Guidelines on Prejudices and Stereotypes in Religions
Intellectual Output I

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Annexes

-Appendix: A Relational Approach to Stereotypes by Niels Reeh

1. Introduction

Today, in our globalised world, religious and cultural diversity is seen by many as a main cause for critical political challenges. Migration flows create multi-ethnic countries and many native citizens seem to be concerned and fearful about the developments and the future. Fear and uncertainty may lead to discrimination, hostility, alienation and other subversive tendencies. The educational systems constitute an invaluable resource that can be used to help foster mutual understanding and prevent the collapse of an already fragile social structure. The SORAPS Project aims to create a collection of *Intellectual Outputs* that can be implemented in any institution or school. The Intellectual Outputs consist of guidelines concerning the prejudices and stereotypes about religion, a curriculum, teaching materials and a MOODLE platform, all aimed to implement a Teacher Training Course on Religion and multiculturalism. This paper comprises one of the guidelines: the *Guidelines on Prejudices and Stereotypes in Religions*.

The purpose of this paper is to both discuss and propose ideas on how to handle stereotypes and prejudices about religion in general, and specific religions in particular. It is created in continuation of a questionnaire survey conducted in Spain, Italy and France. As such, it intends to be a response to the views and needs expressed by teachers and students. The paper is furthermore intended to be a guideline for the other *Intellectual Outputs*, to provide bibliographical references, and to deliver some of the summary results of the questionnaire (more summaries are attached in Appendix 1).

The paper contains sections on 'Religion in itself', 'New Religious Movements', 'Buddhism', 'Chinese Religions', 'Christianity', 'Hinduism', 'Islam', and 'Judaism'. Each section contains a discussion of the subject and a conclusion with a summary of the main points linked to the stereotypes and prejudices mentioned. The conclusion, furthermore, contains propositions on how to tackle these stereotypes and how to avoid unconscious use of them. The stereotypes in the concluding sections do not, obviously, correspond with the 'correct' academic understanding, and are therefore formulated as quotes (even though not all of them are actually such). Moreover, judging from the answers to the questionnaires, we felt that the sections pertaining to Buddhism, Chinese religions and Hinduism ought to offer also a few words on these religious traditions in general, in order to better contextualize the analyses of the stereotypes.

The SORAPS Project's definition of stereotypes, which is also the one used in the questionnaires, is as follows:

> *"A stereotype is an idea or belief that is discontinued, simplistic, preconceived, often false or only partially true, especially about a group of people. Have you ever heard that the Irish are all drunkards or that the peoples of southern Europe are lazy or that women are bad conductors? These are stereotypes: commonly held ideas about particular groups. You*

have often heard about negative stereotypes but there are also neutral or positive stereotypes. For example, the stereotype that Asians do better at school. One of the many problems that stereotypes pose is that, while they can be true in some cases, they are certainly not true in all cases.

A prejudice is an opinion that is formed before one is properly informed of a given situation. In most cases this opinion is negative. One example is sexism: the word sexism is linked to negative opinions about women that derive from the stereotype that women are less valuable or less talented than men. Stereotypes and prejudices are assumed to be related, but different concepts. Stereotypes are seen as the cognitive component and they often appear unconsciously, while prejudice is the affective component of stereotype making."

It is this fairly broad definition and notion of stereotypes and prejudices that serve as the first guiding principle for the following selection of stereotypical notions and postulates about religion.

The phenomenon 'stereotype' can be perceived in many ways. Scholar of religion Niels Reeh, suggests a linguistically informed sociological approach. He argues that stereotypes cannot be avoided altogether, but that they ought to be controlled by e.g. religion education, i.e. religious education based upon the academic study-of-religions approach. The lessons should "…seek to give pupils and future citizens' knowledge and analytical skills enabling a reflexive and self-critical approach to their own proto- and stereotypes" (Appendix 2). Reeh perceives stereotypes as the product of basic human language production. Unfortunately, such linguistic constructions will, through frequent use, be perceived not just as connotations, but also as denotations. This process generates the most dangerous result of stereotype use: the constitution of in-groups and out-groups in a dialectic and often confrontational relationship. It is exactly this construction that may create the aforementioned discrimination and hostility.

Orderly and enlightened education, including religion education, can hopefully help counteract this development and thus help pave the way for a society with open-minded citizens understanding and accepting differences, rather than being dismissive and prejudiced as regards other citizens.

2. The concept of religion 'in itself': key stereotypes and prejudices

2.1. Essentialism, negative and positive prototypes, stereotypes and prejudices

Essentialism in regard to religion is a view according to which religion(s) are thought to possess a specific 'essence' or 'core', an essence or core that is, furthermore, its defining feature and that which makes religion, 'religion'. No matter when and where. As stated by the Swedish scholar Torsten Hylén (Hylén 2015), essentialist notions of religion and religions can be linked to a postulated 'substance' (what it is said to 'be'), as well as to a postulated 'function' (what it is thought to do, for individuals and societies).

One kind of essentialism is 'ontological essentialism', according to which it is but the (postulated) essence that really *is*, and, even if it does not show in each and every manifestation of (a) religion, it is still there, and it functions as a compass for judgments about the specific manifestation or aspect of religion, religion in general or of one particular religion.

The core or essence can be seen as something 'transcendental', theological or ethical (e.g. the sacred, a belief in superhuman beings, an ethical 'love your neighbor' core, a scriptural commandment to kill enemies of the religion) but it can also be seen to be identical to some form or function that a religion (or religion 'as such') is thought to have had in a specific period (e.g. the earliest times of the history of the religion, or at the time when the founder lived) and/or to some form and function to be found at a specific time at a specific geographic place (e.g. Islam in Medina, Christianity in today's Denmark).

Essentialist positions can be entertained by religious 'insiders' (religious people in general or people belonging to a specific religion) as well as by 'outsiders' (people belonging to another religion or to no religion, including people hostile to religion in general or to a specific religion), and essentialist positions may be found in e.g. racism, sexism, and nationalism.

While quite a few people seem to be prone to condemn other kinds of essentialism for their leading to discrimination, to the creation of 'out-groups' against 'in-groups', and to an exclusivist 'we' against an 'other', many other people seem to have more difficulty with condemning the same when linked to essentialist positions and notions in regard to religion and religions; quite often it is exactly the postulated core or essence of the majority religion that is used as the starting point for a negative judgment of other religions, especially religions other than the majority religion. This is important to note, not only for academic study of religion, for religion education, for textbooks and in classrooms, but also for the ways states handle religion, - in their constitutions, in their sub-constitutional law, in their courtrooms, in their schools. How do they/we define and conceive religion (as, respectively, true or good)? It is of importance who has the right or the power to make the definitions of so-called real and true religion(s)and thus to decide what it takes for religion to be (considered) true, right, allowed, good or bad.

Dependent on the various degrees to which various religions manifest the postulated

essence, resemble the postulated 'original', or the postulated one and true form and function, they are seen to qualify (or not) as true and real religions.

Quite often the postulated core of religion (and also of specific religions) is perceived as something 'in itself' good, and thus various manifestations or forms of religion, of religion in general or of a particular religion, are judged as good or bad dependent on the degree to which they are judged to be in line with this postulated essence or core.

While religion in general is often thought to be good, 'essentially speaking', several specific religions are judged to be at variance, in their particular core, with this core of religion, whether in principle or in certain forms or manifestations. They can then be judged to be bad, aberrant or deviant.

> Essentialism is in this context the understanding that both specific religions and religion in general possess a specific 'essence'.
> Such an approach enforces the wrong idea that religions should be judged and evaluated by their "authenticity" depending on their degree of accordance with this postulated "core"; moreover, it often leads to the construction of an exclusive 'true we' against a 'false other'.

Other terms used can be less value-loaded, and they are often seen in literature (also scholarly) on religions and religions: 'popular religion', 'syncretistic religion', or 'sectarian religion', are often used in a judgmental way rather than in an analytical way, that is without precise explanations of the analytical or theoretical background and purpose for the use of these terms.

Another indirect way of dealing with manifestations of religion(s) is to see the manifestations as secondary to the postulated 'eternal' or transcendental core, and to talk about e.g. 'use' and 'abuse' of religion (or of a specific religion) by a certain group of people or individuals: for example, a 'true' and 'good' Christian never does this or that, and if s/he actually does so, then it is because s/he is not truly Christian or because s/he abuses Christianity.

With the current rather negative image of Islam dominating many public discourses on Islam, one can witness two different yet also identical approaches: Muslims who are somehow 'using' Islam in connection with acts of violence, terror or war, are either abusing an otherwise 'in itself' good and noble religion. They act as they do in the 'name' of the religion, they take the religion 'hostage', they politicize religion, and they do so falsely, wrongly, not in line with the religion 'itself', the true meaning of it, or with the earlier 'original' forms of it. The opposite, yet in fact identical approach, is to see such Muslims as 'typical' Muslims. Acting in accordance with the very 'prototype', 'nature' or 'core' of Islam. The interpretation that violent Islamists have of Islam is thus seen as the core of Islam.

There are thus judgments and prejudices linked to essentialist notions of religion, and some of the essentialist notions have a prototypical (see below for more on prototypical thinking about religion) as well as stereotypical character. The prototypical notion, if leading to discrimination and negative judgment (negative prejudice), resembles or functions as a stereotype, but a positive essentialist notion likewise can have the character and function of

a negative stereotype and prejudice.

2.2. 'Religion' and 'religions': typical, prototypical and stereotypical notions

It is, by way of the wide, almost global, spread of the term 'religion' (for instance due to colonialism, westernization, globalization and the spread of human rights thinking, including human rights thinking about religion indirectly defined as in freedom of religion articles in international declarations and conventions, tempting, at least to many people in the West (including many pupils and even teachers), to think of 'religion' as a term, concept or notion about something *universal*. To think, that is, that people past and present, around the world have *always* had something that corresponds to what is often implicitly understood as that which the Western, originally Latin, term religion refers to in much popular and political parlance. 'Religion', as a kind of folk category and general human 'thing', is thus seen as not limited to the West but common to all – a notion of religion, however, which at times can be found also in scholarly discourse and in textbook and classroom religion (teaching).

But the word 'religion' has not always existed all over the world, and what is has come to mean during its long European and Western history, the Western folk category 'religion', so to speak, is something that *has come* to mean something (and even now it does not mean just one 'thing'), - and what it means in Europe as a folk category is far from 'natural' to cultures and peoples of the past and outside the Western world.

Though there is no agreement on its precise etymology, the term 'religion' seems to derive from Latin *religio*, perhaps derived from *religere* and/or *religare*. The first meaning something like 'to be careful/mindful', the latter meaning 'to bind together'. During its long history, from its Latin-Roman non-Christian context to its later Christian-Western context, the term has de- and connoted (maybe first) something close to 'careful performance of ritual obligations', and, later, an inner 'sentiment' or 'experience', a 'conviction', 'faith', or 'belief'.

Later again 'a religion' came to signify a 'system' of beliefs as well as institutions that one could adhere to, be born into, convert to, believe in, adopt etc. The 'prototypical religions' of the West were Judaism and Christianity, and to a certain degree also Islam – the three so-called monotheistic religions with their beliefs and moral systems, practices, and institutions.

But in other cultures there were, in pre-colonial times and in the myths and ritual traditions, written or oral, no words and probably no concept nor notion exactly matching 'our' religion. In India 'dharma' or 'sanatana dharma' (in what later came to be called 'Hinduism') referred to something similar but still also had quite another ring and meaning to it. The same goes for the Arabic 'din'.

Thus one can very well go looking for 'religion' in other times and countries, but one will often find that the kind of 'religion' one finds does not exactly match the 'prototypical' kind of religion looked for from the perspective of the Western notion of religion. However, today,

due to globalization, colonialisation, and Westernization, plus the spread of a notion of religion like the one promoted by human rights law and terminology, one actually *does* find people all over the world who think of 'religion', also their own non-Western religion, in terms of the Western notion of 'religion'.

A semantic exercise worthwhile doing is to take a critical look at the articles pertaining to 'freedom of religion' in human rights conventions and declarations. "The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950" may serve as a good example of a very common way of 'talking' and 'thinking' about religion in such texts.

> Article 9 – Freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Though some insight into the intended meanings or semantics of the key terms might be gained by looking at the *travaux preparatoires* as well as at various comments from human rights institutions, the wording can be seen to be of such a kind that some qualified guesses, as to the intended meaning and implicit notions of religion buried in the quote, may be allowed:

First of all it seems evident that the text has a starting point for what it calls 'religion' in some kind of 'forum internum', a conceived-of inner space of the human being where one finds 'thought', 'conscience', and 'belief', - and it thus seems to be no coincidence that 'religion' is found next to 'thought' and 'conscience', - and that 'religion' seems to be almost equivalent to, yet not identical to, 'belief'.

From 'in there', from in there in the private, individual, forum internum, religion (or belief) may then 'show' or be 'manifested' outwardly in e.g. worship, teaching, practice and observance. Belief comes first, and then follows rituals, whether performed alone or in community with others. To a scholar of religion this points towards a Christian, more

precisely Protestant, religious proto- or stereotype of religion, an idea that 'true' religion is the inner belief or faith, while rituals and institutions are secondary.

This kind of thinking about religion has been very influential, also within the academic study of religion, and it is most likely to be found in major parts of the popular and political thinking and talking about religion. Within the study of religion it is linked to the Western context (with a dominant Christian religion and culture, and with theology, and a Christian theological philosophy, as the dominant kind of study of religion for centuries) but it is also linked to a certain kind of so-called phenomenology of religion, a kind of study of religion according to which the human being (apart from a recent modern variable, not seen as typical) is seen as equipped with a faculty for *experiencing* something considered 'sacred' or 'divine', something transhuman and transhistorical, something transcendental. It is this divine or sacred 'substance' and this postulated experience (or manifestation of the sacred) that constitutes the starting point for religion, in general as well as for the particular religions.

The prototypical religious individual and religious experience within this 'school' of the study of religion often tends to be equated with the postulated *mystical* experiences described and prescribed by so-called mystics, and the mystical traditions within the religions are often thought of as the most 'pure' parts of the religions in question.

> The way most people think about 'religion' refers to a Protestant proto- or stereotype, which states that 'true religion' is an inner belief and faith, while rituals and institutions are secondary. This is a result of the dominance of Christianity, colonisation, Westernisation and globalisation in the west emisphere.

According to this line of thought, so-called 'reductionism' misses what really constitutes the 'religious' about religion and religions, and religion is seen as something *sui generis* that can only be understood if analysed and interpreted on its own 'level'. Explaining religion with reference to the psyche, society, power or the like, is to explain it away. This way of looking at religion is a version of essentialist notions of religion, essentialist notions operating with a core 'substance' or core 'functions' of religion and religions.

To a scholar of religion who knows about religions past and present, in and outside the Western hemisphere, and to a scholar who has problems thinking about a human being whose inner, individual 'self' is not influenced and to a certain degree formed by collective, social, cultural norms and ways of thinking, language and society, this *sui generis* and essentialist way of looking at religion is to turn things upside down: *first* come societies, historical and cultural contexts, parents and institutions, primary and secondary socialisation. *First* come rituals, worship, and institutions and communities bringing up children with and within these rituals, institutions and communities. *Second*, afterwards, via this, the children

may come 'to faith', come to think, and come to believe (more or less like their parents and like the religion in question wants them to). Nobody sitting in a cave, in splendid isolation from the world, from traditions about e.g. specific gods, religious experiences and beliefs, has 'religious' experiences and 'revelations' of e.g. specific gods. From a scholarly point of view nobody sees Jesus or Siva or Gibreel before his inner eye if s/he has not seen him with his normal eye (via narratives, images etc.), that is if s/he has not learnt about this divine figure, the nature of this or that religious experience, and about the way to obtain or have such an experience.

This humanistic, social and naturalistic way of looking at 'things religious 'in historical, sociological or cultural analytical perspectives and contexts may be said to have been slightly challenged recently by cognitivist approaches to religion, approaches 'placing' at least some *general* religious notions, e.g. notions about superhuman agents, anthropomorphic agency, in the brain or with certain universal cognitive faculties of human beings, thus making it 'natural' to be religious at least in terms of ways of seeing and ordering the world.

Nevertheless, even cognitivists will have problems explaining (a) religion rather than 'just' general religious *notions* without a reference to socio-cultural institutions, language and rituals. And, cognitivist approaches to religion do not include notions of 'true' religion being inner belief, experience and the like.

It is of the utmost importance that teachers and students learn how to approach religion as a human, social, and historical phenomenon which, like 'culture', is always 'in motion', always in a state of fluidity, a dynamic human, historical and social process and construct.

Religion is not a 'thing' and *reifications* must be countered and understood as such, not as descriptions of the world and the religion(s) in question. The same goes for generalisations and simplifications. Such may be necessary in order to survive and in order to write a textbook with 25 pages on each religion and to present a religion in the classroom in some 10-20 lectures. It may be necessary for many reasons, but it is nevertheless also necessary to make the pupils aware that the reifications, like the essentialisations, and the generalisations, do not match the 'world out there' and the scientific research on religion, even if they may serve as some kind of 'map'.

