precisely that the film undercuts the association of whiteness with Christianity that leads Dave to believe this is what causes the complaints for some parents.

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwFZucL7PsE>

Despite the relatively benign nature of this 2003 film, Dave noted that “I’ve had and there have been, based on what colleagues have told me as well, there have been parents that when, and it’s not rated R, but when the students, like we show it in class, go home and talk about it, then the parents complain, ‘why didn’t I know that you were going to be showing this film.’” Some of the parents “see it as a propaganda tool” or they’ll “see it as like sort of an attempt to convert people. And it’s not that at all.” Ultimately, Dave feels that the movie reinforces the goal of the department’s social studies classes; that is to put “human faces on a religion that you should understand exists in the world” and to show their lived experiences. However, Dave reiterated a point made earlier in his interviews that as a student,

you can believe whatever you want.... It is of no concern of me. I go home every night and see my own kids ... I’m not here to convert you. Just think about the bigger picture. Students, I think, generally appreciate that. So I haven’t had too much pushback because I’m very transparent.

His colleague Jean Grey likewise felt there was an increasing importance in teaching about Islam in social studies classrooms in the post-9/11 world. Jean felt that this could sometimes be challenging. After all, while growing up she had friends who “maybe didn’t have the same religion as I did” but this mostly meant other branches of Christianity or “you know, maybe Jewish.” She continued, noting that “I don’t think that I had any Muslim friends” growing up. For Jean, this presented her own learning curve. In her classes, students often have the most questions about religions that are not common in the predominantly white Judeo-Christian suburb. Students “really were interested in learning, especially about Islam,” but they were also

very interested in “Buddhism and Hinduism” too, particularly in light of “what the kids see on the news, and certain stereotypes and maybe negative stereotypes at that.”

Neutral presentations are important for Jean, and she tells her students that she is “just here to present the information to you in a non-biased way, so you the student can form an opinion. And I, I try to be very careful with that when it comes to religion. Especially with, um, Islam.” When asked about the particular question of Islamophobia, Jean tries to include it, but that it really depends on the particular day. In the lesson I observed on Islam, it was mostly teacher-centered and there was not a lot of time for questions. That said, “somebody always brings something up in like a joking manner or maybe not even a joking manner. Why are we learning about this, you know, it’s Muslims who brought down the trade [center] ... something stupid.” Sometimes Jean feels these comments come from a place of ignorance, but other times “they might not think [what they are saying] is stupid.” It is at these junctures that Jean feels compelled to “stop the lesson sometimes and get into it a little earlier than” she otherwise would have. She compared it to anti-Semitism which,

all depends on your population of students and if you do have that one kid who makes the dumb jokes or has the comments ... once in a while you do have a student who says, has a crass thing to say about, you know, a hooked nose, for example, or I’ll show anti-Semitism propaganda, and they’ll make fun and I have to go into it a little bit more than I thought I would.

Like their public school counterparts, Catholic school teachers like Stephen felt the need and the obligation to humanize Islam in the face of wider intolerance. For him,

basically I treat all of the world religions with the exception of worshipping I guess the devil or worshipping some bad religion if you want to call it that. They're good, they are basically, there is a sense of goodness about at least the 3 main religions of the world, Islam, Christianity and Judaism. There is a sense of goodness, so I address that as a sense of goodness.

But Stephen admitted that there was a certain negative set of stereotypes at play against Islam in particular, that “you get the idea of like, well it's Islam. It's Muslim.” Stephen felt it was his duty to counteract that hostility, asking rhetorically “do I, we, have to take this radicalness as part as all Muslims are like that? No. I can't. I would never dream of doing that.”

However, in some ways serving as an example of Dave Jones' admonition, Stephen admitted that his knowledge of other religions, particularly those that were the most different from Christianity, was lacking. While Stephen had a general sense that the goal of his teaching was to emphasize the “goodness” of Islam to counteract cultural assumptions that might perceive Islam as “bad,” Stephen admitted that, at some level, he felt that teaching about other religions as a whole was a challenge. Though we live in a post-9/11 world, in many circles this awareness of other religions only exists as vague platitudes toward acceptance and tolerance, and does not necessarily strive towards deeper analysis. After all, we know and teach best that which is a part of our own lived experience.

Stephen spoke of how he “always tells them this is from a Catholic's point of view. I can't speak for Hinduism. I can't speak for Buddhism. I can't speak for Protestants or Lutherans.” That said, Stephen highlighted how he has cultural experience growing up with Protestants and Lutherans, and there is a deeply shared historical legacy. With other religions, he contended that he is

limited basically in the sense of, how can I describe that religion to someone unless I am an expert on it? I'll grab all that I possibly know on Hinduism, all that I possibly know on Buddhism, even new-age world religions. Even new age religions.

As for Islam specifically, he stated that “you know, I don't know. I haven't studied the Koran in depth. I mean, do I know some things about it? Yes.... So there is a difference on the way I address. I would say more on general terms on the religions.” Stephen's comments raise two challenges for teaching about 'other' religions. First, there is the knowledge divide that one must overcome, and it involves a significant amount of preparation on the part of the teacher, preparation that might only end up as a day or two worth of material presented in class each year. Second, there is the challenge of whether or not someone from outside a faith can truly know what it means to be of that faith.

Brother Thomas' words demonstrate that social studies has the most relevance and often can breed the most controversy when it cuts close to home. Living in the post 9/11 isn't just an abstract concept. It involves real people, real fear, real lives, real death. He was in agreement that “particularly in the last sixteen years ... since September 11th, the way [teachers have] taught” about Islam and the Arab world has changed. Brother Thomas noted that there was a certain immediacy and visceral quality to teaching the topic, where emotions still run deep. For many Americans, September 11th was a sea change and a critical juncture in history. He remarked that

I can't tell you how many kids I taught that have served in the military. I've had three die between Iraq and Afghanistan. I've had any number of students; I have one in particular that was in the FBI. That is what he's doing. I was very close to him. I was close to his family. I had, I went to a 9/11 funeral last year. I never thought in 2001, I never thought I

would have to actually go to one of those, but I just got here, and a student in my class, his dad was dying sure enough.

In some communities, the events of September 11th are not in the past because illnesses acquired from working at Ground Zero affect individuals each and every day. The political furor unleashed by Jon Stewart in June 2019 against politicians over financial support of the 9/11 Victims Compensation Fund¹⁴ and the relief over its eventual passage,¹⁵ demonstrates that emotions are still raw and wounds not fully healed. For Brother Thomas, he still vividly remembers the funeral he attended, he was not sure if the student's father

actually worked at the site but apparently; he, this is what I heard, was that he decontaminated the apparatus, when he came back... Because I don't know if he actually was at Ground Zero. He probably was; who wasn't? It's so timely and ever-changing and ever-threatening.

The events of 9/11, (much like the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 did for Voltaire), made Brother Thomas fundamentally question "our world in its stability" and while he "would like to think that ISIS is being defeated," ultimately, "I don't know if it is."

In some ways, Ali viewed the same space, the World Trade Center in a post-9/11 world, as a potential symbol that our world can move past the violence of 18 years ago. For Ali, the World Trade Center also represented the ability of a city to regrow and to heal. Students can learn about the past, and grow and develop to build a better world. Ali noted how the principal encouraged him to take a field trip to New York City and that "she always wants me to go to Freedom Tower" and "to go to this museum." He continued, "We want to go to 9-1-1 memorial. We want to see the Freedom Tower. World Trade Center. Yea, the Observatory." For Ali, there

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYpDC3SRpM>

¹⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmYiW_xMTKc

was recognition of the tragedy of the past, but also that wounds can be healed, that new buildings can rise, and the mistakes of the past might not always be repeated.

Michael also saw that in the post-9/11 world there was a shift in seeing social studies as involving “more global connectedness.” He was not completely sure if this connectedness was a result of September 11th, but certainly saw it as happening more in the few years that followed. He remarked how we “start out with more global economics” and “show how the world is smaller with multinational corporations.” In addition, there was more of an emphasis on discussing the “rest of the world, with the Middle East in prices, in supply and demand and OPEC and everything else that’s been going on.”

Even in the Islamic environment of Kaaba Academy, there were challenges in the way that Islam was taught, according to Ali. He agreed with the other teachers interviewed that it was critical for students to learn about Islam, and in fact, his own world religions curriculum had a similar ethos in combating Islamophobia and wider religious intolerance in a “contemporary world [that] can be so politicized.” For Ali and the other teachers I interviewed, 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq necessitated a politicization of both Islam and Christianity, one that there was a broad consensus did not exist with the same significance in the years before 9/11.

Ali lamented that “oh look, Muslims get marginalized for being terrorists. I want our students to not make that same mistake.” Ali, in his curriculum and from my observations, did try to bring Muslim voices to the forefront. In teaching about the Crusades, he included a reading titled “An Arab View of the Crusades” which looked at the event from an Islamic perspective. An assigned document-based question on the Crusades sought out a similar balance. However,

thinking about the coverage of Islam more deeply in his social studies classes, and echoing the beliefs of Douglass (2000), Ali contended that there was

a serious lack of teaching history of Islam. We don't have that in our school. And I do feel a little concerned about our students don't know enough about the historical content of the Islamic empires and the development of the early lives of the prophets, or just Prophet. And just that part. You talk about an event in Islamic history and my students don't know about it because they are so focused on learning the religion they forget that historical part of it.

At first I found it hard to believe that a teacher at an Islamic school would claim that there was not enough Islam in the social studies curriculum, but the more I heard from Ali and the more I saw, the more convinced I became.

Because students at Kaaba Academy had a separate Islamic culture class taught by Aqsa, Ali, in his social studies class, did not “do basics of Islam. They already know Islam and they practice it.” Ali had assumed that students got the fundamentals from their Islam class, and when it came time for the historical development of Islam, he followed a state curriculum that still for the most part sees the non-Western world as ancillary, and only brings it in, in tokenistic ways.¹⁶ Further, unlike Dave Jones, Ali felt that Islam was still consistently marginalized in the New York state curriculum even to this day. A “clash of civilizations” Huntington narrative has great investment in ensuring that Islam is seen as backwards, anti-modern and ahistorical, and unfortunately, much to Ali's chagrin, the current New York State Standards play right into this narrative. While there are six substantive references to Islam by itself in the most recent New York State 9-12 Social Studies Standards, and other references to “Islam” or “Muslim” in the

¹⁶ <http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/k-12-social-studies-framework>

standards coupled along with other “world civilizations,” all but one of the references are from the period before 1750.

This curriculum is problematic for two reasons, and feeds into a Huntington style superstructure. First, and most broadly, the curriculum continues along with the Orientalist habit of seeing non-Western cultures and religions as primitive, backwards, undeveloped, and anti-modern. Second, and from a more pragmatic standpoint, a recent decision by the state board of education to limit content to material post-1750 on the standardized final exam raises the question of how much of a role, if any, Islam will play in future state exams. As explored more fully in Chapter 5, although most teachers try to be authentic in their teaching, particularly with high stakes assessments, all teachers to some degree “teach to the test.” Following along in much the same way, starting in the 2019-2020 school year, the College Board will only test material 1450 A.D. to Present on the Advanced Placement World History Examination.¹⁷ The historical development of Islam would be, by virtue of the time periods alone, mostly absent in those two benchmark exams. This backs up Ali’s claim that history in general, and Islamic history in particular, is becoming increasingly marginalized in the world of social studies, and that neither are truly valued on state or national exams.¹⁸ This feeling on the part of Ali of the erasure of Islamic history by virtue of state standards was born out in a class I observed on the tail end of learning about the crusades.

Ali: And then came the decline of the Ottomans. [thinking aloud] How do you do the decline of the Ottomans with them? You skip because they are Muslim?

Student: [jokingly] That’s racist. You skip all the Muslim empires. We don’t learn about this in Islam class.

¹⁷ <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/06/ap-world-history-controversy/562778/>

¹⁸ <https://www.engageny.org/resource/regents-exam-global-history-and-geography-ii>

Ali: Constantinople wouldn't fall until the 1450s.

Student: Which we are going to skip?

Ali: Which we are going to skip. You'll be fine.

Here Ali is conversing aloud about the best way to teach the decline of the Ottoman Empire. However, thinking about the demands of the final state exams, he realizes that while relevant and interesting to his students, it is not an important part of those exams. The students respond by calling the decision "racist," which is a consequence particularly of state standards that emphasize "Western civilization."

State standards and the time crunch that they reinforce aside, it seemed there was perhaps another reason that Ali might have felt a little awkward delving too much into Islam. When I asked Ali if he considered himself an insider or an outsider, particularly with respect to religion, he answered that "I feel like I might be an outsider because a lot of these students take things rather very seriously. They won't leave any room for laughing and jokes, and I tend to joke about things. I tend to see myself as more reformed. Relaxed. Spiritual. Sufi." Ali and his Sufi inclinations made him feel somewhat on the outside of Islamic practice and, unlike most of the school community, Ali did not attend daily midday prayers. In his defense, Ali noted, however, that "as you may have noticed I didn't go down for prayer. Not because I don't want to [go down to] prayer or I don't want to pray and prostrate before God. I have my own personal thing." Also "I eat kosher. Whereas a lot of my students wouldn't eat kosher. That's not OK. My sister doesn't even eat kosher. I do." While seeing the law "rather than a set of positivist injunctions" instead as "the directing principle leading to the ultimate goal," gives some background for Ali's ritual choices, they still place him somewhat on the outside of community expectations (Reynolds, 2007, p. 198). When attending a Passover Seder that Ali and his students had been

invited to attend at a nearby synagogue, a debate broke out among his students if it would be permissible to eat the chicken that was being served. Ali said that since it was kosher, it was by definition also halal, but since the students could not ensure the halal status, some, but not all, still refrained from eating the chicken and decided to be vegetarians for the evening. While Ali seemed to have no compunction teaching about other religions, he seemed reluctant, much as a teacher might eschew from talking about politics, from teaching the students too much about their own religion.

In light of his self-identified status as an outsider, Ali came to the teaching of Islam with a certain humility, emphasizing that “I really don’t go into it but I always say to my students ‘if I say something forgive me. I don’t want to offend you.’” But, echoing the work of Gaudelli (2003), one might wonder if, on the issue of Islam, Ali created a space that was a bit “too polite” and did not explore all the challenges of the totality of Islamic history. Further echoing Keith Barton, who argued that social studies needed to “move beyond the ‘major religions’” and instead “explore the diversity within religions” (Barton, 2015), Ali was well aware that his students “came from different backgrounds and they are following different brands. There are no different brands of Islam, but it is how you approach life and how you approach the religion.” Beyond simple divisions between Sunnis, Shias, and Sufis, individual choices as well as family and cultural backgrounds provide a whole kaleidoscope of religious observance. Perhaps as a bit of a cop-out, Ali said that with Islam,

I just tell them and I say teaching you just the basics, teaching you to the book, to the text. I’m not going into any specifics. I’m not imposing my belief onto you. I make sure of that. And I stay as far as possible. I don’t want to get into that. I don’t want to get into a real conflict or any argument with the students.

Although I did not get to observe a whole lesson from Ali on the topic of Islam specifically, it was clear that he taught far beyond simply just what was “in the book,” and Islam was imbued in almost every lesson he taught.

In fact, there were numerous incidents when Ali seemed to challenge students to think outside of their preconceptions about Islam and religious belief more broadly. In teaching about Buddhism, Ali explained that “some scholars say Buddha was a prophet,” and when talking about Hinduism, which has gods and goddesses both male and female, he repeatedly referred to God as “she.” “What do you mean, he?” Ali remarked to the class. “God is a she.” When pressed about his beliefs about the Hindu pantheon by the students, Ali responded, “I am a pantheist. I believe in all gods. Someone call the principal. Someone is going to stone me to death.”

In our post-observation interview, Ali said that his remarks were very intentional. He noted that

lots of students and lots of parents and some of the teachers here come from, I don't want to use that word, especially the faculty, they are more extreme I guess. More conservative. That's the better word. I wouldn't think they are extreme but they are more conservative. I'm more reform, more relaxed.

As a consequence of this relaxation, he felt it was his duty to get students to think beyond their own subjectivities, particularly when these subjectivities were shaped by familial and cultural pressures. “So you joke about gods and goddesses. So you joke about it in class all the time.”

Sometimes this leads to student confusion. In one case, Ali

had a student come up to me at the beginning of the year and he was actually a brand new student, and he was actually curious as to whether I was a Muslim or not. He was like

‘are you a Muslim?’ And I said ‘of course I am,’ and he said ‘all right’ because I joke about pagan gods and belief in them.

Although combating Islamophobia as well as a corollary fear he sees in some of his students to distrust other religions are both a large part of his curriculum, Ali notes that he sometimes feels that there is some pushback for what he does. He admitted that

yea, I’ve gotten in a lot of trouble in the past [with] me joking about, I would talk about, ‘oh I’ve got to consult the oracle. I’ve got to talk to the gods and see what they say.’ And then my students get appalled and say ‘gods? There is only one God.’ I’m like ‘really are you sure about that?’ And then I say ‘I’ve got to speak to God and see what she has to say.’ “What? God? God is not a she. God is a he.’ And I’m like ‘are you sure about that?’ And they are like ‘Allah is a he.’ And I’m like ‘all right.’”

The terrorist attacks on September 11th and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq loom large in the social studies classroom, particularly surrounding the teaching of Islam. For the teachers I interviewed and observed, having a conscious plan of what it means to teach about those events is important. For some, like Brother Thomas, part of it means remembering the past and the lives lost. For Jean, Dave, Ali, and Stephen, there was a strong sense that learning about those events meant shaping the world of the future, to learn how religious conflicts could cause violence, and to learn about these events so that we might not repeat them now or in the future.

The melding of religious and state power in a post-truth age

Just as the temporal context of this study is framed as taking place in a post-9/11 world, the research was also conducted in Donald Trump’s America, primarily during the 2016-2017

and 2017-2018 school years. For the early 20th century Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, superstructure has both political and civil (or social) dimensions. The America of Donald Trump increasingly blurs the distinction between the two, such that the political is the social, and the social the political. Likewise, religions function in certain ways in a democratic society, but religions often behave quite differently, both by choice and by force, in autocratic and authoritarian regimes.

For the classrooms that I observed, Donald Trump and his rhetoric functioned in distinct ways. First, and most obviously, he heightens the rhetoric of a clash of civilizations narrative, amplifying the worst of post-9/11 jingoism and Christian crusader mentality. Donald Trump in those cases is Huntington on steroids, without all the academic polish and carefully parsed words. Of course, while it is interesting to think about the way that Trump functions as a superstructure, it must be remembered that Trump also lives in a post-9/11 world, a world that is shaped by sometimes competing narratives about September 11th. Trump's narrative of 9/11, however, is different than those of reality. He has falsely claimed that "I watched in Jersey City, New Jersey, where thousands and thousands of people were cheering as that building was coming down."¹⁹ For Trump, 9/11 means the defeat of the United States at the hands of its enemies, and Trump sees Muslims, both at home and abroad, as among these enemies. Like the priest and the Conventionist who disagree over the meaning of the French Revolution in the pages of *Les Misérables* (1862), Trump disagrees both in his facts and his interpretations of September 11th. Given his oversized public persona, it is hard to now live in a post 9/11 world that is not also now mediated by interpretations of the event by both Trump and his allies.

Second, and perhaps more under the surface, but just as insidiously, he functions as a fascist and exemplifies the way in which religious and state power can be melded together in

¹⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/09/12/trumps-fuzzy-vision-sept-attacks/>

societies. Not every interview subject made overt reference to Trump (neither Aqsa, who focuses primarily on the teaching of Islam, nor the teachers at the Catholic school brought him up), but his presence at times seemed to loom large. Yet, there is a long history in the field of religious studies that looks at aspects of the fascist nation-state that have analogues in religions. The work of Taylor (2007) explores the way that the Nazi Party reshaped holidays, flags, rallies, and clothing to cement their own ideological prominence.

In thinking of Trump as a fascist who seeks to meld religious and state power, Ali noted that one of his stated goals was for the students to understand how fascism is a state-sponsored religion. He explained that “fascist leaders will lie to you. They will say ‘I will get you jobs.’” At this point in my notes, I wrote “I feel like he’s talking about Trump here,” figuring that Ali might leave it for the students to connect the dots. But Ali continued, drawing a more explicit and clearer thread between state religions, fascism, and Trump, one which has appeared in popular discourse over the past eighteen months (Snyder, 2017). In a fascist system, the leader is a “demi-God” and the goal is for him to “be a new God.” Just “remember Stalin,” Ali remarked. “He had the Orthodox Churches torn down.” This promise of economic prosperity and the cult of personality were, Ali noted, the “same reason Americans voted for Trump. What did he say? Make America Great again.” He concluded, by suggesting that “some things are false promises,” though added, somewhat optimistically to his students, “Do all Americans support Trump? Absolutely not.” Here, Ali is making a link between fascism and state religion, and particularly the notion that fascist political structures both embrace religious elements on one hand, and on the other seek the destruction of traditional religious groups and organizations, particularly when they speak out against the dictator that controls the state. Ali is demonstrating the post-truth

quality of the Trump regime, whereby facts and truth really do not matter, except when they might be used in the service of a dictator who seeks to consolidate his own power.

Much in the same way that Ali spoke of President Donald Trump as channeling a Stalinesque cult of personality, Jean Grey remarked how she presented material on Vladimir Putin through much the same lens. Her students “like to talk about Putin a lot. I have a whole lesson on why he has his shirt off all the time.” Jean Grey was not being facetious, adding that

Vladimir Putin wants to promote this sense of immortality and vitality because seriously, if, God forbid, he died tomorrow, who would replace him? Nobody. He wants you to think he is irreplaceable. And the strength of Russia; so that’s why in the news the other day [he was] taking a dip into the water^[20]. Yeah, I’m going to show the kids that one when they come back because he wants you to think he is like a man of steel, like Joseph Stalin was. There is a whole mentality behind what he does. Everything is orchestrated.

