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The conundrum of religious schools in twenty-first-century Europe

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In this paper Merry examines in detail the continued – and curious – popularity of religious schools in an otherwise ‘secular’ twenty-first century Europe. To do this he considers a number of motivations underwriting the decision to place one’s child in a religious school and delineates what are likely the best empirically supported explanations for the continued dominant position of Protestant and Catholic schools. He then argues that institutional racism is an explanatory variable that empirical researchers typically avoid, though it informs both parental assessments of school quality as well as selective mechanisms many mainstream religious schools use to function as domains of exclusion. He then distinguishes between religious schools in a dominant position from those serving disadvantaged minorities and argues that the latter are able to play a crucially important function other schools only rarely provide and hence that vulnerable minorities may have reason to value.

Many contributions in this issue have discussed the historical development, state support and perceived legitimacy of religious schools in Europe, each of them focussing in detail on variations of education policy in different national contexts. Implicitly or explicitly, different authors also have tried to answer this question: *why do religious schools continue to garner the support that they do in twenty-first-century Europe?* Why indeed. With few exceptions such as France (Pons, van Zanten, and Da Costa 2015), the market share of religious schools in Europe has remained largely unchanged over the last 45 years, and in at least one country – Germany (Scheunpflug 2015) – the demand for religious schools appears to have *increased*. Given what many consider to be an inexorable ‘secularisation’ trend across Europe (Berger 1967; Bruce 2002),¹ what are we to make of these seemingly inexplicable trends?

To try and answer this question, empirical studies on religious schools in Europe typically focus on fairly uncontroversial institutional features, such as core objectives. Or, concerning parental motives for selecting religious schools, studies usually report explicitly observed and reported – and hence measurable – characteristics and responses. However, I would argue that the existing empirical research does not tell us all that we need to know. But that fact should not stop us from reasoned speculation. Thus given the unfortunate lacunae in the empirical literature, some of what I will argue will be couched in terms of warranted conjecture, both as this concerns the reasons why religious schools remain as popular as they do as well as what I think are reasonable

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grounds to support and defend religious schools serving marginalised groups likely to suffer a far worse fate in another school environment. My aim in this paper, then, will not be to recapitulate or synthesise what others have said, but rather to argue that there are other – often well hidden and non-quantifiable – variables relevant to our question than what we presently may ‘know’.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In order to sketch the background for what is to come, in Section 1, I dispute the notion of a ‘secularised’ Europe, and then summarise a number of recent policy-related developments related to religious schools, as well as several criticisms directed against them. Then, to see why religious schools continue to enjoy such a dominant market share, in Section 2, I examine a number of motivations underwriting the decision to place one’s child in a religious school and delineate what I think are likely the best empirically supported explanations for the continued dominant position of Protestant and Catholic schools in twenty-first-century Europe. In Section 3, I hypothesise that institutional racism informs both parental assessments of school quality as well as selective mechanisms many mainstream religious schools use in order to function as domains of exclusion. Finally in Section 4, I distinguish between religious schools in a dominant position from those serving disadvantaged minorities. I argue that the latter are able to play a crucially important function other schools only rarely provide and hence that vulnerable minorities may have reason to value. I then sketch the outlines of a circumscribed case for what I will call ‘voluntary separation’.

Religion in Europe

A traveller moving through Europe is likely to be confronted with evidence on all sides of religion in decline: empty cathedrals and just as nearly empty parish churches, many of which now serve as museums, or which have long been annexed by universities or local authorities to house art exhibits or to facilitate a variety of other municipal functions. Even when churches are still used to exhibit religious art, much of the time they serve merely to enchant a secular public intrigued with exotic relics from the past. Indeed religion in Europe seems marked chiefly by its absence. It would therefore be understandable if this same traveller was to find the persistence of *religious schooling* in Europe to be something of a conundrum. It is a conundrum, she might say, because so few Europeans count themselves as religious, and so many Protestant and Catholic schools no longer explicitly serve to propagate religious teaching (Casanova 2006; Pickel 2009). Having lost their divinely inspired *raison d’être*, they exist merely as artefacts, something that in due time will pass away.

Many people doubtless hold this view, and there is much evidence – as many of the authors in this issue have demonstrated – to suggest that the importance of religion in Europe has indeed dramatically decreased. Yet while it certainly is true that far fewer indigenous Europeans profess to be religious, or that mainstream Protestant and Catholic institutions do not wield the power they once did, or even that explicit references to religion in politics are rare, it would be a non-sequitur to claim that religion has ceased to matter to individuals, let alone that it has ceased to play a significant cultural and political role. Indeed, as Maussen and Bader (2015) articulate in their opening essay, that view would betray too casual an understanding of religion as an important social and political rallying force in Europe. At least three reasons are apposite.

First, Christianity continues to enjoy unrivalled status as the dominant religion and numerous institutions remain assiduously Christian: Christian universities, hospitals,

schools and even churches often receive generous support from the state; virtually every European country has a Christian political party – often in the majority – and in some countries, there are more than one (in the Netherlands, for instance, there are three prominent Christian parties that punch above their weight); multiple countries bear Christian crosses on their national flags; Christian holidays of all sorts (e.g. Good Friday, Pentecost, Ascension Day and Easter) are public holidays in many countries, even when most of the public is unlikely to know or understand the religious significance of these occasions to the devout. These and other phenomena are so ubiquitous as to go virtually unnoticed by the larger ‘secular’ public.

Second, we are unable to deduce anything reliably true about religiosity from available figures on institutional membership. Indeed, it would be mistaken to infer much at all about the religiosity of persons from how frequently they attend the local temple, mosque, church or synagogue. While it is true that large numbers of Europeans now report having no religion at all, or no longer belong to a church, alternative spiritualities among Europeans are well known.² Indeed, sociologist Peter Baldwin has observed, ‘In the most secular nations [of Europe] there seems to be a belief in some higher power that is not captured by a simple question on a survey about faith in God’ (Baldwin 2009, 169; cf. Pickel 2009).

Third, there continues to be a cultural narrative that implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) draws upon the notion of a ‘Christian Europe’. Perhaps nowhere is this more in evidence than in the populist – and unabashedly racist – rhetoric that has swept the European continent in the past quarter century. Indeed, many clearly believe Europe’s ‘norms and values’ to be currently *under threat*. Invoking a ‘Judeo-Christian’ culture as the foundation of Europe, this quasi-religious account separating the indigenous from the non-indigenous resonates with, and easily galvanises, a large public unable to come to terms with the sizable presence of non-Western, and not incidentally, non-Christian, others.³ And the cultural nexus with state-supported education is a seamless one, for until relatively late in the twentieth century even public schools continued to operate as de facto denominational schools owing to the dominance of Christianity as a cultural force.⁴ The upshot is that institutionalised Christianity remains deeply embedded both in the European identity and also in its cultural and educational traditions.