Religion, then, does not exist apart from the human beings, their interests, their ambitions, their understanding and practice and the transmission of the religion in question. It is thus totally wrong to speak of religions as independent, invariant things, entities not to say 'agents' which may, for instance, enter into a clash with each other, with 'modernity', or with e.g. Western culture. Religions do not 'go' to war: human beings 'go' to war, and yes, they may be inspired by (their) religion or by e.g. atheist, anti-religious ideologies and sentiments.

It is not uncommon to hear people talk of religions as 'seamless systems', of thought (beliefs) and practices, something which, once having come into being, is there for humans to find 'out there' and become adherents to. Of course, one may hold that 'Islam is a religion' that implies certain beliefs and practices, and that some person may become a Muslim because s/he finds the beliefs and practices attractive and worthwhile. But even in this case, the person in question has several versions of Islam to choose between, and s/he can understand and interpret and practice each version, his or her version, in an almost endless number of ways - and still be a Muslim practicing Islam.

To put it bluntly: yes, there is something out there that might be called 'Islam', something to which some 1.4 billion human beings all around the world adhere to, but this Islam is not a seamless, unchanging and thing-like permanent system. There are different kinds of it up through history and today, and the religion is always what the 'religionists' make of it, what they *have* made of it, and what in the future they *may* make of it. Thus, one can say that there are and have been as many 'Islams' as there are Muslims, and as many Christianities as there are Christians. Besides, notions of Islam/Christianity/Buddhism etc. by religion scholars, as well by e.g. politicians and media, also contribute to what the religion in question may be, - or may be said to be.

The above also means that there is not one of the versions of any religion that is the one and only true and original version. No religion has an original core, which is transmitted in an unchanged form through history from the beginning of the religion up to today. No matter which of the religions we deal with: they have more than one beginning, they began with people fighting over the right to decide which version and which beginning was to be called the true and original one, and the whole history of the religions is a history of how individuals and groups break out of the current mainstream to return to and get forward to what they consider the true version, the core of the religion, the postulated true beginning of it. The Christian reformation is a good example of this effort, and a good example also of the continuous growth of competing strands and groups and truths. Protestants come in many kinds, and each kind comes in many shapes and shades. The same goes for 'reformists' within other religions.

Religions thus cannot be separated from the people who 'adhere' to them, constantly uphold them, discuss them, interpret and change them. People cannot be separated from their social historical and psychological settings and contexts. This, from the academic and humanistic point of view, means that religion cannot be understood as something 'in itself', but only as a social, cultural product of the way people think, talk and act. All

No religious 'core' has ever been transmitted through time in an unchanged form. All religions have originated, changed, died or transformed in order to fit the needs of each historical period, because religion(s) does not exist apart from human beings and their social, historical and cultural contexts.

the religious discourses are culturally constructed to give sense to the human condition, trying to answer the problem of evil, of suffering and death, and announcing the hope of a way to salvation in this or in another world. For insiders and believers, religions are inspired and/or came to existence due to the presence and activity of powers and/or entities beyond the human condition, like God, gods, impersonal Absolute Principle(s) and so on. The scholar however studies religions as cultural processes that depend on the different social contexts and that continuously change, following the dynamics of history.

Some linked misunderstandings, widely held typical ways of thinking of religion that may lead to stereotypical ways of thinking and that certainly may be seen as prejudices with severe consequences, are pointed out by Hylén (2015, p.20) with reference to the Swedish Islamologist Jan Hjärpe. Hylén quotes Hjärpe about common ideas to be found in the Swedish political discourse on religion and religious people:

> [...] One is the idea that religious belonging is *determining*, that it decides how people act. Another is the idea that religious traditions are *constants*, unchangeable, recognizable through the centuries. The third is that religious people follow the statements of religious *leaders*, and that what religious leaders say is therefore representative of the entire group. All of these three ideas are demonstrably inaccurate. (Hjärpe 2012: 273, my translation, italics in original)

Hylén then (p.20) continues:

> Hjärpe continues by showing, firstly that religious people do not always behave as the traditional interpretations of the religion stipulate and that there are several normative systems other than the religious that must be taken into consideration and that are often prevalent. Secondly, religions and norm systems change constantly through new interpretations of rituals, decrees, and other symbols. Thirdly, religious people often do not care what their leader says. In my view, it is even possible to say that most religious people follow their leaders' statements when it suits them; that is, when the social, political, or economic context does not conflict too much with the leaders' decrees.

2.3. 'Religion', religions, - and 'world religions'

What has been said above also pertains to (criticism of) the so-called 'World Religions Paradigm', in schools and religion education (RE) classrooms and textbooks, but also in approaches by former scholars of religion and in the approach of a large part of the general public. Hirst & Zavos (2005, 5) characterize the paradigm as follows:

This model conceptualises religious ideas and practice as being configured by a series of major religious systems that can be clearly identified as having discrete characteristics. These systems are seen as existing alongside each other in a common space in the global fields of cultural, social and political life. They apparently compete, have dialogue with each other, regenerate themselves or degenerate within this space; a series of systems, then, with their own historical agency. (Quoted from Owen, 2011, 254)

Tite (2015, no pagination) has summarized the criticism laid out in Susanne Owen's influential article as of 2011 (Owen 2011):

The WRP [World Religions Paradigm] largely emerges out of European colonialism; it universalizes and thus essentializes a cultural tradition (a sui generis product that transcends the historical); it obscures the distinctly local cultural practices, thereby decontextualizing those cultural practices while authenticating a constructed "core"; it imposes Western (i.e., Judeo-Christian) models of "religion" that have emerged since the Enlightenment as normative for cultures encountered through colonial expansion and thereby creates and defines that very "other" in terms of the "us" (e.g., religion as a private, internal belief system separate from public or mundane matters); it tends to stop at the descriptive level, albeit with a moral agenda of promoting pluralism and tolerance, and thus avoids – indeed resists – reductive explanatory approaches.

The world religions are normally these five: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, but sometimes Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, and Baha'i may be included (for various reasons) to make a list, or a 'canon' of eight.

Not so rarely, Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity, has, as already said, functioned as the 'prototype' for religion, including a world religion, and religions in general have been measured and labeled with the mentioned world religions serving as the yardstick for a 'real' and 'true" religion. This, of course, causes a problem for the study of religion and the teaching about religion on the most fundamental epistemological, theoretical and methodological levels, sometimes making it hard to even 'see' or 'recognise' religions that do

not 'adhere' to the Christian-Protestant-World Religion model of religion. A model also often linked to the idea that it is the majority religion that sets the standard for what counts as a religion, in people's minds, in states, in classrooms, in courtrooms, - and even in the semantics and discussions of religion in human rights linked terminology and 'law'.

Several scholars (see also the 2016 *After World Religions – Reconstructing Religious Studies* by Cotter and Robertson) have dealt with the many kinds of problems pertaining to the paradigm, including the aspect that such a list of world religions necessarily includes the exclusion of all those religions that are *not* on the list, - and what then do the teacher, the textbooks and religion education do with them? How do they qualify as religion(s) to be dealt with fairly and in a balanced and neutral way in teaching, if from the very outset they are seen as and 'classified' as not pertaining to what counts as a prototypical religion?

The term 'World Religion' is to be criticized because it universalises and thus essentialises cultural traditions. It authenticates a constructed 'core' while obscuring local cultural practices.

So, prototypical thinking about religion as found in the world religions paradigm can have far-reaching epistemological, theoretical and methodological as well as political consequences. The approach to the 'world religions' and to other religions becomes prejudiced.

At this point some clarification is necessary: in the following chapters and in other outputs of the SORAPS Project - an inevitably limited selection of religious traditions is presented. Such a selection is not grounded on a hierarchy of truer or falser "world religions", but on the basis of the number of adherents, of being part of common knowledge and, ultimately, on the basis of the expertise of the Project's consortium. So, it is not meant to be exhaustive, but it aims to present a fairly variegated picture.

Moreover, the use of the term "religious traditions" is used here as a heuristic tool to identify complex and dynamic processes and should not be confused with what the term "world religions" has often implied: a nucleus of unchanging 'religious' characteristics that remain unaltered in space and time.

Also, for an easier comprehension of what will follow here and in other outputs of the SORAPS Project, it is worth attempting a working definition of religion. Before going to it, we must state first that this will be not essentialist. That is, we are not pointing out to the elementary, intrinsic and unchanging characteristics of every religions. Nor will this definition be functional, i.e. it doesn't want to explain religions on the basis of one or more of their functions (like creating social cohesion). Our attempt to define religion can be seen as heuristic and descriptive. 'Heuristic' because it helps navigate through the vast range of phenomena taken into examination, and 'descriptive' because it is based on empirical findings, of which it tries to give a general description:

Religion can be defined as a cultural subsystem entailing a comprehensive interpretation of human existence, giving order and meaning to the world, to life and to death. These subsystems are articulated in various practices, norms, beliefs and social forms, and can be differentiated from other cultural subsystems due to their reference to a dimension that goes beyond the human condition, variously addressed as God, gods, or impersonal Absolute Principle(s).

2.4. Conclusion: Stereotypes and prejudices linked to the concept of religion 'in itself' as well as to the concept of world religion(s)

2.4.1. Main points

A).

- Essentialism is in this context the understanding that both specific religions and religion in general possess a specific 'essence' or 'core'.
- Essentialism often leads to discrimination and an exclusive 'we' over against an 'other'.
- Various forms or manifestations of religion are often compared to this 'core' and assessed to be either good or bad depending on their accordance with it.
- There are thus often judgments and prejudices linked to the essentialist notion of religion.
- The prototypical character that essentialism is built on can both be negative and positive. Both can lead to and function as negative stereotypes and prejudices.

B)

- The way most people think about 'religion' is a result of the dominance in the West of Christianity, of colonisation, of Westernisation and globalisation.
- The term 'religion' originates from a Latin-Roman non-Christian context in which it meant something like 'careful performance of ritual obligations'. Later, in the (Protestant) Christian-Western context, it came to be understood as an inner 'sentiment' or 'experience', a 'conviction', 'faith', and 'belief'.
- What 'it' means today is still not definitive or uniform in all cultures.
- The majority of the world has, however, adopted the Protestant, religious proto- or stereotype, which dictates that 'true religion' is the inner belief and faith, while rituals and institutions are secondary.
- Along this Protestant prototypical line of thinking, it is often asserted that the 'mystical experience' constitutes the 'purest' part of the religion.

C)

- There is <u>no</u> such thing as a 'core' or 'essence' of religion.
- No religious 'core' has ever been transmitted in an unchanged form through time. All religions have originated, changed, died or transformed to fit the needs of each historical period.
- Religion(s) comes into existence through societies, historical and cultural contexts, parents and institutions.
- <u>First</u> come rituals, worship, institutions and communities bringing up children with and within these rituals, institutions and communities. <u>Then</u>, afterwards, via this, the children may come 'to faith', come to think, and come to believe.
- Religion does not exist apart from the human beings, their interests, their ambitions, their understanding and practice and transmission of the religion in question.
- Religion is what the religionists make of it, what they have made of it, and what they may make of it in the future.
- Religion comes with human beings, their human way of thinking, the social interactions they are engaged in, etc.

D)

- The 'World Religions' are usually understood as the following five: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Sometimes Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, and Baha'i may be included.
- The term 'World Religion' is to be criticized because it universalises and thus essentialises cultural traditions. It authenticates a constructed 'core' while obscuring local cultural practices.
- The comprehension of 'World Religions' creates and defines a dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them'.
- The term is often used with a moral agenda of promoting pluralism and tolerance. Unfortunately, this often also results in a resistance to use explanatory approaches.
- It is typical to use the 'World Religions' as a measuring instrument to assess the quality of 'other' religions.

2.4.2. Stereotypes and prejudices

1 "Minority groups which somehow vary from the 'core' of the majority religion are worth less and judged accordingly."
    o The postulated, but non-existent, 'core' is often perceived as something good in itself. Therefore, any deviation from it is considered to be a mistake.

2 "The worth of religious people is measured against their accordance with the 'core' of the religion."
    o This stereotype is built on the apprehension that a 'true' or 'good' religious person should act and think in accordance with what is believed to be the essence of the religion.

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- o If he or she fails to satisfy these requirements, he or she is considered to be erroneous or even abusive of the religion.

3 "Some Muslims are 'using' Islam to justify acts of violence, terrorism or war. They take the religion 'hostage', politicise it, and use it in a way that does not correspond with the real essence of Islam."
   - o This is one of two similar approaches to Islam and Muslims that are seen in the media at present time.
   - o The 'defenders' of Muslims often hold this view, even though the understanding of a religious 'essence' is misguided.

4 "Violent Muslims are in fact 'typical' Muslims, who act in accordance with the very 'prototype' or 'core' of Islam."
   - o This second stereotype is a typical expression of Muslim-hostility or even Islamophobia.

5 "Religion is or ought to be a matter of private belief/faith."
   - o The Protestant influence on Western thinking has resulted in this generalized view on religion.
   - o Religious expression is first of all a result of the social and historical context along with influence from parents, friends, the community, etc.

6 "Religious traditions are constants, unchangeable and recognisable through the centuries."
   - o Religions and norm systems change constantly through new interpretations of rituals, decrees, and other symbols.

7 "All Muslims believe and engage in the same doctrines and practices."
   - o There are several versions of Islam to choose between, and every individual can interpret and practise each version in an almost endless number of ways – and still be a Muslim practicing Islam.
   - o There are as many Islams as there are Muslims, and as many Christianities as there are Christians.

8 "Religious people follow the statements of religious leaders, and what religious leaders say is therefore representative of the entire group."
   - o Religious people are often unconcerned with what their leader says. Most religious people might be said to follow their leaders' statements when it suits them; that is, when the social, political, or economic context does not conflict too much with the leaders' decrees.

9 "Religious belonging is determining and decides how people should act."

- o Religious people do not always behave as the traditional interpretations of their religion stipulates. There are several normative systems other than the religious ones that must be taken into consideration.

10 "Religions clash with each other, 'modernity' or Western culture."

- o First of all: religions are not independent, invariant things, entities and agents that are able to 'clash' with anything.
- o Religions do not 'go' to war: human beings 'go' to war.

2.4.3. How to tackle these stereotypes and prejudices

- It is of great importance that people and pupils comprehend the variety of understandings and definitions regarding religion, and the fact that each of these is a connotation – not a denotation.

- Religion cannot be understood as something 'in itself', but only as a social product of the way people think, talk and act.

- This knowledge is important not only to the academic study of religion, but also to religion education. A kind of social constructivist approach must be shared and engaged in both textbooks and classrooms.

- It is of the utmost importance that teachers and students learn how to approach religion as a human, social, and historical phenomenon which, like 'culture', is always 'in motion', always in a state of fluidity, a dynamic human, historical and social 'process' and construct.

- Religion is not a 'thing', and reifications must be countered and understood as such, not as descriptions of the world and the religion(s) in question.

- All schools, religion education classrooms and textbooks in particular should avoid the 'World Religions'-term, or at least problematize the use of it.

- It is an important issue that the majority religions seem to set the standard for what counts as a religion, in people's minds, in states, in classrooms, in courtrooms, - and even in the semantics and discussions of religion in human rights linked terminology and 'law'.

2.4.4. How to avoid unconscious use of stereotypes

- The terminology used in the engagement with religion is always important to consider. The way we talk about things makes them what they are (cf. Niels Reeh, Appendix 2).

- It is especially critical to be aware of value-loaded expressions about religion. Even analytical terms like 'popular religion', 'syncretic religion', or 'sectarian religion' can be, and often are, used in judgmental ways without precise explanations.

- The way many people often comprehend religion as being what it is, in its Protestant prototype, causes problems for the study of and teaching about religion. Sometimes it is difficult, on the most fundamental epistemological, theoretical and methodological levels, to even 'see' or 'recognise' religions that do not 'adhere' to the Christian-Protestant-World Religions model of religion.

- It is important to be aware of these pitfalls and always take them into account when dealing with religion from the point of view of the study of religion.

3. Stereotypes and prejudices linked to New Religious Movements

3.1. Religion, religions, - and new religions, sects & cults

What has just been said about religion in general as well as to the so-called world religions, and about ideas of 'true' (or 'false'), 'real' or 'fake' religion(s) can be exemplified in many ways.

One example that stands out (and furthermore often attracts the attention of politicians, educators, public debates, *and* pupils) is constituted by widespread attitudes, opinions, and terms (e.g. 'sect' and 'cult') linked to what is called 'new religions', 'new religious movements' (NRMs), and, e.g. in Germany, at some point, 'Jugendreligionen'.

The typical terms, opinions, and attitudes can be found in mass media, political and public discourse, in so-called anti cult and counter cult (e.g. Christian counter cult movements) discourse, - and in actions, policies, and laws aimed at the groups as well as individuals adhering to the NRMs.

Many of these terms, opinions, attitudes etc. are examples of stereotypes and prejudices, and many of the actions taken are discriminatory, often with severe, at times fatal, consequences for the religions and religious people in question *and* for the surrounding society.

NRMs, including so-called sects and cults, have been studied for decades by a large number of highly specialised and excellent scholars of religion, not rarely sociologists of religion, and it seems evident that the study of these religions cannot but include the study of the typical, including stereotypical, notions and prejudices, that are so often so intimately linked to most of these religions. A study of these religions,

> Attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices towards New Religious Movements are an example of erroneous dichotomization in 'true' and 'false 'religions.

therefore, cannot but include a study of their attitudes toward the society surrounding them, - and a study of the attitudes of the surrounding societies to the groups in question.