For Ali and Jean Grey, Trump and Putin represent authoritarians who channel classic fascist motifs, as well as both implicit and explicit religious imagery. In particular, Putin’s icy dip on January 19, 2018, the date of the Orthodox Epiphany, flanked by priests carrying religious icons, could not be more indicative of this completely orchestrated religious motif. Here, Putin is re-enacting the baptism of Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–23) while at the same time demonstrating his strength and virility in the run-up to his resounding win for a fourth term as President of Russia.

Besides the overt association of Trump with fascism in his classroom lectures, for Ali, the person of Trump also allows us to get a clearer window into autocratic regimes of past times, particularly those that set up truly religious cults of personality around their leaders, and the

²⁰ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/01/19/shirtless-vladimir-putin-dunks-himself-icy-water-mark-epiphany/1047259001/>

accompanying worship of a living deity. Ali used the example of a student who thinks that history is unconnected to his or her own life, of which there were many when they start social studies class with him. Students specifically and people, more generally,

think this is something new or irrelevant, something happened so long ago. But guess what, they were doing it, and we are the same people. Times have changed. Theater has changed. And I think Shakespeare really puts it nicely. We are players and the globe is a theater. And we come and we do our role and we move on. We are the same creatures as we were 2000 years ago. What makes Donald Trump so different from, I don't know, Emperor Tiberius? They were crazy. Emperor Tiberius was just as crazy. Well, that's a little extreme. He was a little out there. So you get into these things.

Ali here demonstrates a few important facets of his philosophy of history and its universal character. First, history is a cyclical process where similar events repeat because for Ali, humans have a fundamental humanity that is more alike than different throughout the ages. Second, human beings have roles to play in their lives. They are, according to him, subjects in a grand world-play, where the actors and the lines themselves might change, but the overarching plot and themes remain static. We are actors in this world drama, but actors-as-subjects. In addition, Ali lamented that nuanced comparison, how Trump and Tiberius might or might not be engaged in the same process of deification, is something that “the textbook doesn't go into it. And you want to do stuff like that because it is exciting and your students are going to like it. You know your students; they are going to like that stuff.”

The other moments when Trump's name was used in Ali's class seemed to hold to his stated goal that invoking Trump's name was not necessarily about denouncing Trump (though his name was often used in a pejorative way) but instead to bring in the interests of students.

Trump, it became clear to me, was on the students' minds this past school year. During a visit to a fourth grade class at Kaaba Academy, one student, after seeing that my nametag read 'John,' asked if I "work at Papa John's." I said I did not, and then, completely unprompted, the student remarked that "our class is addicted to Trump." Trump, it seemed, was in the air, like a virus, and his words shaped the classroom discourse.

Ali used the travel ban (which at that point had not yet been completely and lamentably upheld by the Supreme Court) as a way of making sense of the Palmer Raids during the 1920s. Ali mentioned to his class that it was clearly a "fear of immigrants" that led to the Palmer Raids, whereby the "government was convinced the United States was about to be overthrown by communists and anarchists" who were foreigners. Then, like now, Ali continued, "security is on high alert" and while it was true that "there were communists," it was "not enough to really overthrow the government." Ali concluded that the whole thing was a "witch hunt," rechanneling for his own distinct purposes the rhetoric of Donald Trump. It "happened then" and it "happened now," he continued. "All these criminals, drug dealers, and rapists' as Trump would say." That's why he wants to ban immigrants from "Syria, Yemen, Somalia, [and] Venezuela." A student interjected, further mimicking Trump. "They are shitty countries," the student remarked. "Not just that," Ali added, but also "war-torn countries that could cause a problem." For Ali, America always needed to "see itself as a victim of foreign policy." Instead of looking inward to fix their problems, Ali contended that in this new version of immigrant hysteria, they were projecting their hatred outward toward Muslim minorities.

Besides being vilified as a demagogue, or used as a foil to engage students, Trump also was used as a stand-in for American foreign policy writ large, in much the same way that George Bush, or even Barack Obama (at least to those who criticize the imperial presidency) similarly

stood in for disastrous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Lamenting the clash of civilizations style narrative that often has permeated popular discourse, Ali bemoaned that

there's still that struggle between the East and the West. We have very, the West has a very different view of what the Middle East is like or people of the Middle East. There is not a lot of understanding, especially with Donald Trump being in the office. I'm getting a little political here.

Ali was making a point about Donald Trump qua Donald Trump, but it was also more about the way that the United States has understood the Middle East over the last half century. Ali summed it up, highlighting that Trump

renewed sanctions against the Iranian government, supplying arms to the Saudi government. 10 billion dollars' worth. And initiating genocide. Indirect genocides and murdering and selling arms and conflicts in Syria and Yemen and Iran and throughout Middle East and arming and aiding Israel against Palestinians so the United States is very much involved in all those areas. And mainly because of Jewish political reasons, and the strategic locations of those places and natural resources.

That said, while Ali overall has viewed U.S. foreign policy over the last half century, he did give high marks to Obama on this front, admitting that "I think that Obama did so well being in the office. The fact that he initiated talk with Iran, with Cuba, and I think that Donald Trump is undoing a lot of that."

Apart from Ali, who made bountiful use of Trump in both class and his interviews, Trump appeared far less in the teaching of the other study participants. Instead, Trump was like "a specter ... haunting" their classrooms (Marx & Engels, 1848). Dave Jones, who in private conversations had no qualms about voicing his displeasure, only once mentioned Trump in his

formal observations, and not at all in his interview. His use of Trump was similar to the way that Ali compared Trump to Tiberius; namely, making sense of an obscure historical character by comparing him with a more obvious contemporary example. For Dave Jones, Trump was compared to the Mali emperor Mansa Musa. While Dave noted “the textbooks and the [state standards] love him, it is really funny because Mansa Musa is absolutely reviled in West Africa.” Dave, who holds a PhD in African history, wanted to set the story straight, noting that Musa was more akin to a 14th century Donald Trump, a showy, ostentatious know-it-all, who far from the faithful charitable pilgrim of popular fashion, showed up in Cairo and later Mecca “basically in a limo throwing money from the window.” Once again, like with Ali’s examples, while Trump’s example is used in a pejorative manner, the underlying and more nuanced historical point is to better understand a long-deceased historical figure that is incorrectly understood in the master narrative. Instead of seeing Mansa Musa as a pious hajji that helped universalize the Muslim faith, he was for Dave, in a more historically real way, a brutal warlord that used religion as another tool for political control.

Dave Jones’ colleague Jean Grey likewise did not mention Trump in her lessons and an anecdote she shared in her interview sheds some light on her reticence. She noted that last year:

We were doing an election, a mock election for another teacher in the building, another social studies teacher. All I did was pass out the ballots and then I counted, I tallied the result, and Trump won in this one class. And that was it. I just said who won and I didn’t talk about it. I didn’t. One of the girls got very angry about the fact that Trump won. But didn’t say anything to me and a couple days later she was yelling at another girl in class and used the f word. And then I had to call her outside. That’s not how we talk to people in class and I was just trying to get a handle on what the problem was and she got very

angry at me. And walked away. And she said basically I was a racist for, I was just trying to figure out why you were yelling at this girl. We don't use f words in class. And her Mom came in and basically she was angry at me. For that mock election... and I was the racist because of that and also because I called her out first; not the other girl. So that was straightened out.

In the contentious run-up to the 2016 election, simply by holding a mock election, Jean Grey felt she was dragged into the larger political discourse and felt attacked in the process. Jean's own experience with controversy surrounding the teaching of "controversial" issues followed a pattern I noticed throughout the research for this dissertation. While it was often students who might be the ones who were initially upset by or drew attention to the teaching of the controversial issue, it was generally only if parents complained, that an issue was escalated. In this case that was indeed what transpired: "the Mom said we are going to have a meeting because my daughter doesn't feel comfortable." Ultimately, when the issue was 'resolved, it was only "the mom" who felt things were settled while "the daughter did not."

At the meeting with the mother and the student, Jean felt supported by both the assistant principal and the guidance counselor who "handled it well ... Everybody handled it very well." This certainly echoes the writing of Diana Hess (2015) who noted that "while it is clear that teachers bear much of the responsibility for creating a political classroom that works well for all students, others have a role to play in the process as well" (p. 209). Hess continues, remarking that

the support of school administrators is key. One of the reasons many of the teachers ... reported so little pushback from community members and parents when they included

controversial political issues in their classes was that they had the support of their department chairs and principals – who could then serve as front lines of support” (ibid.). While Jean Grey backed away from this specific political issue, she still discussed ‘controversial’ issues in her classroom. I observed very detailed lessons on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and I know from conversations that current events play a large part in her classroom. Had Jean felt unsupported in the conversation with the mother and her daughter, then Jean would have felt far less comfortable teaching about “controversial issues” as a whole.

Religion and public life in the post-Enlightenment

Due to the demands of the state curriculum, the majority of the course sessions involving religion that I observed for this research were offered to ninth graders as part of a global history and geography course. Overall, religion appears more prominently in the world history curriculum than it does in United States history, with 14 mentions in global history before 1750, 3 mentions after 1750, and only one mention in the standards for United States history. Somewhat of an outlier in that he taught both ninth grade history and twelfth grade government, Michael noted at the end of the 2018 school year that with his seniors at St. Patrick’s Collegiate, he does “a great lesson on religious freedom.” He suggested that I contact him again in the fall. Michael’s lesson on religious freedom, taught to seniors at a Catholic school, was quite different from many of the other lessons I observed.

In many ways, it dovetailed nicely with the research of Levinson, who considered whether or not theological motivations were important in understanding civic discourse (Levinson, 2012). Her own reasoning ran counter to that of a student teacher she observed who contended that “religious arguments didn’t have a place in ‘citizenship projects’” (pp. 203-204.)

More broadly, Michael's class on religion and governmental regulation demonstrated the way that, at least in America, we often view religion from a post-Enlightenment perspective. After the Enlightenment, religion became seen more as a private, rather than public affair; it became personal instead of social, concerned with orthodoxy, or right beliefs, rather than orthopraxy, or correct actions and rituals.

Michael's class was a demonstration of Levinson's contention, namely that religion matters most when it enters civic life. In America, people are fine with all sorts of religious beliefs, but religious beliefs become less tolerated when they lead to an outbreak of the measles.²¹ From minute one, though, I knew that while the class would involve religion, politics would be placed front and center. The first student who walked in asked Michael about the migrant caravan from Central America that was slowly winding its way through Mexico, fresh in the headlines as of October 2018, and one of the myriad October surprises that Donald Trump was hoping would stave off Republican electoral defeat in the 2018 midterms. "Look," responded Michael. "We aren't talking about the caravan. I already talked about Stormy Daniels. I just can't do it anymore." Once the bell rang, Michael uncharacteristically began with a prayer. After concluding, Michael announced that he "wanted to begin with a prayer today because if we were in public school, we wouldn't be able to do this." As the lecture began and Michael discussed important Supreme Court cases with the students, first *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, then *Engel v. Vitale*, I thought to myself that this was one of the first times that religion was explored particularly as it related to government authority. In fact, I could not think of anyone I knew who taught in a public school that really talked about religion from this frame of reference. However, Michael was doing so, both because the topic clearly fascinates him and because the setting of a Catholic school makes the topic more of a controversial issue. One of the most interesting

²¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/us/measles-vaccine-exemptions.html>

moments of the class period came in a discussion of *Employment Division v. Smith*, in which Michael and the students explored the implications of a 1990 Supreme Court case that allowed the state of Oregon to deny unemployment to two men fired from their jobs as drug counselors for smoking peyote, though the men smoked the peyote for religious reasons. Michael noted to the students that:

You might have a job that involves drug testing. And part of their practice was smoking peyote. Do you know what peyote is? It is a hallucinogenic. Now you might be thinking ‘shrooms. LSD. But imagine you are a Lakota Sioux and you are smoking a pipe and you are passing it around. The ritual is that you smoke the pipe so you walk around the campfire with your ancestors. I know you are thinking that you are just getting high. What about the Rastafarians? Smoking the ganja. You probably don’t know what they are doing. They are smoking and ingesting the earth.

In reply, a student #1, of a more conservative leaning asked, “why can’t we all just do that?” He was clearly unhappy that there might be a religious-based argument for condoning drug use. Michael responded, noting that:

This is where I want you to keep an open mind. How many of you are Catholics and go up and drink wine? What’s the rite called where you drink the wine? And what’s that called – transubstantiation. Stop for a second. Keep your mind open. I’m having a host and drinking wine. Wine is alcohol. What is the difference between a Catholic with wine, a Rastafarian, and a Lakota Sioux? You are ingesting alcohol. It was not legal during Prohibition.

The same student, growing increasingly incensed, retorted that “marijuana has never been legal.” His more liberal classmate, student #2, chimed in by claiming that “[marijuana] was legal in the 20s and 30s. How many people have died from marijuana?” Michael summed up his case by asking rhetorically:

How many people have died from alcohol? All I know is that if that I want to ingest peyote and be one with the spirit, how is that different than me at Communion?

Student #1: I think there is a slight difference between wine and opioids.

Student #2: There’s 80,000 alcohol deaths versus almost zero for marijuana.

Michael: Have we become so addicted to dogma that we forgot doctrine? Are we going to be like the Puritans and be intolerant?

Student #1: When our founding fathers founded our country they were looking at the ideas of the Enlightenment and not Judeo-Christians.

Michael: Our founding fathers drank a lot of rum and a lot of beer. We look at it through a prism from European history. We have a problem with dropping peyote, or opioids, or ganja. We have a problem with that.

Student #2: Our age is becoming more accepting.

Michael: You guys are becoming more tolerant. I’ll give you that. My generation was extremely intolerant. And my parents’ generation was more intolerant. I goof with you all the time about Colorado marijuana laws. We look at it from that prism and that prism is Eurocentric.

Student #2: Canada legalized it today. [Students break out in applause]

Student #1: The Canucks still suck. And the healthcare. But they have legal weed.

The debate among Michael and the two students over the role of drugs in relation to religious ritual relates to Levinson’s notion of whether religious arguments can be allowed in public political discourse. Once again, Kant’s Enlightenment notion of religious freedom is important to keep in mind. Kant notes in his seminal *What is Enlightenment?*:

Thus it would be very unfortunate if an officer on duty and under orders from his superiors should want to criticize the appropriateness or utility of his orders. He must obey. But as a scholar he could not rightfully be prevented from taking notice of the mistakes in the military service and from submitting his views to his public for its judgement.

For the first student, who sees America as first a country based on the values of the Enlightenment, laws are most important. If a country wishes to ban the use of peyote, or marijuana, or communion wine, then so be it. However, Michael and the second student see religion not just about beliefs but also about practice and ritual. The very idea of religion as a ‘phenomenon’ that is rooted in belief strips religion of its link to its cultural, social, historical roots. Particularly in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Christianity, belief is more important than praxis, in which orthodoxy, or proper beliefs, supplants orthopraxy, or proper worship. For Michael, the ritual is the essence of religion, and Catholicism without the consumption of the bread and the wine is no religion at all.

The discussion amongst Michael and his students also connects (and in some ways mirrors, albeit less polemically) a rather recent well-known debate between Russell McCutcheon and Robert Orsi. These two prominent scholars argued over the proper role of intellectuals who study religions. McCutcheon claims that scholars have an obligation to act as cultural critics, to promote that which is good, but also to condemn that which is bad. Orsi, channeling the religious sympathies of Michael and Student #2 (and it might also be worth noting that both Orsi and Michael were raised as pre-Vatican II Catholics) condemned McCutcheon, claiming that ultimately, scholars of religion really have no “normative epistemology, theoretical acuity, and

political knowingness” by which they might assert “the authority and the right to make the lives of others the objects of his or her scrutiny” (McCutcheon, 2006, p. 721). Who, really, Orsi argued, was McCutcheon to judge “ a devout working class man who kneels to pray at his wife’s grave ... an Orthodox family preparing for high holy days, a Mexican migrant imploring Guadalupe for a healing, a pilgrim to the shrine of the imprint of Krishna’s foot”? (ibid., p. 722).

In his retort, McCutcheon, who would get along swimmingly with Student #1, notes that Orsi, has set up a sort of strawman image of the religious faithful. They are, in McCutcheon’s reckoning, an example of the “‘no cost Other’ – those whose toleration requires little or no investment on our part” (ibid., p. 733). Far more challenging is studying those for whom religion is used to justify violence, be it Jim Jones at Jonestown, Guyana, or the September 11th hijackers, who promote, in the words of McCutcheon’s colleague Merinda Simmons, a “counter-narrative” that is “violent or oppressive” (Simmons, 2013, p. 373). While it might be easy to label this “destructive” form of religion as not embodying “true” religion, such a rhetorical strategy simply sidesteps the question. For McCutcheon, religion can ultimately be a force both for peace and for violence, and normative claims about religion are not only acceptable, but obligatory for scholars of religion.

The two men fired from their jobs for peyote consumption in *Employment Division v. Smith* walk the line between the “no cost Other” and the other that represents violence and oppression. Michael, in comparing the men in the court case to those who drink sacramental wine as part of the Catholic communion ritual, attempts to bring their strangeness into a sense of familiarity for his students. Student #1, emphasizing their deviance, saw their peyote consumption as a gateway to heroin and crack cocaine, and all the assorted covariates of the 1980s “War on Drugs.” Michael and his student have fundamentally ‘read’ “peyote” differently.

For Michael, the praxis is still in the realm of religious ritual, and has not entered the public square as his student fears.

CHAPTER 5 – THE STRUCTURES OF SCHOOL - What does it mean to be a teacher in a particular school setting?

Beyond the macro societal superstructures, the more micro structures of the school environment shape the way that teachers approach the social studies curriculum, and the study of religion is no exception. The structure of schools are such that students, parents, other teachers, administrators, and an overarching school board and board of directors, can each, in their own ways, shape what a teacher teaches about religion in the social studies classroom. In fact, the social milieu of a particular school allows teachers to explore what it means to be a teacher in a unique school setting. It might be first worth describing the ways that each of these schools are structured, and then thinking more deeply about the various ways that the school administration can or cannot impact what goes on in the classroom.

The role of the board of trustees and principal at Kaaba Academy

Kaaba Academy is an independent Islamic school, run by a board of trustees that consists of community members, including parents of current and former students. Though it is part of a regional consortium of Islamic schools, and while this regional body has a charter from the state's board of education, this consortium does not exist as an overseer in the way that a local board of education might. Instead, the association sees itself more as a forum for Islamic schools to meet and discuss with one another, and to have strength in numbers when advocating to the state board of education. Legally, financially, and organizationally, the schools are separate from one another. That said, the regional consortium does see itself as providing legitimacy and status to its member institutions. The consortium notes on its website that, before the consortium's

existence, Islamic schools were alone among religious and independent schools in not having an umbrella organization with state recognition.

From my interviews and observations, the real power at Kaaba Academy lies with the board of directors of the school, along with the principal. The principal was the gatekeeper for my project, and she seemed to be the main driver of larger projects at the school. The board and principal of Kaaba appeared concerned about its image as a high-achieving school and thus has sought out accreditation by both the state board of education and the regional accrediting body. Likewise, they encouraged the students to take PSAT, SAT, and AP examinations, and the school also hosts a chapter of the National Honor Society. This decision to take these exams has a large impact on curricular and instructional choices, and seemed to be driven by a desire to be perceived as “high-achieving” in the eyes of white, middle-class America. While the school has connections to a local mosque, the school is not overseen by the mosque; it is legally independent. Other Islamic schools in the region, however, are more closely connected to the local mosques, either in sharing the same building space or having the same board of trustees.

Ali believed that the overall ethos of the school comes from the board that runs Kaaba and noted that “all the board members are doctors ... [who] were brought up in Pakistan.” In some ways, there are then two cultural systems at work. The first is the “religious convictions,” whereby parents are sending their children to an Islamic school for them “to learn Islam and to learn Arabic because they can get secular education in a public school.” Ali even suggested that the education is not “any better at Kaaba Academy” as they can “get social studies, English, math, science classes in a public school.” Instead, he argues that “the reason why they are coming here is the Arabic and the Islamic environment and the Islam classes.”

However, while the teaching of Islam is important, he also felt that desi cultural values privileged certain occupations, particularly medicine and engineering. This, for Ali, translated to a certain privileging of STEM subjects in the school. While arguing that he was able to carve out a space for the social studies curriculum, he felt that his courses were not necessarily seen to be as important as the STEM courses. Ali feels that he is pushing against this structure when he first encounters students in the eighth grade. He notes that

The general sense is that history is boring and it's dry and it doesn't have value. There isn't a career. You aren't going to make a lot of money off of it. You aren't going to become doctors or engineers. So, it's not, even in the school, there is not a lot of emphasis on it.

Operating in opposition to that presupposition, Ali makes sure that “when students walk into my class they get a very different experience.” Ali has gotten

a lot of comments on, my students spoke to me about it and my colleagues and my principal even tells me about a student that came to class, and they thought it would be a boring class, but they actually turn around and they love history and they look forward to my classes. And I've had students come back to me after they've graduated and they say they are doing a minor in history all because of you.