Recent developments in education

Several significant changes in Europe have occurred – to greater or lesser degrees depending on the location in question – since the early 1970s and many of these changes have impacted education. First, with the massive influx of ethnic and religious minorities after the second World War and in particular from the mid-1960s onwards, states have struggled to come to terms with what it means to ‘accommodate’ this new diversity. Official recognition of the ‘new religions’ began in the early 1970s and by the 1980s, there were halting attempts in many countries to include – somewhat tokenistic – changes to the curriculum in a feeble effort to ‘recognise’ the large presence of minority children in schools. In some places, there even was some (modest) attempt to offer religious instruction for non-Christian faiths, notably Islam.⁵

Second, by the late 1980s, there was a gradual realisation that migrant (and principally Muslim) populations had more or less permanently settled in their host countries. By the end of the decade, some European countries had witnessed the establishment of the first state-supported Islamic and Hindu schools. Concurrent with these

developments came the rapid rise of far-right populist political parties with an openly anti-immigrant – and, more often than not, anti-Muslim – message. Often couched in terms of a ‘culture clash’ or a concern about ‘social cohesion’, these political parties stoked latent anti-immigrant and racist sentiment and galvanised support from a public unnerved by dramatic demographic changes coinciding with a sluggish economy. Though immigrant policies had already begun to change in the 1990s, it was particularly following the New York City attacks of 9/11 that demands of ‘integration’ became increasingly strident. Anti-immigrant populism across the continent and in the UK gained an ever-expanding support base for their racist rhetoric, even in countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands where this previously had been (publicly) taboo. From mainstream politicians, too, there was a new urgency to the ‘politics of integration’, and outspoken concerns about segregated minority groups became common place. Notably, as several papers in this issue have already shown, religious schools serving minority groups – especially Islamic schools – were singled out for condemnation as evidence for a ‘failure to integrate’ (Maussen and Bader 2015; Merry 2007a; Olsen 2015).

Finally, a series of neo-liberal reforms began to take hold in the early 1990s that would alter how school systems in most European countries worked. Many of these reforms were framed as increasing parental choice and school autonomy. Indeed, attempts were made to ‘devolve’ the chain of authority to the local level as much as possible. At the same time, however, stricter top-down directives began to gather steam. Parallel with these reforms was a new kind of school competition taking root in which, partly because of the emergence of published school quality ranking lists, but also better educated and media savvy parents (capable of navigating a confusing array of school options as well as ensuring that their children would have the transportation necessary to reach those schools), began more actively to seek out ‘better’ schools for their children. For their part, schools have responded to these developments by increasingly marketing themselves to parents, sometimes carving out a distinctive niche in order to set themselves apart from the fray (Ackerman 1997; James and Phillips 1995; Smedley 1995).

Criticisms of religious schools

Each of foregoing developments has coalesced to create a very different kind of atmosphere in which religious schools in Europe operate. However, none of them has led to a decline in the religious school market share, even, as we have seen, when fewer persons profess to be religious. Yet as several contributions in this issue illustrate, religious schools have increasingly come under fire (Maussen and Vermeulen 2015; McKinney and Conroy 2015; Olsen 2015).

Criticisms of religious schools have circulated for decades, but as inter alia Maussen & Bader demonstrate, because religious schools across Europe enjoy basic constitutional protections, these typically have focussed on issues of public financing, degrees of organisational and pedagogical autonomy, and educational practices and management. But there are other criticisms. By far the criticism most frequently registered by sceptics and secular philosophers is that religious schools serve to indoctrinate young children. Here the worry is that faith-based instruction functions as a substitute for critical thinking and as such undermines a child’s capacity for autonomous decision-making (Dwyer 1998; Hand 2002; Merry 2005a). A second criticism, one that is more likely to focus exclusively on the recent expansion of Islamic schools in Europe, is that

they serve to promote extremism. Here the worry is that Islamic schools harbour young Muslim children away from mainstream thinking, instil anti-Western dispositions generally, and sexist and homophobic attitudes more specifically. A third criticism is that funding religious schools violates state neutrality. Here the concern is that in doing so the state exhibits favouritism towards the dominant religion on the one hand, and unwisely endorses sectarian doctrines on the other. A fourth criticism is that minority religious schools instantiate segregation; as such they co-conspire with parents in keeping minority children separate from their mainstream counterparts and the norms and values of the dominant society. Hence, the argument runs, these children are denied opportunities to cultivate attitudes and skills necessary for participation in a democratic society.

I postpone my treatment of the last criticism until later in the paper because it deserves more attention. Conversely, in the following paragraphs I will dispense with the first three criticisms rather quickly, not because they are trivial concerns but because, in the first two cases, the empirical evidence for these claims is extremely weak, and with respect to the third claim, the criticism rests upon a needlessly restrictive reading of state neutrality.

With respect to indoctrination, several things tell against this. First, outside of the British context, which has a large independent sector, most full-time religious schools are *state funded and supervised*, notwithstanding different funding and supervisory schemes in each country. Hence Western European states have made good on their constitutional guarantees vis-à-vis educational liberty by incorporating religious schools into their institutional structures. Even where religious schools are given some latitude in determining *how* they meet their learning targets (e.g. the Netherlands), governmental ministries of education still largely determine what they are, which subjects schools must teach, teacher certification requirements, the language of instruction and also how much instruction time can be spent on religion. These quality standards, combined with an absence of a strong religious ethos in a large percentage of mainstream Protestant and Catholic schools, mean that worries about indoctrination in most European state-funded schools are almost certainly exaggerated.

With respect to the claim that extremism is being taught in Islamic schools on the European continent, this allegation has repeatedly yielded no solid evidence (Merry & Driessen, [forthcoming](#)). In contrast to what may be said of certain mosques, there is in fact no evidence of ‘home-grown’ terrorism in Europe being linked to state-funded Islamic schools. Analogous to worries about indoctrination, state-supported religious schools across Europe have their mandates issued by the respective governments and precious little time is actually allocated for explicit religious instruction. In any case, feelings of isolation and alienation conducive to extremist attitudes arguably are more likely to occur in environments – educational or otherwise – where persons feel stigmatised and socially excluded, something, as we shall see, less likely to be the case for Muslim children in an Islamic school. Indeed, extremist religious perspectives are far more likely to be fostered in non-regulated environments, such as weekend Qur’anic instruction or in salafist chatrooms (Becker 2009; Boyle 2004).

What can be said about the claim that funding religious schools violates state neutrality? First, as many of the papers in this issue also have shown, in all liberal-democratic societies, and certainly in all European countries, there are constitutional guarantees to choose a school for one’s child in conformity with one’s conscience, and a majority of European states have ensured that religious schools are among the available choices. Of course, funding religious schools does not logically follow

from this; it could be argued (and often is, for example, in the USA) that the state should remain ‘neutral’ by *not* directly supporting religious causes.⁶

But it is far from obvious whether the best way to demonstrate ‘neutrality’ is to pull back from supporting religious schools. One can be faithful to the principle of neutrality, for instance, by *expanding* recognition, not by restricting it (Bader 2007; Laborde 2002, 2008; Merry 2007b). First, doing so demonstrates equal concern for the quality of education all children receive irrespective of the type of school they attend. Second, doing so demonstrates equality of recognition, both in facilitating parental choice and, more controversially, in assisting with (marginalised) group self-determination. Third, doing so is more likely to strengthen the case for legitimacy, for if we proceed with a robust notion of democratic equality, then an *inclusionist* model arguably will be more legitimate than a model that excludes. In short, educational choices that include religious options are more likely to reflect the ideals of a liberal-democratic society, certainly when both pluralism and voluntary association play a central normative role.