The list below aims at rendering sort of an 'average' of the many listings of typical and stereotypical notions about these religions, but readers are encouraged to consult some of the more recent overviews (e.g. the ones by Erin Prophet) of the field of the (study of) so-called new religions, sects and cults if they want more descriptions and discussions.

Typical stereotypes and prejudices

- The leader of the religion in question is not what s/he pretends to be (e.g. a prophet, a sincere believer) but a pretender and a fraud. If not actually mad or somehow sick, s/he is mainly interested in manipulating the followers - and cheating them for their support, - and money. The leader, thus, is seen as a *false* prophet or 'guru', and the so-called *charisma* that pertains to him/her is something s/he has tricked the followers to bestow on him/her so that they will follow the leader with blind devotion. The leader very often is also accused of being sexually deviant, e.g. having too much lust for

sex, or a homosexual, and s/he uses his/her authority to have sex with members and/or minors. S/he also has a perverse lust or greed for power and authority. And for money.

- The followers/believers are credulous (or outright stupid), and/or decent people but weak minded or fragile people who have been deceived and manipulated, if not *'brainwashed'*. They follow the leader(ship) blindly, like zombies, and they are ready to give up everything, family, profession, work, children and to live in 'compounds', secluded from the rest of the world.

- The methods used to *convert* them to this (new) religion, sect or cult are manipulatory. It is only because they are fragile, weak-minded, and because they have furthermore been manipulated, if not downright 'brainwashed', that they can believe in the beliefs in question and put up with the manipulating authoritarian leadership. Modern anti- or counter cult movements thus have thought it necessary and all right to kidnap followers, e.g. sons and daughters from the new religion in question, and staged a 'de-programming' of the followers.

- The new religion, sect or cult in question, e.g. Scientology, is not a real religion but a manipulating 'business', cheating money out of the poor followers who come to believe in the nonsense beliefs and practices and the manipulatory leadership, and who are ready to devote their life and spend their money in the service of the leader who is a fraud and smart businessperson.

- The new religions (or some of them) are, as said, often called sects or cults, and in most common parlance these terms are *not* used as analytical, sociological terms (denoting a movement and a group of people, breaking out from a 'mother'-, majority-, and established religion, and explicitly distancing themselves, more or less radically, from the norms of the mother group as well as from the norms of the majority society) but as mere pejorative terms. Terms indicating fanaticism, radicalism, exclusivism, and secrecy.

- The beliefs entertained are considered radical or ridiculous, at times though, also dangerous, e.g. millennial or apocalyptic ideas about the end of the world, and the salvation of the chosen few, ideas which, combined with the absolute authority of the leader, may lead to violence, suicide and killings. Several of the most (in-)famous NRMs, sects or cults have thus been termed 'suicide 'or 'killer' cults, and the examples given are often these: the Peoples Temple (1978, mass killings and suicide, more than 900, in Jonestown Guyana), Branch Davidian (1993, death of 74 people in Waco, Texas), Aum Shinrikyō (1995, sarin gas attack in Tokyo underground), the Order of the Solar Temple (1994,1995, and 1997, killings and

suicides in various cities in Canada and Switzerland), and Heaven's Gate (1997, suicides in San Diego, California)

When taking a closer look at the NRMs, and the typical and stereotypical notions and prejudices attached, it pays off to take heed of the scholarly literature and to be careful not to mistake anti- or counter cult literature for neutral scholarly literature. Sometimes it may be hard to see what is what, and in the same way it is not rarely hard (but important) to differentiate between insiders (often in a position as apologetics) and outsiders (e.g. neutral scholars who also defend, indirectly and directly, the religion(s) in question from unfounded attacks and discrimination).

For a scholar of religion, the first thing to notice is that typical stereotypes and prejudices linked to contemporary religions labeled 'new religions', 'cults' and 'sects' are very similar, or identical, to typical stereotypes and prejudices linked to religions of the past, religions which, when they originated were also new religions.

This, then, is also one of the first lessons to be learnt in regard to the establishment of an analytical, historical and comparative critical reflection and relation to the NRMs, and the typical stereotypes and prejudices accompanying discussions about them: 'new religions' are not special to our times, and those religions, including the so-called world religions, e.g. Christianity, which are today major or mainstream religions in the world and majority religions in many countries and areas, started out as new religions. And, they too started out not infrequently in a context where a majority population belonging to a majority religion looked at them with distrust, despise, and scorn, mixed with fear and anxiety. Just as is the case today.

> Typical stereotypes and prejudices linked to contemporary new religious movements are very similar to typical stereotypes and prejudices linked to majority religions when they started out as minority or new religions. This is linked to the dynamics of mainstream religious communities that tend to consider new and minority religions as 'unacceptably different'.

Consequently, new religions as well as many of the typical stereotypes and prejudices linked to them can, with advantage, be studied and understood if analysed and interpreted within a framework and perspective of *majority - versus minority-religions*. The new religions, just like the old religions, are not *sui generis*, not isolated from humans, societies, and politics, including identity politics, and they are therefore 'used' for many purposes, by the adherents/members as well as by their adversaries.

One of the many prominent scholars of these religions, Erin Prophet, in one of her introductions to the subject matter, with reference to Gordon Melton, another prominent key scholar of NRMs, says (about 'cults'):

According to Melton [2004, 17], the only criteria that can meaningfully be applied to all groups that are labeled 'cults' is their marginalization with respect to dominant religious and secular traditions, meaning that they "exist in a relatively contested space within society as a whole" (Prophet 2015b, 162).

What NRMs, a term less pejorative than 'cult', have in common, she says (Prophet 2017a, 230) again with reference to Melton [2004, 25], is

That they are "unacceptably different" from the "dominant religious community" [...]. Although some NRMs may at some time in their history have displayed one or more of the stereotypical characteristics, there is no cookie-cutter definition. The cultural construct does not explain the actual behavior of NRMs or their members.

Scholars, Prophet writes, have evaluated *cult stereotypes* and *cult discourse* in an effort to understand the power dynamics at work. She refers (Prophet 2015a, 229) to scholars Dillon and Richardson who argue that the use of the word 'cult' is a "hegemonic" term reflecting a larger contest for power and legitimacy [Dillon & Richardson 1994, 190], as well as to another famous scholar, Lewis, who has written about the cult stereotype as a "potent ideological resource" to "marshal public opinion" against the groups [Lewis 1994, 32].

A (rather long) quote from an article by Prophet (2017a, 230-31), where she summarises current scholarship on NRMs, may serve as an example of what the best scholars have to say when they address the typical stereotypes on the basis of their empirical research. Readers are referred to the article by Prophet for the references to the works of scholars mentioned:

"Brainwashing" as understood in the popular sense has not been dem-onstrated to be possible without forced confinement and physical abuse, which is not practiced in most NRMs. Although some NRMs house members communally, the majority of their members live independently and are employed outside the group.

The process of joining an NRM usually takes time, and indoctrination techniques are generally successful only on a small proportion of interested people (Barker 1986; Anthony and Robbins 2004a). Individuals cannot be hypnotized to act against their best interests (Anthony and Robbins 2004b). Members usually get fulfillment in the form of spiritual experience, self-improvement and social benefits, though they may later decide it was not worth the time or investment. During their membership, followers think

oppositionally, and may plan to leave before actually doing so (Dawson 2006).

Few NRMs are deliberately deceptive or more abusive than traditional religions, although like many organizations, they put their best foot forward to new recruits. Most members have overlapping identities and engage in a complex process of decision-making. Joining an NRM is not necessarily for life. Individuals usually end their relationships with an NRM after several years; some cycle through a number of groups or transition into mainline religions. A few become vocal apostates, producing narratives, which feed into the cultural construct. For the most part, when NRMs break the law, they are discovered and sanctioned by official authorities (see Dawson 2006).

Again, with special regard to Scientology but with importance for the understanding of other NRMs and attitudes to them, Prophet (2017, 231), in her article on the popular construction of Scientology as a 'monster' religion, writes:

Whatever the cultural construct of Scientology, the reality is that most members live independently, hold down jobs, contribute to their communities, do charitable work, and may have overlapping affiliations with other religions. They are motivated by sincere religious beliefs, and believe that the "tech, the auditing technology that is at the core of the church's spiritual beliefs, has changed their lives for the better.

Prophet, noticing that one of the reasons for the strong opinions about Scientology has to do with the fact that Scientology is seen as a *hybrid* religion, transgressing conceptual borderlines or combining what is considered different domains*, in casu*, borderlines between what is considered 'religion' on the one hand, and 'science' on the other. In order for religions to be acceptable, they have to accept to stay within what is considered the special 'religious' sphere, and they have to respect that science is superior to religion, at least in most respects. Religion, by 'nature', should deal with e.g. 'faith' and 'belief', not with what is considered the domain of science and e.g. a more or less scientifically founded, medicine, and psychotherapy.

Scientology, and its leader and founder, Ron L. Hubbard, does *not* respect these boundaries and domains, and it does thus straddle what are supposed to be separate domains. Hubbard himself, a human, yet also almost treated as a god or god-like hero, who, furthermore, thinks that he, with the help of a (ridiculous) technology and science, can make humans superhumans.

Concerning this important use within Scientology of the so-called 'auditing' and the technological device, the electropsychometer (E-meter), Prophet writes (2017a, 231) that it is seen as intruding

> … on the sanctums of both medicine and the law, due to the similarities between auditing technology and psychotherapy as well as the E-meter's functional relationship to the polygraph, used by law enforcement to support the justice system, which may suggest why this practice attracts widespread ridicule and censure.

Scientologists, it should be noticed, have for years been discriminated in France, Germany, and in the US they are rated even lower than atheists and Muslims. Despite the many famous actors and celebrities in support of Scientology, actors like Tom Cruise and John Travolta also become objects of ridicule and suspicion, accused, as also Ron Hubbard himself, of being sexually deviant (Prophet 2017a, 231ff).

As for the many other typical stereotypes and allegations directed towards NRMs ,including the so-called suicide or murder cults mentioned above as well as the general allegations about violence, murder and suicide, the reader is referred to the literature listed.

3.2. Conclusion – New Religious Movements
3.2.1. Main points

- New Religious Movements can be used as an example of the abovementioned ideas of 'true' (or 'false') religions.
- The typical opinions and attitudes regarding the movements can be found in mass media, political and public discourse, in so-called Anti/Counter Cults and in individual comprehensions.
- The attitudes presented are often dominated by stereotypes and prejudice.
- Especially the terms 'sect' and 'cult' can be seen as discriminatory. They are a part of a hegemonic contest for power and legitimacy.
- Actions taken against the groups have often been severe and at times fatal.
- 'New religions' are not special to our times, and those religions (including the so-called world religions, e.g. Christianity), which are today major or mainstream religions in the world, started out as new religions.
- They arose in a context where a majority of the population, belonging to a majority religion, looked at them with distrust, despise, and scorn, mixed with fear and anxiety.
- Typical stereotypes and prejudices linked to contemporary religions labeled 'new religions', 'cults' and 'sects' are very similar, or identical, to typical stereotypes and prejudices linked to majority religions when they started out as minority or new religions.
- The only real thing new religions have in common is that they are 'unacceptably different' from the dominant religious community.
- The accusations of 'brainwashing' have proved to be wrong.
- The majority of members live independently and are employed outside the group.
- People usually join the new religious movements to get fulfillment in the form of spiritual experience, self-improvement or social benefits.

- An example of a new religious movement that has been hugely discriminated is Scientology. This has to do, inter alia, with the fact that Scientology is seen as a hybrid religion (a crossing of religion and science).
- The new religions, just like the old religions, are not *sui generis*, not isolated from humans, societies, and politics, including identity politics, and they are therefore 'used' for many purposes, by the adherents/members as well as by their adversaries.

3.2.2. Stereotypes and prejudices

- "The leaders of new religions are not *real* prophets, but pretenders or frauds."
- "The leaders use manipulative methods to 'brainwash' credulous people and recruit them."
- "The leaders often use their authority to act out perversions and have sex with members and/or minors."
- "New Religious Movements are not real religions, but manipulating businesses, cheating poor followers out of their money."
- "New Religious Movements encourage fanaticism, radicalism, exclusivism, and secrecy."
- "Their beliefs are radical and ridiculous – sometimes even dangerous."
- "The ideas and beliefs of new religions lead to violence, suicide and killings."
- "Religion, by 'nature', should deal with 'faith' and 'belief', not with what is considered the domain of science (e.g. Scientology)."

3.2.3. How to tackle these stereotypes and prejudices

- New religions as well as many of the typical stereotypes and prejudices linked to them can, with advantage, be studied and understood if analysed and interpreted within a framework and perspective of *majority - versus minority-religions*.
- New religions as well as many of the typical stereotypes and prejudices linked to them can, with advantage, be studied and understood if analysed and interpreted within a framework and perspective of what has been said about stereotypes and prejudices linked to religion in general and to the world religions paradigm.
- This approach can help to understand the general mechanisms that cause such hostile behavior.

3.2.4. How to avoid unconscious use of stereotypes

- It is important to be careful not to mistake anti- or counter cult literature for neutral scholarly literature. It is equally important to try to differentiate between insiders (often in a position as apologetics) and outsiders (e.g. neutral scholars who also defend, indirectly and directly, the religion(s) in question from unfounded attacks and discrimination).

4. Stereotypes and prejudices linked to Buddhism

4.1. Introduction

Buddhism has played a central role in the cultural and social life of Asia and during the 20th century it spread to the West becoming the world's fourth-largest religion. Buddhism encompasses a variety of traditions, beliefs and spiritual practices largely based on teachings attributed to the historical figure of Siddhārtha Gautama (c. 563 BCE/480 BCE – c. 483 BCE/400 BCE), commonly known as the Buddha, who taught mostly in the eastern part of India. Buddhism developed gradually into Asia during the third century BCE following the conversion of King Ashoka, an Indian emperor of the Maurya Dynasty who ruled almost the entire Indian subcontinent from c. 268 to 232 BCE. During the same period, Buddhism split into two main schools – the "Great Vehicle" (*Mahayana*) and the "The Lesser Vehicle" (*Hinayana*). A third school, known as "Diamond Vehicle" (*Vajrana*) is referred to as Tantrism (a term derived from its canonic texts, the Tantras) or esoteric Buddhism.

Central to Buddhist teaching is that it is a path towards the elimination of ignorance and craving, and that it aims to attain the Nirvana (*nirvāṇa*), which represents the ultimate state of soteriological release and liberation from rebirths in *saṃsāra*, the beginning-less cycle of repeated life and death. Buddhism has become a complex religious phenomenon with an eschatological vision of liberation from the state of dissatisfaction and suffering. Since Buddhism cannot be considered as a sort of 'religion of the book', such as Judaism or Islam, nor an ethnic religion, such as Hinduism or Shintō, Buddhism is characterized by an incredible capability for assimilation in order for it to adapt to different cultural realities, thus also giving rise to many schools of thought.

> One of the roots of the stereotypization of Buddhism lies in the fact that it has been considered as a homogeneous and foreign "world religion".

Despite the richness of the various Buddhist schools - which vary on the exact nature of the path to liberation, the importance and canonicity of various teachings and scriptures, and especially their respective ritual practices -, the main teachings are generally understood under the single category of "world religion". The concept of Buddhism was created about three centuries ago to indicate a pan-Asian religious tradition and was gradually accepted and described as one of the main 'world religions'. However, interpreting Buddhism as a singular religion, as Deal and Ruppert have observed (2015: 1), offers a very simplistic and stereotypical interpretation of Buddhism (as of any of the other so-called world religions):

> The notion that "Buddhism" is a "world religion" is an idea derived from nineteenth century Western scholars. Moreover, the discourse of "world religions" is alive and well in the twenty first century, as world religions courses have, if anything, proliferated at North American and European colleges and universities. Despite revisionist views within the history of religion that call into question the unitary character of any of the great "isms",

Buddhism frequently continues to be described as a singular and stable tradition. The result is the obfuscation of manifold "Buddhisms" displaying complex, multiple religious practices and ideas.

Consequently, Buddhism is still nowadays interpreted as a homogeneous 'foreign religion', a way of 'oriental thinking' that is inverse to religious monotheisms such as Christianity and Islam (consider, for example, that Buddhism has no concept of sin or eternal damnation at all). A common view of Buddhism has thus laid the basis for many stereotypes, generalizations and simplifications: it is no coincidence that in the questionnaires of the partner schools the results reflect the idea among students that Buddhism is basically associated to Zen ('everything is Zen') or that Buddhism is 'peace and quiet', 'peaceful' or, more generally, 'a good practice of meditation and not a religion'. Synthetically, some of the main stereotypes of Buddhism are described below, focusing in particular on the association of Buddhism to peace, tolerance and non-violence, to the stereotypical idea that Buddhism promotes vegetarianism, is a 'philosophical and meditative religion', and that Buddhism is basically Zen.

4.2. Pacifism, egalitarianism and tolerance

Buddhism is generally considered to be one of the richest religious traditions of ethical values. It is often identified as a non-fundamentalist and pacifist religious tradition that is placed in antithesis to other religious traditions which are considered prone to violence, war, militarism and intolerance. The answers to the questionnaires have confirmed this association of Buddhism to pacifism: both teachers and pupils have stated that this is the main stereotype concerning Buddhism. Such stereotypical understanding of Buddhism is very widespread in the world, especially in Western culture, thanks also to the mass media broadcast and, in particular, to so-called New Age culture which has associated Buddhism to pacifism in the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s. Especially in Western culture, Buddhism has also been generally considered a tradition of thinking that does not preach violence and, above all, it is often said that Buddhism has never created wars of religion. In mass culture, Buddhism is often conceived as a religion of peace, iconographically constellated to smiling Buddhas and charitable saints whose teachings promote regeneration, tolerance and pacifism.