While Ali felt that the administration of the school did not necessarily place social studies at the front and center of the curriculum, my interactions with the principal suggested that this might have been an intentional leadership strategy on her part. The fact that she directed me first to Ali when I was looking for a teacher to interview and observe suggests that she values what he is doing in the classroom, and sees him as an exemplar of good social studies praxis. During one

of my visits, when she passed us in the hallway, Ali asked me to “tell her what a good job I am doing.” The principal replied that she “already knew.” Even though it was clear from my conversations that Ali does not get formally observed by his principal, it is also apparent that she recognizes and values the contributions he makes to the school, even if it might occasionally get students or parents upset. The entire second floor of Kaaba Academy, where the high school is, is covered with posters, flags, timelines, and other social studies charts, all acquired and curated by Ali. There are posters relating to Islam but also other topics relating to social studies and the study of world religions. While Ali self-identified as an outsider at his school, he was still empowered to teach authentically about both religions and social studies. Even though he identifies as an outsider, the new perspectives and alternative viewpoints he brings into class seem highly tolerated, if not outright encouraged by the principal.

It is also worth noting that apart from her work as an administrator, the principal of Kaaba Academy serves as the school’s biology teacher, and given economies of scale, is stretched further in her duties. That said, despite Ali’s characterization of the role of the administration as rather hands-off when it came to his curriculum, when thinking of social studies in a broader social sense, it was clear that the principal was very supportive. Ali recalled that every year, he takes his students on trips to the movies, to museums in New York City, and even to the 9/11 memorial, all of which seem to serve a purpose of acculturation to American values. Kaaba Academy not only had a drama class but also put on school plays on a regular basis. In his estimation, the

principal is very liberal, very outgoing. She was telling me the other day to take them to a Broadway play. And I would. I would love to take them to a Broadway play. See something that is affordable and something that is appropriate. Not un-Islamic.

When I asked Ali to explore what plays might present an issue, he noted that “if we were to go see *Wicked*, I don’t think we’d have a problem. Even though it has to do with sorcery and witchcraft. Though I don’t think she’s the type of person that would have a question or raise an eyebrow. She’s like, ‘go ahead.’” Recent research has suggested that the impact of live theater cannot be underestimated, as not only does it lead to increased student content knowledge but also overall gains in their levels of tolerance towards people who are different from themselves (Green, Erickson, Watson & Beck, 2018).

While the question of whether or not *Wicked* is blasphemous might seem trivial to an outsider, these are questions that religious schools deal with on a continual and recurring basis. During my own tenure as the principal of a K to 8 Catholic school, I had to decide whether or not having an afterschool Pokémon card game club would be acceptable and in accordance with Catholic doctrine. While I initially approved the idea after a few parents came to me with the proposal, thinking that really any club that promoted social interaction among students would be a good thing, a staff member asked me if it would be promoting ‘witchcraft.’ The parish priest was away on vacation for a few weeks, so I was left to my own devices and judgment to conduct an investigation and make a decision. I did some research into the history of Pokémon, and while it was clear that there was some connection with Japanese animism,²² this connection did not feature prominently in the history of Pokémon. Though Pokémon’s game structure was clearly based on Magic: The Gathering (and I probably would have gotten far more pushback if I had allowed a Magic club), it thankfully did not figure into the Pokémon Wikipedia page. Instead, I was able to rely on a nearly two-decade-old article from the New York Post which claimed the

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jul/12/pokemon-go-addictive-game-shares-much-with-religious-devotion>

Vatican had given its blessing to the original Pokémon movie.²³ A print-out of the article in hand, the staff member was satisfied with the apparent papal blessing, and the Pokémon club proceeded without issue, meeting in conjunction with the previously established Lego club.

At Kaaba Academy the question of what is properly Islamic came up with Ali's annual trips to the local cinema. According to Ali, in some of the parents' minds, 'movie theaters' are places of ill-repute. However, Ali's principal defended the idea, suggesting that "if you are living in America, you have to embrace the culture." In fact, Ali remarked, the movie trip was her idea. Ali had been out of school for a few days, and the principal heard him talking about the film *Victoria and Abdul* before he left. When he returned from his absence, the principal told him that she wanted him to take the students "to see this movie [*Victoria and Abdul*]. And I was like 'are you serious?' I'm like, 'oh that's wonderful.' She booked a theater in advance ... hired a bus ... and then the manager there [at the theater] accommodated us." Seemingly much on her own initiative, the principal took an aspect of Ali's curriculum and made sure it happened. In fact, despite Ali's claim that he feels social studies is somewhat marginalized, it seems that many of the experiential learning activities that the school undertakes have a direct and active support of the principal.

For the most part, Ali was glad to be teaching in an Islamic school. He shared an anecdote of how once, when teaching about absolute monarchs, he "mentioned some scandalous piece of news about Louis XIV and what he was doing with his mistresses and all, and in public school you'd probably get in trouble for that." Ali surmised that this probably would not fly in the public schools, and that was a shame because "my students get a kick out of it. They love it." Ali commented on his own relative freedom of expression at Kaaba Academy out loud to the students during a lesson on the Scopes monkey trial, in which John Scopes was fined for

²³ <https://nypost.com/2000/04/21/pokemon-earns-papal-blessing/>

teaching about evolution in the public schools of 1920s America. In class, Ali thought aloud, “I can’t think of anything I can’t teach here. I definitely share with you more than I would in a public school.”

While Ali may have felt like an outsider from a religious perspective given his own Sufi religious pluralism, his superior social studies content knowledge helped him in teaching social studies in a way that made sense to him. And while Ali had heterodox religious beliefs, he had a certain ethno-cultural in-membership that allowed him to thrive as a teacher. Like many of his students, he could speak Urdu and used this linguistic knowledge to make interreligious and transcultural connections. He knew what films, shows, and social media his students would be interested in, which helped bridge the divide when he encountered any religious differences. Instead of seeing his goal as one of reinforcing the values of the school, he, in many ways, saw his role as one of providing alternative perspectives.

Ultimately, Ali saw the space for teaching his own perspectives and ideas as being carved out from the larger structural values of Kaaba Academy. The Weberian bureaucracy, in his mind, left him mostly to his own devices, and from that, he dug out his own niche. But my own analysis of the situation was a little different; namely, that Ali did not just create space to inject his own ideas, though that was partially true. Rather, the principal actively, though perhaps subtly, helped in the creation of this space. She encouraged Ali with his desire for more experiential learning and eliminated the red tape to allow field trips to New York City and the local movies, as well as numerous events that encouraged transcultural and interreligious dialogue with those in the local community. Much in the same way that she first introduced me to Ali and then stepped back to attend to her own teaching and administrative work, the principal of Kaaba Academy likewise, often behind the scenes, helped him in achieving his goals.

Catholic education and autonomy

Saint Patrick Collegiate, like Kaaba School, is legally independent in that it is not directly overseen by a local parish church or diocese. Instead, Saint Patrick Collegiate, like many Catholic schools in the United States is run by a religious order: in technical canonical terms, a Lay Religious Congregation of Pontifical Right. By “lay,” it means that this religious order consists only of brothers and not of ordained priests, and that it is “pontifical” means that it falls under the direct authority of the Pope, and not under a local diocese or parish. This distinction is an important one, as the recent national headline grabbing case of two married men who taught at different Catholic schools in the state of Indiana illustrates.

In June 2019, one of the men, Joshua Payne-Elliott was fired from the diocesan Cathedral High School, and he is now suing the Archdiocese for discrimination.²⁴ Though the actions of the Archdiocese were loudly condemned in many circles, the move found support in Donald Trump’s Department of Justice, which in late September 2019 filed a “statement of interest” in which the DOJ noted “that the First Amendment protects the right of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Indianapolis to interpret and apply Catholic doctrine.”²⁵ Consequently, the DOJ argued that the “First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects the right of religious institutions and people to decide what their beliefs are.”²⁶ For Donald Trump’s Department of Justice, Cathedral was well within its rights in firing the teacher for entering into a same-sex marriage. This particular development in this unfortunate case demonstrates the ways in which the lines between structure and superstructure can be blurred. Cathedral High School independently asserting its First Amendment Rights is one thing, a letter of support from the

²⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/10/us/gay-teacher-indianapolis-catholic-suit/index.html>

²⁵ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-files-statement-interest-indiana-lawsuit-brought-former-teacher-against>

²⁶ *ibid.*

Department of Justice provides a whole additional level of superstructural support to a structural edict.

Yet the case in Indiana becomes even more illustrative with the fact that the Archbishop of Indianapolis also demanded the firing of Mr. Payne-Elliott's husband who worked at another local Catholic school, the Jesuit-run Brebeuf Preparatory School. However Brebeuf is and has been legally independent since its founding in 1962, and while the school's president, Fr. William Verbryke along with the Board of Trustees noted that they have "enjoyed a collaborative partnership with the Archdiocese," ultimately they "respectfully declined the Archdiocese's insistence and directive that we dismiss a highly capable and qualified teacher due to the teacher being a spouse within a civilly-recognized same-sex marriage."²⁷ This caused the Archbishop, Charles Thompson, to issue a decree in which "the archdiocese no longer recognize[es] the school as Catholic."²⁸ The Archbishop's pronouncements aside, Brebeuf notes that while "the Archdiocese of Indianapolis may choose to no longer attend or participate in the school's masses and formal functions," after "close consultation with [their] canon lawyer" the fact remains that "Brebeuf Jesuit is, and will always be, a Catholic Jesuit school."²⁹ While according to Brebeuf, the Archbishop does not have the ability to determine whether or not the school can call itself Catholic, he can place restrictions on the ability of the Jesuit priests who work at the school from conducting mass. While he has allowed them to conduct the regular "daily 7:45 AM Mass" he "declined to grant his permission for ... various other Masses on campus this year."³⁰ Given his restrictions on the ability of the Jesuits to hold mass, they have "asked the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome to consider and address the issues at

²⁷ <https://brebeuf.org/statement-to-the-brebeuf-jesuit-community/>

²⁸ <https://www.archindy.org/criterion/local/2019/07-12/archbishop.html>

²⁹ <https://brebeuf.org/statement-to-the-brebeuf-jesuit-community/>

³⁰ <https://brebeuf.org/update-from-brebeuf-jesuit-president-fr-bill-verbryke-s-j/>

hand and, hopefully, suspend the effects of the decree during the appeal process.”³¹ In late September 2019, the President of the school noted that Vatican had provided some temporary relief, by “decided to suspend the Archbishop’s decree on an interim basis, pending its final resolution of our appeal.”³² In practical terms, this meant that the Archbishop would permit the “sacramental celebrations of the Eucharist” until the dispute wound its way through Vatican tribunals, a process which could take months, if not years.

While Saint Patrick Collegiate is not a school run by the Jesuits, the order that does run the school has a similar stature within the Church; that is, they ultimately answer directly to the Pope in Rome, and not the local bishop, archbishop, or Cardinal. In many ways, this creates a two-tiered structure of Catholic schools, one answerable more directly to local religious authorities, and the other answerable only to a theocratic sovereign some 5,000 miles away. In fact, Cathedral High School, the diocesan school that ultimately chose to fire the gay teacher that taught at the school blamed the decision, in part, on their status as a diocesan Catholic school. They noted that if they did not accede to the directives of the Archdiocese, the school:

would lose the ability to celebrate the Sacraments as we have in the past 100 years with our students and community. Additionally, we would lose the privilege of reserving the Blessed Sacrament in our chapel’s tabernacle, we could no longer refer to Cathedral as a Catholic school, our diocesan priests would no longer be permitted to serve on our Board of Directors, and we would lose our affiliation with The Brothers of Holy Cross.

Furthermore, Cathedral would lose its 501(c)(3) status thus rendering Cathedral unable to operate as a nonprofit school.³³

³¹ *ibid.*

³² <https://brebeuf.org/update-from-brebeuf-jesuit-president-fr-bill-verbryke-s-j-2/>

³³ <https://www.gocathedral.com/about/news-marketing/school-news/news-post/~board/homepagenews/post/dear-cathedral-family>

Though not a taxation lawyer, having worked at a private Catholic school for a time, the claim about losing their 501(c)(3) status seems dubious. However, the other claims are completely true. An archbishop, if he wished, could forbid masses from being held on campus, and forbid his priests from having any involvement with the school. In the Weberian sense, the diocesan priests are functionaries of the archbishop, unlike the Jesuits who enjoy a wide degree of latitude and autonomy.

When thinking about Saint Patrick Collegiate, it must be thought of as a school like Brebeuf Prep, enjoying a wide degree of latitude and insulation from the whims of the local Catholic community and leadership. That said, ultimately the school is still answerable to the religious congregation that runs the school, and ultimately to the Pope. From my interviews and observations, at Saint Patrick Collegiate, the teachers spoke about teaching religion in the social studies classroom in terms of both freedoms and responsibilities. According to Michael “we have no fear in teaching about anything that’s out in the world ... I’m not worried about any repercussions because I know the mechanics of doing it ... I’m going to teach you what the Catholic Church believes in.” For Michael, the Catholic Church seemed to represent both a way to include ideas he thought were important, but also, at times, a foil for introducing ideas which might be more socially unpopular.

Michael raised the issue of abortion, stating that “if we’re talking about abortion, we’ll talk about abortion. I have no problems with that, none at all... I know a lot of my colleagues in other schools are very much afraid. We’re not. We’re not afraid.” For Michael, this means that it is important for him to “follow it through ... even if I don’t agree with it, I’m going to say ‘This is what the Catholic Church believes in.’” Michael here raises the slippage that occurs between structure and superstructure. Where does local culture end and larger societal values begin?

‘Catholicity’ might mean one thing in one school context, and quite another in another school context. For one Archbishop, discussing the issue of abortion might mean giving balanced voices to different perspectives; for another, it might mean never even acknowledging the ideas of competing perspectives.

A lesson from Brother Thomas demonstrated Michael’s philosophy in action. He taught a class on social Darwinism in the mid-19th century and how Cecil Rhodes and others used both religion and science to justify imperial aims. Contained in the lesson were the views of 19th century social Darwinists who used Christianity to support racism. These social Darwinists did not care about “the surplus population, the extra. They are people who can be done without. The empire is loaded with millions [of them].” He continued, increasing in volume. Remember, he said to the class “This is not Brother Thomas speaking. This is Cecil Rhodes. Be careful. This is not Darwin talking, either. Now I don’t want you going home and telling your parents Brother Thomas is a racist.” Taking the point even further, Br. Thomas exclaimed that Rhodes had perverted the main tenets of Christianity, transforming Jesus’ death on “Golgotha, Skull Mountain, where he saves all humanity from hell and saves us from our sins,” and making it about enslaving those in Africa and India. Their goal was to make imperialism “look proper, look just, and, dare I say, look holy.” “Now,” Br. Thomas concluded, “don’t go home and tell your parents that Jesus Christ was a racist.” Br. Thomas knew ‘the mechanics’ of how to introduce a controversial topic. While he is engaging with ideas that are repugnant, he is making the moral distinction between the views of Cecil Rhodes on one hand, and Jesus and his own on the other. He is making a distinction between a ‘true’ Christianity that correctly interprets the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and a false Christianity that uses them for nefarious purposes.

In reading a draft version of this dissertation, one of my dissertation committee members wondered if Brother Thomas would teach about “Black Lives Matter.” It is one thing, the professor remarked, to condemn the past, but another altogether to critique contemporary society, as well as the modern complicity of religion, and Catholicism in particular, with the nation-state. In the spirit of member checking, I asked this question directly to Brother Thomas and he stated that while he does not teach about “Black Lives Matter” in his world history course, he did not shy away from exploring contemporary controversial issues, either. For example, this year he tried to update “notes in areas of Imperialism to include Brexit and its implications to British possessions, especially in regards to Ireland.” Brother Thomas also highlighted how “with the section on ‘The Arab World, Then and Now,’ it’s a never-ending attempt to keep up,” and that he now includes “an examination of Boko Haram and the kidnapping of young girls in Nigeria.” Finally, Brother Thomas noted, while “there are some issues like Imperialism that I teach in light of Catholic teachings,” he also tried to “‘explore’ and let the kids make up their own minds about most issues.”

Michael had a similar take to Brother Thomas when it came to teaching his 9th graders. “As far as the Frosh, I will hit certain topics as they relate to everyday life. We just completed a Black History Month unit fused into India’s Road to Independence [and explored] the relation to Dr. King and Mohandas Gandhi.” Here, there was more of an unwillingness to explore controversial issues unless it made sense for the curriculum. This appeared to be more of an issue about course objectives than it was an issue of the age of the students, as Michael explained how recently “I have expanded our classroom debates to our [school] morning show. The whole school watched a debate on transgender bathrooms, including the freshman.” By giving this example, Michael was suggesting that his classroom, and by extension the school he teaches at,

are up to date with contemporary social issues and concerns. Unlike the controversies at diocese schools in Indiana, Saint Patrick Collegiate was a school in the 21st century.

While there seemed to be a role, though not an excessive one, for contemporary political issues in Michael's ninth grade world history class, with respect to his senior government class, Michael noted that there, "we discuss ALL Controversial issue[s] in my class." Quite frankly, he added "we need to spice it up with current event issue[s]." He explained, "we have discussed religious sexual abuse of children, transgender bathrooms, abortion/choice as related to women's rights, Black Lives Matter, Me Too [and the] Kavanaugh hearings, undocumented immigrants [as well as the] US Southern Border Wall." As evidence of his willingness to discuss these issues in class, Michael shared a class blog where students wrote position papers on these various topics, proudly sharing that the blog "has had 35,000 hits worldwide." However reiterating a point that was made in his interviews, Michael reminded me that he "enjoy[s] academic freedom as long as the Catholic Church's position is clear." Once again, Michael remarked that "academic freedom is an earned privilege." He continued that he was "not afraid of controversial issues because the [order of religious brothers that runs Saint Patrick Collegiate] have a history of exploring the tough topics." This academic freedom is not something that starts on day one but rather a "new teacher would have to prove mastery of the curriculum first and academic competency before he/she could push the envelope." While he noted that "new teachers are encouraged to experiment," it was also true that "they would need a vote of confidence."

Michael felt that the backing of the administration was a critical piece of his ability to feel confident in his teaching about religions in particular, and controversial issues as a whole. Michael reminisced that very early on in his teaching career "twenty-four years ago ... I had a parent night." During the parent night, Michael spoke positively of "the political acumen of Bill

Clinton, as he circumvents all these charges and stuff going against him, and still be able to go on with the country.” One of the parents complained to the president of the school, who was a religious brother. “He was like, get out, [you have got to be kidding]” and passed it on to “the principal at that point in time.” About a week later Michael had a conversation with the principal, and the principal said, “Brother knows it’s not a big deal,” and that Michael should not worry about the incident any further.

It is worth pointing out that Michael mentioned he was lucky to teach at Saint Patrick’s Collegiate. I have no doubt that, had Michael or Brother Thomas taught at a diocesan high school, they might not be so open about teaching more controversial issues. A diocesan school must answer more directly to the whims and mores of the local Catholic community, unlike the more insulated world of Saint Patrick’s Collegiate. There, parents and the governing religious congregation have power, but the incensed congregant writing a letter of complaint to the local bishop has far, far less.

Michael’s story follows a similar pattern among the teachers that I interviewed for this dissertation. In nearly all the cases where a teacher ran into trouble teaching about a controversial issue, the complaint always was filed by the parent, and because in this case the administrator in charge of the school supported the teacher, it effectively went nowhere. Among the controversial issues that provoked complaints from parents, they usually involved a very limited set of topics, support and/or criticism of the sitting President, teaching about Islam in a positive light, and less commonly, discussing Israel/Palestine or teaching about animistic religious traditions.

Independent Islamic and Catholic schools, ultimately really only answer to the parents that send their children and their boards of trustees. Yet the diocesan school in the illustration from Indiana

is far more vulnerable to being shaped by other voices, be it a vocal group of Catholics in the community or the particular religious and social prerogatives of the Archbishop of Indianapolis.

Public schools and the teaching of religion

The structure of a public school system, while there is some variation from state to state, is more directly connected to notions of American democracy. The school district in which Taft High School is located is a K-12 district, with two high schools, two middle schools, and about a dozen elementary schools. Elm School District is classified as a central school district, which according to state regulations lays out the governing structure. For Elm, this means there is an elected school board consisting of nine members, each of whom serves three year terms. They in turn appoint a superintendent, who chooses assistant superintendents and principals. While superintendents and school boards in ideal situations work well together, oftentimes there can be tension and rancor, particularly if there has been a recent change in the composition of the elected school board.

The study of religion in public schools is influenced by the structure of public education because they themselves operate with a certain orientation toward religion. At Taft High School, according to Dave, “not to be snarky” but here “in a public school ... there is no religion other than, you know, that [the end of year state exam] is the religion.” He continued, suggesting that “there is certainly an ideological bent to what it is we are trying to do. We get mandates from the state.” However, Dave argued, “I think when it comes to religion, there has never been a pressure on me directly to have to teach and toe the line one hundred percent of the time. Which I think is good. It leaves a lot of grey area.” However, with that freedom to teach as he pleases around the topic of religion, Dave felt that there was a certain “responsibility” to “make them aware that

other religions exist.” While Dave felt that the school administration itself did not have an agenda when it came to religion, he did concede that “occasionally we run into push back from parents” who “don’t want their kids, for whatever reason, to learn about other religions.” Unfortunately, Dave would argue, “they think that any sort of conversation about religions undermines or potentially plants the seeds to undermine their own, which is very tragic.”

Jean Grey felt that parents could push back against content they did not like, not only with respect to the study of religions, and particularly the study of Islam, but also around issues concerning contemporary politics and the election of Donald Trump in particular. That said, Jean felt supported by the administration of the school. She spoke of how the social studies

coordinator is very big on diversity; and last year or a couple of years ago, she had a performer come in ... a one man play, and he was an African American actor and he ... revealed in the end he was married to a white lady. His views on race and how your views could be skewed by your own bias. He had to overcome his bias because he fell in love with the woman who was Caucasian and you really had an impact on the kids.