Of course even in school systems offering a variety of educational options, constitutional freedoms alone could not explain the persistent selection of *religious* schools, particularly, as we have seen, when a great number of religious schools no longer offer a distinctly religious ethos⁷ and also when we have evidence to support the suspicion that these schools remain popular among decidedly non-religious parents. Therefore in the next section, I want to explore a number of voluntary and involuntary factors that may help us better understand the strong market share of religious schools. I frame this discussion against the background of neighbourhood and school segregation.

Religious schools and segregation

Even when liberal-democratic societies endorse normative ideals like pluralism and voluntary association, the reasons for selecting *religious* schools in such high numbers do not appear to make sense. What we need is an account of the reasons for selecting religious schools at rates more or less equivalent to 40 or 50 years ago, when church attendance levels were still quite high. In the following paragraphs I delineate a variety of plausible explanations. Several of these are well supported in the empirical literature, while others are less explicitly identified. However, this is where I think we are justified in looking to a large empirical literature on segregation for clues to other explanations. And it is appropriate that we look at this literature, for segregation is one of the predictable consequences of ‘school choice’, and religious schools importantly count among the favourite choices. As the literature in Europe grows (Bakker et al. 2011; Harris 2012; Karsten et al. 2006; Rougier and Honohan 2015), the findings mirror those elsewhere, namely that segregation indices (irrespective of the instruments sociologists use to measure this) are very high, and environments are often ‘spatially concentrated’ rather than ‘spatially mixed’ (For Dutch figures, see Ladd and Fiske 2009; Musterd and Oostendorf 2009; Vedder 2006). The reasons for this are of course complex. Both voluntary and involuntary mechanisms play a role.

Voluntary factors

Voluntary mechanisms seem beguilingly simple. These include choices to live near, and socialise with, others like oneself. These choices can facilitate modes of identification and interaction on the basis of shared backgrounds, habits, interests and

preferences. Here we recognise the elements of *voluntary association* and this has an effect both on where persons live and with whom they interact. Voluntary association also will have a strong effect on parents' motives for choosing a particular school for their child. Yet because neighbourhood patterns already reflect some form of voluntary association, parental motives may not require much intentionality at all but may simply indicate an 'obvious' choice owing to facts about where and how one is situated. Let us look at three motivations for selecting religious schools that are well supported in the empirical literature.

Location

Though perhaps rather banal, locality plays a central role in school selection and hence the preference for religious schools for many parents largely comes down to a matter of convenience. In most European countries, the virtual omnipresence of denominational schools means that they effectively function as the school preference by default. Particularly when parents are largely responsible for transportation, and hectic schedules can prove a serious impediment to making different choices, the distance between home and school matters a great deal. In many communities, it is the local denominational school that meets this requirement. Because much of Europe shares a religiously segregated past, many neighbourhoods and their schools remain either Protestant or Catholic, even if in name only. However, so long as the school is perceived to be a part of the local community and the quality of the school is acceptable, for some parents choosing a religious school for this reason alone will suffice (Burgess et al. 2009; Denessen, Driessen, and Slegers 2005).

Piety

The second explanation also might go without saying, but we would be remiss to ignore explicitly religious motives. Devout parents wishing to reinforce their own religious worldview often consciously choose a religious school. In many European countries, a distinct minority of conservative Jewish, Christian and Islamic schools succeed in marketing themselves as an *alternative* to nominally religious schools. Devout Jews, Muslims, Catholics and Protestants (particularly of the Reformed and Evangelical variety) rank a school's authentic religious ethos high on the list of priorities. Religious schools catering to this market niche can make themselves more appealing to these parents by not only emphasising the centrality of faith (e.g. scripture reading, a weekly sermon, liturgical celebrations), but also in maintaining traditional practices (e.g. ritual cleansing, dress codes) that many religious parents have reason to value. Conservative religious schools will aim to incorporate religious doctrine in all subjects, including curricular items (e.g. how Darwinian evolution theory is handled in a biology class) that many believe are at loggerheads with their faith. Being able to select an *authentically*⁸ religious school therefore becomes a marker of distinction.

Academic reputation

Our third explanation for selecting religious schools concerns the academic reputation of the school. In their analysis of OECD data earlier in this issue, Dronkers and Avram maintain that there are different 'choice patterns' in Europe. They argue that higher social class, together with enhanced resources, seems to constitute the prevailing

reason for choice of what they call ‘non-governmental dependent schools’ in a select group of countries, with these schools tending to cater especially to children of upper-class professionals (Dronkers and Avram 2015). Stating this more candidly, we might say that parents with greater social capital are likely to act similarly when selecting schools, and choosing schools that are able to offer one’s own child something *distinguishable* from what ‘other people’s children’ receive is a behaviour consistently documented in the sociology of education literature (Ball 2002; Brantlinger 2003, Holme 2002; Reay et al. 2007).

To ascertain a school’s academic reputation, some parents may consult published test scores and school rankings or government inspection reports available on the Internet, but for most parents it is rather difficult to determine the quality of a particular school beyond a few obvious features (e.g., location and pupil composition). Hence parents are very likely either to fall back on word-of-mouth – and this means the opinions of others like oneself – or else by selecting the ‘brand’ of the school.⁹ But whether a particular religious school actually succeeds in maintaining a good academic reputation may in fact depend less on what the school itself can provide and more on the fact that persons of similar social class background congregate together, as Dronkers and Avram suggest. The upshot is that a school’s ‘better’ quality may in fact simply be a more homogenous school comprised of mostly middle-class children.

Now it is of course not always true that denominational schools offer a better quality education than the alternatives. School quality will in any case depend upon a variety of background variables. However, there is data to suggest that many religious schools are able to offer a better quality education and hence often outperform their non-confessional counterparts (Avram and Dronkers 2010; Driessen and Merry 2006; Merry and Driessen 2012). These studies point to the fact that many confessional schools facilitate favourable informal relations between school administration and teachers conducive to a better overall school climate (Hofman 1997). Consequently, they do a better job of maintaining strong leadership, smaller class size, stricter discipline and higher academic achievement. There are also criticisms of these studies, pointing for instance to the fact that religious schools often reserve the right to exercise some degree of selectivity with respect to both its hiring of teachers and its pupil intake. Although state-supported religious schools may not openly discriminate against pupils, they generally *are* able to refuse children with disabilities on the grounds that they do not have the appropriate facilities or staff, and they generally *are* able to expel pupils with behaviours that staff find difficult to manage.¹⁰

Readers conversant with the empirical literature on religious schools and religious education in Europe (and elsewhere) will be familiar with each of the foregoing explanations. However, in my view these and other empirically supported explanations do not tell the whole story. Indeed, as I aim to show, there arguably are other camouflaged factors; as a result they remain understudied and inadequately understood. In what follows I will argue that there are reasons for weighing other relevant factors rarely made explicit (and hence difficult to measure) but which nevertheless are germane to the continued popularity of particularly Protestant and Catholic schools in Europe.