During the twentieth century, the Western rediscovery of Buddhism forged the stereotypical idea that Buddhism is mainly characterized by tolerance and compassion, transcending all specific cultures. Buddhism is therefore seen as a sentimental doctrine of universal love and compassion, democracy and tolerance based on the fundamental concept of *ahiṃsā* ('not to injure' and 'compassion'), that is, the idea that violence towards other living beings is morally polluting.

The reception of Buddhism by westerners greatly exaggerated its ethical dimension, so that an aura of tolerance and 'smiling buddhas' obscures the physical, political and ritual violence that exists also in Buddhism.

Buddhist pacifism achieved also international renown thanks to Gandhi, who applied a very broad interpretation to the concept of *ahiṃsā* (shared by Hinduism), using this expression to emphasize the need to eliminate the violence and all thoughts centered on hatred in order to build a world of peace. Strictly connected to the idea that Buddhism is a peaceful religion, another dominant stereotype of Buddhism is the common idea that it praises tolerance and egalitarianism. According to the main teachings of Buddhism, salvation is potentially accessible to all living beings, asserting that human beings are all equal.

However, despite such an aura of pacifism, egalitarianism and tolerance, Buddhism as it is found in the real world, is equally full of paradoxes and conflicting aspects as any other of the big religions, and some of these aspects often contradict the stereotypical vision of a serene, no-edged Asian faith. It is a common idea that no battle has been made in the name of Buddhism, however, according to Bernard Faure, it is unclear what 'in the name of' might signify (2009: 95):

> […] Buddhism has a complex relationship with war, and reasons for bending the principle of non-violence have never been wanting. In countries where Buddhism represented the official ideology, it has often been obliged to support the war effort. Violence was justified by considerations of a practical nature: when the Buddhist Law (Dharma) is threatened, it is necessary to ruthlessly fight the forces of evil. Kill them all, and the Buddha will recognize his own. Murder in this case is piously qualified as "liberation," since the demons will be released from their ignorance and can then be reborn under better auspices.

There are episodes in the history of Asia where Buddhism has been exploited for political ends, for justifying military campaigns among Buddhist monasteries, including also conflicts between Buddhists and non-Buddhists. One example is the Japanese warrior monks: the word *sōhei* (*sō* means 'monk' and *hei* 'warrior') is a term of Japanese historiography that indicates paramilitary groups associated with Buddhist temples in the Middle Ages, in which laymen and ordered monks fought for the interests of their monastery or religious sect. The political influence of the warrior monks was so strong that Lieutenant Oda Nobunaga (1534 - 1582) decided to exterminate them so as not to impede his rise to power. In other geographical contexts, there have been historical events in which Buddhist monks embraced weapons against foreign forces, as in the case of Tibetan Buddhist monks fighting against the British armies. In other cases, Buddhist monks supported the nationalist ideology as in the case of Zen monks who supported the military expansion of the Japanese empire during World War II. Finally, one of the most emblematic case of violence in Buddhism was the case

of the Japanese new religion movement Aum Shinrikyō ('supreme truth') which began to operate in 1980 as a spiritual group mixing Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, adding then elements of Christian apocalyptic prophecies. Aum Shinrikyō was founded by Shōkō Asahara and became known around the world following the massacre in the Tokyo subway of March 20, 1995. Episodes of violence have also occurred in Myanmar. Peter A. Coclanis details this violent history, explaining its rise in the context of Buddhist nationalism, an ideology combining "Buddhist religious fanaticism with intense Burmese nationalism and more than a tinge of ethnic chauvinism" (Coclanis 2013:23). Since the 1990s, radicalized Buddhist monks have voiced "an aggressive anti-Muslim message." Anti-Muslim riots in 2001-2002 and again in 2011-2012 and 2017 left dozens of Rohingya, a Muslim minority, dead and hundreds of thousands displaced by what Coclanis calls Buddhist terrorism.

Interestingly, the fundamental concept of *ahiṃsā* professed by Buddhism can also be questioned by a ritual point of view: in many traditions, Buddhism through its rituals created a real 'symbolic violence' against other religious traditions. Even for the question of murder, theoretical justifications have been formulated by Buddhist monks who, in order to overcome the thorny issue of non-violence, supported the idea of 'preventive killing', i.e. killing another person in order to prevent further crimes. Also the view of Buddhism as egalitarian is contradicted when considering all the Buddhist schools that openly questioned the basic principles of egalitarianism: for example, the precarious social condition of young people inside the Japanese monasteries represents one of the most controversial aspects of Buddhism.

Even the traditional Buddhist position on women's condition has posed some ethical problems. From a philosophical point of view, many Buddhist texts in the Mahayana tradition eliminate discrimination against women. Although the principle of non-duality implies equality between men and women, in fact, the social status of nuns is considered inferior to monks, trapping them within regulations that force them to live in a state of poverty and economic dependence. In this regard, Buddhism could be regarded as a religious androcentric tradition, a thesis that is partly confirmed by Buddhist texts, which consider rebirth as a woman a relatively unlucky event.

4.3. Spirituality, meditation and Zen Buddhism

It should be kept in mind that Asian Buddhists do not call their own religion 'Buddhism' but *Dharma*, or Law, or they use *Buddha-sasāna* (Buddha's teachings), while applying the term 'doctrine' to refer to Buddhist beliefs is misleading because the concept of doctrine is often too connoted to Western religion. However, it is possible to use the term doctrine if we mean the systematic formulation of religious teachings whose original theoretical core is contained in a series of interconnected propositions formed by the historical Buddha, and known as the Four Noble Truths.

According to the main doctrines of Buddhism, the main goal is to attain liberation from *saṃsāra* and the main and most ancient practice aimed to achieve it is meditation, which is basically a borrowing of the pre-existent spiritual practices of the early Hinduism. In fact,

early texts explain the Buddhist path to enlightenment as founded on three pillars: **ethical conduct, wisdom** and **meditation**. Along with its historical development and the geographical distribution, Buddhism diversified also its meditative techniques: on one hand, it aims to purify the mind from all kind of passions and desires towards the external world, in order to obtain a serene and detached equanimity of mind; on the other hand, it aims to focus the mind on the real nature of reality that is impermanent and illusory.

Traditionally, the study and the exposition of the doctrines are handed down by the monastic order (*sangha*), which cares for and interprets the canonical texts. However not all monks are philosophers and many have considered that liberation from *samsara* was possible only through the mystical experience of meditation. In the history of Buddhism, practice and meditation were therefore the privilege of intellectual and educated elite, and only from the twentieth century meditative practices spread among the laity.

The fact that Buddhism is essentially understood as a philosophical and meditation-based tradition is due to the fact that this religious tradition is somehow in tune with some of the important contemporary currents of thought, which undoubtedly contributed to its spread to the West. The so-called 'modernist Buddhism' is the fruit of this Western interpretation of Buddhism, even though it neglects some aspects that are present from its origins and are less compatible with

> Buddhism is often considered only in philosophical, meditative or mystical terms. But a stereotype of this kind is a limited reading made by both westerners and indigenous popularizers wanting to appeal to a modern Western audience.

Western culture. The belief in miracles, the effectiveness of tantric mantras, magic, and magic formulas are some obvious examples. For example, the Tibetan government is still consulting the state oracle for advice on important issues, while in Japan the salvific and benevolent magic powers of Buddhist saints and Buddhas are being prayed in Buddhist temples.

Finally, a few words on the Western assimilation of Zen Buddhism (from Sanskrit *dhyana*, or 'meditation'), one of the major schools of Japanese Buddhism that came to Japan from China. Modern Western culture has witnessed, from the 60s and 70s, a progressive spread of Zen Buddhism, not least in the hippie counter-culture, and the encounter with psychoanalysis inspired many western writers and scholars to search for intersecting points between two different paths, both apparently aiming at spiritual growth and liberation. Among the authors who were most interested in the connections between psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism were Carl Gustav Jung and Erik Fromm who personally knew Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki (1870-1966) considered one of Zen's greatest Buddhist authorities. The Buddhist Zen tradition generally has an iconoclastic tendency and considers the study of texts, doctrines and dogmas as potential obstacles to *nirvana*, arguing instead that meditation is the most suitable means of attaining spiritual awakening. In particular, the current Western imagination about Zen is still largely shaped by the image that Suzuki created. As Bernard Faure has observed (2009: 79):

Suzuki managed to convince his Western readers that Zen could rival the very best of Christian mysticism, or rather that it was, in fact, superior to all other forms of mysticism, both Oriental and Western, and as such constituted a unique historical phenomenon. Suzuki logically concluded that Zen is neither a philosophy nor a religion but is quite simply "the spirit of all religion or philosophy."

The interpretation of Suzuki has made a big impression on Japan and in particular on the philosopher Nishida Kitarō, the founder of the Kyoto school. Again, Bernard Faure (2009:78) has noted that in Japan meditation is practiced only in some large monasteries while

In most Zen temples, as in the temples of other sects, priests spend most of their time carrying out funeral rituals for their parishioners. With the spread of Zen Buddhism throughout Europe and the United States, there has been a trend towards ignoring the more religious and ritualistic aspects of Zen and focusing instead on its technical aspects, thereby subjecting *zazen* to the same treatment as Indian yoga.

4.4. Vegetarianism

A final topic directly related to the main Western stereotypes regarding Buddhism (nourished by Western interest in vegetarian or vegan lifestyle and diet) is the idea that a practicing Buddhist strictly follows a vegetarian diet. As previously mentioned, a very common idea about Buddhism is that Buddhists respect scrupulously all living things, men and animals, considering the use of violence strictly unacceptable. For these reasons, Buddhist tradition has led many of its followers to become vegetarians. However, affirming that all Buddhists are vegetarians is a generalization since the historical Buddha and his monks ate meat. If we consider, for example, the Sanskrit word for monk, *Bhikṣu*, we note that this term literally means 'beggar'. In fact, monks originally begged every day and ate everything that was donated, including meat. The question of vegetarianism changes according to the Buddhist school. For example, in Theravada Buddhism the practice of vegetarianism is completely separated from the Buddhist doctrine and only a few monasteries encourage this practice. The school of Buddhism that is probably the most responsible for creation of this stereotype is the Mahayana Buddhism that requires vegetarianism for monks, encouraging also laypeople to take on a vegetarian diet.

4.5. Conclusion – Buddhism

4.5.1. Main points

- Though the Buddhist tradition is one of the major Asian cultural traditions, it is still today subject to simplification and stereotyping of orientalist origin, New Age or other Western cultural influences.
- Modern pop culture has appropriated Buddhist imagery, commercializing it (Hollywood-cinema, Oriental music, ethnic fashion, etc.), thus influencing or contributing to the creation of the main stereotypes of contemporary Buddhism.
- Buddhism, under the influence of New Age ideas, thus becomes a cocktail of various spiritual traditions and alternative sciences, blended with the aim of creating a syncretistic religiosity.
- Surrounded by the proliferation of representations, characteristic of mass culture and media, the main stereotypes of contemporary Buddhism have highlighted a tradition of thought based solely on ethical, philosophical and moral principles that have been historically decontextualized.
- Buddhism therefore appears as a sugar-coated version, free of internal contradictions, unconnected with its historical and socio-cultural and political heritage and, above all, reshaped according to the spiritual and cultural necessities of contemporary Western culture.

4.5.2. Stereotypes and prejudices

- "Buddhism is one of the richest religious traditions and a source of ethical values".
- "Buddhism is a "world religion""
- "Buddhism in its essence is a philosophical and meditation-based tradition".
- "Buddhists promote vegetarianism prohibiting the killing of animals and the consumption of their meat."
- "Buddhism in its core is basically equal to Zen-Buddhism and Zen-Buddhism is equal to 'Suzuki -Zen' rather than to Zen as actually practised in Japan, and it is closely associated with the culture of Japanese martial arts".
- "Buddhism is a pacifist and tolerant religion, based on the principle of nonviolence, teaching and practising compassion and promoting social equality and equality between man and woman".

4.5.3. How to tackle these stereotypes and prejudices

- The stereotypes of Buddhism are especially due to two cultural factors: the modern Western idealization of Buddhism, partly due to the influence of New Age and mass culture, and the apparently indirect cultural heritage of Western colonialism. Buddhism is stripped of its cultural complexity, both in the doctrinal and historical, political and social spheres.

- This Western understanding of Buddhism, 'Buddhist Modernism', neglects certain fundamental elements of this religious tradition (for example, rituals and magical formulas, etc.), foregrounding instead meditation or philosophical reflection.

- Considering Buddhism as an exclusively philosophical Asian tradition, often identified with the Zen Buddhist tradition, reveals not only a certain confusion on the doctrinal level, but does not even take in consideration the pragmatic dimension of Buddhism.

- Pragmatism and spiritualism are two complementary elements of the Buddhist tradition. It should also be noted that Buddhist practice does not focus solely on meditation but, apart from the monasteries, it also includes magical rituals, and other ritual formulas for obtaining worldly benefits.

- Furthermore: Buddhism is not a Zen doctrine, a common misconception that is mainly derived from Daisetsz Teitarō Suzuki's dissemination works. Closely associated with this type of stereotype, is also the common idea that Zen Buddhism is mainly tied to martial arts (for example, *karate*, *judō,* but also *bushidō,* that is, the code of honour that dictated the *samurai* way of life).

- Buddhist practitioners are thought to respect scrupulously all living things, men and animals, considering morally unacceptable the use of violence. According to this very common stereotype, Buddhists promote vegetarianism thus prohibiting the killing of animals and the consumption of their meat. Even in this case, one should be aware of that fact that the idea of considering Buddhism as an essentially vegetarian movement is due to a process of Western simplification of the various doctrines of the Buddhist schools.

- Buddhism is also very often considered a pacifist and egalitarian religion, based on the principle of nonviolence, which teaches compassion and promotes social equality between man and woman. Also in this case Buddhism is transformed into a totally idealized doctrine of thought without taking into account the thorny questions about the factual roles of women, especially nuns, within Buddhist monasteries, or the recent acts of violence perpetrated by some Buddhist sects and groups (the Japanese sect, Aum Shinrikyō, for example, carried out the deadly Tokyo underground *sarin* attack in 1995).

4.5.4. How to avoid unconscious use of stereotypes

- A critical review of the actual use of interpretative categories such as, for example, 'religion' or 'meditation' can provide greater clarity about the cultural complexity of the Buddhist tradition. Through the critical analysis of what is actually Buddhism, it is possible to identify the cultural mechanisms that lead to creation, even unconscious, of the many stereotypes regarding this Asian religion.

5. Stereotypes and prejudices linked to Chinese religions

5.1. Introduction and the problem of the "Three Teachings" model

The results from the questionnaires in the partner schools has revealed an evident scarcity of interest or an explicit incapacity to picture what Chinese religion(s) could be. Apart from this finding, it seemed that the dimension of religion in China was reduced to exotic features like super-human abilities (like in *Kung fu* movies) or admittedly labeled *exotic* - in sense of totally other. For some respondents it didn't even make sense to talk about Chinese religions, since they were thought to have been totally wiped out by the Communist Regime.

In what follows we will discuss how these responses could be linked to the fact that the Chinese religious landscape doesn't fit our stereotypical notions of religion and what it may mean to be 'religious', in particular with reference to the Chinese tradition of 'non- exclusivist' affiliation to one or more religious traditions or schools, and to a poor knowledge of recent Chinese history.

The confused understanding of Chinese religions and relative contrasting stereotypes can be explained by the fact that the way in which religion is lived in China doesn't fit typical Western notions of religion and religiosity.

This means that here, unlike the other sections, we will need to dwell on the question of what it is that makes up and characterizes Chinese religions(s), especially in recent times. Links to the IERS Digital Modules web pages are provided in order to make the text easier to read. Moreover, we will add and discuss further misconceptions and stereotypical views described in the scientific literature on Chinese religions.

Let us begin with the first issue: the difficulty to have a clear-cut idea (according to Western standards) of the religious landscape in China.

Supported by a tradition of old scholarly works, Chinese religions have long been identified using the "Three Teachings" model: Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. (For Daoism, cf. the related Digital Module. For Buddhism, cf. the Digital Module I and the section relative to Buddhism in China. For Confucianism and the Three Traditions of China, cf. this section).

Just to make matters more complicated, these "religions" are half reality and half reification. True is that these three traditions still retain their identities, if we refer to high literate strata of society, and, of course, to the national organizational bodies, like the Chinese Daoist Association or the China Buddhist Association.

However, when it comes to everyday practices, these neat categories break down and become meaningless. They often don't care which deity belongs to which religion or which religious tradition inspired which morality book. Recent research offers new ways of looking at Chinese religion and religiosity, focusing on the ways religions are engaged by people in practice, not how people *think* about this or that theological question. The five modalities or approaches proposed by Adam Yuet Chau (Yuet Chau 2011) are useful for our discussion:

There is the *discursive* or *scriptural* modality, based on the composition and use of religious texts; the *personal-cultivational*, involving a long-term interest in cultivating and transforming oneself; the *liturgical*, which makes use of procedures conducted by priests, monks or other ritual specialists; the *immediate-practical*, aiming at quick results making use of religious or magical techniques; and the *relational*, emphasizing the relationship between humans, deities, ghosts, and ancestors as well as among people in families, villages, and religious communities.