Jean shared that story as a way of suggesting that not only did she feel supported by her coordinator on diverse issues around race, but also a host of other topics as well. Jean noted that while the anecdote did not specifically engage with notions of religion, just that sense of openness and tolerance on the part of the coordinator came out very vividly in the choice of the play. For Jean, it was a window into the way her coordinator approached life and what values the coordinator held. Jean continued by noting that the coordinator also afforded the teachers other opportunities, including a summer reading book that dealt with race and ethnicity and a conference on broadening perspectives in historical thinking at a local library.

Along with her departmental coordinator, Jean felt that “we have really great principals here, both the assistants and the big boss.” Ultimately, Jean felt they had active support from their administration to teach openly and freely about religion, within certain boundaries. She described one lesson where the students spent the class period exploring Confucian aphorisms and then looking at the school district’s “mission statement” and then “we discussed as a group whether or not it could be an example of an aphorism.” Jean knew that the assistant principal enjoyed the lesson because they were “there for the entire lesson and [she] received a very good review.”

Dave echoed Jean’s sentiments, remarking that in the last few years Taft has an “increasing diversity” and the

school district allows us, and certainly our immediate bosses ... not the free reign like [total] free reign, but enough free reign that we are able to sort of do what is necessary, not just to teach the kids what they need to know.

Dave said that this freedom did not just come out of nowhere and was not because of a power vacuum, but rather was an intentional choice on the part of the administration. For Dave, the experience of both him and his colleagues was an important part of the picture. Dave said that “there is enough confidence after twenty years for most of us in our department.” While there were a few in the “single decade range,” Dave pointed out that the average teacher in the social studies department at Taft had at least ten years of experience, and a good percentage of the department was closing in on their twentieth year. That experience comes with a proven

track record as a department ... because we’ve proven ourselves and will continue to do so. We’re not going to slack off; despite all the stereotypes of teachers with tenure and everything else, the majority of teachers are very committed to what we are doing.

In many ways, David leveraged his own strong content knowledge, in order to teach the sort of values and ideals that he thinks are an essential part of the curriculum.

State examinations

Apart from the role that the administration can play, state standardized exams also have a strong structural impact on the way that teachers navigate curriculum. In this study, a natural sub-experiment emerged. During the course of my visits, I learned that both Kaaba Academy and Taft High School took state standardized exams at the end of the school year, while St. Patrick's Collegiate did not have such exams. While students at St. Patrick's did take the exam some years ago, Michael emphasized that you are "very restricted with the [state exams]. You can't do this sort of stuff with them," in describing his classroom that was both student-centered and interactive. Without the exams, Michael noted "we [can] spice it up with current event[s]." In a less guarded moment Michael conceded that the state exams "in social [studies] are a joke."

The answer to the question of why Saint Patrick Collegiate does not participate in the state exams is one that would be rarely stated explicitly, but the simple answer is this: the rich school districts near to Saint Patrick Collegiate believe that a standardized curriculum is beneath them, and thus opt out wherever possible. Of the three schools in this study, Saint Patrick Collegiate is located in the wealthiest region. This means that many local affluent public schools offer neither AP or IB exams, simply offering generic courses because "all the children here are exceptional." Saint Patrick, as a private school, having the ability to opt out of the state exams, chose to do so. After all, the real mark of a high school's "success" is where the students go to college, and Saint Patrick Collegiate is a strong feeder for Jesuit colleges throughout the United States.

The teachers at both Taft and Kaaba lamented the restrictions that these state exams place on their curriculum, but did not share the same sense of Michael that the exams were a cause for laughter. Ali noted that “there’s a cap” to how much depth students can explore a topic since “we have to finish certain materials by June. And they’re going to be responsible for this, this, and this. And you don’t need to know the other stuff. You don’t need to know the details of it.” He noted that fundamentally, whether enforced by the school or one’s own conscience, there is an imperative to:

teach them the basics and move on, because you got to get to the next chapter, because if you don’t get to the next chapter by next week it will be too late, because you won’t get to all of the material by June, and that’s what’s frustrating, because there are certain things that I love talking about, I like, love maybe they can do investigative learning, and really explore and discover on their own. You can’t do that because you have a time limit. That’s what frustrates me.

Compounding the issue for students at Kaaba Academy is the fact that for the past few years, Ramadan has been during May and June due to the fact that its date is set by the lunar calendar. This puts Kaaba Academy students at a distinct disadvantage for both AP exams and the state tests. While state examinations are routinely scheduled so as to not conflict with Judeo-Christian holidays, there has so far been very little accommodation for Muslim students. However, there have been some small conversations nationally around this issue in 2017,^{34,35} with continued conversation in 2018.^{36,37} Given that Ramadan will continue to move back into the peak of AP exam season over the next three years, this issue will only continue to grow.

³⁴ <https://pjmedia.com/faith/2017/06/14/uw-profs-hold-exams-after-sunset-for-muslims-during-ramadan/>

³⁵ <https://www.change.org/p/allow-early-ap-testing-for-muslims-observing-ramadan>

³⁶ http://www.dailyuw.com/news/article_759ee4f0-2336-11e8-ab3c-87857b7ec023.html

Apart from the particular issues that Kaaba Academy faces, Ali's need to teach to the test appeared a number of times during classroom instruction. During one visit to his US History class, he remembered that he "totally forgot about *Schenck v. United States*. That always comes on the state exam." While clearly a significant case, *Schenck* here was relevant only because of its frequent appearance on a state exam, and not because of its obvious value in understanding the first amendment. State exams, it seemed, had impact not only on content but also on pedagogical strategies. Ali noted that "in the near future you won't be copying notes. We need to save time. We have class to cover. Do you know the dates you need for the [final] exam?" Here, Ali was willing to eschew note-taking as a classroom activity because of the demands of state testing. Instead, the main focus was on memorizing the dates that would be tested. A final humorous vignette occurred when the students were doing practice questions from an old state exam (which are often repeated from year to year in very similar form.)

Student: When is this exam from?

Ali: 2008.

Student: I was 7. I was born in 2001. Wait what's this?

Ali: Rust from the paper clip [used to hold the exam together.]

Here, Ali was using the state examination to study, which obviously did not include any material from the last ten years. Yet, Ali and many other teachers have no issue with using these tests. In short, a state exam from ten years ago is still perfectly good for practice.

At the time, I noted that this incident really showed the hegemonic way that state and national exams can impact what teachers decide to teach in the classroom and what material they choose to skip. Though Ali clearly had a passion for teaching about the Ottoman Empire,

³⁷ <https://www.lohud.com/story/news/local/westchester/yonkers/2018/06/25/muslims-seek-yonkers-school-closures-high-holy-days/717985002/>

knowing the content emphases of the standardized state final exam, he realized that beyond students knowing that the empire fell during the 1450s, this historical content would likely not help them score any higher on the state test. “They are looking at the early period and then the contemporary, but they don’t go into the historical development.” I asked him to clarify if it meant basically you learn “the history of Muhammed up to 650 ... and then it kind of jumps ...” and he replied that this was exactly what happened. He remarked that “We need to know how Islam came to be and where it is today. The development of Islam and the spread and conflicts.” Ali lamented that

nobody talks about the caliphates and the Umayyads and the Abbasids to the extent that the social studies textbook allows me to... I have to finish the material to a certain point by June and I can’t be talking about the Umayyads and the Abbasids in detail and talking about achievements. The quarrel between them. And religious wars and conflict between them. I can’t. There’s no time.

Ali was consciously aware that even he was not super fond of the argument he was making, noting that “I’m going to sound obnoxious.” But like Gollum in *The Hobbit*, Ali continued, “I don’t have time. I’m bound by time ... I don’t have time for it” (Tolkien, 1937, p. 78). Ending on a hopeful note, though, Ali remarked that “we need a class for that. That’s a different class. Islamic history. I think we should offer that here.” In our further discussions, Ali began to think that perhaps in future years, such a course might possibly be offered as an elective.

Teachers at Taft High School spoke of being similarly beholden to the state exams for their classes. Dave Jones, in fact, had one very small class with the explicit goal of getting students to pass the mandated state final exam. The only students taking the class were those who had already failed the exam at least twice, and needed to pass it in order to graduate from

high school. I visited this class in early February after the most recent round of state exams. (Exams are given three times a year and students who do not pass in June can retake the exams in August and January.) Because a few of his students had passed the exam in January, they were no longer required to take the course. Dave was very conscious of the fact that the singular goal of this particular class was to get students to pass. He handed me the outline, complete with state standards, during my visit.

His colleague Jean Grey highlighted that “in general .. [they] limit the time I have to teach the entire curriculum in the space of ten months, minus snow days, vacation, and review.” If these exams did not exist, Jean contends that she “would include more material that I personally find interesting or that the kids like, or that I think that they would get a kick out of.” For religion specifically, this meant that she might be able to “show them more about each individual philosophy/belief system/religion, such as documentaries, or perhaps we could all just do more together, such as class activities.” In general, given the content demands impressed upon her by the state exams, Jean is unable to do as many whole-class activities as she would like. While whole-class activities are her personal favorite pedagogical style, “there is never enough time for [them].” She says this is unfortunate, “because when you do group work or even partner work, it degenerates into lots of talking about other stuff and then real quick, ‘let’s get this work done!’”

In recent years, the date for the state final exam has been pushed even earlier, and this year it was the first week in June. This year she was “really feeling the pressure to get as much done as possible and then have more time than ever left to review.” Jean, echoing the words of Ali at Kaaba Academy noted that:

Sometimes there are whole eras that I would love to discuss more but then again, no time,

so let's move on. For example, the UK and the damage done by the English to Scotland and Ireland. Where would I find the time to teach about that? I have five minutes to teach about the Irish Potato Famine but that's it. I talk about Northern Ireland and the Catholics and Protestants and the IRA toward the end of the year – and in Global 9 I mention it during our Christianity unit, and it sometimes comes up when we speak about the first amendment - but I would really like to do more. Sometimes it's not just the [state exam's] fault but the fact that I have one year to teach about pretty much everything in Global history from 1750 on.

Teachers who worked in schools with mandatory state examinations felt more pressure than their peers who worked at schools without such exams. The teachers at both Kaaba Academy and Taft High felt a certain pressure to teach to the test, and claimed that their classrooms would be different both pedagogically and content-wise if not for the state examinations.

CHAPTER 6 – TEACHER SUBJECTIVITIES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES - How do the subjectivities and lived experiences of a teacher affect the way they teach about religion as a part of the social studies curriculum?

This chapter explores a number of categories in which teachers' subjectivities and lived experiences as they relate to the teaching of religion as a part of the social studies. The first section concerns their roles as subjects who are interviewed and observed as a part of this doctoral dissertation. I then explore the ways that teachers think of themselves both as "being teachers" on one hand and "on performing the role of teacher" on the other, although the two are not mutually exclusive. Where does identity end and performativity begin? From there I explore both the content and methods used by the teachers in the lessons they chose to show me. As much as possible, agency was an important part of this study. My goal was to listen to what teachers had to say, and to let them tell their stories. If their words fit with philosophical models of how the world is, or ought work, that was fine. But I did not come in with a "treatment" or an "intervention" to fix that which is "broken." Instead, I wanted to hear, to see, to listen, to record, and finally to interpret and report out. Each lesson that I observed tells a story about people and their own lives as both students and educators, as people growing up and living as adults in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. From there, I move to how the subjectivities of the teachers inform their understandings of religion as well as exploring, echoing the anthropological notions of Durkheim, the relationship between religion and culture.

All of these themes emerged from my thematic and axial coding schemes. They were items that appeared in two or more of the teachers' interviews and observations, bubbling to the surface as themes that deserved further commentary and insight. At the outset of the project, I could hardly have foretold that they would be important; at the close of the project it is clear to

me that each, in their own right, could serve as a starting off point for future investigation and research.

Interviewed and observed

Each teacher that took part in this study played the role of the subject through both interviews and observations, just as I played the role of interviewer, observer, and researcher. For some of the teachers, particularly those with the most years in the classroom, and for white males, there was a lack of explicit mention of worry about my role as interviewer and observer. While I did not ask questions around my role as researcher and theirs as subject, this information arose naturally in the course of the study. For them, I was much more of a fly on the wall when I visited their classrooms. Dave, for example, would let me know when he would “like [a] question a lot” and invited me to come in “any time,” while Michael noted, after completing the first set of interviews questions, “that was easy.” Among Dave, Michael, and Br. Thomas, there was much less of a concern of me as an evaluative figure. In their interviews and conversations, I could only find one instance in which there was some marginal concern. When asked why he decided to share the lesson he did with me, Br. Thomas responded “because you asked to come in and observe and I thought that this was one that would be close to what I thought you were looking for. Was it?”

Others, however, expressed more moderate anxiety about the idea of being interviewed and observed. Jean Grey specifically asked me if she was “being helpful” on more than one occasion, indicating the way that the observed often, particularly in the school setting, is hoping to please the observer. This stems from the fact that most observations are either done by supervisors, be they principals or curriculum coordinators, or someone who is there on behalf of

a higher authority. Though my research was of my own accord, in that it was sanctioned by the school administrations as per IRB regulations, it had a certain institutional imprimatur.

Both Taft High School and St. Patrick's Collegiate had a culture of regular observations; Kaaba Academy did not. On account of this, the observed teachers at Kaaba Academy took a bit more time getting accustomed to the idea. Aqsa discussed her general apprehension about going into the classroom and being watched by someone else. She noted how "all of us are bound to make mistakes." She said that "before I go to the class I always" say a prayer to "please make it easy for me." She remarked that she always hopes that God will "make easy whatever I say, so the people will understand what I say." In much the same way, during my initial visits, Ali repeatedly asked about the quality of his instruction, as it had been "many years since [he] was last observed." To some extent, I felt bad about the experience of these interactions. Here was a teacher who was excellent in the classroom and doing great and varied things, but because he was not used to being evaluated in his role as a teacher, it was clear that I was putting undue pressure on him and causing anxiety. Ali noted in his interviews that "what gets me nervous is being observed. Of course. And standing in front of larger crowds. And [a] new audience. New student bodies. That gets me nervous. I think that gets everybody nervous." While Ali perhaps had higher than normal anxiety around observation, it was likely the culture of the school site wherein he had "never really been observed even by the principal" that contributed to this subjective feeling of apprehension. As time went on, however, my observations became more normalized for Ali. Meanwhile as my observations became more regular for him, the students, too, learned that I was writing my dissertation, "a long paper," about their teacher and the school. In some ways, this anxiety of being observed was transferred from the teachers to the students. Though the students were not a direct part of my study, they did not necessarily know this and

felt surveilled. During one of my later visits, Ali joked to the students, and asked, “are you all so well behaved because John’s here? No chatting? No jokes?”

In much the same way, my role as an observer came up twice with other members of the school community during my visits to Kaaba school. During the hajj presentation, which was put on under Aqsa’s direction by the 4th and 11th grade classes, a parent sitting with me in the audience asked if I was “a parent at the school.” When I said I was not, he replied, “oh then you must be a graduate student.” Since nearly all of the families at Kaaba Academy are of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent, I doubt the parent actually thought I had a child at Kaaba Academy, but so as not to stereotype, he went with the assumption that I might. Having put to rest the possibility that I was a parent, his next guess was a graduate student, engaging in ‘research.’ This question of my observation and research also came up with a student in a sixth grade classroom that I visited:

Student: Are you the Board of Ed[ucation]?

John: Nope.

Student: Are you going to be a new teacher?

John: No, I’m already a teacher.

Student: What are you doing here?

John: Working on my PhD.

Student: What’s that?

John: It’s an advanced degree. I have to write a really long paper.

Student: How long? 100 pages? How small does the writing have to be?

John: Small.

Student: I feel bad for you.

Other student: Me too.

John: Thanks.

In this short conversation, it was clear to the student that both he and his teacher were being observed, as I, a stranger, was sitting in the back of his classroom with pen and paper in hand. However, the student did not immediately know what my observations meant. Was I Ali's supervisor or his subordinate? Having ruled out those two possibilities, the student was unclear as to what purpose my observation would serve. Naturally inquisitive, the student explored what it meant for me to be "working on a PhD" only to conclude that it probably was not a fun experience.

Teachers in the school setting are subjectivized, are made into subjects in a variety of ways. In this study, this occurred with respect to religion, but it also occurs regarding their gender, their race, their ethnicity, their broader cultural background, and the way that they view themselves as insiders or outsiders in that particular school environment. There is, consequently, a certain privileging of dominant modes. In a Foucauldian sense, they experience both discipline and punishment for transgression against established rules and regulations (Foucault, 1977), and the observers in the institutional panopticon have an important role to play in enforcing the hegemonic power structures.

In 21st century American education, there is long tradition of 'research' being designed to 'fix' or 'solve' the 'problems' in contemporary education. This follows a Marxist notion of seeing the superstructure as tasked with reorganizing and reordering the structure, and a Weberian notion that the bureaucratic system helps comport workers for the productivity and betterment of the overall capitalist system. The superstructure feeds the structure, which reinforces the superstructure. Yet, I have long been wary of the role of research to solve the

challenges faced by education. In fact, it has become clear to me that the research is often more about the researcher than anyone else. Likewise, the subjective practices that the teachers in this study engaged in are not ones that can easily be taught or disseminated; they are learned over years, perhaps even decades, through life experiences that extend far outside the classroom.

On being a teacher and performing the role of teacher

Overall, the teachers interviewed for this study felt their roles as teachers formed an important part of their own identity. Michael, for example, had pictures of former students and student-athletes hung up on the wall of his classroom. He noted that “I identify as a teacher, I was a coach. I retired from coaching. But I identify with them, and yes, I’m there with them.” He noted that former students come back and visit “all the time,” particularly around Christmas breaks when they are home from college. Michael was especially proud of and made note to point out a picture of himself with a group of Muslim students who had attended St. Pat’s. For Michael, the picture demonstrated his teaching philosophy at its core, and the mission of St. Patrick’s Collegiate. According to Michael, “teaching is personality” and “it’s your personality of who you are.” Michael said he “learned that a long, long, long time ago,” and beyond any content knowledge or pedagogical strategies, all those “academic pieces,” it is the relationships that you build with students that are most important. For Michael, being a good teacher is not just knowing your subject, but rather “your experiences outside this school are important in the classroom cause you to develop a personality.” Finally, Michael felt that it was important to note that one’s teaching personality is context specific, and that while his “three sections of freshmen are fun to teach,” one “can’t speak to them the same way as I do to my AP Government kids.” There are developmental differences between freshmen and seniors, and how they relate to

teachers, their peers, and the world at large.

Along with one's teaching identity being rooted in specific contexts, Brother Thomas, who had the most teaching experience of those that took part in the study, noted that while he has always "probably [taught] the way my mother would want me to teach," his style has changed significantly over the last thirty-six years. His identity as a teacher, and what it means to be a good teacher has changed over time. He noted that he had "mellowed over the years" and that earlier on in his career "I [would] get right in the kid's face if someone [gave] me any bit of lip." But over the years, Br. Thomas has felt that the way society views teachers and their role has shifted, and while "you have to be tough with them ... at the same time, there's somewhere along the way you got to loosen up."

The other teachers also saw their identity as teachers as core components of who they are. Dave remarked that he could not see himself "in any other role" and that he most certainly is "not a cubicle" kind of person. The social aspect of teaching is very appealing for him, particularly the "interacting with people" part. For Dave, this is as essential as the intellectual piece, of which he sees thinking and reading as critical virtues. Dave did lament that while this "idea of knowledge being housed" for posterity is an important part of the profession, it is prioritized "not as much as perhaps" it should be, but overall "enough of us ... see its value." Jean Grey noted that being a teacher at its core means that "you never stop learning" whether through reading "books about history or watching documentaries." Jean expressed a certain teleological view of coming to know and understand the world, with human life being about "always trying to improve [oneself] in general." Ultimately, she said, "I think everybody should always be trying to improve themselves ... no matter what it is."

Both Jean and Ali shared stories of how they felt their teacher identities came out in their daily lives. Jean noted how sometimes she'll be at "the supermarket and things like that and then ... I think to myself 'That's the teacher in you coming out.'" When I asked her to clarify what she meant, Jean noted that "the loud voice comes out sometimes [and] I'm like, 'hey, your cart is going to bang into mine.'" In this instance, Jean sees that teaching is about taking a leadership role, from being able to stand and talk in front of a group of other adults to "chaperoning my kid's field trip." She noted that "they always want me to chaperone so I can line them up real well and take charge; even the parents listen." Ultimately "it just becomes part of who you are. I couldn't picture being anything else honestly."

Ali echoed the essential nature of being a teacher to one's identity, however, Ali also very much saw a theatrical quality to the role of being a teacher. He contended that "the best teachers are the ones who can act. And it is all about theater. It's all about acting." Ali, however, did not think of his teacher performance as limited by the 45 minutes of the class period; though Ali engaged in the performance of 'teacher', this role was an all-encompassing social identity. Not only is becoming a teacher, according to Ali, "who I always wanted to be for a very long time," but at a fundamental level, "it's who I am." Sometimes, Ali noted, this comes out even when that is not his plan. He spoke of how his wife will sometimes say, "you are treating me like a student." And I'm like 'how?' And she says 'you don't know and you don't realize it.'" Ali also remarked that sometimes he'll be "having a conversation with my cousins and they want to know something or something is going on in the politics and when I start talking, they'll say that I sound too much like a teacher. 'Stop it'. I guess it's just natural." Ali's cousins were not pleased with Ali's 'teacher voice,' but for him this naturalness of being a teacher, as a core part of one's identity, was a theme that came up again and again.

Ali noted that many of these techniques for how he talks about the content in his social studies classroom came from his own teachers in the public school system here in the United States. He remembered one English teacher who

would announce quizzes and tests and then we would request him to change the test date and he would imaginarily talk to a god and be like ‘God should I give them a test? And let’s see what she has to say.’ So yeah, certain things you remember. You steal that. I took that from him and I still remember him doing that and I do that with my students.