Involuntary factors

The explanations discussed in the previous section all serve to illustrate an assortment of ‘voluntary’ parental motivations. But *involuntary* mechanisms also shape – often in profound ways – the choices that we all make. As we have seen, parents may choose a

school on the basis of its location, but one's original location is rarely *chosen*. Neither are one's first language, social class, skin colour and religion, to take only a few examples. When combined with a limited selection of resources and opportunities, choices may become constrained. Even for the relatively privileged, acting on one's *first preferences* may not be an option. But for those who are significantly disadvantaged – and stigmatised¹¹ – the options often are far more severely restricted.

Certainly in the educational domain disadvantaged and stigmatised minorities rarely have the same options available to them as more advantaged members of the dominant group. I say more about this below. For now it will suffice to point out that in the European context, and particularly in mixed urban environments, demographic changes in Europe, particularly during the past forty years, have made previously existing patterns of segregation (e.g. along the lines of social class, race, ethnicity and religion) more *visible*.¹²

How does any of this bear upon our subject of religious schools? First, as we have seen, many religious schools, owing to their core values and expectations, have much less difficulty constructing and maintaining a cohesive school mission that will be attractive both to teachers and to parents who share them. Further, schools with a strong core mission and strong leadership often are able to produce virtues conducive to higher levels of teacher job satisfaction and pupil well-being. Core values such as respect, cooperation and self-discipline translate into better behaved pupils and higher morale within the school, and these generally will be less difficult to attain than in other schools where these are absent. We also can expect to see a strong correlation between these non-cognitive features and the cognitive outcomes of the pupils (Agirdag et al. 2012; Dijkstra, Dronkers, and Karsten 2004; Merry and Driessen, *forthcoming*). Second, in Europe's larger cities, a high percentage of non-confessional state schools are now majority–minority schools. That is, a majority of pupils attending 'urban' public schools¹³ are now of non-Western background (read: non-white) and the achievement levels of these schools are often subpar relative to schools that have a more exclusive pupil intake. And here it is important to consider how Protestant and Catholic schools, even in majority–minority urban environments, often succeed in remaining overwhelmingly white.¹⁴

I examine this further below. Some of what I will argue remains speculative owing both to the paucity of empirical research and to the presence of social desirability bias. Yet I think the *absence* of explicit empirical support constitutes an even stronger reason to investigate this. Indeed, if my earlier conjecture is true, namely that parents may select religious schools for reasons other than piety, convenience and educational quality, then it certainly is not far-fetched to hypothesise that confessional schools in many European countries facilitate exclusion under the guise of religion.

Religious schools and institutional racism

How might the involuntary and the voluntary converge in ways that produce more privilege for some and less for others? In addition to the reasons I canvassed earlier, there is evidence to suggest that Protestant and Catholic schools in Europe continue to operate in arguably 'discrete' ways that attract white parents in sufficiently high numbers so that the net effect is a homogeneous environment, i.e. a *de facto* white middle-class school (Ball 1994; Vedder 2006).¹⁵ My conjectures here do not pertain to Protestant and Catholic schools per se, but rather to one of the functions they wittingly or unwittingly serve in mixed urban environments. But if and when schools

also actively seek to attract and retain these parents through selective means, then religious schools effectively come to function as *domains of exclusion*.

Now even when religious schools no longer have a strong religious profile,¹⁶ they nevertheless are able to serve an important comparable function. Indeed, there is a sense in which religion serves to bind persons together who share similar backgrounds. It has long been recognised that religion signifies a *mode of belonging* to a group and its way (s) of life, and religious schools can do this without imparting any theological content. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that religious schools may partly serve this purpose for ethnic minorities as well (Merry and Driessen 2012). Less attention, however, has been paid to how religious schools may serve this same function for *majority* groups.

The point here is simply that religious schools need not be about dogma or belief but rather about *being with others whose backgrounds are similar and whose interests and preferences happily converge*. Religious schools may therefore facilitate social interactions and networks that supply meaning, membership, solidarity and purpose to their members. Hence parents may select a religious school not in order to inculcate religious teachings – indeed they may prefer that the school not be *too* religious – but rather to congregate with others with whom they share educational (and other) priorities in common, and doing so certainly satisfies what most of us understand voluntary association to entail. This all sounds harmless enough.

Yet by and large empirical researchers in Europe have neglected to study – or even speculate about – another side of the so-called ‘religious school effect’, namely the intersection between religious school selection, segregation and racism.¹⁷ And so when we come to studies that examine whether there is a ‘religious school effect’ in Europe, these studies typically report only the motivations that parents *explicitly* express, and hence owing to social desirability bias¹⁸ and implicit bias,¹⁹ we unsurprisingly learn almost nothing about other – less admirable – motivations that *coincide* with voluntary association and contribute to religious school segregation. This is an odd omission given how endemic to Europe both segregation and racism are (Huggan and Law 2009; Lentin 2004; MacMaster 2001; Wieviorka 2010).

Racism need not take crude or obnoxious forms, such as is common in racist behaviour exhibited at European football matches towards black players. It also need not take the form of openly xenophobic remarks, such as those of Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, who recently celebrated an electoral victory by inciting his supporters to demand that fewer Moroccans be allowed to live in the Netherlands.²⁰ Racism typically is more insidious than that. Given the stigma associated with being a ‘racist’ – indeed, few persons willingly espouse the label – I think ‘institutional racism’ best captures the sense in which I am using the term.

Institutional racism corresponds to the sociological notion of stratification in that it broadly describes differential access to goods, services and opportunities among society’s members owing to the ways in which its institutions are designed and structured to benefit dominant groups.²¹ Importantly, the mechanisms of institutional racism typically privilege members of dominant groups *quite irrespective of* how ‘well-intended’ our attitudes or choices may be, for our perceptions and understandings more often than not are shaped through *habituation*, and hence the injustices to which we contribute may not rise to the level of conscious reflection (Bourdieu 1984). Hence one need not consciously be a *racist* for one’s thoughts and actions to be complicit with *racism*²² (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi 2001; Lawrence 1987). Second, the features of racism are imprecise; they frequently intersect – or may be conflated with – ethnicity, gender or social class. In the European context,

racism may also incorporate *religion*, given the ways in which anti-Semitism perpetuates harm towards Jews and ‘Islamophobia’ operates to stigmatise Muslims (Cesari 2004; Modood 2005).

And we also can recognise racism’s cosy relationship to stigma, for stigma entails strong disapproval by the majority of some unspecified person(s) or the group(s) with which they identify, and again these often take subtle forms of expression – euphemisms and codes – including how minorities (e.g. ‘allochthonous,’ ‘Muslims’) and the schools they attend are labelled (e.g. ‘black schools’ in the Netherlands or ‘concentration schools’ in Belgium). Finally, racism is expressed in the disapproval of *spatial concentrations* of stigmatised minority groups, buttressed with the concomitant – and patronising – belief that minorities are incapable of ‘integration’ or self-determination without the ‘help’ of an already beneficent and ‘integrated’ majority. The racist import of these ‘liberal’ beliefs is not lost on stigmatised minorities simply because they are expressed with ‘good intentions’.