*(*From the Overview to Yuet Chau, https://religiouslife.hku.hk/modalities-of-doing-religion/ last access in 05/04/2017)

What is striking from a Christocentric point of view is the fact that these modalities cut across different religious traditions and often the single practitioner swings between traditions and modalities depending on the social status, situation or aim.

As an example, we can think about late imperial state officials, whose career was dedicated to the study of classic texts. Even if their focus was on Confucian classics, they nonetheless would often be drawn to other intricate and highly symbolic texts, like the Buddhist sutras or the Daoist Scripture, because they were trained into the discursive or scriptural modality.

The liturgical modality is especially apt to show the porous boundaries between religions. Large scale rites can be of all sorts: precommunist regime Confucian imperial state rituals, Daoist rites of cosmic renewal, exorcist rites, Buddhist sutra chanting rites, or Daoist or Buddhist rituals for the universal salvation of souls. Nevertheless, all of these are often commissioned by collective groups (families, villages, temple communities) and involve a group of ritual specialists. But more important: these rituals are conducted for the sake of these groups, for a common good, let's say, independently of the affiliation of the participants.

For example, "in the spring of 2003, during the height of the SARS epidemic in Hong Kong, the Daoist Association combined forces with sixteen Daoist temples and altars to stage a 'calamity-dispelling, misfortune-absolving, and blessing-petitioning ritual congregation' on behalf of the entire Hong Kong population" (Yuet Chau 2011: 75).

At the same time, among the spectators of such a huge Daoist event, the majority had their deceased dear ones buried in accordance with Buddhist funeral rites, because Buddhism in China is "specialized" in mortuary rites. Again, inside this majority, some people have a particular lofty religious aim (to achieve long life in Daoism, to be reincarnated into a better life or to achieve nirvana in Buddhism, to become a man of virtue or to be closer to sagehood in Confucianism, or a combination of the three) and undergo self-cultivation practices such as meditation, qigong, internal or outer alchemy, personal or group sutra chanting, etc...

Other people, more inclined to profane matters, would nonetheless often resolve to immediate practical religious practices, such as drawing divination lots. A worshipper with a particular problem - whether or not to start a new business or having a child, for example - goes to a temple, burns incense in front of the deity, and then shakes a box of divination sticks until one "jumps" out. He or she then consults the corresponding divination poem or message for the divine message.

As a final remark, it is very likely that both types of person, the one with self-cultivation aims and the oracle consulting one, take part in relational modalities of doing religions, for example the veneration of the clan's ancestors, who are venerated during the last day and first day of the lunar year, when family members will bring offerings and burn incense in a hall dedicated to the ancestors. Members who work far from the village return on these special days, which act also as family gatherings (Wai Lun 2011: 37-41).

After this brief sketch, one can indeed wonder if this staggering internal diversity is indeed a reason behind the difficulties for the common European or American audience to understand Chinese religiosity or even being aware of its existence. It should be noted, however, that these five modalities of engaging religions are not exotic or peculiar only to the Chinese case. They could be applied also to traditions characterized by a stricter affiliation, like the three Monotheisms. Please refer above to the stereotypes concerning essentialism in religions and the concept of world-religions.

5.2. Chinese religions as "immutable wisdom"

What we previously stated allows us also to critically review another stereotype linked to Chinese religion and religiosity (often pointed out by scientific literature): it is the one that pictures Chinese religious and thought a "immutable wisdom", embodied in an old, calm and long-bearded sage.

Such stereotype is based on a one-sided reading of the long and complex history of China made by Westerners. First the Jesuits, between the 16th and 17th century, favored the discursive or scriptural modality of the Confucian tradition to be transmitted and made known to Europe, because it was the tradition they deemed much more apt to dialogue and subsequent conversion to Christianity. Other ideas and practices, like the Buddhist and Daoist ones, were discarded like superstitious magic and enchantments. Moreover, if the German philosopher Leibniz (1646-1716) was among the first of the European intelligentsia to see in the Chinese classics a true religious expression of *philosophia perennis*, the ancient and perennial unitary truth underlying all great religions, for the philosopher Hegel (1646-1716), China's cultural immobilism was bound to remain outside the history of the world. Even when other Chinese religious traditions, like Daoism, enjoyed interest in the West, it was only through a few selected texts, like the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* (cfr. the related Digital

> Similar to Buddhism, the interest in Chinese religions by Westerners focused on a few philosophical and mystical texts, thus creating the exotic idea of an immutable (and sometimes extravagant) oriental "wisdom".

Module page here), which represent an allegedly "philosophical Daoism" versus a corrupted "religious Daoism". In 1910, philosopher Martin Buber, in a commentary on a German translation of the *Zhuangzi*, drew parallels between Daoism and Judaism's Kabbalah, as two religions of social protest, with a common ethic of unconventionality, common meditation-visualization techniques and a common goal of mystical union (J. Clark 2001: 37-62).

Here we see the shift from a stereotype based on the discursive or scriptural modality, to one based on the personal-cultivational modality, that is: Chinese religions, especially Daoism, seen as an exotic, mystic, esoteric way to personal freedom. It had already started with esoteric readings in late 19th century Europe and reached its fullest state by the late 1960s and early 1970s in America. It was a period when "Eastern religions" were part of an emergent "new age" paradigm. Ideas of "spontaneusness" or "enlightment" of Daoism and Buddhism (notably Zen Buddhism, which, worth noting, originated in China as Chan Buddhism) were perceived as ways to individualistic and anarchic freedom, epitomized by beat-generation literary works such as Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* (1958). Just a look at the complex organizational structure and disciplined code of ethics of both Daoism and Buddhism, reveals how this is a great exaggeration and a stereotyped view of important religious concepts. Thanks also to the growing population of Chinese immigrants in the US, Daoism was moreover associated with martial arts and other nowadays famous traditions of bodily techniques, such as *qi-gong* and *Taiji quan* (which are not strictly of Daoist origin) thus reinforcing the stereotype of the Chinese religious practitioner as being also an expert of super-human martial arts (Towler 1996:49-57).

5.3. The stereotype of the "environmental-friendly" religions

In the '70s, the ecologist dimension of the counterculture movement also developed an "environmentally friendly" stereotyped view of Chinese and other Eastern religions, - seen as having a view of the relationship between Man and Nature as being one of total unity.

It is true that in the Chinese view, all things in the cosmos share at their most fundamental level a flow of cosmic energy (*qi*) that shapes everything—from the physical landscape of mountains to the biological one of plants, animals and humans. But this does not necessarily need to be romanticized and does not necessary entail the ideal of protecting nature over human wishes, something that appeals more to a Western, biblical idea of Man as the guardian of the Eden. On the contrary, Chinese views included some aspect of understanding of Man's working within the flow of the universe for the benefit of humanity, a view that actually justified the exploitation of resources and the damage of the environment as witnessed in modern China (Weller 2011).

5.4. Chinese religions wiped out by Communism

Another prejudice concerning religions in China is their actual absence due to the Communist era and anti-religious ideology. Indeed, during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) religious institutions became primary targets of the attacks against the "four olds" (old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas). However, the approach of the Communist

Party to religions was more one of control and of "modernization", i.e. it strove to limit "freedom of religion" to the private sphere and to a belief, with restrictions on the social expression and organization of religion, - waiting for that to slowly fade away due to the modernization of the state.

This was the basic policy when the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, granting free adherence (but not for a Party member) to five official recognized religions (Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism), which in turn must be organized in state-sponsored organizations. It should be noted that the state has always sought to control religion in China. Not only did religious elites and personnel often provide legitimacy to the existing political structure in exchange for recognition from the state, but the state itself, on the basis of the so-called "Mandate of Heaven," claimed supreme authority in religious matters.

However, for the Communist Party stance on religion - which was a modern and Western conception of religions - the vast majority of the people who participated in the worship and rituals to their ancestors and in village and neighborhood temples, to local saints, heroes, and deities, were outside the five official religions and therefore persecuted as superstitious practitioners hindering the path to modernity.

Incidentally, it must be also noted how Maoism itself played the role of a religion, with the worship of Mao at its center. This cult lives on today for many. Millions of peasants worship him, just as in pre-regime times, exceptional people, a few generations after their death, were revered as superior spirits or even "promoted" to deities. Many people look at Mao today as an exceptional personality worthy of worship. His birthplace has become a huge center of pilgrimage. Traditional golden amulets for fortune and health have his picture in the center, right where a representation of the Buddha or Laozi was traditionally placed.

> The presence of a communist regime in China does not compel us to think that religion has been cancelled in this part of the world. On the contrary, notwithstanding a strong national control, there is a religious revival in contemporary China.

After the death of Mao, the radical anti-religion policy relaxed considerably. According to the 1982 Constitution, people have the right to believe in any "normal religion" but a definition of what is normal remains unclear and depends on the discretion of local authorities.

Hu Jintao, who became leader in 2002, seemed to continue the policies of his predecessors. However, his advocacy of the principle of "harmonious society" gave more room for religions to claim that they could contribute their experience and teachings to the building of social harmony. His government appeared to show more significant state support for religious institutions (Laliberté 2011:196-200).

Moreover, the growing market provided opportunity for funding and social space that helped the religious revival lead by those leaders persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. With the receding ideologies, expansion of the market economy and burgeoning urbanization, space has been left for the return of religious worldviews for all those people

looking for a comprehensive meaning of life and sense of belonging. This is the case in particular of those many worshippers who do not trust the leaders of the official religious associations (because they are too closely related to the Party) and take part in the religious gatherings which are still not inside the "normality" allowed by the Government. However, due to the big change in social structure, the local governments often tolerate these phenomena, which involve an increasing number of religious traditions (Yang 2011).

In sum, there is a slow but steady revival of religions in China, and the idea of a fully secularized China is probably linked to its recent communist history as much as to an old Western misconception: that modernization and economic growth always entails a diminished role of religions inside society. Incidentally, this is proving wrong also in Western countries. Also the other stereotyped approaches, namely the negative view on Chinese religion as being exotically superstitious or positive admiration of it as eternal wisdom and/or an environmentalist tradition, are particularly telling. Those two opposing views speak about the self-understanding of Westerners looking at China: on one side 'we' deem ourselves superior and don't want to give different religious traditions the status of "official religion" (just like the Communist Regime somehow still does), on the other we are deluded by our own cultural traditions, and project our desires and ideals on foreign traditions.

5.5. Conclusion – Chinese religions
5.5.1. Main points

* There is little or no knowledge of the Chinese religions, at least in the partner schools.

* The internal diversity of the religious landscape in China and the difficulties of framing them into Western categorization of modern religion could be one of the motives behind this difficulty.

* In fact, it is much more useful to understand Chinese religion and religiosity as a vast array of practices, rather than beliefs.

* Despite the strong repression on part of the Communist Regime in the recent past, there is a steady revival of religions in China, helped, and not hindered, by the market economy.

* The general comprehension of Chinese religions in Europe suffered and still suffers of the one-sided, partial understanding and transmission of knowledge about Chinese religions. It was partial because it was meant to answer to various political agendas, trends and intellectual needs of the times, from the Jesuits' to New Age believers'.

5.5.2. Stereotypes and prejudices

* "There are well-defined and separated religious traditions in China, like the three Monotheisms".

* "There is no such a thing like religions in China. Only exotic superstitions".

- "There is no such a thing like religions in China. Communism wiped them all out".

- "Religions in China represent an eternal immutable wisdom, inscribed in a few texts, part of a *philosophia perennis* that Westerners should turn to".

- "Religions in China, especially Daoism, are inherently environmentalist".

- "Religions in China, especially Daoism and Buddhism, preach a spontaneous and absolute freedom of the individual".

5.5.3. How to tackle these stereotypes and prejudices

- The idea that these three traditions are strictly divided, also in the mind of each practitioner, is a Western projection. When confronted with real life phenomena, those categories often do not hold true. Moreover, even at loftier levels of each religious tradition, borrowings of religious ideas and practices often took place.

- The disregard of Chinese religions seen as exotic superstitions depends only on a narrow, modern understanding of religion, which, along with a sense of superiority, forces the onlooker to judge it an "untrue religion", difficult to understand.

- The perceived absence of religions in China due to the Communist Regime or due to the "natural flow" of modernization, reveals a partial reading of the recent history of China. It is true that religions have been repressed, but they are now resurgent in a context of market economy. Also here we should not superimpose the (now old) idea that along with modernization comes the disappearing of religions.

- The philosophical or mystical understanding of Chinese religions does not hold true when confronted with other texts and practices concerning more ritual, communal or material aspects.

- The environmentalist understanding of Chinese religions is an appropriation and profound modification born within the counterculture movement, nowadays still trendy for market consumption.

5.5.4. How to avoid unconscious use of stereotypes

- Being always aware that our categories of religions, as well as the concept of religion itself, are born out of and still influenced by Western history, and therefore cannot match with phenomena that are broadly generalized as "religious".

- Keeping in mind that descriptions of Chinese religions that appear to be too simple or too narrow, should rise doubts and call for critical examination.

- Paying attention in this critical examination to the way in which it is actually the West and its ideals and desires that are mirrored in these stereotypes. Sometimes the West is portrayed as the promoter of the ideal, modern life, which China ought to develop, too or, alternatively, as a culture in need of that – postulated - eternal Chinese wisdom.

- Being aware of the fact that political agendas, intellectual tendencies and even market trends have always been behind the formation of stereotype and prejudices, especially when it comes to a distant yet influential civilization like China.

- Trying not to arrive at a definition of Chinese religion solely consistent with our modern sensibilities and broaden our horizons in order to appreciate the richness and diversity of multifaceted religious manifestations.

6. Stereotypes and prejudices linked to Christianity

In sharp contrast, and often explicitly so, to notions amongst pupils and teachers as to what constitutes the postulated 'core 'of Islam (quite often held to be 'violence'), Christianity is quite often said to be a religion that first and foremost, or 'originally', in its 'correct' form or so-called 'core', is about 'love your neighbor'.

As indicated by a strong tendency in the answers to the questionnaires, it is, however, often the case, and paradoxically so, that Christians are also said to be hypocrites – with regard to the postulated 'love your neighbor' and with regard to their ideals about a peaceful world and welfare society based upon that principle. As expressed by a respondent: "God is only love, but Christians have made great massacres". Christians are, furthermore, at least by some respondents, seen as particularly wealthy and so is the Catholic Church.

Some answers seem to indicate that some pupils and teachers consider it typical (cf. above) to (wrongly) think of Christianity as the best and superior religion and that some Christians likewise think of themselves as superior to other religious people.

Some respondents also indicate that the idea that the (good) values in Europe depend on or originate with Christianity is a stereotype, and the same goes for notions about the Christian religion as a major moral force even in today's society.

The answers to the questionnaires also indicate that many pupils and teachers consider Christianity (as well as other religions) outdated, 'narrow-minded', etc.

Important, and in spite of all possible critical remarks, is, however, that the answers, if compared to those in regard to Islam, show a notion of Christianity as a religion that, after all, is much less prone to intolerance, violence, and war than Islam.

Moving from the questionnaires to attitudes and notions about Christianity in general, it is noteworthy that it seems to be less easy to find (apart from the already mentioned) many more other negative stereotypes and prejudices.

That does, however, not mean that Christians are not met with attitudes that may be called prejudiced, and some good examples of this can be taken from writings by Christians themselves.

A list about what American Christians, according to a selection of Christian websites (http://www.changingthefaceofchristianity.com/negative-christian-stereotypes/) dedicated to that theme, think they are faced with in terms of prejudices, may be telling also for what is the case in Europe, at least in some instances:

- <u>Hypocritical</u>, i.e. "We do not practice what we preach" don't match. We present an outward appearance of being sinless, yet often live in sin. Because of this, we are often viewed as hypocrites."

- <u>Homophobic</u>, anti-homosexual, i.e. "Our Gospel teaches, and we affirm, that homosexual sex is a sin, but, instead of loving the person and hating the sin, we hate both. We threat homosexuals as not worthy of our love or God's love: instead of focusing on correcting our own sins and seeking God's grace and forgiveness, we project hatred and a special curse against people who are attracted to the same sex. We act as God's agent of wrath towards homosexuals instead of sharing the grace, love, and forgiveness that is available to ALL people who accept Jesus Christ as their savior."

- <u>Judgmental</u>, i.e. "We are viewed as prideful, self-righteous, and acting as if we are better than others. We act as judge and jury toward others, instead of leaving that job up to God."

- <u>Intolerant</u>, i.e. "We are viewed as having no patience for dialoguing with others with different values, beliefs or opinions."

- <u>Too political</u>, i.e. "Using politics to force our beliefs and morals on other people; limiting other people's freedom and rights, based on OUR beliefs. Even though we don't live in a theocracy, we seek to impose our beliefs on people who don't share our beliefs."

- <u>Superficial</u>, i.e. "We are regarded as not knowing what we believe or why we believe what we believe. We are viewed as not understanding science and having a naïve view of the evolving world we live in."