Ali continued that he remembers when his teachers would deliver jokes, or anecdotes, or ways of thinking that really inspired him and those stay with you. Ultimately, rattling around in your brain, as an actor, almost “you steal the best lines.” Ali made the connection to acting even more concrete by noting that “the best teachers are the ones who can act. And it is all about theater. It’s all about acting. So I like that and I took it and I remember the reaction that I got, that I had when Dr. [Brown] said that, and the same reaction is more so when I say it with my students.” Although Ali was not aware of the writing of bell hooks, he is clearly in alignment with her notion that “teaching is a performative act” whereby there is “space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as the catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom” (hooks, 1994, p.11).

While most of the teachers connected their teaching to their identity, Stephen, who I was able to interview but not ultimately observe took a step back and said that while teaching is an important part of who he is, it does not necessarily define him. He noted that “I am who I am no matter what I do.” Stephen felt that this is how he approached identity throughout his life. He noted how “even when I was young, it was never about how I was a football player or I was a basketball player. I was Stephen to my family. I was Steve to my friends. And that’s it.” For

Stephen, who had a prior career in business before becoming a teacher, he saw teaching as something he was proud of but not necessarily an essential part of his identity.

The choice of lesson topics

Subjectivities also came into play as the teachers chose what lessons they would have me visit. From a general perspective, the teachers taught to their relative strengths, either from cultural knowledge or their own academic study. Yet, it is not simply a case of the teachers teaching what they know. Rather, what they know and therefore what they teach, is deeply shaped by their own social and cultural upbringings. Our life experiences shape what we know, and unless we encounter other cultures, religions, et cetera in some real way, it is unlikely that we will know them at anything more than a surface level.

Aqsa chose lessons on Islam, having earned a master's degree in Islamic Studies and grown up in a predominantly Muslim world in Indonesia, while Ali taught about Hinduism and Buddhism, reflecting his own desi (i.e., the shared heritage of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh) cultural upbringing. When I asked why he knew so much about Hinduism, Ali remarked that:

We grew up with that and we also grew up with watching Bollywood movies and a lot of that has the Indian influence and the Hindu faith and the worshipping of the various gods and goddesses. You said 'you know so much about them'. You knew the names. That's because you grew up with. Though we don't follow those gods we knew about them.

Ali was not a Hindu, yet he lived in a world where Hinduism was culturally present. His knowledge was unavoidable because it was present in the very superstructure of society.

Like Ali, Jean Grey naturally fell back on her cultural strengths, showing lessons on Judaism and Christianity in her first two visits. She similarly expressed the sense that one's cultural upbringing influences what one knows. She remarked that

it's a little easier I guess to teach about Christianity. And maybe Judaism? The Old Testament and the New Testament. You have to, I personally, speaking only for myself, you have to research sometimes more on Hinduism and Buddhism and Islam and Taoism and all the different beliefs.

Dave Jones presented a lesson on the way that atheism and the Enlightenment both attacked traditional ideas about religion, reflecting his own interest in philosophies, as well as an engaging and deeply nuanced lesson on the Christianization of Africa, echoing his training and work in African history. In fact, one story he told in his lesson on Christianity in Africa, no doubt specifically came from his extensive doctoral work. He explored the concept of baptism with salt (Sweet, 2003, pp. 195-197) with his students; namely, that Catholic missionaries, to accommodate pre-existing local rituals into the Christian faith, used salt for the ritual of baptism. This particular act of religious syncretism was a new concept to me despite my training in theology, and far from finding any reference to it in state standards or even Wikipedia, it was clear he was sharing a very specific story from a book he had read as part of his doctoral studies. In this way, he brought to the table a perspective that transcended the state curriculum. Likewise his innate interest in Africa was connected to his own studies and also his learning to speak Portuguese and his travels to various Lusophone countries.

At St. Patrick's, Brother Thomas showed me a lesson involving Christianity but in a way that highlighted his own experience in critiquing the faith when he saw it erred. Michael was not as interested in showing me what he was teaching but rather how he was teaching. Apart from

this instance, the pedagogical style of most of the lessons I observed was still relatively traditional, falling either into the category of lecture or lecture interspersed with Socratic seminar.

Thinking about a student-centered curriculum at Saint Patrick Collegiate

While given the option, most teachers showed me lessons that fit into a more traditional pedagogical mold, Michael showed me lessons that were for the most part, student-centered. After a brief Socratic seminar with his students outlining the main points of similarity and difference between Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism, he had the students co-construct essays using Google Classroom. Although I did not pick up on it in my first interview, Michael came to his classroom with a deep intellectual humility and orientation towards pedagogical experimentation. He did not worry about failure, and for him, this created a relatively unique classroom environment. He noted that, “I’ll do the lesson and if I like it, I’ll keep it.” In this particular lesson, by having students co-construct essays through Google Classroom, there was very much a sense that knowledge was shared, with a certain Freirean orientation. Michael did not purport himself as the expert, but rather stepped aside and let the students explore and reconcile these ideas together. He would give them a question to answer, and then two to three class periods to work together to craft an essay to answer it. Unlike seeing technology as a winner-takes-all tool used for individual evaluation and accountability, in this lesson, technology brought about a real sense of reciprocity. When there was a small issue with the file settings for sharing using Google Classroom, Michael deferred to his students for solving the issue, exclaiming “you guys are better than me at this.” After the issue was resolved, he turned to me and said, “see, they know. Just walk around and see.”

While Michael's content was relatively traditional, the way he approached collaborative group-work through technology was unique among the teachers I observed. I actually found his pedagogical style so interesting that I ended up using it for a graduate course I was teaching the following semester, and have repeated it in the semesters since. The graduate students have taken to the new praxis tremendously, having them collaboratively design both individual lessons and unit plans. Together, we have been able to think in depth as to what it meant to have a truly collaborative and Freirean classroom and still embrace the use of technology. I was able to model from Michael a certain intellectual humility and a stepping aside from the podium, such that my graduate students and I uncover and discover together.

Having taught Freire to my students before, struggling to put his words into action, I found Michael's class to truly be a breath of fresh air. Michael, too, clearly saw his own praxis evolving. From the spring to fall of 2018, when I returned to Michael's classroom for one final visit, he noted that he "changed things up a little since last time," and now he uses "Google classroom all the time; it puts the ownership on them." Suggesting that he was still thinking about this evolution as a continual and recurring process, Michael asked me if I had "ever heard of Khan's Academy? I just learned about it last week and the videos are great." From Michael, perhaps most of all the teachers I interviewed and observed, and this was most surprising, I learned that teaching and learning in a changing world is reciprocal; I learned from Michael and Michael learned from me.

Religion, education and experience at Kaaba Academy

Michael's embrace of a progressive pedagogical praxis highlighted a true sense of reciprocity, instead of the older, more traditional model of thinking of education as one of

banking, from knowledgeable teacher to unlearned student. There was also at Kaaba Academy an emphasis on experiential learning, with respect to social studies in general, and religions in particular. Though it is a small school with only one class per grade, Kaaba had an active Model UN club, and both Aqsa and Ali had me attend experiential events relating to the teaching of religion. The first, organized by Aqsa was a reenactment of hajj, in which the 4th and 11th graders jointly presented to an audience of mostly parents as well as other invited guests.³⁸ Aqsa noted, in introducing the event that “hajj is the ultimate form of worship” and that “one day, God willing, the students will be able to go on hajj.” Her hope, ultimately, is that the reenactment would in a small way “plant the seeds” for the real thing one day.

Not only does hajj play a part of her experiential curriculum in the reenactment, but Aqsa plans the curriculum for her Islamic studies classes with the Islamic calendar in mind. During Dhu al-Hijjah, the month during which hajj traditionally takes place, Aqsa focuses her teaching on that pillar of the Islamic faith, and during the month of Ramadan focuses her teachings on the holiday. In this manner, Aqsa disrupts the Christian calendar that forms the basis for the vast majority of schools in the United States, including Kaaba Academy. After all, “the enumeration of time through calendars—Gregorian or any other—is never neutral; it is ideological and political in nature, organizing time and activities in particular ways as they advance some at the expense of others” (Burke & Segall, 2011, p. 10). Aqsa, in a small way, by organizing her curriculum around the traditions, events, and holidays of Islam, is subverting the dominant modes in American culture. She is taking the Western Christian superstructure, and through her

³⁸The presentation I observed reminded me in some ways of a Catholic school’s Christmas pageant, but here the 4th graders pretended to be pilgrims on hajj, bedecked in the white clothing that symbolizes being in a state of ihram. Over the next thirty or so minutes they went through all of the hajj rituals while the 11th graders narrated, from circling the Kaaba during the ritual of Tawad, to walking between the two hills of Safa and Marwah, to making a pilgrimage to Arafat. Even the sacrifice of the cardboard lamb complete with cardboard knife toward the end of hajj was pretty adorable in my humble opinion.

own teaching, attempting to create a counter-narrative, a different way of thinking about the passage of time, over the course of a month, or a year. Instead of thinking about a school year starting in September, and it getting cold in December and then a new year, followed by spring, the end of the school year in summer, Aqsa would like her students to think more in Islamic terms.

That means they should learn the notion of sacrifice and self-denial during the month of Ramadan, particularly when it is during the summer: advocate for a spirit of non-violence and peace during Dhu al-Qadah and learn about the rituals of hajj during Dhu al-Hijah. There is a certain Deweyan quality to the unity of book learning and experience learning. It is one thing to understand the practices associated with Ramadan and the daily fast without food or drink from sun-up to sundown for an entire month; it is at another level of experience to actually take part in Ramadan for oneself. In that sense, experience becomes a critical and irreplaceable dimension.

Ali also had me take part in one of the many experiential activities in which Kaaba Academy regularly participates, when he invited me to an inter-faith Seder that he and the 11th and 12th grade students annually attend at a nearby temple. In some ways, Aqsa and Ali worked in complementary ways. Both were concerned about experience in their pedagogical praxis. For Aqsa, she was concerned with their experiences with the Islamic faith; for Ali, he was occupied with their experiences with the larger secular world, and the religious worlds of those of different faiths.

The experience of the Seder was an important learning experience for many in attendance, myself and the students of Kaaba Academy included. The students argued about whether kosher food was also halal, learned that they really liked Manischewitz grape juice, and asked me questions about Christianity. Also in attendance was a group of Catholic and Jewish

students who, as part of a longstanding program in the community, had gone on a trip together to Israel and Palestine, visiting the Temple Mount, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and other significant Judeo-Christian holy sites. As one of the Catholic students noted in a short talk about the trip, “how can you really be Christian or Jew without going to the real place? This was a transformative experience for me.” In general, research has shown that visits abroad increase students’ levels of toleration.³⁹ This is true for the Catholic and Jewish students going to the Holy Land, or for Muslim pilgrims on hajj (Clingingsmith, Khwaja, & Kremer, 2009).

One particularly interesting moment occurred when the rabbis of the congregation asked for any religious leaders to introduce themselves at the front of the room. For the majority of the Christian groups in attendance, this meant a priest or pastor. Yet, Islam does not think of authority in precisely the same way. When the announcement was made, Ali told one student that, seeing how the student was planning to be a Hafiz, someone who has memorized the entirety of the Koran, he should go up to the front of the room and introduce himself. The student was nervous at first and reluctant but eventually acquiesced, introducing himself and reciting a portion of Sura 21. When he returned to his seat, I asked him if he could tell me the general idea behind the passage he chose, and he said he could not, as the meaning was not really the point of the exercise in becoming a Hafiz. In some ways though, this interaction between the student, myself, and others present at the Seder was a learning experience for all involved. Non-Muslims such as myself learned the importance of Koranic memorization and recitation in Islam, and the student learned that others viewed other aspects of religion as important too.

I share this story from the Seder as it demonstrates a few points of difference, which are important as much as points of commonality. First, not all religious communities think of leadership in precisely the same way as Christians do. For Ali, a student studying to be a Hafiz

³⁹ <https://studyabroad.ucmerced.edu/study-abroad-statistics/statistics-study-abroad>

was obviously a religious leader, as he possessed knowledge that others did not. However, a high school student Hafiz-in-training might not fit in with Western definitions of leadership, which is very much thought of in terms of social power, rather than the acquisition of knowledge. A religious leader was someone who had put in the time, earned a Master's degree, and had some grey hairs to prove it; a religious leader was not some smart kid who had memorized the Bible or Quran from cover to cover. The student's response to me that he did not know what the passage meant demonstrated that not all forms of knowledge are valuable in all contexts. To become a Hafiz requires years of study, and in certain Islamic communities is something about which one should be particularly proud. Likewise, in certain Christian communities, memorizing passages or books of the Bible is similarly celebrated. However, from my own experience both in Catholic circles, and secular American education, memorization has been increasingly de-emphasized. Hardly a badge of honor, memorization is often looked down upon. Over the course of the evening, the student Hafiz was asked by a few older congregants of the synagogue if he could share what the passage from Sura 21 meant. This happened on at least three occasions, with the student responding that while he had spent a good deal of time memorizing Sura 21, he had not thought about learning what the text meant. That was not the point of the exercise after all. It became a bit of a running joke, and by the end of the event, he told me that he would definitely make sure to come up with a brief summary for next time.

Thinking more broadly about the theme for this section, in which I explored the types of experiential learning that occurred at Kaaba Academy, I think too of the ways that this dissertation project has been for me an exercise in experiential learning. Particularly at the Islamic school site, there was a much steeper learning curve. There were many more new experiences, and consequently, and since beginning work on this dissertation, I have taken a fair

amount of time to think more critically about notions of Orientalism, and how they may or may not be escapable. At the very least, it is worth commenting that in some ways, the warm welcome I received at Kaaba Academy and my interest in visiting the school in some ways plays into, and in other ways helps to undo the tenets of Orientalism.

Like the imbalance of power between interviewer and interviewed, between observer and observed, there is, as Said so clearly notes, a similar relationship between Occident and Orient. “The relationship between [the two] is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said, 1978, p. 5). Coming into Kaaba Academy, I was an outsider but an outsider with power. I am white, Christian, male, and have a secular Ivy League education. In a certain way this opened up the door for my visit, and in fact securing an Islamic site proved the easiest, both for this project and my prior pilot study. For Ali in particular, there was a sense of wanting to be validated by my work as an observer. On my part, aware of my role in this Orientalist motif, I very much wanted to show that the “terrible reductive conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics like ‘America,’ ‘the West,’ or ‘Islam’ and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse,” are, to say the very least, extremely problematic (Said, 1978, p. xxviii).

I hope this discussion of the structure of Kaaba Academy in particular accomplishes what Said hopes is the correct approach; that is, “knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes” as well as “the will to understand for purposes of coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons” (Said, 1978, p. xix). At the same time, there is always the challenge, of thinking about the ‘other’ in relation to the ‘self’. Though I attempted to avoid letting experiences and ideas speak for

themselves, I found myself at times, thinking of Islam in terms of its homological similarities to Christianity, and making it make sense in light of Western, Christian forms of culture.

Religion and culture at Kaaba Academy

From the very first interview question, when the teachers are asked to offer up a definition of religion, their own lived experiences come into play in very clear and distinct ways. Ali began by noting that “obviously this isn’t something people normally [are asked] on a day to day basis.” Over the course of the interviews I conducted, the notion that a question was “good” or “complex” or “difficult” or something the interviewee “hadn’t thought about” was a refrain that I heard on a consistent and recurring basis. Teaching is, for many, an instinctual and habitual profession, and it is not all that often that we peel back the layers of what lies underneath, exploring our own subjectivities and motivations. The interviews, for most of the participants, were a space to think back and really reflect on their own teaching praxis. Ali noted that for his definition of religion,

it’s any kind of belief on a supreme being and submitting to that supreme being. Not necessarily always submitting but adhering to it and following it. Following a certain sect or rituals, customs in accordance to that faith whether it be, I don’t know some cult, or some major monotheistic religion, so that’s really my understanding of it.

Ali, as a Muslim, offers a definition of religion that is clearly very rooted in his own Islamic faith. His answer mirrors the Shahada, the Islamic declaration of faith, and the first pillar of Islam, which begins by noting that “there is no God but god” (Aslan, 2011, p. 43). For Ali, a definition of religion stems from his own positionality as a Muslim and the notion of a supreme being. Compounding this, he specifically uses the word “submitting”, drawing on the Arabic

word for Islam, literally “to submit” (Aslan, 2011, p. 57). Then, though, Ali pauses for a moment, broadening the definition by saying that religion might not simply mean submission to a supreme being, but more broadly “adhering to” or “following” the laws of that supreme being. Ali’s identification with Sufism is coming to the surface, as he is trying to offer a definition of religion that encompasses a variety of faith traditions.

In many of his lessons, Ali tried to point out the commonalities among religions. When discussing the eight noble truths with his students, he assigned them to find a surah or verse of hadith that would “back up all the teachings of Buddha.” He said the assignment should be easy because all of it “can be found in the Koran.” He noted that “I’ve heard scholars say that Buddha may have been one of the prophets. We don’t know, but it is probable. So we don’t know, but it is possible.” In much the same way, Ali identified both Zoroaster and Isa (Jesus) as prophets. When a student asked if they could really be prophets, since they were both worshipped, Ali noted that some rituals in Islam look like worship even though they are not. He noted how “in the Kaaba, there is the sacred stone, and you are supposed to kiss it. If you are not a Muslim, it looks like you are worshipping it.” Besides his Sufi orientation, Ali’s background in a desi cultural upbringing comes out in his use of the word “cults.” Here, rather than in a pejorative sense, he uses it to mean the many individual and localized worship practices that are found particularly, but not exclusively, in Hinduism.

For Ali growing up in Pakistan and Aqsa growing up in Indonesia, religion and culture were interrelated. Ali spoke of his experience with Islam in Pakistan and noted that there particularly it was “a way of life” and “not just a philosophy or certain dogma. It’s a way of life so you grew, you grow into it. You are born into it.” Waxing poetically, Ali noted that being a

Muslim was “from the first experience to your last moment on Earth, everything has to do with Islam.” He continued noting that

You are born into it, really. You say God’s name the moment you wake up until the moment you go to sleep... The first act of a child being born into Islam when they are a baby and when they are actually in a hospital is when the muezzin, the man who calls for prayer, recites the adhan, the calling of the prayer in the baby’s ear. So every child is born that way.

Ali noted that many of his earliest memories involved his Islamic faith, “my father taking me to the masjid, the mosque, every Friday and reading the Koran.”

Of course it is worth noting that Ali’s understanding of Islam is shaped by his own upbringing and his own sense of identity. Other Muslims at Kaaba Academy, or in his local community, or in other parts of the United States might have different visions of Islam and the relationship between one’s Islamic faith and the totality of one’s lived experience. Ali’s perspective is one of only an estimated 1.8 billion Muslims in the world (Aslan, 2011) much in the same way that it would be problematic to represent a Christian, Jew or Hindu as representative of all Christians, Jews or Hindus. Ali’s notion of being a Muslim is mediated by his own role at Kaaba Academy, where he remarked that some of the students questioned if he was “really” a Muslim. Ali’s devout understanding of the faith pushes back against those who might demand a certain orthopraxy to truly be considered among the Muslim faithful. For Ali, it begins from birth, and no amount of heterodox belief could change that. In fact, according to Ali, again drawing on his Sufi inspiration, “we believe that every child in the world is born Muslim. Whether they grew up Hindu, Christian or whatever faith that’s different. So that’s why when older people convert to Islam, we don’t say convert we say revert.”

Although Ali did not directly know of Benedict Anderson and his work *Imagined Communities*, it was clear that he channeled him in a significant way in understanding the relationship between religious and national identity. Ali noted that religion comes first, both historically and, in his mind, ideologically, whereby “everything else comes later. Countries did not ... I don’t ... the nation-state ... there’s not this sense of nationalism and pride and patriotism. That all evolved later on. First you identify as a Muslim.” One of the main points that I took from Ali’s understanding of religion and culture was the notion of overlapping identities. Ali sees himself as an American, but also as a person of Pakistani origin. He also spoke of the desi cultural values that place a premium on education in the STEM field, and the ways that becoming a doctor or an engineer are seen as bringing with them a certain cultural capital. These values are somewhat separate from the religious values of the school, which emphasize the importance of learning about Islamic practice and the Arabic language as a means of being able to learn and memorize the Koran.

That said, because Ali came to the United States when he was in middle school, his own values were shaped not only by desi culture but also the cultural grammar of the American education system. He noted the difference from Pakistan, where “we had class on Islam ... and everybody took that class seriously.” However, “here in public schools, in the United States, that’s not even taught. I think we may have had a Bible club and we weren’t part of that. We made sure we weren’t part of that. Now I think they have MSA, Muslim Student Associations, in colleges and I think even in some public schools too. But that was not the case back ... when I graduated.”

For Ali, and this was inevitably connected to those desi cultural values of which he spoke, there was the important legacy of evaluating British colonial rule. Ali, with the movie

Victoria and Abdul fresh on his mind, as he had recently taken students on a field trip to see it in theaters, noted that he loved talking about monarchs and was “a big monarchist.” He was interested in “the clothing, the fashion, the style, the grandeur of it.” For Ali, analyzing monarchies was “all about theater” as well as the “propaganda” which underlies the entire institution. He was particularly glad his students got to see *Victoria and Abdul* “because it has to do with, it has something to do with their culture.” Ali believed it was

a wonderful film about Victoria and how she cultivates this relationship with her subject Abdul, [who] is Indian and speaks Urdu, and he ends up teaching her Urdu. And he ends up teaching her the Koran, and how she cultivates that relationship with her subject, who is a commoner.