None of these everyday features of institutional racism should surprise scholars. Indeed, it has long been established in the sociology of education literature that (stigmatised) non-white minorities are far more likely to be labelled with behavioural problems, to be tracked low, to be singled out for discipline and special education assignment, and to receive advice from teachers that pushes them into lower forms of vocational training (Agirdag et al. 2011; Harry and Klingner 2006; Hilberth and Slate 2014; Kelly and Price 2011; Merry 2013). Moreover, the way that most schools – as state institutions – are designed and organised combines with the often lowered expectations of school staff to thwart the aspirations of stigmatised minorities before they even have had a chance to germinate. And lest we forget the parents: institutional racism certainly influences the behaviours of white and middle-class parents,²³ who often assess the quality of a neighbourhood or school solely on the basis of its (poor) minority pupil population. All of these things fuse to reinforce and maintain patterns of segregation and social stratification, but also stigma and disadvantage.

So why is this factor so typically absent from empirical work? I would argue, first, because ‘racism’ continues to be construed by members of dominant groups in its most simple – and hence easily identifiable – form of expression. As such, racism attaches only to *unequivocal, malevolent* and *personalised* speech and actions with the *intent* to harm or exclude. Accordingly, the silent and subtle workings of power that structure relations between society’s members too often remain hidden from view. Second, as members of the dominant – and also privileged – classes in Europe’s universities, all too often researchers working on ‘minority issues’ are themselves blind both to their own privilege and to their reflexive habit of labelling minority groups, labels that all too frequently serve to impute deficits and stigma. Paradoxically, institutional racism is perhaps most disturbingly manifest in the *systematic denial* of racism by those who benefit from it and, in my experience, this certainly includes many empirical researchers. Consequently, those who routinely suffer the dastardly effects of racism are assumed either to be exaggerating the problem, or worse, imagining what is happening to them. Disguised in these ways, the explanatory power of institutional racism seldom rises to the surface in empirical studies.

But it seems to me that we need to take *this* dimension of religious school segregation and performance more seriously. Doing so, I would argue, would help illuminate ways in which *institutional racism* is linked to the *institutionally privileged status* of Protestant and Catholic schools in many urban European environments. For example, it might help us better understand how many of these schools are able to

produce strong ‘magnet effects’, such as concentrations of white and middle-class parents attracting *other* white and middle-class parents.²⁴ Schools that do this also typically manage to attract and retain teachers with higher qualifications and more experience. And here we recognise the familiar Matthew Effect, for if the *perception* of excellence leads more parents with higher social capital to select these schools for their own children, this only enriches the privileged status many of these schools already enjoy. Remember, too, that religious schools are able to exercise some latitude in creating the kind of school they want through selective mechanisms in recruiting both staff and pupils. A certain measure of school board autonomy may be a positive thing, but in practice it often translates into policing who gets in and who does not.

With regularity we read that the answer to these problems is more school ‘mixing’ (Blum 2002; Trappenburg 2003). Yet despite what some claim, most attempts to mitigate these trends through policies aimed at mixed pupil intakes seem doomed from the start. Indeed, even in so-called mixed educational environments, constitutional protections governing school choice, sorting and selecting mechanisms of schools, the differentiated expectations of teachers and a garden variety of middle-class parental behaviours ensure that these efforts very rarely attain what they purportedly set out to (New and Merry 2014). Even in schools that remain fairly ‘mixed’, well-educated and better informed parents – and in Europe, again, this typically means indigenous white and middle-class parents – often know how to navigate the school system more quickly and efficiently, and it is not uncommon that parents will jump the waiting list queue to ensure that one’s own child attends a school with a low minority pupil composition.²⁵ Again, nothing that I say here should surprise researchers, for these middle-class parental behaviours are well documented in the empirical literature. They include parents challenging personnel decisions (e.g. having one’s child moved to another class), pressing for ability grouping that facilitates in-school segregation and simply switching schools when things do not go their way (Ball 2002; Brantlinger 2003; Holme 2002; Reay et al. 2007).

Parents need not *consciously* have racist or class-based motives steering their school preferences; *nearly all parents want what is best for their child*. All concerned parents look for a good atmosphere (supportive staff and peer group and favourable school climate), a school that is not too large, one that is academically challenging, etc. Moreover, in wanting what is best for their child, parents need not be consciously elitist for them to decide that what is ‘best’ for one’s own child often means selecting schools that effectively are ‘better than’ other schools. But these choices, I would argue, are imperceptibly influenced by institutional racism, just as they are imperceptibly influenced by the competitive sphere that has entered the educational domain, something we have already seen. When there are a limited number of resources available and the supply does not match the demand, many parents may indeed think it necessary to ‘jump the queue’ just to give one’s child a fighting chance (Swift 2003).

But I think this argument is a clever ruse; well-situated parents nearly always are able to transfer privileges to their own child, and mostly this occurs *outside of the school*. And this is where *implicit bias* influences school choice, for as we have seen *pupil composition* is one of the proxies that particularly middle-class and white parents use to judge the quality of a particular school. This means that parents can publicly express a desire for a ‘challenging curriculum’ or a ‘good match’ between home and school without ever having to openly discuss the coded ways in which they skilfully navigate the educational landscape and avoid schools they find ‘unsuitable’ (read: too many minorities).²⁶ Gauging school quality in this way is perhaps especially

convenient in ‘urban’ and spatially mixed areas populated by significant numbers of (non-Christian) ethnic minorities. And importantly, *social desirability bias* means that ordinary citizens can express public outrage about segregation while engaging in precisely the routine choices and behaviours that assist in maintaining it.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, these conjectures sit comfortably alongside other seemingly positive parental motivations. For instance, nowadays it is common for many middle-class parents to report wanting more ‘diversity’ for their child’s learning environment (McDonough Kimelberg and Billingham 2012). Encounters with diversity are believed to work in the following way: they ostensibly are important for disadvantaged children who often lack relevant knowledge and skills as well as norms and values necessary to thrive in mainstream society. But for middle-class and well-educated parents such encounters also serve a cosmopolitan purpose, for they also are believed to be important for broadening the empathies of more privileged children, whose lack of contact with marginalised and minority others erodes their capacity for recognising them as equals.

The ‘diversity hypothesis’ expresses a noble ideal, and, under favourable conditions such interactions can produce generally positive outcomes. The problem with the diversity hypothesis is that middle-class parents interested in ‘diversity’ typically have in mind a learning environment in which the balance of diversity strongly tips in their favour (New and Merry 2014). The desire for ‘diversity’ therefore translates as follows: the school my child attends ought to be majority white with just the ‘right amount’ of minority children to offer one’s own child some ‘exposure’ to difference without interrupting the peer group effects that matter to middle-class parents, and without compromising the level of challenge the parents expect from the school. And, as we have seen, schools are rarely designed in ways conducive to the ideal encounters ‘diversity’ is meant to facilitate, only partly because of how they sort and select pupils. The upshot is that the outcomes ‘diversity’ ostensibly inspires actually require a great deal more parity of power and participation among the participants, and that seems rather difficult to achieve so long as voluntary and involuntary forces – including institutional racism and stigma – continue to have the impact that they do.