Apart from the above, it must be mentioned that both Christians and non-Christians often nourish and express prejudiced opinions and stereotypes about Christian denominations and minority groups which - judged from the perspective of some majority or mainstream Christianity - are seen as being aberrant, deviant, old-fashioned, backwards, bizarre. In short: several of the prejudices and stereotypes linked to new religious movements and minority religions are also often linked to various Christian denominations or groups which, from a study-of-religions point of view, are nothing but another kind of Christianity.

> Stereotypes linked to Christianity follow two main and opposite directions: either depicting Christianity as a source of positive values or as a greedy, hypocritical institution. These perceptions must be reflected upon, taking into consideration the dominant and often state supported role that Christianity has played in Europe.

From a study-of-religions perspective the following must be said: when dealing, also in the classroom, with Christianity and the various prejudices and stereotypes attached to it (both positive and negative) it is undeniable that Christianity has had, for good and bad, a strong impact on European culture and social life over the centuries. The degree to which so-called Christian (positive as well as negative) values actually still influence the social, political and, cultural life in Europe is certainly up for

debate and very hard to establish precisely. The Christian religious and cultural heritage, however, remains an ideological source to tap. An example is the claim that the moral and cultural roots of Europe belong exclusively or mainly to Christianity, without acknowledging any other components (Greek, Latin, Arab, Saxon, secular, anti-Christian, etc.) of the complex history of Europe. This over-simplified and stereotyped view has served multiple purposes. For example, for some of those who endorse the view that Europe should defend its borders from immigration, it has provided the reason for claiming that integration, especially of people from Muslim countries, cannot and should not happen.

Since the Christian religion is the main, dominant and often state supported religion in Europe, it is, on the other hand, also quite understandable that this religion, in its various main forms in Europe (Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic), is - and has been - the object of criticism, mostly due to its being perceived as linked to discursive and political dominance and power. In Europe, due also to the influences of Communism and Socialism, Christianity has been seen also as one of main obstacles to social progress and reforms, also in the moral and ethical spheres. In some countries, Christianity is linked directly to relatively conservative political parties, and the well-off, rich, and powerful people are sometimes considered the (hypocritical) 'typical' Christians.

These basic reflections suggest how a study–of-religions approach to the study of Christianity (as well as to any other religion) may lead to a better understanding of how and why stereotypes are constructed, and how they are used in social and political life.

6.1. Conclusion

6.1.1. Main points

- Especially if compared to Islam, it is not as easy to find as many negative stereotypes and prejudices. They do exist, however.
- Answers to the questions in the distributed questionnaires show how stereotypes linked to Christianity follow two main and opposite directions: one depicts the teachings of this religion as the foremost source of (positive) ethical values, the other depicts Christians as greedy hypocrites who betray their own ideals.
- Christianity stereotypes and prejudices are often linked to discourses about European cultural roots and heritage, due to the fact that Christianity has had, for good and bad, a strong impact on European culture and social life over centuries.
- The apparent paradoxical way in which Christianity is perceived can be preliminarily explained by the fact that it is the dominant and often state-supported religion in Europe. Progressive groups go against Christianity, seen as a symbol of conservatism and power, while conservative groups appeal to the European Christian heritage to prevent unwanted social change, e.g. immigration.

6.1.2. Stereotypes and prejudices

- "Christianity is the religion of 'love your neighbor.'"
- "Christians are often hypocrites."

- "Christians have performed great massacres, in contrast with the omnibenevolence of God."
- "Christians are particularly wealthy."
- "Christianity is the best and superior religion. Christians are superior to all other religious people".
- "Christians *think* that Christianity is the best and most superior religion. Christians therefore think they are superior to all other religious people".
- "All the good values in Europe depend on or originate from Christianity".
- "Christians think that all the good values in Europe depend on or originate from Christianity".
- "The Christian religion is the major moral force in today's society."
- Christians think that the Christian religion is the major moral force in today's society".
- "Christianity is narrow-minded and outdated" (this applies to all religions).
- "Christianity, compared to Islam, is much less prone to intolerance, violence and war."

6.1.3. How to tackle these stereotypes and prejudices

- A study-of religions approach to religions may lead to a better understanding of how and why stereotypes are constructed and how they are used in social life.
- It is important to be aware of the difference between connotation and denotation along with the change in these that happens when using stereotypes (cf. Niels Reeh, Appendix 2).
- The teacher of religion must try to deconstruct the understanding of religion by way of historicization and comparison of religion and religions, including Christianity.
- *Some* generalizations are necessary to be able to actually talk about religion, but they must be used only as analytical tools.

6.1.4. How to avoid unconscious use of stereotypes

- Stereotypes can never be avoided completely, but through proper religion education, pupils and future citizens can learn to analyse them and self-reflect critically.
- It is important to always question your own prototypes and stereotypes.
- Since it is often the Protestant prototype that is used to conceive of 'religion' as such, it is especially important to be aware of terminology and epistemology used in this context.

7. Stereotypes and prejudices inked to Hinduism

7.1. Introduction

Originated on the Indian subcontinent and widely practiced in South Asia, Hinduism is commonly considered one of the major world religious traditions,which includes a broad range of philosophies, cosmology, textual resources, religious beliefs and ritual activities. Another common name for Hinduism is *Sanatana Dharma* (eternal duty/law), which is not widely known in the West and its followers are called *Dharmis*, which means "followers of Dharma". Accordingly to most widespread ideas in Hinduism, it can be said that there is a belief in a absolute principle, called Brahman, which is behind a world in cyclical flux of birth, development and destruction. Its counterpart is the Atman, the equivalent of the Brahman, concealed in every individual, a 'sparkle of eternity' inside every human being.

It should also be note that "Hinduism" is a word invented towards the end of the 19th century by the British colonizers of India to indicate the religion practiced by the Indians. The use of the words "Hindu" and "Hinduism" were initially used in Western Orientalist literature, though many modern Indians have nowadays adopted them. As Hugh Urbam observed about its original meaning (2011, p.12):

> The terms Hindu, Hindoo, and Hinduism first begin to be used by Indian reformers and British Orientalist scholars writing in the early nineteenth century. And for the next two hundred years, these terms would be intimately tied to the politics of colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism. For British missionaries and Orientalists […] the wild diversity of "Hindoo" idolatry and polytheism presented the surest evidence of India's need to be ruled by a more civilized power and converted to the guiding light of Christ.

Hinduism and India have had a special place in western cultures as the "exotic other" *par excellence*. This is reflected in various stereotypes that on one side depict Hinduism as a backward, idolatrous religion and on the other as a mysterious and mystical tradition.

According to the main principles of Hinduism, its followers indeed accept and celebrate the pluralistic nature of their traditions: such religious expansiveness is made possible by the widely shared Hindu view that truth or reality cannot be encapsulated and cannot be dogmatically proclaimed in one formulation and must be sought in multiple sources.

Despite the fact that Hinduism is a fundamental part of the cultural history of India, the perception that Westerners have of India's Hindu culture is often permeated by numerous stereotypes, which are parts of a wider historical discourse and of the perception and imagination that the Western culture has of Indian culture. According to Amartya Sen, the perception of Indian culture tends to fit into at least three interpretative categories: an 'exotic approach', which focuses on the wonderful aspects of India's culture; a 'superiority approach', which takes on a sense of superiority and protection needed to deal

with India and, finally, a 'curatorial approach', which attempts to observe, classify and record the diversity of Indian culture in different parts of India (2005: p. 140-158).

Many of such stereotypes come from a classical, orientalist view of India. Orientalism, born in the second half of the 18th century, produced an impressive number of works of also academic nature, exerting an enormous cultural influence on the way Westerners still see, nowadays, non-Western cultures such as the Indian culture (Said 1979). The image of the Orient, in this case India, as 'other' in respect to the European culture, has occupied a special place in European intellectual history.

A substantial 'corpus' of orientalist stereotypes describe Hinduism as a source of sexual depravation and social injustice: Hindu gods are imagined as bloodthirsty and lustful, Hindu saints as having indulged in sexual orgies, or to have taken actions against Muslims, while sacred scriptures are presented as a litany of tales of 'faithful women forsaken by their ungrateful husbands' (Agarwal 2015).One of the most common stereotypes about Hinduism remains anyway the 'Hindu mysticism' (Parsons 2011), which has often fueled the Western collective imagination, becoming also a religious source for new forms of spirituality. An example is the worship of the goddess Kālī, which has been seen both as an obscure and exotic cult, and as "an exciting figure for reflection and exploration, for notably feminists and participants in New Age spirituality, who are attracted to goddess worship" (McDermott 1988).

There are also other misconceptions concerning the cultural heritage of Hindu traditions such as religious literature (for example, the Bhagavadgītā is considered a sort of 'Indian Bible') or the daily religious practices, such as cow worship or the *bindi* symbol used mostly by Hindu women.

The consequence is that the general outlook is that Hindu religion is the reflection of a poor and backward Asian society, afflicted by social injustice. This is quite evident when we consider the results of the questionnaires which have highlighted the following critical key points on describing Hinduism: 'passive acceptance of injustice and poverty', 'Hinduism as a religion that justifies caste division', 'they have a dot on their forehead', 'polygamists', 'caste system', 'exoticism' and, finally, 'ancient and respectable religion'.

In what follows, some of the most common stereotypes regarding the Hindu religion will be briefly described and (re-)contextualized.

7.2. Hindu vegetarianism

Similarly to Buddhism, Hindu tradition is considered basically a sort of 'vegetarian culture', in which Hindu people practice vegetarianism. However, although it can be asserted that the Hindu tradition states that all animals are sentient beings, and hence that the Hindus must refrain from eating their flesh, many Hindu people have no particular food restrictions. Generally, only a small part of the Hindu religious community (30-35%) follow a vegetarian diet due to the principle of *ahiṃsā* ('not to injure', 'compassion'), present also in Jainist and Buddhist traditions, which states that all living beings have a spark of the divine spiritual energy. It is also important to consider that most spiritual leaders – such as *swamis*, *sadhus*,

and *gurus* –, strictly follow a vegetarian diet while lay Hindus are inclined to include meat in their diet.

7.3. Hinduism and the caste system

Another main stereotype on Hinduism is the general misconception that Hindu tradition offers the cultural basis for a discriminatory caste system. Hinduism permeates uses, ritual, and social behaviors of everyday life and it can be therefore affirmed that important dimensions of India's society and culture are still heavily influenced by this complex religious tradition. Indian society is essentially hierarchical and the *varna* (lit. 'color') caste system is associated with Hinduism, in which hierarchical ordering is present in varying degrees in all communities, influencing the social behavior of all individuals, even within families including also the non-Hindu communities.

The Indian caste system divides Hindus into *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), *Kshatriyas* (warriors and rulers), *Vaishyas* (farmers and merchants), and *Shudras* (laborers). Those who fall outside the system are the so-called Dalits, the "untouchables", who were excluded from the four-fold *varna* system and form an excluded *varna*, the *Panchama*. It follows that the Indian social structure is a layered hierarchy of castes in which the groups and individuals who belong to a specific caste are guided by prescribed norms, values and social sanctions typical of that

> The Indian cast system is a complex and sensitive topic that can easily lead to misunderstanding and hasty judgements. In order to avoid stereotyped views, this topic must be engaged taking into account the social, cultural and historical context.

caste (including definitive exclusion from the community), thus creating specific patterns of behavior. This means, also, that everyone born into the varna caste system takes on the status and role of their own caste identity unconditionally, resulting in a specific and unalterable social status that brings the caste sytem to be considered as a closed social group.

However, affirming unilaterally that Hinduism justifies inequalities and social exclusion is misleading: first of all, using Western cultural models as interpretative parameters, such as social equality, makes it impossible to fully comprehend the special kind of hierarchical order and the varna caste system linked to the Hindu idea of ritual purity, that varies according to the caste, geographic areas or religious groups and places all people in different "compartments" based on their level of ritual purity.

The caste system is related to the concepts of purity and impurity, which establish the structural social distance between the caste and the obligations that every Hindu has towards the other castes. In other words, the caste system envisions a society where each person, in order to preserve the order of the universe - a sacred and strongly religiously connotated concept of order - has his/her own well pre-defined collocation, duties and rights.

Such concepts of ritual purity and impurity highlight the close relationship between the Indian social stratification system and the Hindu religious belief, from which it is possible to

understand some of the most important characteristics of Indian society, such as the untouchables *Dalits* or the status of the social superiority of the priestly caste.

However, and this is the second point, it must be noted that this is a traditional view expressed by official ancient texts, while the reality of nowadays India is different and much more complicated. The actual system does not preclude social mobility. It must be noted that each *varna* is divided in multiple *jati* (lit. birth) which is a term used to denote the thousands of local closed social groups. A *jati* can move in the hierarchical scheme of society, and an individual could move to another *jati* through inter-*jati* marriage. Moreover, discrimination based on caste is prohibited in the article 15 of the 1950 Indian Constitution. It is still a common custom especially in marriage, however. In fact, the idea of equality of men, typical of the Enlightenment, is quite antithetical to the traditions of India. Also, in nowadays India there is the common idea that duties come before rights, because a society is considered to be functional and healthy when each segment works smoothly inside its own compartment.

7.4. Hindu idolatry and polytheism

Hinduism is often described as a polytheistic religion based on idolatry, especially if compared to the monotheistic religions such as Islam or Chistianity. It is true that Hinduism is commonly thought to be a polytheistic religions since there are thousands of gods and goddesses in its pantheon. However as seen previosly, according to Hindu tradition, truth or reality cannot be dogmatically proclaimed in one formulation and must be sought in multiple sources. In other words, Hindus consider the worship of many gods and goddesses according to the principle of 'the divine in everything'. The Hindu concept of divinity can be different for each person and different religious practices allow for various representations of the divine, but each representation (*deva*) is in itself a divine manifestation. In brief, Hindus believe that the one supreme being cannot be fully understood, so the different earthly representations are merely symbolic of a supreme being that cannot be understood.

One of the main concepts of Hinduism is the so-called religious practice *murthi puja* (image worship), which refers to the ancient belief that all of creation is a form of the supreme divine being.The literal meaning of *murti* is manifestation. Murti without any prefix refers to *devata murti* or god-form. It follows that *murti* is a representation of god-form and *murti puja* a worship of murti as a god-form, that is, worship of god-form in the *murti*. According to this religious vision of the supreme divine being, from a Hindu point of view distinguishing "true" worship from "false" idolatry makes no sense, because Hinduism considers it as a direct worship of the supreme divine being (who manifests himself in everything) instead of the worship of a representation of the supreme divine being. Given the preconception regarding idol worshipping outlined in the Old Testament, however, it is difficult for Westerners to distinguish idolatry from the Hindu practice of *murthi puja* from idolatry.

7.5. Worship of cows

Another Western stereotype concerning Hinduism is that 'all Indian people worship cows'. This common misconception is due to the manner in which Hindus treat cows, which symbolically represent the sustenance of life. According to Hinduism, honoring cows instills in people the virtues of gentleness, and these animals are honored, garlanded and given special feedings at festivals all over India. The reasons why cow are considered sacred in Hinduism are religious and economic. From an economic point of view, the cow is an animal that gives more than it takes: consuming grain, grass, and water, the cow offers in return milk, cream, yogurt, cheese, butter, and fertilizer for agricultural uses. For its peaceful nature, the cow is worshipped as a symbol of *avihiṃsā* (non-violence) and it is seen as a maternal caretaker. The cows are therefore object of love and care just like cats and dogs in Western countries and, as the consequent cultural sensitivity towards their welfare, in India there are several protective shelters called *Goshala* for old cows. From a religious point of view, the cow is considered the earthly embodiment of Kamadhenu, a goddess, whose veneration is directly linked to the cow that symbolically represents her 'living temple'.

7.6. 'Red dot means married woman'

One of the main symbols that characterizes but is also used as a stereotype linked to the Hindu culture is the *bindi*, the red dot on the forehead worn by Hindu women and young girls. Such symbols have a religious role even though their symbolic power has declined in modern times. According to the Hindu tradition, a woman would wear a red bindi made with vermilion powder above and between her eyes to signify marriage, therefore denoting prosperity, while the position of the *bindi* symbolizes the "third eye," where one loses their *ahamkara* ("ego"). However, this practice has nowadays lost its religious meaning and Hindu women can wear whatever color *bindi* they choose: a black *bindi*, for example, is worn by a widow to signify the loss of her husband. Such practice of wearing a *bindi* is not restricted only to Hindu women, since also men can wear a type of bindi called *tilak*, which is a series of lines worn the forehead. Moreover, various colors of *bindi* would signified different castes, but this is mostly a cultural practice that only a small group of Hindu practitioners still follow nowadays.

7.7. Conclusion – Hinduism
7.7.1. Main points

- Many of the stereotypes about Hinduism (cow veneration, vegetarianism, polytheism, funeral rites, etc.) are part of a wider historical discourse on the Western misperception of Indian culture.

- The orientalists who first studied the Hindu religion were strongly influenced by preconceived ideas about religion. Even today, the comparison between Hindu

religious culture and monotheistic religions has often generated, even unconsciously, various forms of misunderstanding and simplifications.

- Hinduism is a word invented towards the end of the 19th century by the British colonizers of India and it is often interpreted as an Asian religion that promotes a discriminatory caste system, social injustice and superstitious practices repulsive to Westerners.

7.7.2. Stereotypes and prejudices

- "Hindu religion supports social injustice and caste system".

- "Hinduism is a polytheist religion and hence by implication, pagan".