In the film, Victoria’s warmness towards Abdul is rejected by the other members of the royal household, who cannot comprehend her kindness towards

this peasant, this dirty creature; that’s how they see the civilization, they had to be civilized. So that’s what the movie focuses on. How could an Indian commoner rise to the occasion and become such an intimate friend with the head of the British government?

While there was a feel-good message in *Victoria and Abdul*, Ali wanted the students to understand the broader context of British colonialism “in general, particularly British colonialism in Africa, India.” Given his and many of his students’ cultural heritage, “I bring in a lot of information on that that’s not in the textbook. So they get excited. We go into quite a detail.” Culturally relevant pedagogy was clearly important for Ali. *Victoria and Abdul* brought in both students’ ethnic heritage and Indo-Pakistani culture but also the religious heritage of Abdul’s

place as a Muslim who enjoyed a close relationship with Queen Victoria. Ultimately, Ali's goal is teaching nuanced perspectives, and not the "watered-down history." Ali contended that his students needed to know that:

The British saw Indians as beggars. Savages. A society that needs to be Christianized. A society that needs to be civilized. They mistreated them. They oppressed them. There was famine in India during the Victorian age. Millions and millions of Indians were killed as a result. So there's a resentment toward the British Empire that grew into a nation... an outcry to gain independence by 1947. So there's this whole history behind it. So that's what I get into. And of course talking about building that friendship with somebody. They were so divided with class difference. She's royalty and he's the no one from nowhere basically. And he rises on his own merits as Victoria said it in the movie.

At the core, Ali had a strong and deep orientation toward religious tolerance and understanding. He wanted his students to learn about other cultures and other religions, and for others to learn about Islam. Partially, this seemed to be part of his upbringing. Much in the same way that Dave Jones hoped to have his daughters engage in a variety of religious experiences, it seemed too that Ali's own father had much the same concern. Ali noted that "my father was careful with us growing up ... [and] he taught us there was another sect in Islam, Shia-ism and we attended those congregations as well. Not to follow those, just to experience." Likewise, that spirit of openness seemed to rub off on Ali once he reached adolescence. He remembered once in high school doing a project on Christianity his senior year and interviewing a priest. He remarked:

when I was a teenager and I would feel frustrated for whatever reason I would see solitude and I would randomly go into [St. Mary's]... And nobody would be there. And I would just go there and just sit quietly. And I would just try and focus and absorb the aura of being in a church and just knowing that it is sacred regardless of what faith it is. It is a church of God. It is a holy place. A sacred place.

There was a certain mysticism to Ali's world, no doubt influenced by his Sufi religious influences. But I think, too, it was Ali's own experience in American culture, and the prevailing climate in the post-9/11 world, that made him look toward intercultural and interreligious understanding. At least twice to me, Ali mentioned that in America, "Muslims get marginalized for being terrorists. I want our students to not make that same mistake." To Ali, this seemed to be one of the great cultural mistakes of modern America; that is, to equate Islam with terrorism, or even more subtly, but all the more insidiously, to think about Islam in relation to what it had to say about terrorism.

Aqsa was also raised outside the United States, but she came to America only more recently, after graduate school. She spoke of growing up in Indonesia, a country that had Islam as a state religion but also had a large diversity of religious praxis. She noted that in her home region of Indonesia, the "majority are Muslim" and students often attend schools based along religious lines. She noted that she "didn't go to public school" but rather "went to the Islamic private school." In Indonesia, both public and private schools talk about Islam, but not other religions. Aqsa remarked that, in general, Catholics attended Catholic schools. Aqsa also spoke of how during college, she lived with a number of Hindu students, and this experiential learning experience was important for her. She remembered how:

We respect each other ... because they give pork but they don't serve us the pork. They respect us. We respect them for Hindu people because they have a different, completely different religion. Every morning, they worship, they have the statue in front of their house that they worship every morning.

For Aqsa, the Indonesia concept of Pancasila was important in understanding notions of religious tolerance. She noted that in "Indonesia, we have five different religions" and the "government" seeks to protect those "five different religions, five different ways of looking at how God created things." For her, the concept of Pancasila is a bridge between faiths, a "way of being tolerant toward other religions." First introduced in 1945 by Sukarno, father of modern Indonesia, Pancasila sees belief in God, justice and civilization, unity, democracy, and social justice as essential values. Many have argued that this move toward interreligious unity is an essential part of the creation of the Indonesia nation-state (Schindehütte, 2005).

Aqsa sees her own upbringing in the Islamic schools of Indonesia as shaping the way she sees the role of Kaaba Academy. She spoke of one of the challenges of teaching students to be good Muslims in a Western country. For the students of Kaaba Academy, these are "young kids, the youth, growing up in a country that is not Muslim," and at times they are "influenced a little bit, with western values." For many parents this proves to be a culture shock, as growing up, they, themselves "learn[ed] Islam back in their country, it can be Malaysia, Pakistan, no problem." There the Islamic religion was more culturally enforced and promoted, which is hardly the case in the United States.

Here, Aqsa noted, many Muslim parents find it to be a challenge with raising children in an American society that does not necessarily embrace those same values. She noted that parents will "send the kid here ... to be able to learn something about Islam." In some ways, Kaaba

Academy is set apart from the broader culture and the natural tide that comes along “of course living in the western society”—namely, that “some people, might adopt some American ways and values as a part of their culture.” Kaaba Academy gives a balance to “the society, the environment” that deeply causes a young person to be “influenced by western society.”

That said, Aqsa felt that teaching about religion was the same wherever you go because Islam is a religion that embraces universal ideals. For Aqsa, while she comes from Indonesia, “when you teach Islam ... in general, you teach the same way. It doesn’t matter where you teach. The formula is the same. The totality is the same ... the knowledge that you want to share ... is the same.” Though the religious and cultural make-up of Indonesia might be different from Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia, or the United States, the underlying values are the same. The whole point, Aqsa remarked, is “treating people with respect. Respect, not only toward the Muslim, toward others. This is how we create some kind of peace, because the word Islam itself meaning, peace, salaam, salaam, right. When you give salaam, then you are giving peace toward people.” For Aqsa, it certainly seemed that religion was the overarching envelope and that culture played a secondary and supporting role.

Religion and culture in a public school

Dave Jones who identified as a “secular humanist, at best,” similarly defines religions with his subjectivity in mind. He noted that religion is

a philosophical construct of some sort that generally has some sort of deity or an explanation for phenomena beyond just the philosophy. So, I think a religion is a philosophy that ultimately has some sort of conception of a God of some sort or multiple

Gods ... that are ultimately used to explain phenomena in the world. That's what I would say religion is.

Dave is clearly aware of the debate between whether religion is something unique unto itself or part of a broader cultural category. By positing religion as a subset of philosophy he is eschewing a phenomenological understanding of religion and instead taking an anthropological view, in which religion is a subset of philosophy. Religions provide a certain *type* of answer to philosophical questions, but for Dave, philosophical questions are still the primary analytical category. It is also worth noting that despite Dave's view that religions are a subset of philosophy, he still has a particularly Judeo-Christian notion of religion, whereby it is the presence or absence of a deity that is most important. Further, despite Dave's identification as a secular humanist, he still felt there was some value in growing up in a Christian cultural milieu. For him at least, growing up with religion meant that he could understand religion in a way that someone brought up in a completely secular environment might not. Knowing about religions gave him an entry point to the study of religion that someone growing up completely devoid of religious teaching would not have.

Dave also explored his own sense of being a white male as it related to religion and culture. "I'm a white male and I'm 6 foot 3. So I can be very imposing but I'm also born into the middle class ... so that of course comes with a certain privilege as well." However, Dave also suggested that his whiteness and his size came with stigmas that "there is this assumption as a white male that I'm a gun-toting, truck-driving Republican. I am none of the above. I drive a hybrid. "While Dave remarked that of course "plenty of white folks" break this stereotype, he sees it as a part of his job as a teacher to challenge the "long-standing historical phenomenon that structures have been built up to sort of support whiteness and Christianity." For Dave, following

the suggestion of Moore (2007) and Barton (2015), being a self-identified insider at Taft High School meant using his privilege as an insider and his privilege in American society, the privileges of maleness and whiteness (and maybe tallness, too) to get others to rethink their own pre-suppositions about the world. It meant getting students to rethink their stances on immigration, or the virtues of capitalism, or the rightness of the Christian religion.

Jean Grey, who like Dave teaches at the public Taft High School, but identifies as Catholic, offers a definition of religion that is rooted in her Catholic identity, but also her broader goal of spiritual meaning. She noted that

a belief in faith and of a power that is higher than us beyond our scope maybe. It is not something we can see or feel or, you know, beyond our senses, but something that is omnipotent and something that we believe in, with the hope that there is something after this life.

The notion of “something after this life” was a theme that was repeated throughout Jean Grey’s interviews, namely that religions try to provide answers to what lies beyond this world.

Finally it is worth considering more broadly the relationship between, religion and culture in a public school. After all, religions and democratic societies have always kept one another at arms-length. After concluding my research at Taft High School, a small controversy arose when a student at Taft proposed to start a Christian club on campus, an incident that is illustrative of this tension. (In order to preserve the anonymity of the site for the purposes of IRB, I will simply recount the general outline of the disagreement, and will refrain from quoting any of the actual local news articles.) Initially, when the student presented his club idea to the principal, the principal presented an alternative idea, namely that the student could start a “world religions” club instead, one that would be open to all faiths and perspectives. The principal

argued that a world religions club would be more inclusive, and would avoid the pitfall of excluding certain LGBTQ students that might be shunned by various forms of Christianity. The student and his parent found such a proposal unacceptable and brought their request to the superintendent of the school district. After consulting with the school district's attorney, the superintendent reversed course and allowed the club to proceed, noting that the Equal Access Act of 1984 would essentially require it.⁴⁰

The situation at Taft illustrates the tensions that exist between public schools and religions. The principal envisioned his school as one of pluralistic tolerance and saw the study of religions as a benign alternative to a club that engaged in exclusiveness and perhaps proselytization. But of course, that is only one view of the role of public schools vis-à-vis religion. A public school need not emphasize the study of religions at all, and one could imagine many a school where students study world religions in very limited circumstances. And of course, it must be noted that the principal's suggestion of a "world religions" club, came about only because he was faced with a potentially more controversial possibility, namely a Christian club that he feared, at least in his mind, might promote indoctrination and discrimination.

Obviously a Muslim school should have no problem inculcating Islamic beliefs or a Catholic school no problem in promoting Catholic ones. Yet, as the example of Cathedral High School in Indiana illustrates, when a religion's ideological beliefs and actions are too far from the greater social norms, attempting to reopen what Hess (2015) calls "settled issues," they too can face public scorn. For the most part, at private schools, both religious and non-religious alike, there is still the overture of promoting democratic citizenship, at least in the American context.

⁴⁰ <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/4071>

The question of what values ought to be promoted is all the more difficult for a public school. Is the proper stance of public schools toward religion one of silence or one of active promotion? Complicating the case of Taft High School is the fact that clubs, as extracurricular activities, have a voluntaristic aspect to them, and are one of the places where students' ideas and values, in the Freirean sense, are more likely to take center stage. An additional challenge is that public schools answer not only to parents and members of the internal social community, but members of the voting public at large as well as special interest groups. Ultimately, public schools and their "cultures" when related to religion are complex because there is a failure to "acknowledge multiple publics" in the words of Russell McCutcheon (Patton, 2019, p. 27). The teachers and students in a public school, like the citizens of liberal democracy as a whole might believe that there is a shared set of values in their "imagined community" (Anderson, 1984) but, these common principles are fundamentally a myth.

Religion and culture in Catholicism

Stephen, who both teaches at a Catholic school and identifies as a Catholic was most clear in connecting a broader definition of religion to his own experience as a Roman Catholic. He noted that in defining religion,

obviously I would go with a belief system that encourages a belief in a supreme being.

Ok. Whoever or whatever that supreme being is. I was raised a Catholic, so I would say I believe in the one true God of the Catholic faith. I think that would probably be the most simplest way I could think of a religion is that it is a belief system that bases your faith on a supreme being.

For Stephen, defining religion is innately connected to his own experience of having been born and raised as a Catholic. His identity is inexorably connected to his understanding of the conceptual category, and in various ways all religions are evaluated vis-a-vis this subjective stance.

Mary, who teaches at Saint Patrick Collegiate, in some ways took a similar view to Dave Jones, but sees religion as partially being different in the types of questions it asks. She notes that “a religion, I think, is a belief system that people hold to answer three basic questions: Where do we come from as people? How should we live our lives? And what happens to us after we die?” On the other hand, Mary argues, “philosophy is more how you live your life.” While there is a shared anthropological experience in which religions ask about how one should live one’s life, there are additional questions asked by religion that make it a discrete phenomenon. In this way, Mary was channeling some of the same ideas about religion that were held by Jean Grey—namely, that life is “a big story with a big secret that nobody knows where you come from, and nobody knows where you go.”

Like his colleague, Mary, Brother Thomas walked the line between phenomenological and anthropological notions of religion, favoring a ‘both/and’ approach to an ‘either/or’ approach. He noted that, for him, religion is the “yeses and the nos, the dos and the don’ts.” Br. Thomas acknowledges a shared ethical and moral concern for both religions and philosophies, but also added that, in religion alone, and particularly in the Catholic faith, there is the need to “acknowledge that I’m a sinner.” This places Catholicism as something wholly different from simply philosophy.

Just as Ali and Aqsa navigated their own upbringings outside of the United States, the pre-Vatican II Catholic world operated with different fundamental principles than contemporary

American society. Brother Thomas, Michael, and Stephen were all raised as Catholics in this milieu. For Br. Thomas, the shift from the pre-Vatican II era to post-Vatican II was of fundamental importance. He noted that his definition of religion is inexorably linked to that pre-Vatican II world, when religion and culture went hand in hand. For him, religion is

the structure, the organization of faith, and its practice. There is also a societal thing to it. Being from an Irish Catholic background, it was not just part of my faith, but my culture. The parish was everything. Religion provides the structure from which those beliefs are put into practice.

For Br. Thomas it would be hard to divorce Catholicism from his Irish heritage, and he continued to note in his interviews that Irish Catholicism had its own unique paradigms.

Stephen spoke of the numerous Catholic parishes in the small city where he grew up, where an Irish-Catholic parish and school would be 150 feet away from an Italian-Catholic parish and school. Religion, for Stephen, was very much rooted in ethnic identity. While I was familiar with the city in which Stephen grew up in with its urban decay, white flight, and urban renewal, as well as numerous church demolitions, sales, and closures over the last 50 years, the landscape that he described to me felt like a veritable brave new world. He described the parking lot where the German-Irish Catholic school once stood, and the shuttered building that once housed the Italian-Catholic parish and school, the epicenter of a now mostly vanished Italian-American neighborhood. Stephen's 'imagined community' of an Italian-Catholic religious community existed mainly in memories of the past, much in the same way that Robert Orsi describes Italian Harlem in his seminal *The Madonna of 115th Street* (Orsi, 1985). For both Stephen and Orsi, "religion is so completely enmeshed in the structures of culture" (Orsi, 1985, p. xxi).

Where does culture end and religion begin?

Many of the participants of this study often spoke of their own experiences with religion, both growing up and in their everyday lives. Jean Grey, for example, recounted a fond memory of often reading the Bible with her father as a child. But that memory, that experience, instead of being about learning what Jesus did at the Sea of Galilee or what happened after Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, was significant to her because it was a time that she got to spend with her father. In fact, Jean could not really remember what lessons she learned reading the Bible with her father. Does that event represent a religious experience? Likewise, Stephen spoke fondly of both Italian family dinners on Sunday as well as an annual Feast of the Seven fishes dinner every Christmas Eve. These events and memories thereof are concerned with food, culture and family. It is hard, I would argue, to think of the first as purely secular, and the second as purely religious. Instead, when we think of religious subjectivities in the post-Enlightenment world, it becomes difficult to separate out the truly ‘religious’ and see it as distinct from culture. Instead, religion has an inexorable cultural component, but given the competing cultures that exist in the modern world, one that is not omnipresent. Rather, as noted by Gottlieb and Wineburg (2012), post-Enlightenment people often employ epistemic switching between religious and secular modalities, and one singular event can be read both in religious and secular terms.

Language, words and meaning, part I: general considerations

One final notion of subjectivity is in the shared and disparate ways that individual teachers use the same words in different ways over the course of our conversations. For example, both Jean Grey and Dave Jones spoke of a shared post-Vatican II understanding of CCD as a

primary marker of Catholic educational instruction. For them, there was a shared meaning of what CCD meant, a shared social understanding that was not necessarily shared by non-Catholics such as Ali and Aqsa, or even Brother Thomas, Michael, or Stephen, who grew up in a pre-Vatican II world. This sense of thinking of words as signifiers is important, particularly when viewed through the lens of identity. For Ali, the idea of being “Pakistani” is packed with meaning, which came out through my interviews, but was not necessarily shared or even understood by the other participants. In much the same way, for Aqsa, “Canada” serves as a symbol for “the West” while for Brother Thomas and Michael, “New Jersey” represents a suburban life, and the end of childhood nostalgia. In thinking of language as signifiers, the point is that meaning is content-specific and ultimately subjective. It is bound in time and space, and informed by the lived experiences of the participants who use the words. This was true in thinking not only about religious people, places, and events, but also secular ones as well. Throughout this research, I noticed time and again the way that words held deeper meaning beyond simple dictionary definitions or Wikipedia entries, but deep symbolic meanings that were inexorably connected to the lived experiences of those who participated in this study. Further, it is important to parse out what is meant by these signifiers, for their definitions are contextual and subjective, and not universal.

Language, words and meaning, part II: ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’

Besides the general ways that the same words can be used to signify different meanings, the words we use to describe religion can likewise be illustrative in marking one’s subjectivity. Quite consciously, I chose to have this dissertation concern itself with “religions,” a word that while open to a multiplicity of interpretations, has a long and well documented historical

genealogy (Masuzawa, 2005; Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1962). At its core, there is a shared social sense of the phenomenon, though some would also emphasize the private nature of the religious experience. The word “religion” connotes a different, yet related meaning when compared to the word “spirituality,” a term which, in the text of this document I have consciously avoided. While in the Middle Ages, spirituality was seen far more as a synonym for religion, in the post-Enlightenment era, the word “spirituality” has come to define the individual experience with God and religion, separate from a larger communal experiment. Although as of 2019, the exact genealogy does not seem to have been precisely documented, the phrase “spiritual but not religious” appears to be of post-World War II origin.

That said, Ali specifically uses the word “spiritual” in describing his own religious persuasion noting that

as I've grown into an older person I feel that religion is very spiritual. I see myself as this spiritualist person and you have to have your own experience. It is not something that is imposed on you. It is something that you do.

Here, Ali, is demarcating the personal nature of religion. Like with Rudolph Otto, it is something that one just has to experience. Ali, however, referenced “spirituality” a second time, and in this case used his spirituality not only as a description for his own “Sufi” form of Islam, but also as a way of demarcating his own faith from the “more conservative” members of his school community. While the Muslim community at Kaaba Academy had their own set of cultural values, Ali was placing himself in opposition to, or at least, apart from these values. His religion was “spiritual”; it was personal, between him and God and not contingent on what others thought.

David is consciously aware of the “spiritual but not religious” category and specifically notes that he is “not going to give you the typical” answer. For him, such a phrase was “sort of cliché.” Dave’s claim about the cliché-ness of the category ties back to Russell McCutcheon’s (2006) notion of the “no cost Other” (p. 733). In claiming to be spiritual, but not religious, David sees in that pronouncement a certain taking of the good, and leaving the bad behind. Religion becomes problematic and contentious precisely when it enters the public arena. It is actions, and not just beliefs where religion causes the most consternation for, and tension with, civil democracy.

Language, words and meaning, part III: Are religions and the teaching of ‘religions’ controversial?

One last term that is worth considering is the word “controversial.” I remember one moment when I first began my research into religious schools, and particularly after studying an Islamic school site. I had a conversation with a professor about my work, one whom I respected. Though I would characterize this professor broadly as a progressive and a liberal, he surprised me by replying, right off the bat, that “those madrasas are very controversial. Your research should be very interesting.” This comment stuck with me for the past six years, and on its face, I can say with a fair amount of certainty, that it is incorrect. In and of themselves, an Islamic school is no more controversial than a Catholic school, or a Jewish school, and religious schools are no more controversial than their public school counterparts. In fact, when thinking about religion framed in terms of “controversy,” it was clear that controversy almost invariably emerged when religion entered the realm of politics and most importantly, contemporary politics. Looking back on the data I collected, none of the teachers shared a single instance of a real issue

when teaching about the history of religions. The challenges were when religions had a role in the public square. Thinking about the themes explored in this paper one sees a similar trend: 9/11 and the post-9/11 world, Israel and Palestine, the role of public schools to promote/not promote Christianity/other world religions, drug laws, and discrimination against LGBTQ people. All of these issues are concerned with social facets of life, and while there might be a theological component, such theological components only becomes truly relevant when manifested in discrete and concrete actions that effects the actual lives of real people.

CHAPTER 7 – DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

The way in which teachers teach about religions in their social studies classrooms is impacted by a variety of internal and external factors, from the broader social superstructure, to the relationship of the school to state testing mandates, to the organizational structure of the school, to the subjectivities and lived experiences of the individual teacher. Though I posited that teachers' identities as "teachers" are constructed and are not an inherent part of their very being, it was clear from my interviews that the majority of the teachers saw their identities as teachers as an inexorable part of their very being. Nearly all of the participants, each in their own way, spoke of their role as teacher as an essential part of who they were. They all spoke of a desire to authentically present the material they were tasked to teach. In a certain sense, they saw themselves as teachers in a certain school setting, "subjects" tasked with relating information to students in a specific set way. However, their own subjectivities toward religion appeared in a variety of ways, in terms of how they defined religion and what lessons they decided to share with me.

