

they are wasting their time. Computers are wonderful machines, but we have been learning about "garbage in/garbage out." Applying complex computational designs and algorithms to complex human phenomena will yield complex, but often meaningless, worthless results. In the same way, the use of complex computational designs and algorithms, applied flawlessly to human phenomena, can only produce a very expensive waste of time.

As immigrants of varied physical appearance come to the United States from countries with racial folk taxonomies different from our own, they are often perplexed and dismayed to find that the ways they classify themselves and others are irrelevant to the American racial taxonomy. Brazilians, Haitians, and others find themselves labeled by strange, often pejorative, terms, and grouped together with people who are different from and unrecognizable to them. This can cause psychological complications (a Brazilian immigrant—who views himself as white—being treated by an American therapist who assumes that he is not).

Immigration has increased, especially from geographical regions whose people do not resemble American images of blacks, whites, or Asians. Inter-marriage is also increasing, as the stigma associated with it diminishes. These two trends are augmenting the physical diversity among those who marry each other—and, as a result, among their children. The American folk taxonomy of race (purportedly comprised of stable biological entities) is beginning to change to accommodate this new reality. After all, what race is someone whose four grandparents are black, white, Asian, and Hispanic?

Currently, the most rapidly growing census category is "Other," as increasing numbers of people fail to fit available options. Changes in the census categories every 10 years reflect the government's attempts to grapple with the changing self-identifications of Americans—even as statisticians try to maintain the same categories over time in order to make demographic comparisons. Perhaps they will invent one or more "multiracial" categories, to accommodate the wide range of people whose existence defies current classification. Perhaps they will drop the term "race" altogether. Already some institutions are including an option to "check as many as apply," when asking individuals to classify themselves on a list of racial and ethnic terms.

Thinking in terms of physical appearance and folk taxonomies helps to clarify the emotionally charged but confused topics of race. Understanding that different cultures have different folk taxonomies suggests that we respond to the question "What race is that person?" not by "Black" or "White," but by "Where?" and "When?"

✓ **Study and Review** on myanthrolab.com

Review Questions

1. What is Jefferson Fish's main point about the way Americans define race?
2. What is the difference between the way race is defined in the United States and in Brazil? List the Brazilian folk taxonomy of *tipos* and how to translate *tipos* into U.S. racial categories.
3. What evidence challenges the view that races are biologically defined types? What evidence would have to exist to prove that the human species is genetically divided into races?
4. Why does Fish feel it is important to understand that race as Americans define it does not represent a biological reality?

23

Moto
and

David W

Mary thing
in the last
Manufactu
groups, an
McCarthy
ple of a la
like thous
able and

• Lis

If a cou
prised
the ext
works
from

*Orig
autho

changes from a vegetable into a fruit. In both cases, what changes is not the physical appearance of the person or avocado, but the way they are classified.

I have focused on the Brazilian system to make clear how profoundly folk taxonomies of race vary from one place to another. But the Brazilian system is just one of many. Haiti's folk taxonomy, for example, includes elements of both ancestry and physical appearance, and even includes the amazing term (for foreigners of African appearance) *un blanc noir*—literally, “a black white.” In the classic study *Faiths of the Americas*, anthropologist Marvin Harris gives a good introduction to the ways in which the conquests by differing European powers of differing New World peoples and ecologies combined with differing patterns of slavery to produce a variety of folk taxonomies. Folk taxonomies of race can be found in many—though by no means all—cultures in other parts of the world as well.

The American concept of race does not correspond to the ways in which human physical appearance varies. Further, the American view of race (“hypo-descent”) is just one among many folk taxonomies, [none] of which correspond to the facts of human physical variation. This is why race is a myth and why races as conceived by Americans (and others) do not exist. It is also why differences in behavior between “races” cannot be explained by biological differences between them.

When examining the origins of IQ scores (or other behavior), psychologists sometimes use the term “heritability”—a statistical concept that is not based on observations of genes or chromosomes. It is important to understand that questions about heritability of IQ have nothing to do with racial differences in IQ. “Heritability,” refers only to the relative ranking of individuals *within* a population, under given environmental conditions, and not to differences *between* populations. Thus, among the population of American whites, it may be that those with high IQs tend to have higher-IQ children than do those with low IQs. Similarly, among American blacks, it may be that those with high IQs also tend to have higher-IQ children.

In both cases, it is possible that the link between the IQs of parents and children may exist for reasons that are not entirely environmental. This heritability of IQ *within* the two populations, even if it exists, would in no way contradict the average social advantages of American whites as a group compared to the average social disadvantages of American blacks as a group. Such differences in social environments can easily account for any differences in the average test scores *between* the two groups. Thus, the heritability of IQ *within* each group is irrelevant to understanding differences *between* the groups.