- "Idolatry is one of the main religious practice in Hinduism".

- "All Hindu practitioners worship cows".

- "Hindu women with red dot (*bindis*) are all married".

- "Hinduism is a reflection of a backward Asian society".

- "Hinduism is a religion based on superstition".

- "Hinduism involves cruel practices, like *sati* funeral custom, repulsive to Westerners".

- "Hinduism requires a vegetarian diet".

7.7.3. How to tackle these stereotypes and prejudices

- Developing a greater awareness of the use of the modern interpretative categories of 'Hinduism' or 'Hindu', which are anachronistic and do not refer to any ancient texts of Hindu tradition. The common term to indicate such tradition is *Sanatana Dharma* (eternal duty/law), even if is not often used in the Western culture.

- Be also aware of the fact that Hinduism is a complex and varied cultural tradition and it must not be identified solely with Indian society. Many Hindu communities are present in various areas of the world, following precepts and doctrines that may be different from each other.

- Be aware of the fact that, contrary to the common idea that all Hindus are vegetarians, a considerable number of Hindus eat meat and many of them claim that their scriptures, such as the Vedic texts, do not forbid consumption of meat.

- Be aware of the fact that Hinduism does not promote directly the caste system (*varna*), which is interpreted as an unfair discriminatory system. First of all, this stereotype is based on a judgmental system that uses only Western cultural parameters. Secondly, the reality of nowadays India is different and much more complicated than the traditional view expressed by official ancient texts.

- Be aware that many customs of the Hindu tradition should not be generalized but considered in their specific geographical and cultural context. This means that stereotypical generalizations such as cow veneration, vegetarianism, or funeral or marriage rituals and customs must be contextualized within certain social groups and in certain geographical areas which do not necessarily have to be related to Indian society as a whole.

- Be aware of the fact that, although Hinduism is generally thought to be a polytheistic religion, this is not always an accurate depiction. The Hindu idea of the divine refers instead to the ancient belief that all of creation is a form of the divine: according to this religious view, the multitudes of divine beings in the Indian pantheon are thus the manifestations of only one divine being or absolute principle.

7.7.4. How to avoid unconscious use of stereotypes

- Many stereotypes regarding Hinduism and, more indirectly, Indian society are due to the use of a system of judgments and values derived from Western culture (exoticism, New Age, mass culture, etc.).

- Hinduism is an ancient Asian tradition that has to be contextualized by its geographical, economic and political context and cannot simply be understood as a religion of India or Indian society. Be also aware of the fact that many customs of the Hindu Indian society can be misunderstood or generalized, such as e.g. marriage and funeral customs that often do not concern the culture of contemporary Indian society or only concern the religious practices of some social groups.

- To avoid using unconscious stereotypes, it is important to make a critical analysis of popular cultural forms (for example, Indian literature such as novels or music) and other media of contemporary Indian society. This analysis of popular cultural forms can be one of the easiest and most active ways to think about the complex questions of how Hinduism has been represented and imagined historically.

8. Stereotypes and prejudices linked to Islam

It almost goes without saying that Islam is the religion that pupils as well as teachers - according to their responses to the questionnaires - think is most closely linked to straightforward prejudices and stereotypes. Likewise, the pupils and teachers themselves admit to holding several of the very same stereotypes and prejudices.

> It is no wonder that stereotypes and prejudices attached to Islam are mostly linked to an increasing Islamophobic trend that triggers unfounded hostility towards Islam, understood in such context as a monolithic block, often antithetical to modern Western values.

According to several surveys on religion in Europe, including surveys on public and political debates on religion, as well as several specific surveys on Islamophobia, Islamophobic or anti-Muslim notions and attitudes have been on the increase over the past decades, and nowadays (2017) Islamophobia can even be said to have become 'mainstream' (Cf. Bayrakli & Hafez 2017). Even if the scepticism and prejudices pertaining to religion in general and to the so-called sects among the minority-religions are not totally gone (as evidenced also by the responses to the questionnaires), Islam and Muslims seem to have taken over as the major 'monster', the most significant 'significant other'.

Some observers, consequently, consider Islamophobia "a real danger to the foundations of democratic order and the values of the European Union, [...] the main challenge to the social peace and coexistence of different cultures, religions and ethnicities in Europe", (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2017, 5).

The same authors, in the same report on European Islamophobia, in their introductory chapter on the "The State of Islamophobia in Europe", continue (p.5):

> Islamophobia has become more real especially in the everyday lives of Muslims in Europe. It has surpassed the stage of being a rhetorical animosity and has become a physical animosity that Muslims feel in everyday life be it at school, the workplace, the mosque, transportation or simply on the street.

The definition of Islamophobia given by the above-mentioned editors, deserves to be mentioned, and it is evident that in the case one can endorse this definition even if only partially, the relevance for the discussion of stereotypes and prejudices in general as well as in relation to Islam is clear (*Ibid*, 7):

> When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism Studies has shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor to how it is used. Such is also the case with Islamophobia Studies. Islamophobia has become a well-known

term used in academia as much as in the public sphere. Criticism of Muslims or of the Islamic religion is not necessarily Islamophobic.

Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed 'we'. Islamophobia operates by constructing a static 'Muslim' identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalised for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts, because Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam.

It is also worthwhile mentioning the definition given in the famous Runnymede Trust report as of 1997 on *Islamophobia*: *a challenge for us all*: "[…] dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, [...] fear or dislike of all or most Muslims." (Conway & Runnymede Trust 1997, 1). A little later (p.4) the definition is elaborated upon and reads:

> The term Islamophobia refers to unfounded hostility towards Islam. It refers also to practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs.

For decades, then, it has seemed important to at least some, to pinpoint stereotypes and prejudices attached to Islam as part of Islamophobia. But before listing the most outspoken and widespread stereotypical notions, yet another reference to the Runnymede Trust report might prove helpful, also because it links to what has already been written about essentialisation, reification, and generalisation in regard to stereotypical and prejudiced approaches to religion in general and to specific religions.

Runnymede classifies approaches to Islam and Muslims as, respectively, 'open views' and 'closed views', the two kinds of views or approaches in direct opposition to each other. With regard to Islam they cover the following spectre of possible views on Islam and Muslims:

1. Whether Islam is seen as monolithic and static, or as diverse and dynamic.

2. Whether Islam is seen as other and separate, or as similar and interdependent.

3. Whether Islam is seen as inferior, or as different but equal.

4. Whether Islam is seen as an aggressive enemy or as a cooperative partner.

5. Whether Muslims are seen as manipulative or as sincere.

6. Whether Muslim criticisms of 'the West' are rejected or debated.

7. Whether discriminatory behaviour against Muslims is defended or opposed.

8. Whether anti-Muslim discourse is seen as natural or problematic. (*Ibid*, 4)

Before mentioning more directly the stereotypes and prejudices proposed by the respondents to the questionnaires, it might be the case to mention some, but not all, of the stereotypes and prejudices that, over the years, have been found to exist not just in public media discourses and outright Islamophobic discourses but also in school textbooks, for religion education, history, geography et al. For a fuller overview, we refer the reader to the relevant works mentioned in the selected bibliography.

One important stereotype is linked to the very term 'Islam' (and 'Muslim') and the translation thereof into 'submission' and 'one who is submitting him/herself (to Allah)'. Though it can certainly be argued that 'submission' may be a correct direct translation, and though Muslim insiders most certainly may also say so and defend this as the most correct understanding of Islam and what it means to be a (good) Muslim, the translation tends to neglect that there is also most often an element of the Muslims *wanting*, of their own free will, to 'submit' themselves to the god whom they consider the ultimate and one and only god (Allah) who has created the world and given humankind guidelines as to how to live life on earth in the best way, the best way for them, their families, societies and mankind in total.

> Many negative stereotypes derive from a one-sided, negative translation of key terms like *Islam* ('voluntary submission'), *jihad* ('struggle') or *sharia* ('path') that depicts this religion as a coercive tradition that compels to war and expresses itself in unequal laws. But the reality is much more complex and nuanced.

However, there is a notion of Muslims doing what they do, not because they *want* to, but because they fear the consequences in this life and on Judgment Day and thus in the eternity of afterlife, because their god (Allah) is like an Oriental despot, primarily threatening and punishing. They submit themselves, slave-like, out of fear, to a despot, in order to not be punished. The fact that the most used adjective linked to Allah in the Quran is 'the merciful one' is not mentioned, and likewise, mention of *niyya*, the expression of the intention to e.g. pray with a pure heart, is rare.

The already mentioned stereotypes may have severe consequences, of course, for efforts to teach about e.g. the five pillars of Islam in such a way as to also include elements of free will, dedication, love, etc., and soon turn into other stereotypes: the rows of Muslim men in the mosques become rows of slave-like soldiers and it is not far to go from the prayer niche to war. Devotion, in such a prejudiced perspective, turns into blind submission and blind violence and into what is called a sacred, or holy war.

This, of course, leads us to a foremost stereotype: *jihad*, understood and practised as 'holy war' (including terrorism) directed and fought against infidels, non-Muslims, Westerners and Muslims who have been deemed 'bad' Muslims.

Not often enough is it mentioned that this is not the first and foremost or at least only meaning of *jihad*, and that 'holy war' is not necessarily a Muslim but rather a Christian idea, and that *jihad* may simply refer to the concerted effort of the individual Muslim to be a good Muslim, *and* that so-called *jihadists* constitute fractions within the Muslim world, and, of course, in terms of numbers: a minority.

Stereotypes or prejudices are also linked to the notion of *sharia*, often translated without further ado into 'divine law', 'the law of Allah', or 'the law of Islam'. Quite often readers get the impression that *sharia* is a 'thing', a well-defined body of articles, stating the precise rules and regulations, as well as measurements of exact punishment for violations of the law. Likewise, it is mostly the so-called *hudud* rules and regulations, plus those concerning the (unequal) rights of women over against men, and the relations to infidels or non-Muslims that there is mention of. But only rarely do textbooks try to explain the legal and hermeneutical rules that are meant to help govern and interpret the *sharia*, and only rarely is the fluid and situational character of the *sharia,* as well as the various and different interpretations and applications of sharia, described or explained.

Last but not least: the mentioning of stereotypes and prejudices linked to the notion of *sharia* leads to the mentioning of notions of Islam (like Judaism) as what is called a 'religion of law' (over against Christianity which is then represented as a religion of love and free will and faith).

This again leads to the notion of Islam as a political ideology which at its core insists on *'din wadavla'*, that religion and state is or should be one, i.e. what *some* Islamists insist on, Islam as 'a total system' covering everything in the world, from the individual to the state, from the private to the public and political sphere. A total 'system' that by nature is also totalitarian and by nature in opposition to democracy.

More examples from textbooks might be mentioned but time and space does not allow us to do so, and we therefore move on to the summaries of the responses from pupils and teachers to the questionnaires.

The answers do not come as a surprise, and pupils' and teachers' answers are almost identical, and can be summarised as below. They all refer to the following fairly 'closed views' or stereotypical and prejudiced conceptions of Islam and Muslims:

Islam is a religion of:

- extremism, radicalism, fundamentalism and terrorism. It is a

- backward (old-fashioned) religion, and the Muslims are (if real Muslims)

- fanatics, jihadists, terrorists and narrow-minded.

Islam is male-dominated, machismo, and the veil is a sign of exactly that.

Islam and Muslims are intolerant.

Another (stereo)typical idea is that (prototypical) Muslims are Arabs. Allah and the Quran rule it all, and Islam is a religion of law. (Summary of responses to questionnaires)

8.1. Conclusion – Islam
8.1.1. Main points

- Islamophobia can be defined as anti-Muslim racism.
- Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources, rights and definition of a constructed 'we'.
- Islamophobia also refers to the practical consequences of the unfounded hostility towards Islam. An example could be the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs.
- Islamophobia is considered a real danger to the foundation of democratic order and the values of the European Union. It is the main challenge to social peace and the coexistence of different cultures, religions and ethnicities in Europe.
- Islamophobia has become a physical animosity that Muslims feel in everyday life: at school, at work, in the mosque or on the streets.
- Islam and Muslims seem to have taken over as the major monster – the most significant 'significant other'.
- Approaches to Islam can be classified as, respectively, 'open views' and 'closed views' (the former being the more lenient approach).

8.1.2. Stereotypes and prejudices

- "Muslims do not act upon their own free will, but solely on their fear for the consequences in this life and on Judgement Day. They submit themselves like slaves."
- "The terms 'Islam' and 'Muslim' are translated into 'submission' and 'one who is submitting him/herself (to Allah)."
- "Allah is like an Oriental despot, who threatens and punishes the submitted worshippers."
- "*Jihad* is 'holy war' directed and fought against infidels, non-Muslims, Westerners and Muslims who have been deemed inadequate."
- "*Sharia* is 'the divine law of Allah' – a well-defined body of articles, stating the precise rules and regulations regarding punishment for violations of the law."
- "Islam is 'a religion of law' (over against Christianity – the religion of love, free will and faith)."
- "Islam is a political ideology."
- "Muslims strive for an Islamic system covering the whole world. This system is totalitarian by nature and in direct opposition to democracy."
- "Islam is a religion of extremism, radicalism, fundamentalism and terrorism."
- "Islam is an old-fashioned religion."
- "*Real* Muslims are narrow-minded fanatics, jihadists and terrorists."
- "Islam is a male-dominated religion, and the veil expresses the oppression of women."
- Muslim women are all 'under the thumb' of the Muslim macho man
- "Muslims are Arabs."
- "Islam and Muslims are intolerant."
- "Islam is a monolith – static, with no internal differences, and discussions. They have no tolerance in regard to a plurality of truths."
- "Islam constitutes a culture on its own, isolated from other cultures, and with no interest in any intercultural communication."
- "Islam and the West are by nature direct opposites."
- "Islam and Muslims constitute the significant 'other' over against 'us'."
- "Islam and Muslims are barbaric, irrational, sexist and primitive (Westerners are civilised, progressive, etc.)."
- "Islam is by nature violent and belligerent. It has been so ever since its beginning and spread, and it is so in today's world too, where it is 'at war' with everything Western.

8.1.3. How to tackle these stereotypes and prejudices

- First of all, it is important to acknowledge the fact that all Muslims are not the same. Islam is, as any other religion, diverse and multifarious.

- The picture painted by the media of a violent and dangerous group of people does not correspond to reality.
- To tackle stereotypes about Islam it might be helpful to study minority groups or focus on actual academic literature, instead of newspaper articles.
- Subjects should focus on other themes than terrorism and gender oppression.
- This will lead to a better understanding of the actual, nuanced picture.
- Islam should, as any other religion, be studied with an approach that corresponds with the scientific study of religion.
- Methodical approaches could be sociological, phenomenological, philosophical, iconographic, etc.

8.1.4. How to avoid unconscious use of stereotypes

- Teachers must be careful not to adopt anti-Islamic and Islamophobic notions from the media.
- Teachers must be equally careful not to adopt Islamist interpretations of Islam and to not present these minority views as representative of Islam and Muslims in general.
- By deliberately choosing to focus on other aspects of the religion than the ones presented by the media, you interrupt the contribution to the process of denotating otherwise connotative notions of Islam.

9. Stereotypes and prejudices on Judaism

Dealing with stereotypes and prejudices (in the broad understanding of 'stereotypes' and 'prejudice' we are using here) in regard to Judaism and Jews, one cannot escape dealing with what is called anti-Semitism and Holocaust, i.e. the systematic murdering of about six million Jews by the Nazi regime before and during World War II, a crime against humanity based upon an outspoken racist, anti-Semitic ideology.

It is, however, equally clear that one cannot avoid dealing also with a very complex scholarly discussion about possible link(s) between this kind of 'anti-Jewish' ideology and much earlier kinds and instances of anti-Jewish thought, attitudes and practices, including what has been called 'anti-Judaism', i.e. Christian thoughts about Judaism and Jews, closely linked to earlier and later Christian theology, to specific theologians and to Christian churches, be it the church of early Christianity, the medieval or later Christian churches, Catholic or Protestant.

Also Muslim or Islamic thoughts about Judaism and Jews should be included and seen as important, e.g. in regard to modern and contemporary Muslim attitudes (and attacks) on Jews, attitudes linked not just to past theological Muslim ideas and to past relations between Muslims and Jews in the Middle East and Spain, for example, but linked also to the situation in Palestine where Muslims (nominal or not) suffer from the anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab, and thus for a large part anti-Muslim politics of the state of Israel and thus of some Jewish people.

In the case of Christian and Muslim theological writings that hold negative (including defamatory, hateful, ridiculing etc.) views on the religion of the Jews and thus of the Jews practicing that religion, it must be remembered that this kind of anti-Jewish discourse is part of the theological-polemical 'nature' of such writings where one group of religious people seeks to show itself superior to another, especially if the other religion in some ways may be mistaken for or look a bit like one's own. Many of the first Christians were Jews living in an environment influenced by Judaism, and they thus had to distance themselves from Judaism if they were to become something special and different. Likewise, early Islam, to some degree based upon some Jewish as well as Christian traditions, had to distance and differentiate itself from both Christianity and Judaism.

One, furthermore, has to take heed of what the scholar Jan Assmann has observed with regard to the coming into being of monotheism:

> Let us call the distinction between true and false in religion the 'Mosaic distinction' because tradition ascribes it to Moses. ... The space severed or

cloven by this distinction is the space of Western monotheism. It is the mental and cultural space constructed by this distinction that Europeans have inhabited for nearly two millennia. (Assmann 1996: 48).