Research in retrospect

Being a participant in a research project requires bravery and the willingness to be exposed and vulnerable. It means generosity of time and of spirit. These teachers were willing to participate because of the same generosity of time and spirit that they give in their work each and every day. They were willing to be interviewed and observed, and it became increasingly apparent that this project is not so much about me but about them. At the same time, it has become clear to me that the effort that they put into this project cannot ever be properly repaid by me. Their time and their words are gifts they gave to me, and I hope in some small way, I can

share these gifts with others. In our society, the benefits of research often lie with the researcher and less often with the researched. In my own future work, I hope to consider if undoing this paradigm is at all possible. In as much as possible, I have aimed to let their voices shine through, such that their thoughts, ideas, and lived experiences might gain a wider audience.

In listening to the stories of Brother Thomas, Michael, and Stephen, all raised as Catholics in the pre-Vatican II era, it became clear that the relationship between religion and culture was quite different than the experiences of Dave, Jean, or myself. Religion was inexorably linked with culture and not something that was separate and apart. While Dave might be able to drive into town and escape church, and could tell his parents he was not going to CCD, for pre-Vatican II Catholics, this was not an option. Instead, religion was an essential part of the cultural fabric, an inexorable part of their world. And one could no more escape Irish or Italian Catholicism than one could avoid breathing in the air around you. In much the same way, Ali in Pakistan and Aqsa in Indonesia described the cultural and religious synthesis of Islam with their national and ethnic cultures. The relationship between religion and culture was not the same for every individual that took part in this study. For some, religion is indelibly linked with culture, and separating the two would be far more difficult.

Some of the most important moments of religious learning over the course of my research occurred when individuals stepped outside their comfort zones and learned about the subjectivities of others. For a variety of reasons, and considering that these schools are located in America in 2019, I had the opportunity to participate in more of these experiential learning events with the students and teachers of Kaaba Academy. When the students accompanied Ali to the interfaith Seder hosted by the local Jewish community, the students stepped outside their comfort zones to learn about Jewish customs, food, and song. In much the same way, members

of the Jewish community engaged in conversations with the students and learned more about the Muslim faith. This was a real experience outside the classroom, a shared meal among a community that transcended the boundaries of the classroom wall.

Besides individual subjectivities, the structures of a school can and do have an impact on the way that the teachers of this study taught about religion. School administration, either through active or passive forms of support can encourage or discourage the teaching of religion. Even for teachers who eschewed notions of “teaching to the test,” end-of-year cumulative state examinations can have a dramatic impact on what is emphasized or omitted from the curriculum. Alterations in the state examinations over the 2017-2019 school years means that historical content before 1750 will no longer be assessed and the mode of assessment will switch from rote memorization to document analysis. Will the lack of emphasis on the part of the curriculum where world religions are often taught mean more freedom for the teachers to explore authentic and creative teaching styles, or will the lack of emphasis mean a future marginalization of the place of religion in the curriculum?

Larger societal structures similarly framed the emphases of the curriculum. We all live in history. Thinking about religions in terms of a post-9/11 world is critical, as is thinking about what religions mean in a world where the melding of religious and state power in a post-truth age has increasingly occurred. Despite the relative personal autonomy, schools can have a certain hegemonic character to them, that individual teachers can either embrace or find ways to subvert. Individual teachers often had to navigate their own subjectivities vis-a-vis the following questions, which given the normative aspects of their particular school settings, were often observed, judged, and examined (Foucault, 1977) by themselves, the administration, and their students:

- 1) What subjectivities does a teacher bring to the classroom?
- 2) What does it mean to be a teacher in a particular school setting?
- 3) Am I an insider or an outsider (particularly with respect to religious identity) at this school and how do I navigate that relationship?
- 4) Do I see my goal as reinforcing the values of the school or providing alternative perspectives?
- 5) What external forces outside the school shape my pedagogy, and how do they shape it?

Using the lens of the school as a site of normative training, one finds that teachers sometimes struggled to claim their own individual voices, especially when it competed with the normalization and hegemony of the school environment. This was decidedly less problematic for ‘insiders’ who had a clearer ideological alignment with the dominant heterodoxy. Both Michael at St. Patrick’s Collegiate and Dave at Taft High School demonstrate how the support of the school administration allowed them a certain freedom in what they were teaching. Early on in his career, Michael faced complaints from parents, ones that the principal judged to “not be a big deal,” giving him the support to engage in more robust discussions. Dave noted how in his school there was a sense that social studies teachers had

certainly from our immediate bosses ... not the free reign like [total] free reign, but enough free reign that we are able to sort of do what is necessary, not just to teach the kids what they need to know.

For those on the outside, there was some struggle between, on one hand, conformity, and thus the erosion of their own individual subjectivities, and on the other, rebellion, which allowed

for potential ostracism by their colleagues and punishment by the administration. That said, teachers who saw themselves as “outsiders” often still felt empowered to teach about religion, particularly if the following factors were in place in their own teaching and the school environment.

First, the “outsider” teacher had, and felt they had a strong disciplinary content knowledge. They knew their content and they knew it well. Second, the “outsider” teacher had a strong understanding for him or herself of why the study of religion was important. The particular reasoning was not important, and responses varied from stopping religious discrimination to thinking about the big questions that life asks; instead, the fact that they could easily explain their rationale for the inclusion of religion in the social studies curriculum was a more critical factor. For example, Ali was very focused on the study of religion as a way to deal with Islamophobia. He noted that he had “seen a lot of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments here in the United States. It hurts me and it hurts my students. I want to make sure they never perpetrate the same prejudices that they are sometimes victim [to].” For Ali, teaching religion is about making sure his students are tolerant people who are respectful towards people of other faiths or are different from them.

While dealing with bigotry was important for Jean Grey, she also uniquely described the importance of religion in helping to look at the big picture. After all, Jean remarked, her ethos here very much rooted in a phenomenology of religion, “we all have one life and we don’t know what happens afterwards and religion tries to put an answer to that great afterwards of what happens after we die.” Ultimately, it tries to answer questions that other disciplines don’t necessarily try to answer. Put another way, Jean shared words she heard once in an interview from the actress Betty White. In the interview, according to Jean, White contended that life is

a big story with a big secret that nobody knows where you come from, and nobody knows where you go. And when you die; when somebody dies you shouldn't feel bad for them. You shouldn't feel sad because now they know the answer to the big secret.

While Ali and Jean's rationales certainly overlap, they point to two separate concerns, one immediate and physical, the other less time-bound and metaphysical.

Along with a strong disciplinary content knowledge and *raison d'être*, the 'outsider' teacher who was willing to dive headlong into teaching about religion had a willingness to tackle controversial issues at large. These teachers often felt comfortable discussing at least one if not all of the following other issues: ethnicity, race, gender, politics. Similarly, the "outsider" teacher felt that they were supported by their administration. This support could be active, but it could be passive, too. Principals, along with subject coordinators, were listed most commonly as important support agents, with fellow faculty and school boards seen as somewhat less important. From a Foucauldian perspective, this makes sense, as principals and curriculum coordinators wield the most direct power over a teacher in the classroom. Having (or not having) their blessing was a highly important factor, perhaps the most important factor outside of one's own subjectivities. For a teacher to teach about religion in their social studies classroom, they need to feel that their boss believes that social studies is a subject worth teaching, and religion (or ethnicity or race or gender or politics) is an important part of that subject. From Ali's principal arranging a field trip to see *Victoria and Abdul*, to Jean's coordinator inviting a guest speaker to talk about race and interracial relationships, to Michael's discussion of Bill Clinton's political acumen in the 1990s, all the teachers had stories of when they felt supported by their bosses. In some case, there were stories when they felt that they could have been more

supported. However, if a teacher “got in trouble” for teaching about a controversial issue, they felt like it got resolved well and to their satisfaction.

There were a number of corollary factors that discouraged or would have discouraged teachers from teaching about religion, particularly among the group who identified as “outsiders”:

- 1) The teacher was lacking in disciplinary content knowledge.
- 2) The teacher was lacking skills in pedagogy, specifically facilitating debate/dialogue.
- 3) The teacher could not articulate a strong vision for why teaching about religions was an important part of the social studies curriculum.
- 4) The teacher was unwilling to tackle controversial issues at large and often felt uncomfortable discussing at least one of the following other issues: gender, race, politics, ethnicity.
- 5) The teacher felt unsupported by the administration – this lack of support could be active, but it could be passive, too.
- 6) If a teacher “got in trouble” for teaching about a controversial issue and really felt that “I got burned” in the process.

One of the challenges of putting together this list is that, by and large, the teachers who participated in this study are educational exemplars. All excelled in teaching about religion and in bringing challenging conversations to their students in a social studies classroom. This was because there was a certain filtering process in the way that the participants were recruited for the study, first in finding willing school sites, and then willing teacher participants. It is true that, much of what they did to facilitate robust and authentic conversations about religion could be

applied to other controversial issues as well. The critique “is this not just about good teaching?” is a fair one, but over the course of my research, it became apparent that good teaching is easier said than done. Good teaching became an innate and almost habitual and instinctual part of these teachers’ being, as they reacted to a variety of contextual situations, but it took many hours of conversation to unpack the nuances.

However, the voices of those who refused to engage in on-the-record conversations about the teaching of religions in the social studies classroom do not appear in this study. Though I encountered teachers who fit these descriptions during my preliminary research and pilot study phase, getting signed IRB consent forms in some cases proved to be a more insurmountable challenge. I hope in the future to continue this line of research, as it is clear that teachers in general and social studies teachers in particular, are, in some contexts, actively policed in what they teach in the classroom.

Finding teachers who ran into trouble when teaching about religion, and one can find many such examples that occasionally appear in the national media, would be an interesting and worthy future study. A quick Google search reveals that a variety of teachers in a variety of settings suffer consequences for their speech. After the 2016 American presidential election, a teacher in Palo Alto, California was suspended for comparing the election of Donald Trump to the election of Adolf Hitler, and the teacher later retired at the end of that school year.⁴¹ In another particular case in Virginia in 2015, all the schools in Augusta County, Virginia, were closed after social media erupted over a teacher’s assignment on the shahada, the Islamic statement of faith.⁴²

⁴¹ <https://www.mercurynews.com/2016/11/23/mountain-view-teacher-who-compared-trump-to-hitler-to-retire/>

⁴² <https://www.cnn.com/2015/12/18/us/virginia-school-shut-islam-homework/index.html>

In terms of the structure and superstructure, it seemed that for the majority of teachers in this study, the attitude of one's direct supervisors as well as local school climate and the local school structure were more important than the macro superstructure. Though teachers pointed to the Diocese, the State Board of Education, the College Board and national curricular standards, as all important sources of information about the curriculum, it was clear that the local climate was more significant in determining their comfort level in teaching about religions. Unhappy students and angry parents could be a dissuasive force, but this impact seemed to be greatly reduced when a teacher felt that they were genuinely backed by either a union or the school administration. The one area that state educational dictates did have an impact was if the school participated in state final examinations. For schools in this study that did have these culminating year-end exams, there was far more attention paid, for better or worse, to the dictates of state standards. Finally, the larger superstructure, particularly what it meant to teach about Islam in the post 9/11 world and in a post-truth age where religious and state power are melded together, was highly impactful on the work of the teachers that I interviewed and observed for this dissertation.

Beyond the emic/etic (insider/outsider) divide: Caretakers, critics, and somewhere in-between

While the traditional sociological terms of insider and outsider are helpful to an extent in parsing the relationship between the study's participants and their social context, the work of Russell McCutcheon (2001), a scholar of religious studies, provides an additional analytical layer for thinking about the relationship between an individual and their social milieu. Drawing on the work of his mentor Bruce Mack (2001), McCutcheon describes that in relationship to their religious traditions, learned individuals can act as either "caretakers," namely those who seek to

preserve the status quo, or “critics,” those who seek its evolution and change. As a simple example, when thinking about Catholic Popes of the last 50 years, John XXIII, Paul V, and Francis would likely be critics, where John Paul II and Benedict XVI would be caretakers. In some ways, the mapping corresponds to a certain liberal/conservative divide. For his own purposes, McCutcheon (1997) uses the caretaker and critic dualism to advocate for the proper role of a scholar of religious studies, not “to act as caretakers for religion [saving] ‘the vitality, as well as the moral and cultural influence, of religion in the world’” (p. 461). Instead scholars of religion must “accept the role of public intellectual” which demands “unfailing to probe beneath the rhetorical window dressings that authorize conceptual and social constructions of our own making” (ibid.). In simple terms, this means critiquing religion, and showing its true essence, warts and all.

McCutcheon clearly situates himself in the camp of seeing religion as a cultural category, along with Durkheim, Weber and Geertz. In fact, much of his academic scorn is directed at Otto, Eliade, and Orsi, perhaps the most recent phenomenologist of religion. Albeit for Orsi, there is a clear acknowledgement of religion’s cultural underpinnings. As McCutcheon himself notes, this role will not win scholars any awards for most congenial as “one does not win a popularity contest by pointing out the emperor’s general state of undress” (ibid.). While many appreciate McCutcheon’s conceptual categories, others, such as Atalia Omer (2011) see them as a bit too reductionist, and that one can overcome “McCutcheon’s binary construal” by introducing a third term of “critical caretaker” (p. 459).

It is with these three terms in mind that it is worth rethinking the participants of this study and how they map onto McCutcheon and Omer’s categories. Looking back at the interviews and observations, James, Jean, Aqsa and (perhaps) Michael often functioned as religious caretakers.

Their goal was to impress upon their students the value of religious identity as it related to their social context. Aqsa and James both wanted to teach their students to embrace the virtues of Islam and Catholicism respectively, while at the same time showing tolerance for those of other faiths. For Jean in the context of her public school, it was clear that in each religion she taught about, bringing about tolerance for that faith was an important objective. Michael, who “consider[ed] [himself] an insider,” more consciously played the role of “devil’s advocate.” While Michael felt it was important for students’ to know the Catholic Church’s official position, it was clear he felt this was best done through debate and discourse. By encountering alternative views, students could better advocate for their own ideas and positions.

Ali and Brother Thomas fall into the category of critical caretakers. While both are devout in their religious convictions, each expressed the failings of their own religious traditions (as well as others) and a desire to correct those flaws. Ali lamented the anti-Muslim bigotry in 21st century America, and also sought to make sure that his own students were never unjustly critical of others for their religious beliefs. At the same time, he saw his own liberal Sufi notion of Islam as an important balancing perspective for his students to also learn about. In this way, though Ali thought of himself as a Muslim, some of his students did not, and for this reason, he felt as though he were an outsider. Likewise, Brother Thomas noted that while “this is a very Catholic school which is lovely, that is not the case in some Catholic schools.” For Brother Thomas, Catholic-ness was more than just a name, and it was clear that to him, a true Catholic identity meant the ability to disagree and debate, and to point out the times where Christianity and Catholicism had been used to justify evil causes.

Only Dave Jones, who specifically identified as “not religious”, fit the mold of critic as outlined by McCutcheon. For him, there was no personal baggage that caused him to refrain

from pointing out the flaws of religion wherever he saw it. Dave was the only participant to name the sexual abuse crisis of the Catholic Church and also spoke of the problems of religious violence after September 11th, in his view, not only attributable to Muslims but also the very Christian presidency of George W. Bush. For Dave, religion was not important because of so-called “religious values” but instead because including religion in instruction allowed a person to better understand the completeness of society and culture.

The tripartite categories of caretaker, critic, and critical caretaker are helpful in unpacking the way that the individual relates to their broader social community. While it might be tempting to reduce the role of caretaker to that of insider, and critic to that of outsider, it is worth noting that of the two critics, one of the teachers identified as an insider. Unlike Ali, who identified as an outsider in his school setting, Dave identified as an insider, and in fact used his whiteness and maleness to recognize the “amount of privilege and authority” and “turn it on its head to a certain extent.” Dave, in a Freirean sense, sought to undo his own positionality of power and use the power instead to undo the hegemonic power structures.

Taking a step back, it is also worth thinking about my own subjectivity vis-à-vis my research? Do I see myself as a caretaker, critic, or critical caretaker? In many ways, having been trained in the academic study of religion, Catholic theological studies, and in a school of education, I find myself sympathetic to my research subjects, and I desire to present them authentically, but also charitably. This, as Lori Patton (2019) notes, is a fundamental demand on scholars of religion, who study communities that implore us to “be empathetic. Be one of us. Don’t treat us as disembodied. Don’t just study our texts. Don’t just study our rituals” (p. 24). The participants in this study are real people, who get up in the morning to go to work each day, to do their best in the classroom. They are well-intentioned and well-meaning people. As a

consequence of this, at times I do find it hard to listen to the “ghosts of the academy” who, Patton notes, are in tension with the religious communities that we study and demand that we “be scientific ... Be socially responsible. Criticize religion as an oppressor of the people. Understand religion as a function of economics, power, and polity” (ibid.).

Thinking back to my work studying theology in graduate school, and occasionally teaching about religions in a variety of settings, I have, in my own work, tended to adopt a critical-caretaker model as embodied by Brother Thomas and Ali. Balance is important in perspectives and the narratives presented. This stance is in line with the perspective of Robert Orsi who “advocates for an ‘in-between’ stance, ‘at the intersection of self and other, at the boundary between one’s own moral universe and the moral world of the other’” (Patton, 2019, p. 28).

Areas for continued study

The specific relationship between teachers’ beliefs about their own subjectivities as a teacher, their status as an insider or an outsider, and the role of institutional/external forces seemed to be strong determinants for their willingness to see religion as an important part of the social studies curriculum and the degree to which they were willing to teach the subject. The role of institutional/external forces is a question that is of particular importance in a world where Common Core (and now Next Generation) standards dictate a prescribed curriculum across a discipline. As of 2019, Common Core has still not been forced upon the social studies in the same way as it has for math and ELA, and certainly not for the teaching of religion. Therefore, as a result, teachers in the social studies field still have a certain freedom to shape their own pedagogies and curriculum, to be the “curricular gatekeepers” as described by Thornton (2005).

This bore out in the interviews, in that teachers saw the local context for their work as more important than state or federal level curricular mandates, particularly when those curricular mandates do not come with any tool to ensure compliance, like high stakes assessments.

In addition, the study of Islam, both among Islamic teachers and teachers in both Catholic and public schools, was cited most often as a challenging topic, given the larger geopolitical significance. It seems that more attention given to presentations of Islam would be valuable in a variety of school settings. Serious discussions of the works of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, both from theoretical and practical angles, would be important for pre-service as well as practicing teachers.

The visit that I had to Michael's government class in the fall of 2018, in which he explored questions of religions as they related to American government, was also a revelatory visit for me because it uncovered something that I hope to follow up on in a future study. How religions are talked about in the context of social studies is very course specific. When we think about the teaching of religions in the social studies curriculum, the vast majority of the literature and all the classes I was directed towards were ninth and tenth grade world history classrooms. However, religion could be taught as part of a US history class and, further, could be taught as part of a senior government course. The way that Michael and his students discussed the role of religion in public life was very different from the ways that one would talk about religion in a historical context. In an important way, it raised the specter that Kant discusses about modern post-Enlightenment versions of (particularly Christian) religions: believe what you want, but obey. Some of Michael's students, it was clear to me, really had a hard time with orthopraxy that went against civil law. Michael, a product of a pre-Vatican II Catholicism, seemed far more at ease with advocating for a limited role of the nation-state in criminalizing legitimate religious

praxis. I hope in the future to study if religion is at all a part of twelfth grade government classes, and if so, how it is understood as part of the exploration of civic life.

Finally, it is worth considering whether the base and superstructure exert unidirectional influence on a teacher's praxis, more in line with a banking model of education (Appendix A), or if following Freirean (1970) notions of reciprocity, the flow is more in both directions (Appendix B). In my observations, pedagogically, classrooms were less Freirean than I expected, indicating that the banking model of education is still alive and well. That said, there was a certain reciprocity between teachers and their principals, suggesting that there is space for a more Freirean understanding not only of pedagogy but also the organizational structures of school.

Scholarly significance

Unlike positivist notions that truth can be easily found through empirical quantitative study, this dissertation takes the form of a post-positivist study, recognizing that the truth is messy and often hard to come to. Our sense of self, school, and the larger world is informed by our own temporal beliefs and perspectives. After all, as noted by Phillips and Burbules (2000), we have recently

seen the rise to popularity of philosophical views that challenge the status of science as a knowledge-producing enterprise, and social scientists and educational researchers have been particularly vulnerable to these attacks. Scientists... are no less human, and no less biased and lacking in objectivity than anyone else (p. 1).

Rather than denouncing truth altogether, post-positivism embraces the fundamental messiness that subjectivities bring to the table. Phillips and Burbules note that:

If researchers are to contribute to the improvement of education - to the improvement of educational policies and educational practices - they need to raise their sights a little higher than expressing their fervent beliefs or feelings of personal enlightenment, no matter how compelling these beliefs are felt to be. They need to aspire to something a little stronger, seeking beliefs that (1) have been generated through rigorous inquiry and (2) are likely to be true; in short, they need to seek knowledge. This aim is what the philosopher Karl Popper and others have called a “regulative ideal” for it is an aim that should govern or regulate our inquiries - even though we might sometimes end up wrongly accepting some doctrine or finding as true when it is not. The fact that we are fallible is no criticism of the validity of the ideal because even failing to find an answer, or finding that an answer we have accepted in the past is mistaken, is itself an advance of knowledge. (p. 3)

This study is situated in a particular US context during the 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 school years. A different set of teacher participants who teach about religions as part of their social studies curriculum might yield a number of dissimilar results. There is the sense here of letting the data speak for itself, a rich set of data that “do[es] not give us transcripts but visions of the world” (Barzun, 2000, p. xiv). It is the “visions of the world” of which Barzun speaks that dovetails with Deborah Meier’s (2002) claim that in teaching, “there is neither prescription for action nor checklists for observation to assure intelligent and responsive teaching. All that can be offered are a guiding theory and abundant examples” (p. 154).