Beyond this, though, studies of differences in behavior between “populations” of whites and blacks, which seek to find biological causes rather than only social ones, make a serious logical error: They assume that blacks and whites are populations in some biological sense, as sub-units of the human species. (Most likely, the researchers make this assumption because they are American and approach race in terms of the American folk taxonomy.)

In fact, though, the groups are sorted by a purely social rule for statistical purposes. This can easily be demonstrated by asking researchers how they know that the white subjects are really white and the black subjects are really black. There is no biological answer to this question, because race as a biological category does not exist. All that researchers can say is, “The tester classified them based on their physical appearance,” or “Their school records listed their race,” or otherwise give a social rather than biological answer.

So when American researchers study racial differences in behavior, in search of biological rather than social causes for differences between socially defined groups,

A *morena* has brown or black lips that are not thin. Brazilians who come to the United States think that a *morena* is a "brunette" and are surprised to find that natives are considered white. Americans have difficulty classifying people of Hispanic or Latin American origin. Are these people, if not just as white as the Americans, not as black as the Africans? One might also wonder if *morenas* have trouble with where do you come from (country) questions as given, but asking instead "Where do you come from?" or "What language do you speak at home?" or even "What was your maiden name?" or even "What color is your hair are a sleight-of-hand question.

A *mulata* looks like a *morena*, except with tinge currying toward the originally darker range of hair colors and skin colors. A *preta* looks like a *mulata*, except with dark brown skin, broad nose, and thick lips. To Americans, *mulatas* and *pretas* are both black, and if forced to distinguish between them would refer to them as light-skinned blacks and dark-skinned blacks, respectively.

If Brazilians were forced to divide the range of uppos, from *toira* to *preta*, into "kinds of whites" and "kinds of blacks" (a distinction they do not ordinarily make), they would draw the line between *morenas* and *mulatas*; whereas Americans, if offered the same choice, would draw the line between *brancas* and *morenas*.

The proliferation of types, and the difference in the white-black dividing line do not, however, exhaust the differences between Brazilian and American folk taxonomies. There are tips in the Afro-European domain that are considered to be neither black nor white—an idea that is difficult for Americans visiting Brazil to comprehend. A person with tight curly blond (or red) hair, light skin, blue (or green) eyes, broad nose, and thick lips, is a *sarará*. The opposite features—straight black hair, dark skin, brown eyes, narrow nose, and thin lips—are those of a *cabo verde*. *Sarará* and *cabo verde* are both tips that are considered by Brazilians in Salvador, Bahia, to be neither black nor white.

When I interviewed my American daughter and her Brazilian boyfriend, she said she was black because her mother is black (even though I am white). That is, from her American perspective, she was not black blood"—though she is a *morena* in Brazil. Her boyfriend said that he was not black because, viewing himself in terms of Brazilian tipos, he is a *mulato* (not a *preto*).

There are many differences between the Brazilian and American folk taxonomies of race. The American system tells you about how people's parents are classified but not what they look like. The Brazilian system tells you what they look like but not about their parents. When two parents of intermediate appearance have many children in the United States, the children are all of one race: in Brazil they are of many types.

Americans believe that race is an immutable biological given, but people (like my daughter and her boyfriend) can change their race by getting on a plane and going from the United States to Brazil—just as, if they take an aviator's with them, it

That is, hypo-descent is informative about ancestry—specifically, parental classification—rather than physical appearance.

There are many strange consequences of our folk taxonomy. For example, someone is inherited to genes that produce “African”-appearing physical features would still be considered “black” if he or she has a parent classified as black. The category “black” includes many such people. Americans have the curious belief that people who look white but have a parent classified as black are “really” black in some biological sense, and are being deceptive if they present themselves as white. Such examples make it clear that race is a social rather than a physical classification.

From infancy, human beings learn to recognize very subtle differences in the faces of those around them. Black babies see a wider variety of black faces than white faces, and white babies see a wider variety of white faces than black faces. Because they are exposed only to a limited range of human variation, adult members of each “race” come to see their own group as containing much wider variation than others. Thus, because of this perceptual learning, blacks see greater physical variation among themselves than among whites, while whites see the opposite. In this case, however, there is a clear answer to the question of which group contains greater physical variability. Blacks are correct.

Why is this the case?

Take a moment. Think of yourself as an amateur anthropologist and try to step out of American culture, however briefly.

It is often difficult to get white people to accept what at first appears to contradict the evidence they can see clearly with their own eyes—but which is really the result of a history of perceptual learning. However, the reason that blacks view themselves as more varied is not that their vision is more accurate. Rather, it is that blacks too have a long—but different—history of perceptual learning from that of whites (and also that they have been observers of a larger range of human variation).