According to Assmann, the importance of this development is that all religions that subsequently developed had to take 'the Mosaic distinction' into account.

The space "severed or cloven" by the Mosaic distinction was not simply the space of religion in general, then, but that of a very specific kind of religion. We may call this a 'counterreligion' because it not only constructed but rejected and repudiated everything that went before and everything outside itself as 'paganism'. (Assmann 1996: 49).

The importance of this then is that Judaism - as well as the subsequent religions that developed in contact with Judaism and its more successful successors (in terms of the number of adherents) such as Christianity, Islam and most other modern religions – and its religious texts tend to regard 'the religious other' as false (Assmann 1996, Reeh 2013a, b). The Hebrew Bible is thus, for instance, critical of the religion of Canaanites, Babylonians etc. In a similar manner the New Testament is critical of Jews, especially Pharisees, and the Qur'an is critical of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and especially so-called infidels.

Here, it should be stressed that the point is not that this is a fault of Jews or Judaism but rather that the development of what Assmann calls the Mosaic Distinction is a crucial development in our religious and cultural history and that it has created a cultural climate in which religious distinctions need to be overcome and that these distinctions have a history as old as the religions.

Scholars are not at all in agreement as to the historical links and transmissions between various early and later kinds of anti-Jewish writings, thinking, discriminatory, and racist practices, and thus of the relation between, on the one hand, 'anti-Judaism' (seen as a Christian theological, religious anti-Jewish way of thinking and acting) and on the other, anti-Semitism (seen as a racist, secular, and popular, rather than theological and religious, ideology).

Some scholars claim that there is a big difference between the two, that anti-Semitism came into being only in the late 19th century (1870s), and that anti-Judaism belonged mainly

to the early Christian times, medieval times, and to some degree to the time of the Reformation. Others claim that there is continuity between the two, that anti-Semitism, also the one adhered to by Hitler and his German Nazi-regime, in at least some ways draws upon and is linked to Christian anti-Judaism, for example the very outspoken anti-Jewish and anti-Judaist writings of the protestant German reformer Martin Luther as well as writings of a not unimportant branch within the 20th century German protestant church that was in support of Hitler and his anti-Semitic ideology.

Some also claim that the very distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism is a 'discursive' move, used to suppress the importance of religion, and to help people neglect or forget the factual influence of Christian churches and Christian theological anti-Jewish attitudes in regard to later anti-Semitism and the Holocaust (cf. Favret - Saada 2014).

At the same time, one can, as indicated above, hardly speak about anti-Jewish thinking and practice without also speaking of the views on Judaism and Jews that can be found in the sacred scripture of Islam, the Quran, and in other important scriptures within the Islamic tradition, as well as in scriptures by later Muslim theologians and writers. Anti-Jewish ways of thinking about Jews and Judaism are closely linked to the early history of Islam but also to later relations between Jews and Muslims, including recent and present tensions, e.g. the tensions related to the establishment of the state of Israel and the documented discrimination and maltreatment of Arabs, Palestinians, and Muslims by the state of Israel today, in the occupied territories and in Jerusalem.

When it comes to stereotypes about Judaism, it is impossible to avoid the issue of anti-Semitism (i.e. being against Jews as an ethnic group). The two are different issues yet intertwined. Concerning the religious dimension, attention must be put on the need of Christianity and Islam to differentiate from Judaism, with which they share a common background.

More than 2000 years of a complex mixture of religious, ideological, socio-economic, and political histories and developments in the Middle East, in the past and today, in Spain up to 1492, in various parts of Europe, Eastern and Western, South and North, in the USA, as well as in Russia past and present, is therefore of importance when it comes to describing and discussing the kind of stereotypes and prejudices that can be seen as linked to discourses on Judaism and Jews past and present. Some scholars even point to the importance of pre-Christian Egyptian anti-Jewish thinking and practices, as well as to Greek and Roman thinking (cf. inter alia Chazan 1997, Langmuir 1993, and Nirenberg 2013).

Consequently, the very few stereotypical-like notions (apart from the typical notion of Judaism - and other religions, too - as a monolith) expressed by pupils and teachers in the questionnaires, namely that Jews are greedy, stingy, and busy making money, do not match

the many more stereotypical-like notions and prejudices linked to Jews, sometimes explicitly referred to Judaism, other times more explicitly referred to the Jewish people (ethnos, 'race') and hardly at all to the religion.

It is sometimes difficult to separate negative and outright hostile attitudes towards Jews from prejudices and ignorance about Judaism, past and present, yet, at other times, it seems evident that anti-Jewish attitudes have almost nothing to do with the religion of the Jews in question, - apart from, of course, the fact that it is the religion of a minority quite often feared, despised, and persecuted.

The Christian Bible consists of two major compilations of writings: what the Christians call Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). The first one, the OT, which to a large extent corresponds to the Jewish Hebrew Bible consisting of the Torah, also known as the Pentateuch or the five books of Moses, Nevi'im, also known as the Prophets, and Ketuvim (also known as Writings), is seen by Christians as but a prelude to the second, the NT, and the NT is seen as a sort of fulfillment and perfection of the first. The central Christian figure and divine being, Jesus Christ, is the second Adam, the promised Messiah (greek 'khristos') and, to Christians, the son of 'God'.

There is a Christian religious idea in the OT about continuity from the beginning of the world and world history to the death and resurrection of the postulated son of the same god, namely Jesus Christ and the future 'Judgment (Day)' with the return of Jesus Christ and the coming of the 'Kingdom of God' or 'Paradise'. But the Jews do not see it this way. To them Jesus is not the Messiah announced in the Hebrew Bible, the Hebrew Bible is not the prelude to the NT, and the God Father and God Son in the NT is not Jahve or the God of the Hebrew Bible. God does not have a son. God is, for Jews and Judaism as well as for Muslims and the Quran, one and only one. It is therefore also telling of the need to distinguish oneself from an 'other' that one can find in Muslim writings the postulate that the Jews saw Ezra as the son of God, just as Christians saw Jesus as the son of God.

At the same time, as there is continuation, there is, thus, also discontinuation: the old treaty (pact) between the god (Jahve) and the Jewish people, sealed inter alia by circumcision of boys, as well as by Moses and a bloody sacrifice on the occasion of God handing over to Moses the 'Law' (the Torah) at Mount Sinai, has been superseded by the new treaty where God gave his own son (the law now, so to speak, transformed into a human and divine being) to seal the new treaty or pact (now between the Christians and God) by the blood of himself, sacrificed (the crucifixion) to the benefit of mankind (cf. also the myth of the last supper where Jesus is supposed to establish the mass that celebrates and commemorates the new treaty and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ).

The links, but also the break between, Christianity and Judaism and Jews thus are already clear in this regard and if one also considers that a large group of early Christians

were actually Jews (the Jesus of the NT included) living and establishing themselves not just in the Roman Empire but in the predominantly Jewish-Hellenistic Palestine, it also becomes likely that there have been tensions and discussions as to the historical and religious relationship between Jews and Christians, Judaism and Christianity.

In order for Christianity to become a distinct religion, and in line with the so-called Mosaic distinction, the attention needed to be focused not just on continuity and similarity but also on discontinuity and dissimilarity, - or radical difference. Creating an in-group often implies creating an out-group, or the so-called significant 'other'. In this case the Jewish religion and Jews.

This all shows in several ways of distancing oneself from and actually criticizing and rejecting Jewish beliefs and practices and blaming Jews for whatever it might be useful to blame them for. Though often difficult to separate each item from the other, we can list a series of (stereo-)typical negative notions about Judaism and Jews, beginning with those that can be found already in NT writings and the early so-called 'church fathers':

- Judaism is seen (e.g. in the writings of Paul) as a 'religion of the law' in contrast to a religion of faith, - faith in God and faith in God sacrificing himself to take away original sin from mankind.
- It was the Jews who handed over Jesus to the Romans and thus killed Jesus Christ, the Son of God and himself God (Thessalonians 1, 2, 15; Matthew 27.20-26; Mark 15.6-15; Luke 23.13-25; John 19.8-16; Acts 2.22-23;3.13-15. See also Michael 2006, and Falk 1992 for references to a series of like notions to be found in church fathers like Tertullian, Origenes, Gregor, Ambrosius, Chrysostomos, Hieronymos and Augustin).
- The Jews and Judaism constituted the enemy and the opposite of the true religion, and of God. The Jews and Judaism thus incarnated the Devil, evil in itself; their 'god' was not actually god but Satan or the Devil. The Jews were demonized and dehumanized.

It is not possible to follow the politics (not only anti-Jewish, but often predominantly so) and attitudes towards Jews from this time up to the time following the first millennium CE, so we can - with reference to Herbener's summary (2017, 107-121 with references) only say this much: ever since the time of the First Crusade, the crusades have implied persecutions and killings of Jews, in Europe and Jerusalem, because the Jews were supposed to be as much of an enemy to God, Jesus and the true Christian religion, as were the Muslims.

Though some popes issued papal statements to the effect that Jews should be protected, it is equally clear that they were often severely persecuted and that they really were in need of protection from being killed, stoned, beaten up, forced to convert, etc. With the increased number of Jews coming into the predominantly Christian regions of Europe, anti-Jewish sentiments and actions flourished amongst the religious elite but also in the population in general.

Not just theological ideas but also socio-economic developments lead to discrimination and persecution: as of the fourth Lateran Council in 1215 Jews had to wear special clothes, and Jewish ghettos came into being, and at some point, Jews were prohibited from holding high public positions: they were, on the contrary seen to be destined to serve as slaves ever since they "killed our Lord". In 1434 another Christian decision taken in Basel said that (inter alia) Jews could not obtain a university degree, and in Germany during the 15th and 16th centuries, Jews were banned from owning land and from most normal vocations, therefore they often had to wander from place to place and take upon themselves work that Christians could or would not take. For instance, work linked to money and loans: Christians were not allowed to give loans nor take interest rates. It was considered 'usury' and not good. But the Jews could do it, - yet it was still considered usury and the Jews, of course, considered greedy, etc. That some Jews did become wealthy, did not help: they were all the more to be despised and hated.

Another theologically based, but a widespread common idea since the 12th century was that Jews not only killed Christ, the Son of God:

- The Jews continued to kill and sacrifice Christian children, using the blood in their terrible rituals, e.g. Pesach (Passover, Easter) rituals. This widespread 'myth' was accompanied by another one, namely that
- The Jews stole and (in various ways) desecrated the bread (and thus Jesus Christ incarnated in the bread) used for Holy Mass ('Eucharist').

One of the most famous theologians who came to hate the Jews and whose anti-Jewish writings came to have devastating consequences was Martin Luther (cf. inter alia Herbener 2017, 89-107). Though he was ready to try to treat Jews with kindness and tolerance in his early writings, Luther in several later writings continued and reinforced several of the most blatant anti-Jewish notions of his day. In his later writings, Luther did no longer hope for or believe that Jews could be converted to Christianity, and he saw their religion as not just false but poisonous, a satanic device, and he wanted severe measurements to be taken: synagogues to be burnt down, as well as Jewish homes and sacred books, and rabbis forbidden to teach. Jews were to be locked up in one place and not allowed to travel, and the money, gold and silver taken 'back' and prohibiting them from taking interest rates (Herbener 98-99 with references to the writings of Luther).

It is beyond the scope of this overview to track the history of killings and persecutions of Jews in European history, up to the coming into being of explicit 'anti-Semitism' in the 1870s, and the times of the 1930s, with the above mentioned anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi branch within the German

Both theological stereotypes ("Jews as the killers of Christ") and sociological stereotypes ("Jews are rich and greedy") worsened, over the course of the centuries, the already fragile position Jews had as a minority religion, thus bringing them to be object of discrimination and scapegoating practices.

Protestant church, and the Holocaust, but mention may be made of one out of many important anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish myths that has managed to poison and influence the atmosphere around Jews in both Eastern and Western Europe, namely the fabricated forgery (originating in Russia in the early 20th century) and so-called 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion', sometimes called the oldest conspiracy theory of them all, this time with the idea that Jews are conspiring to take over the world, an idea and a forgery aimed at legitimizing the persecution and killing of Jews. A fabrication used by many, sometimes mixed with other old and Christian anti-Judaic ideas, e.g. the Nazi-regime to, as in the title of a book of Norman Cohn (Cohn 1996), Warrant for Genocide, indicates.

As for Muslim scriptures and other writings, and Muslim and Islamic ideas, stereotypes and prejudices about Jews, we have to limit ourselves to reiterating that because of the now long-standing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs - with Israel suppressing Arabs and Muslims to a large degree in various ways and with various intervals - Muslims today, also outside Palestine, can be tempted to express their frustration and hatred towards any Jew they meet or even think of. Doing so they also have, as Christians (practicing or not) have, a large reservoir of anti-Jewish writings to draw on. Apart from what has been said above, we can here only exemplify such a tendency by quoting a Saudi school book from year 2006:

> Some of the people of the Sabbath were punished by being turned into apes and swine. Some of them were made to worship the devil, and not God, through consecration, sacrifice, prayer, appeals for help, and other types of worship. Some of the Jews worship the devil. Likewise, some members of this nation worship devil, and not God. (See Saudi Arabia's *Curriculum of Intolerance* Archived October 1, 2008, at the Wayback Machine. (pdf), Freedom House, May 2006, pp. 24–25)

9.1. Conclusion – Judaism
9.1.1.Main points
- Dealing with stereotypes and prejudices in regard to Judaism and Jews, it is impossible to avoid the issue of anti-Semitism.
- Indeed, the stereotypical-like notions expressed in the questionnaires make more explicit reference to the Jewish people (ethnos, 'race') than to the Jewish religion.
- However, there are equally important developments in the theological domains, both Christian and Muslim , of various anti-Judaism ideologies.

- In fact, these traditions share a common background and ideas with Judaism (they are often called Abrahamic religions or Mosaic Religions) and in order to emerge, they had to distance and differentiate themselves from Judaism, often employing denigratory and discriminatory expressions.
- There is no complete scholarly consensus whether religious anti-Judaism (theologically grounded, from Medieval and Reformation times) is actually linked to modern anti-Semitism (racist, secular).
- However, two thousand years of a complex mixture of religious, ideological, political and socio-economic developments are difficult to dismiss as non-influential, for example, as in the present tension between Palestinians and Arabs, or in the formation of the stereotype of the greedy Jew, so common in Europe.

9.1.2. Stereotypes and prejudices

We can divide various stereotypes and prejudice-like notions in two kinds: the 'theological ones' and 'ethnic, sociological ones'. Even if a direct link between the two kinds is not agreed upon among scholars, distancing and denigrating practices on a religious level can easily lead to discrimination and scapegoating practices on a broader level.

- Theological ones:
  - "Judaism is a 'religion of the law' in contrast to Christianity, religion of faith".
  - "It was the Jews who handed over Jesus to the Romans and thus killed Jesus Christ".
  - "The Jews, and Judaism constituted the enemy and the opposite of the true religion, and of God. The Jews and Judaism thus incarnated evil in itself".
  - "The Jews not only killed Christ but continued to kill and sacrifice Christian children and stole and desecrated the Eucharistic bread (and thus Jesus Christ incarnated in the bread)".
- Ethnic, sociological ones
  - "Jews are rich, greedy and stingy".
  - "Jews are a very close and secretive community, conspiring to take over the world".

9.1.3. How to tackle these stereotypes and prejudices

- A study-of-religions approach may lead to a better understanding of how and why stereotypes are constructed and how they are used in social life.
- The origins of these 'theological' stereotypes and prejudices can be historically recognized in the need of the first Christian communities to break with Judaism and minimize or delete the continuity and origin.

- During Medieval and Reformation times these denigratory practices continued and were exacerbated to the point where Jews were supposed to be as much as an enemy to the true Christian religion as were the Muslims.
- In the past Christians were not allowed to give loans nor to take interest rates. It was considered 'usury' and not good. But the Jews – who were, moreover, hindered from taking normal jobs due to discrimination - could do it. So they started to be considered greedy and stingy. Some of them became actually wealthy and this did not help.
- The conspiracy theory about the Jewish takeover of the world originated in Russia in the early 20th century with the so-called "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", an anti-Semitic fabricated text purporting to describe a Jewish plan for global domination, translated into multiple languages, and disseminated internationally.

9.1.4. How to avoid unconscious use of stereotypes

- Being aware that religions and religious discrimination are powerful tools in the identity construction of communities.
- Being aware of the dynamics between "major" religions and "minor" religions inside a certain society.
- A study-of-religions approach may lead to a better understanding of how and why stereotypes are constructed and how they are used in social life.
- Stereotypes can never be avoided completely, but through proper education regarding religions, pupils and future citizens can learn to analyze them and self-reflect critically and historically.

A specific problem in today's Antisemitism is that stereotypes of Jews are used as an instrument in the conflict between Israel and the Arab/Muslim world. Consequently, Jews are threatened when they wear, for instance, a *kippah* on the European streets today. Teachers in the schools of Europe are thus faced with the problem that some students might have strong hostility vis-à-vis Jews. This represents a huge task for teachers. Teachers could, perhaps, start by reminding their students that we are all humans and that our different cultures and religions are used as instruments in conflicts which could make individuals suffer tremendously.

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