I am constantly reminded of this maxim and of the realities of my work. Every year, I teach a new batch of pre-service master’s degree students who in 12, 18 or at the most 24 months

will be at the head of their own classrooms. Given those realities of preparing teacher candidates for work in the profession, there is at some level, a degree of grand theorizing that can be useful, particularly for new teacher candidates. Generalizability, in the form of checklists (see, for example, the Charlotte Danielson rubrics) do erase the messiness of what teaching truly means, and give concrete and actionable steps. My approach has been to balance the philosophical and the literary with the concrete and the experiential. In this chapter, I provided a very short list of values for new teacher candidates to consider when they teach about religion. My goal here is to synthesize, if at all possible, a set of rich, lived experiences, and in relatively short order, attempt to answer “well what does it all mean in terms of actual classroom praxis?” That said, I take to heart Deborah Meier’s maxim that there are not either “prescription for action nor checklists for observation” for good teaching. I see efforts toward generalizability merely about providing those abundant examples.

The questions I posed earlier in this chapter, that ask teachers, and perhaps more importantly teacher candidates, to reflect upon their own work and lives, as teachers, as individuals, and as social communal beings, are relevant not just for the study of social studies in particular, but are generalizable across the secondary disciplines. In my own work over the past five years, I have been concerned not only with training teachers of social studies, but also teachers of science, mathematics, English language arts, foreign language, art, music and special education. It is truly essential for all teachers to ask themselves, about what subjectivities they bring to the classroom, what it means to be a teacher in their unique school setting, how they are shaped by influences and perspectives outside the classroom, and if they see their goal as one of reinforcing the values of the school or instead providing alternative perspectives. This sort of meta-analysis which I asked the teachers that participated in this study to undertake, has become

a more integrative part of the teaching I do with my own undergraduate and graduate students. Flourishing as educators ultimately requires them to think for themselves, to be those who would “dare to know!” as Kant says, to live examined lives, in the words of Socrates.

The basic words of our profession, “teacher, curriculum, and method,” are all worth digging down and exploring deeply and robustly. I have my students ask, like amateur reporters, the “who, what, when, where, why and how” questions. Who is a teacher? What do they teach? When do they teach and where? Why do they teach? And how? These are the type of generative questions (Freire, 1978) that allow us to get below the surface, to a far more nuanced understanding of ourselves and our collective work.

Conclusion

As I was writing up the manuscript for this dissertation study, I realized, in the true spirit of triangulation and member-checking, it might be worth reconnecting with my teacher from twenty years prior with whom I first learned about the Holocaust, the experience of which I shared in the opening pages of this dissertation. We are Facebook friends, although we had not really had any substantive conversations since I went off to college. I shared with her my experience of learning about the Holocaust with her in my public high school. She reminded me that, in her defense, we did look at “pre-Hitler antisemitism” and the “various events in England and Europe that illuminated the growing rise of Christian anti-Semitism, from Hugh of Lincoln to blood libels to host desecration.” However, she continued, noting that

at no time did I, a public school teacher, ever think it was my place to espouse my personal religious or political beliefs. I don’t remember in college education courses ever

being advised not to do so. It was just a given. And I was never asked by any student what my personal beliefs were.

For her, she was a teacher in a certain context, in this case in a public school. And as she identified primarily as an English teacher, she suggested that her role was different than that of a social studies teacher, or a religious studies teacher, or a theology teacher. “In studying literature, I viewed my role as a facilitator, one who exposes students to the complexities of life as presented by the authors, all the while remaining neutral in these highly personal belief systems.” She emphasized that “the perspective from a religious school faculty member may be very different; that makes sense to me, but we in the public schools have a different burden to bear.” Finally, and I think most importantly, she concluded by saying that “we teachers ... are in our own little classroom cocoons, so I have no idea how other teachers deal with these issues.”

To close, this dissertation demonstrates that instead of the dualistic narrative dividing the religious and the secular, individual teachers each with their own subjectivities engage with both worlds, and how they navigate them does not necessarily follow any specific pre-determined course. Rather, teachers at public schools often had some of the same fears, anxieties, and challenges, but also triumphs, as did their counterparts at religious schools. It was the individual subjectivities of the teachers, and the local environment, coupled with macro-institutional dictates and the superstructure that determines what and how they would engage with religion as part of their social studies classroom.

My goal at its core is about giving voice to the teachers with whom I shared many hours of conversation. It explores the ways in which they thrive as teachers, and what it means for them to teach today, in the United States, in their school, and as the persons that they are. It also explores the challenges, and what keeps us from asking the difficult questions. Together, Dave

Jones, Jean Grey, Stephen, Brother Thomas, Michael, Ali, Aqsa, and I have explored these questions, and I hope to take what I have learned from them for use in my own work as a teacher-educator.

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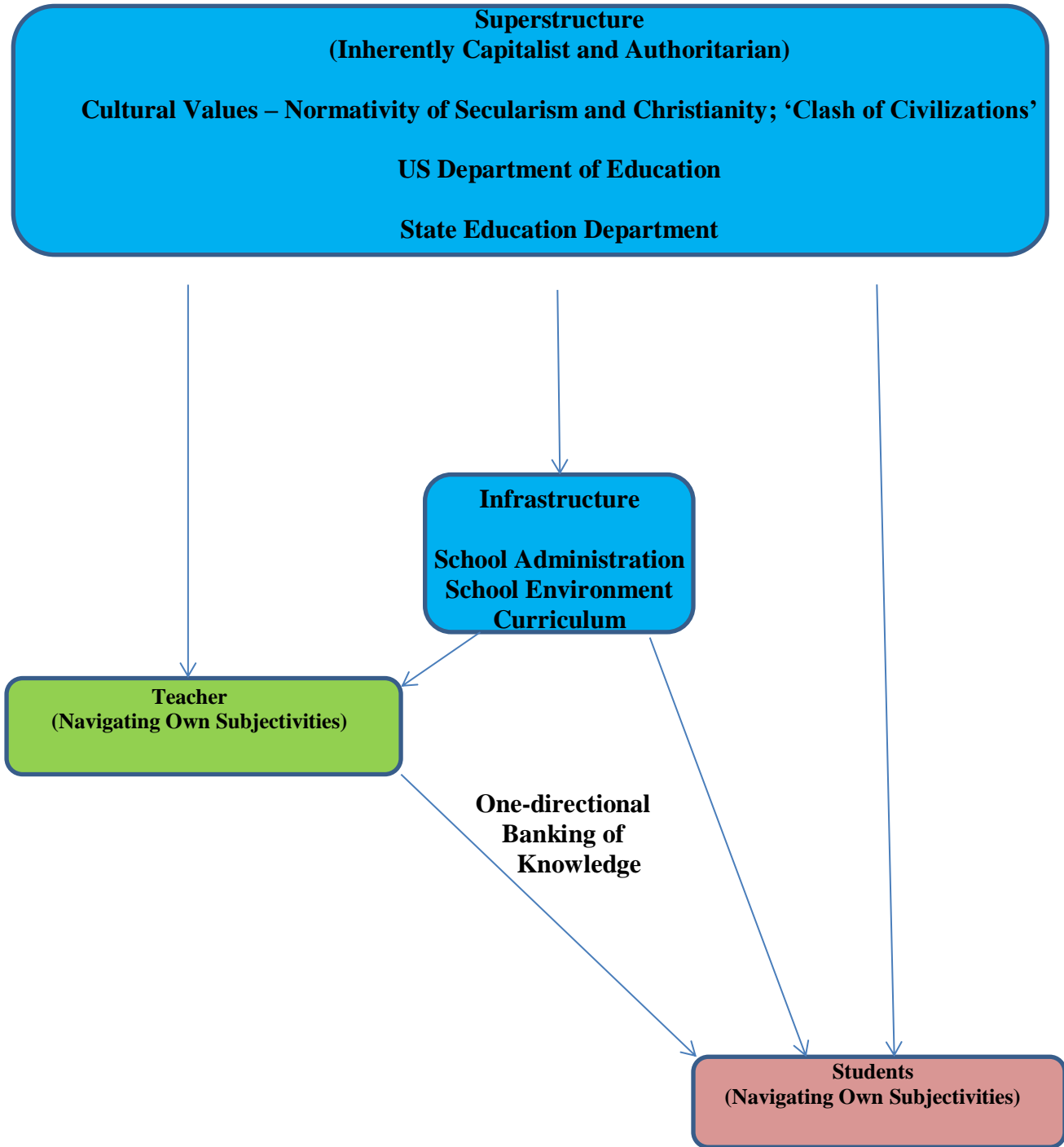
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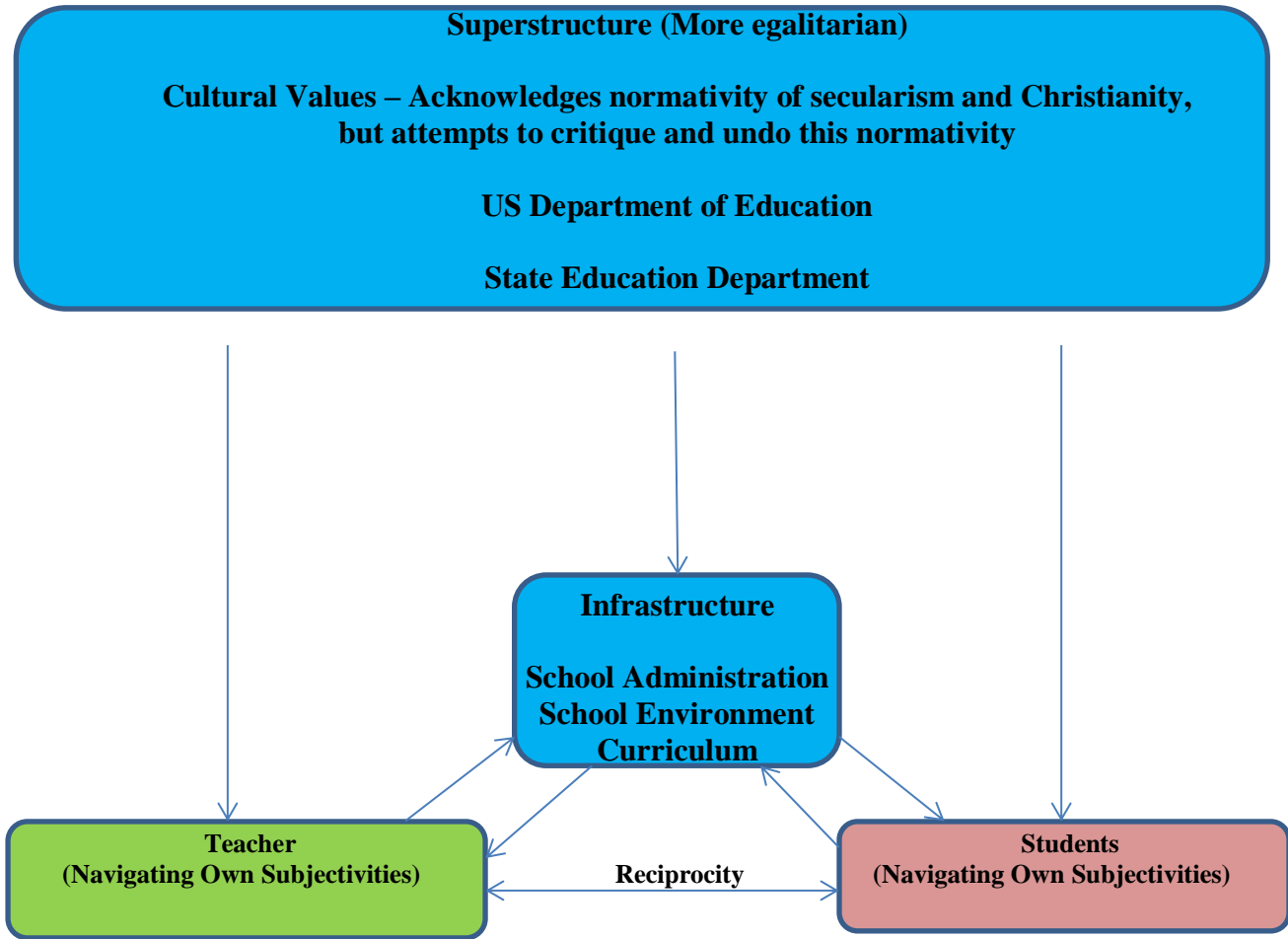
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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Theoretical framework - Traditional banking model



Appendix B – Theoretical framework - Freirean model



Appendix C – Timeline of interviews and observations

Week 1 - Life History Interview (Religion and Beliefs)

Week 2 - Observation # 1 and Post-Observation Interview # 1

Week 3 - Life History Interview (Teacher Identity)

Week 4 - Observation # 2 and Post-Observation Interview # 2

Week 5 - Life History Interview (Teaching of Social Studies)

Week 6 - Observation # 3 and Post-Observation Interview # 3 (As Needed)

Week 7 - Reflective Interview

Appendix D – Details of interviews and observations

Visit 1 – Life history interview (religion and beliefs)

The questions for this interview are based on the work of Seidman (2006) and Seidman-type interviews will be conducted in odd weeks, during week 1, week 3, and week 5. Each week will have its own focus. Ideally, this will occur in a private or semi-private space so as to ensure that the teacher is able to speak freely and openly. Schools are often sites that breed conformity and normativity, so even the presence of co-workers might severely alter the respondent's answers. The teacher will be given a general overview of the project, that I am interested in seeing how religions are taught as a part of the social studies curriculum, as well as exploring the issues that commonly emerge for the teachers. I will also explain that the research will be conducted in discrete phases, with a pre-interview that focuses on an overall biographical life-history, a post-lesson interview that focuses on the present lived experience, and a final culminating interview in which the participant reflects on his or her experiences. The following questions will be asked in week 1:

- 1) Can you offer a definition of religion?
- 2) Can you describe your first experience with religion?
- 3) Can you describe your first experience with religions?
- 4) What was your experience with religion growing up?
- 5) As a student, what role did religion play in your education?
- 6) Growing up as a student, what role did religions play in your social studies curriculum?
- 7) What forces do you think determined what you were taught about religions in school?

- 8) What impact did your experiences with religion have in your own work as a teacher?
- 9) How do you identify religiously? What makes you identify as such?
- 10) Do you consider yourself as sharing the same values with respect to religion as the school you are teaching at? Do you consider yourself as an insider or an outsider (particularly with respect to religious identity) at this school and how do you navigate that relationship?
- 11) Can you describe an experience where your religion has impacted the way you teach social studies?
- 12) Would you say there is a difference in the way you talk about your own religion when teaching subject matter related to it as opposed to teaching about other religions?

Visit 2 – Observation protocol

- 1) Before the first interview, I will let the participants know that I would like to observe a social studies class of theirs in which they “teach about religion.” I will try not to lead the teachers in one particular direction, so I will leave it up to them in terms of content, scope, etc. The class should be a ‘normal’ lesson, ideally one that the teacher has prepared ahead of time and taught before. My goal here, is to be as neutral as possible (though I know such a term is problematic), and not lead the observed into seeing ‘what I want to see.’ However, it will ultimately be unavoidable that the teachers I am observing will end up “becoming a subject at school in research” (Gallagher, 2008, p. 50).
- 2) I plan to audio record the class session and will take notes on my iPad. I will not engage in any form of participation in the classroom, except for if a student asked who I am or why I am visiting. This is not meant to be a participant-observation, though I do plan to circulate when/if students are engaged in student-centered learning. Otherwise, during moments of more teacher-centered instruction I plan to sit quietly in the back of the classroom.
- 3) I plan to focus on thick descriptions of what has occurred and will, in the moment, as much as possible, refrain from normative or interpretive judgements of what I have seen. I will try to refrain from extrapolating in this moment and making connections or evaluating the efficacy of a particular piece of the lesson.
- 4) In addition, again as much as possible, I will try to record the dialogue of what happens during the class period in much the same way as a movie script. I will also try to capture the pace of the lesson by recording the time spent on various aspects of the lessons. Spaces of silence and waiting are as important in understanding the context of the lesson.

5) After finishing my observations for the day, I will complete the notes, filling in any missing dialogue or adding in any details I might have missed during the observation itself. Still, at this point, I will refrain from normative judgements but will simply be concerned with filling in the holes of what my senses (particularly but not exclusively my eyes and ears) were able to capture but my typing was not able to sufficiently record. Then, only after a transcript has been produced will I go back and start to analyze what I have seen and interpret the experience.

Visit 2 – Post-observation interview protocol

The interview will be conducted after the observation and as much as possible in the closest prep period following the visit. Ideally, this will occur in a private space so as to ensure that the teacher is able to speak freely and openly. Schools are often sites that breed conformity and normativity, so even the presence of co-workers might severely alter the respondent's answers.

- 1) **Grand tour question:** How would you describe the lesson that I observed?
- 2) **Grand tour question:** Why did you have me observe this lesson?
- 3) **Grand tour question:** How would you describe this school?
- 4) **Experience question:** What external forces in the school shape your pedagogy and curricular choices, and how do they shape it?
- 5) **Experience question:** What external forces outside the school shape your pedagogy and curricular choices, and how do they shape it?
- 6) **Experience question:** Have you ever run in to any trouble when teaching about religion in your classroom? If yes, what precipitated the issue and how was it resolved? Who were the major parties involved? If no, why do you think that is?
- 7) **Contrast question:** What is the difference between how you would teach social studies here versus how the subject might be taught at a public/religious school by a teacher at that school?
- 8) **Native language question:** When you talk about teaching world religions with your social studies colleagues, what advice would you give them?
- 9) **Native language question:** Are there specific terms that you use when talking with your disciplinary colleagues about the teaching of religions? How important is content knowledge in your work as a social studies teacher?

10) **Native language question:** Is objectivity a value that you think is important when talking about religions? Why or why not? If it is, how do you objectively present the material you are charged to teach? If not, why specifically is it not?

11) **Native language question:** Can religion be used to make ethical judgements about historical questions? Should religion be used to make ethical judgements about historical questions? Why or why not?

Visit 3 – Life history interview (teacher identity)

The questions for this interview are based on the work of Seidman (2006) and Seidman-type interviews will be conducted in odd weeks, during week 1, week 3, and week 5. Ideally, this will occur in a private or semi-private space so as to ensure that the teacher is able to speak freely and openly. Schools are often sites that breed conformity and normativity, so even the presence of co-workers might severely alter the respondent's answers. The following questions will be asked in week 3:

- 1) What has been your experience with schooling growing up?
- 2) Can you describe an example that backs up your claim from question 1?
- 3) Did you enjoy school? Why or why not?
- 4) What made you decide to become a teacher?
- 5) Why did you specifically decide to become a social studies teacher?
- 6) Thinking back to that decision, what made you most excited? What made you most nervous?
- 7) Do you see your job as a teacher as an important part of your identity? Why or why not?
- 8) What parts of your identity do you see as often coming in to your classroom? Why?
- 9) What parts of your identity do you see as rarely or never coming in to your classroom? Why?

Visit 4 – Observation # 2 and post-observation interview # 2

The second observation will occur approximately one week after the teacher identity Seidman interview. It will follow the same procedure as the first observation and the same questions will be asked in the post-observation interview. Repeating the same post-observation questions will be useful to see the change over time as a participant is more fully engaged in the topic of the study.

Visit 5 – Life history interview (teaching of social studies)

Ideally, this will occur in a private or semi-private space so as to ensure that the teacher is able to speak freely and openly. Schools are often sites that breed conformity and normativity, so even the presence of co-workers might severely alter the respondent's answers. The following questions will be asked in week 5:

- 1) Can you offer a definition of social studies?
- 2) Can you describe your first experience with social studies?
- 3) What was your experience with learning social studies growing up?
- 4) As a student, what role did social studies play in your education?
- 5) What is it like to be a social studies teacher in this school?
- 6) Can you describe an example that backs up your claim from question 5?
- 7) What forces do you think determined what you were taught about social studies in school?
- 8) What impact did your experiences with social studies have in your own work as a teacher?
- 9) Do you consider yourself as sharing the same values as your school with respect to social studies?

Visit 6 – Observation # 3 and post-observation interview # 3

The third observation will occur approximately one week after the teaching of social studies Seidman interview. It will follow the same procedure as the first and second observation and the same questions will be asked in the post-observation interview. Repeating the same post-observation questions will be useful to see the change over time as a participant is more fully engaged in the topic of the study.

Visit 7 – Reflective interview protocol

The interview will be conducted approximately a week after the final observation visit and post-observation interview. This will give the participant time to reflect upon the project, the observation and the interviews that he or she gave:

- 1) Thinking back to the first interview, when we talked about your life history and how it relates to your experience with religions, is there is anything you would like to add or highlight?
- 2) Thinking back to the second interview, when we talked about your life history and how it relates to your identity, is there anything you would like to add or highlight?
- 3) Thinking back to the third interview, when we talked about your life history and how it relates to your role teaching social studies, is there is anything you would like to add or highlight?
- 4) Thinking back to the lessons I observed, is there anything you would like to add or highlight?
- 5) Thinking back to the post-observation interviews, when we talked about your present experience as a teacher in this school, is there is anything you would like to add or highlight?
- 6) Given what you said in the interviews, how do you think now about teaching about religions as a part of the social studies?

- 7) Since we first met, is there anything that has changed in the way that you think about teaching religion as a part of the social studies?
- 8) How might you move forward in your teaching about religions in the social studies classroom?