Minority religious schools and voluntary separation

As we have seen, the expression of voluntary association tends to produce spatial concentrations – segregation – in a variety of domains, including the school. It would not be surprising, then, if religious schools *for all of the right reasons* were to replicate patterns of segregation in other domains. Yet it is *minority concentrations* that continue to alarm broad sectors of the European public.²⁷ Even among those known for espousing minority rights and protections for stigmatised and disadvantaged persons, we find scepticism towards the idea of schools for minority groups. For example, Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka (2013, 6) opines that possibly ‘what immigrants need most is not separate schools, but rather a more multicultural approach to education within the common public schools.’ Indeed, it is particularly the existence of religious schools²⁸ serving stigmatised minority groups that critics often rail against, singling out Islamic schools for special attention. In its place there has been a renewed emphasis on ‘integration’ across Europe (Joppke 2004, 2007).

Though its meanings and uses are manifold – they may include economic, psychological, cultural or civic expressions – *integration* typically is taken to mean that a society’s minority groups – whether they be immigrants, asylum seekers or even

natives – must accept the dominant political and cultural norms and values of the host society (Penninx 2004; Vasta 2007). Naturally some groups are singled out more than others.²⁹ Yet whether expressed as populist rhetoric or political mandate, ‘integration’ continues to be an ideologically ambiguous concept with many implicit features whose meanings are not entirely evident to either the immigrant or the native population. Consequently, there is much debate concerning its features and requirements (Bader 2012; Berry et al. 2006; Merry 2013).

Only on one thing does there appear to be broad consensus, and that, apparently, is that segregated schools are bad for a society that values citizenship and opportunity on equal terms. Rather, it is far better for children of different backgrounds to come together and focus on what they share in common and be educated for equal recognition and citizenship. We can discern here the elements of a ‘common school’ thesis. And again, it may be true that *under special conditions* the ‘integrated’ common school may be able to foster favourable outcomes for all children. Yet even if everyone could agree that ‘integration’ and the common school are worthy ideals, under *highly non-ideal conditions* the relevant attributes and requirements invariably will entail far less sacrifice for members of majority groups whose backgrounds more closely correspond to the institutionalised habits, norms and values of the mainstream. Indeed, the conditions that common school – and ‘diversity’ – advocates imagine typically are hard to come by, especially given (a) persistently high segregation indices – facilitated both by the normative good of voluntary association and the legal support of constitutional protection for school choice – that show little sign of reversing course; and (b) the institutionalised ways in which wealth and poverty, race/ethnicity and religion interact, for example how schools routinely engage in grouping practices, disciplinary procedures and special education labels that disproportionately affect poor and minority pupils, and arguably more so in ‘mixed’ schools (Agirdag et al. 2011; Ireson and Hallam 2005; Thrupp et al. 2002). Indeed these two points illustrate how voluntary and involuntary forces more often than not work in tandem.

Given the unrealistic scenarios painted by advocates of the ‘integrated’ common school, members of disadvantaged and stigmatised minority groups are rightly sceptical of the ‘solutions’ drawn up by well-intentioned (but often disingenuous) liberals. Indeed, it is pragmatic alternatives that many are likely to find both more feasible and more attractive. Therefore in what follows I briefly explore the possibility that some types of religious schools serving disadvantaged and stigmatised minority pupils may be a more realistic course to follow in pursuing outcomes favourable to stigmatised groups.

Voluntary separation

The reader will recall that there are both voluntary and involuntary factors to help us understand why spatial concentrations of particular groups occur in neighbourhoods and schools. As we saw earlier, environments can become homogenous – segregated – because of the ways in which voluntary association facilitates modes of shared identification and interaction. Of course not every expression of voluntary association is benign; nor can we understand the impulse to voluntarily remain separate if we fail to keep the relevant non-ideal conditions of European societies in mind. We already have seen what some of these conditions are in the previous section, and they include high levels of existing segregation, significant inequalities, racism, stigma and discrimination, and pressures to assimilate to dominant norms. However, even in

the absence of intentions to exclude, we still should expect that segregation will occur. And the clustering of certain groups need not cause alarm. Indeed, as Bernard Boxill (1992, 184) observes,

Fighting and protesting against compulsory segregation does not mean fighting and protesting against every kind of segregation. It means precisely what it says. Fight compulsory segregation. This is quite compatible with permitting, and even urging, [stigmatised minorities] to voluntarily self-segregate, and I see no reason why voluntary self-segregation cannot be a sufficient means of enabling [stigmatised minorities] to make its cultural contribution to the world.

This point needs underscoring, for even when one is not able to choose one's original predicament – those brought about by institutional racism, for instance – this does not render one powerless. Indeed, strength can be found in solidarity and resistance, and these can be facilitated by spatial concentration. Within segregated communities members of stigmatised groups often experience greater equality of recognition, treatment and self-respect than they do in mixed environments, and persons can still act willfully and in solidarity with others, *turning segregation to their advantage*. And when spatial concentrations coincide with efforts to redirect the purposes of segregation, we may say that they typify a form of 'voluntary separation'.

Allow me to elucidate. Because the voluntary and the involuntary will almost certainly intertwine, there will be involuntary elements to any voluntary gesture. But it is proper to refer to various forms of segregation as 'voluntary' to the extent that there is *intentionality* behind decisions and actions to circumstances not necessarily of one's choosing. It is also proper to see various forms of segregation as voluntary inasmuch as inhabitants strongly identify with their dwelling space and wish to remain with others like themselves. But voluntary separation basically involves strategies that creatively *resist, rearrange* and *reclaim* the terms of one's segregation. And hence by 'separation' I am not defending the prerogatives of privileged groups but rather those of the disadvantaged. Indeed, those most likely to adopt voluntary separation as an appealing strategy will be members of groups subjected to various harms and stigma. And it turns out that stigmatised minority groups in particular often have reason to stay together for the benefits such proximity affords.

And thus where education is concerned, contrary to conventional wisdom separation as such need not compromise educational quality and may in fact enhance it. Indeed, as a pragmatic strategy separate religious schools may afford persons the right to be with others like themselves if they want to. Voluntary association is in any case a normative good. More than this, separate religious schools that consciously facilitate enabling conditions may enhance educational quality to the extent that schools facilitate the fostering of self-respect, and demonstrate equality of recognition and treatment of pupils, who, not incidentally, are less likely to receive this treatment in another school environment (Agirdag et al. 2012; Terry et al. 2014). Separation may also enhance a child's education to the extent that virtues can – arguably more efficiently – be cultivated within a homogenous environment, and these virtues potentially have civic import inasmuch as they can contribute to the good of one's community and beyond. In short, it is reasonable to assume that a variety of religious schools potentially serve an emancipatory function inasmuch as in aiding disadvantaged and stigmatised populations they are able to offer pragmatic responses to stigma, discriminatory treatment and exclusion.

Consider the case of state-supported Islamic schools.³⁰ Other authors in this issue have argued that they are controversial, and we have already seen how they are singled out for criticism among other minority religious schools. Yet it is undeniable that Islamic schools in Europe serve a stigmatised and marginalised group, even in cities where Muslims may constitute a majority. It is also the case that nearly all of them serve more poor pupils than other kinds of religious schools. According to one study from the UK that I referred to earlier, of the 11 state-funded Islamic schools (or, Muslim schools as they are called in the UK), all are collectively more reflective of their community, with 67% of primaries and 60% of the secondaries having more than the local authority average of free school meal pupils.³¹ Islamic schools host staff and pupils who share a common history and experience – and in Europe this will include routine encounters with racism and stigma – and they aim to create a school climate capable of mitigating those harms. One of the ways they aim to do this is by strengthening the relationship between teachers and pupils as well as overall internal school cohesion. Those aims also can be reflected in the didactics, namely the fact that more individual attention can be given to the cultural needs of the pupils.

To be sure, *aims* are not enough. Resources, or what I prefer to call *enabling conditions*, must also be present in order for there to be educational successes. Enabling conditions will take different forms according to circumstance and need, but in addition to institutional supports outside of the school they certainly will include things like qualified and inspirational teachers, a caring school ethos, a challenging curriculum and high expectations. Provided that these conditions are secured and coincide with the right aims, Islamic schools can help to raise the academic achievement of their disadvantaged pupils.³² Considering the formidable challenges most Islamic schools face, this is no trivial achievement. Perhaps more significantly, as an instantiation of voluntary separation, Islamic schools may be a justifiable response to social inequality when parity of recognition, treatment and participation for Muslim pupils in other school environments are in short supply (Merry 2007a; Shah 2012; Zine 2007). I have not the space here to offer a full account of Islamic schools. I only submit that if we consider (1) what we know about de facto segregation, and (2) the variety of problems – high pupil mobility, high teacher turnover, low expectations, a punitive school climate, etc. – associated with Muslim pupils in other schools, then voluntary separation in the form of an Islamic school may indeed be one of several compellingly pragmatic strategies to confront these challenges.

Voluntary separation is not defeatist; nor is it an argument against ‘integration’. Rather it involves supporting *constructive alternatives* to institutional racism and the entrenched patterns of involuntary segregation while at the same time affirming all that is good about voluntary association. Accordingly, it accepts that many worthwhile and positive features attend segregation and that to deny their importance or seek to disrupt them is potentially to engage in harmful and unwelcome forms of social engineering – ones that wittingly or unwittingly undervalue the resources that spatial concentrations often provide. The motives and need for voluntary separation will vary from one context and group to another, and its duration may fluctuate depending on external conditions. But voluntary separation certainly will have appeal for those for whom equal treatment is lacking in mixed environments, that is, where stigma and discrimination are the normal state of affairs.

Of course, simply being a member of a stigmatised group in itself will not suffice as an argument for separation. Further, even with the benefits that ‘voluntarily separate’

environments may provide, separation will not be an attractive option for everyone. Many will favour ‘integrated’ environments for their children, and for different reasons. Nothing in my argument speaks against this. Not only are stigmatised groups just as heterogeneous as non-stigmatised groups; members of stigmatised minority groups also will inevitably interact with mainstream society, at least some of the time, if for no other reason than that minority status makes this unavoidable. Whatever the case, separation will continue to be an appealing alternative for those whose equal status is not recognised, whose opportunities are impeded or denied, and whose opportunities for parity of participation all too often are diminished in ‘integrated’ environments. Finally, voluntary separation offers an alternative to those for whom the possibility of seamlessly blending in with the mainstream remains a fantasy. Indeed, voluntary separation can really only make sense in environments in which segregation is already the norm.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have examined the question why there continues to be such a high market share of religious schools in Europe. In addition to the answers available to us from extant research, I argued that institutional racism is a contributing factor that warrants closer consideration by empirical researchers. To understand this better, I believe that methods should be devised to control for social desirability bias and implicit bias. Further, I have offered a defence of voluntary separation for religious minorities for whom stigma and disadvantage continue to be hurdles to overcome. I offered by way of example the case of state supported Islamic schools.

Though I have been careful to circumscribe my defence of religious schools as an example of voluntary separation, it is important to keep the following items in mind. First, as we have seen, merely a desire to remain separate will not suffice as an adequate defence; enabling conditions must be present, and religious schools that fail in this regard either must work to improve their performance or be shut down. Second, religious schools able to satisfy the requirements of voluntary separation will have among their primary aims to serve stigmatised and disadvantaged groups. The type of religious school, then, will vary according to the group in question, the context and the need. Given the appalling history of anti-Semitism in Europe, for instance, it will likely include Jewish schools; moreover, in addition to Islamic schools, it also may include Hindu, Sikh and even some Catholic schools. It also may entail religious schools for Roma, a large percentage of whom are Pentecostal Christians. Finally, the religious schools for which I am offering a defence will be funded and supervised by the state. Here we can see again how ‘neutrality’ can be interpreted not only to include these schools, but also issue quality controls and assist with facilitating the self-determination of marginalised groups.

Yet even though I have defended state support of religious schools that serve vulnerable and marginalised groups, I believe the matter of state support will remain a thorny problem for religious schools, for while it arguably is a preferable expression of neutrality, it has its drawbacks. As Dronkers and Avram (2015) observe, ‘in return for its financial support, the State has imposed and continues to impose various types of controls on schools and in the process has reduced school autonomy’. There are ways of improving this balance, for instance by allowing for more autonomy at the level of the school board, or by giving schools more room to cultivate a distinctive atmosphere at the school, rather than merely permitting cosmetic differences to

remain. And to be sure, there also will be trade-offs, the most significant of which may very well occur between educational quality and religious identity – something that Islamic schools in Europe know too well, given how they continue to struggle to attract talented and motivated young people to teach at a time when the teaching profession continues to be held in low regard, and when more lucrative professions are drawing educated young Muslims into other fields.

Notes

1. It should be noted that different interpretations of ‘secularisation’ are in circulation, and over the years this has touched off heated debate between scholars about its meaning and application. For more on this debate, see Dobbelaere (1999) and Pickel (2009).
2. Esoteric bookshops across Western Europe remain very popular, as are a variety of New Age spiritualities and quasi-religious worldviews (Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy) and in many European countries any of the following beliefs/practices are widely reported: belief in a ‘higher power’, the credibility of astrology, use of crystals, contact with the dead, belief in angels and spirits, reincarnation, life after death, etc. Each of these is consistent with the ‘individualisation thesis’ discussed by scholars. See inter alia Baldwin (2009), Norris and Inglehart (2011), Eagleton (2014) and Pickel (2009).
3. This is not limited to Muslim immigrants; indeed anti-Semitism against Europe’s Jews is again being documented in several countries, including Hungary and France, precipitating ongoing emigration to Israel. See Bunzl (2005) and Kaplan and Small (2006).
4. Indeed in many parts of Europe ‘public’ schools – particularly in Catholic and Orthodox countries – continue to operate as de facto religious schools endorsing the dominant religion. See Dronkers and Avram (2015).
5. Belgium is an outlier, where Islamic instruction has been widely available in state schools for decades (Merry 2005b).
6. The fact that it is routinely argued in the USA does not mean that this is in fact what happens. Faith-based non-profits engaged in drug counselling, job training or sheltering and feeding the homeless receive government subsidies, and religious schools also receive indirect subsidies through tax exemption, not to mention other kinds of services. See Green, Baker, and Oluwole (2013).
7. Quantifying the precise number of schools matching this description is not possible. But let me clarify here that not all state-supported Christian schools are devoid of a religious ethos. Particularly for some Catholic schools, the presence of a religious ethos is even preferred by many devout Muslim parents, who can rest assured that basic religious values will not be spurned. Moreover, a number of evangelical schools have been established precisely because so many mainstream Protestant and Catholic schools remain only nominally Christian. Notwithstanding these exceptions, it is undeniable that perhaps the majority of mainstream Protestant and Catholic religious schools are indeed not playing the confessional role that they once played.
8. Or what Maussen and Vermeulen (2015) in their paper have called ‘pervasively religious’ schools.
9. A school’s ‘brand’ need not involve religion. A variety of ‘alternative’ schools (e.g. Montessori, Steiner, Dalton and Free) are on offer in many European countries, many of which are also state supported and operate as de facto all-white schools. On Danish ‘free schools’, see Olsen (2015).
10. For more on the disingenuous reasons religious schools may use in refusing ‘weaker’ pupils, see Maussen & Vermeulen 2015.
11. Stigma can cover a variety of characteristics, including social class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, immigrant status, weight, etc. The *locus classicus* on stigma is still (Goffman 1963).
12. Irrespective of whether continental Europeans feel comfortable talking about ‘race’, *racism* is a concept widely in use across Europe.
13. I indicate urban with inverted commas because ‘urban’ environments may not be geographically located in city centres but rather in suburban environments, placed as many are outside of the predominately white and wealthy city centres. *Les banlieus* outside of Paris come to mind, but also poorer minority neighbourhoods in Amsterdam and elsewhere.

14. There are some exceptions. Indeed, in some cities (e.g. Antwerp), it has only been possible for some Catholic schools to remain open by admitting (mostly) pupils of Muslim background. See Agirdag, Merry, and van Houtte (2014).
15. It is not a coincidence that these racially charged labels are precisely how schools are labelled in the Netherlands. Schools hosting a 'larger than usual' share of minority pupils are simply known as 'black schools'.
16. For Dutch figures demonstrating that this occurred already some decades ago, see Karsten, Meijer, and Peetsma (1996) and Vreeburg (1993).
17. I am aware that the concept of 'race' is rather imprecise and problematic, and only partly because 'races' (perhaps even more than other identity markers like gender, sexuality, ethnicity or ability) entail somewhat artificial and arbitrary constructions. Yet even with these qualifications, race constructions do not make the effects of racism less real.
18. Social desirability bias refers to the habit of responding to questions about sensitive topics (e.g. homosexuality, racial prejudice and immigration) in such a way that one believes her answers will be viewed favourably by others.
19. Implicit bias describes the phenomenon of holding consciously egalitarian assumptions or beliefs about other people (e.g. "I wouldn't base my decision about a school my child will attend on the ethnic/racial composition of the school") while simultaneously holding contradictory beliefs at a subconscious level (e.g. "a high concentration of ethnic minorities in a school is a proxy for poor educational quality").
20. But in fact several mainstream Dutch politicians – like politicians in other European countries – simply find more subtle ways of expressing their racism. See Özdil (2014) and Vandyck (2014).
21. For an excellent analysis of racism as a set of structural, ideological and cultural processes, see Bonilla-Silva (1997).
22. For example, my teenage daughter's ability to study (without permission) off campus from her high school during her lunch break without ever being stopped or even suspected of being truant – unlike her male and Latino schoolmates, who *are* routinely stopped – illustrates how her racial identity and also her gender (and class assignment) confer mobility privileges without scrutiny from school officials, irrespective of whether she has any negative thoughts towards her minority schoolmates.
23. And, as other groups join the middle classes, these same behaviours occur. Here again, institutional racism will incorporate other variables, notably social class.
24. On the European continent, there are no empirical studies that have examined this closely (notwithstanding COOL data in the Netherlands showing a strong correlation between mainstream denominational schools and indigenous majority attendance; Belgium shows similar patterns). However, in the UK, recent empirical data have slowly begun to emerge. See for example, 'Richer pupils at church schools,' *BBC News* (February 13, 2006) available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/4707452.stm; 'Church schools shun poorest pupils,' *The Guardian* (March 5, 2012) available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2012/mar/05/church-schools-shun-poorest-pupils> and for more figures from the UK suggesting that faith schools are becoming islands of privilege within poorer urban areas, see <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/mar/05/faith-schools-admissions>. From this report, we learn that some 73% of Catholic primaries and 72% of Catholic secondaries have a lower proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than the average of all children schooled across its local authority. The same is the case for Church of England primary and secondary schools. Some 74% of the Church's primaries and 65.5% of its secondaries have a smaller proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than is average for the local authority. In contrast, half – 51% – of non-religious primaries and 45% of non-religious secondaries have a lower proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than is representative for their local authority.
25. Again, these schools need not be coded by religion; other 'alternative' schools may serve the same purpose.
26. Compare an exhaustive study in the Netherlands on school choice:

Het doelbewust mijden van scholen vanwege de hoge aantallen allochtone leerlingen is in onderzoek lastig boven tafel te krijgen. Ouders zullen niet graag toegeven dat ze een school vanwege het hoge aantal allochtone leerlingen ongeschikt vinden. Ze zullen

eerder andere, inhoudelijke argumenten aanvoeren om niet voor een school met veel allochtone leerlingen te kiezen. (Herweijer and Vogels 2004, 107)

27. There are many claims of this sort. See for example 'Faith Schools Fragment Communities'. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/jun/13/faith-schools-fragment-communities> and 'Faith-based schools may fuel racism', <http://www.irishe Examiner.com/ireland/faith-based-schools-may-fuel-racism-224489.html>.
28. There are of course other minority religious schools that serve members of the indigenous majority. These usually will be a variety Christian denominations (e.g. Seventh-Day Adventist but they also may be Catholic schools in predominately Protestant areas or vice-versa.).
29. For instance, there is the claim that Muslims harbour loyalties at odds with liberal democratic citizenship. Suggesting that there might be something to this, polls do indeed show that Muslims *as a whole* do not feel as attached to their host countries in Europe as much as members of the majority. Importantly, there also is no shortage of data showing that Muslims – again, as a whole – do not feel *welcome*. But it is true that a small minority of young, socially isolated men are becoming radicalised.
30. I set aside Islamic schools that operate, in England, within the Independent sector for reasons mainly having to do with the fact that most are not well-financed and also academically underperform relative to state-supported (voluntary-aid) Islamic schools.
31. Free school meals are a common (though problematic) proxy used by researchers for determining poverty. See <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/mar/05/faith-schools-admissions>.
32. A majority of Islamic schools in Europe continue to struggle to raise their academic achievement, but for growing evidence that Islamic schools in the UK – like their North American counterparts – are beginning to turn a corner, see <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6006501>; for the Netherlands, see <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4492/Nederland/article/detail/3268671/2012/06/11/Islamitisch-basisonderwijs-voldoet-nu-ook-aan-Nederlandse-basisnormen.dhtml> and for France, see <http://www.leparisien.fr/societe/decouvrez-le-palmars-2013-des-lycees-26-03-2013-2672843.php>.

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