The fact of greater physical variation among blacks than whites in America goes back to the principle of hypo-descent, which classifies all people with one black parent and one white parent as black. If they were all considered white, then there would be more physical variation among whites. Someone with one-eighth white “blood” and seven-eighths black “blood” would be considered white; anyone with any white ancestry would be considered white. In other words, what appears to be a difference in biological variability is really a difference in cultural classification.

Perhaps the clearest way to understand that the American folk taxonomy of race is merely one of many—arbitrary and unsentimental like all the others—is to contrast it with a very different one, that of Brazil. The Portuguese word that in the Brazilian folk taxonomy corresponds to the American “race” is “*tipo*,” a cognate of the English word “type,” is a descriptive term that serves as a kind of shorthand for a series of physical features. Because people’s physical features vary separately from one another, there are an awful lot of *tipos* in Brazil.

Since *tipos* are descriptive terms, they vary regionally in Brazil—in part reflecting regional differences in the development of colloquial Portuguese, but in part because the physical variation they describe is different in different regions. The Brazilian situation is so complex I will limit my delineation of *tipos* to some of the main ones used in the city of Salvador, Bahia, to describe people whose physical appearance is understood to be made up of African and European features. (I will use the female terms throughout; in nearly all cases the male term simply changes the last letter from *a* to *o*.)

Consider the avocado—is it a fruit or a vegetable? Americans insist it is a vegetable. We eat it in salads with oil and vinegar. Brazilians, on the other hand, would say it is a fruit. They eat it for dessert with lemon juice.

How can we explain this difference in classification? The avocado is an edible plant, and the same edible plants are classified differently. The avocado, while continuing to be a cognate term, classifies some edible plants differently, but its folk classification changes, depending on who's doing the classifying.

Human beings are also folk taxonomists; not scientific ones, but folk ones. When we ask a fruit or a vegetable, we can ask if it is white or black. And when we ask race questions, the answers we get to people—or "vegetable" or "fruit"—applied to terms like "white" or "black" applied to people or avocados. Rather, avocados—do not give us biological information about people or avocados. Rather, they exemplify how cultural groups (Brazilians or Americans) classify people and avocados.

Americans believe in "blood," a folk term for the quality presumed to be carried by members of so-called races. And the way offspring—regardless of their physical appearance—always inherit the less prestigious racial category of mixed parentage is called "hypo-descent" by anthropologists. A sentence thoroughly intelligible to most Americans might be: "Since Mary's father is white and her mother is black, Mary is black because she has black 'blood.'" American researchers who think they are studying racial differences in behavior would, like other Americans, classify Mary as black—although she has just as much white "blood."

According to hypo-descent, the various purported racial categories are arranged in a hierarchy along a single dimension, from the most prestigious ("white"), through intermediary forms ("Asian"), to the least prestigious ("black"). And when a couple come from two different categories, all their children (the "descent" in "hypo-descent") are classified as belonging to the less prestigious category (thus, the "hypo"). Hence, all the offspring of one "white" parent and one "black" parent—regardless of the children's physical appearance—are called "black" in the United States.

The American folk concept of "blood" does not behave like genes. Genes are units which cannot be subdivided. When several genes jointly determine a trait, chance decides which ones come from each parent. If a mother and a father each have a trait, a child gets four from each parent. For example, if eight genes determine the hypothetical genes BBBBWWWW, then a child could be born with any combination of B and W genes, from BBBBWWWW to WWWWWWWW. In contrast, the folk concept "blood" behaves like a uniform and continuous entity. It can be divided in two indefinitely—for example, quadroons and octoroons are said to be people who have one-quarter and one-eighth black "blood," respectively. Oddly, because of hypo-descent, Americans consider people with one-eighth black "blood" to be black rather than white, despite their having seven-eighths white "blood."

Hypo-descent, or "blood," is not informative about the physical appearance of people. For example, when two parents called black in the United States have a number of children, the children are likely to vary in physical appearance. In the case of skin color, they might vary from lighter than the lighter parent to darker than the darker parent. However, they would all receive the same racial classification—black—regardless of their skin color.

All that hypo-descent tells you is that, when someone is classified as something other than white (e.g., Asian), at least one of his or her parents is classified in the same way, and that neither parent has a less prestigious classification (e.g., black).

of the facial features. Americans think of as racial—eye color, nose width (actually, the ratio of width to length), lip thickness ("evertness"), hair form, and hair color. They do not vary together either. If they did, then a "totally white" person would have very light skin color, straight blond hair, blue eyes, a narrow nose, and thin lips; a "totally black" person would have very dark skin color, black curly hair, dark brown eyes, a broad nose, and thick lips; those in between would have a correlated degree—a broad light brown hair, light brown eyes, and intermediate nose and lip forms.

While people of mixed European and African ancestry who look like this do exist, they are the exception rather than the rule. Anyone who wants to can make up a chart of facial features (choose a location with a diverse population, say, the New York City subway) and verify that there are people with all possible admixtures of facial features. One might see someone with tight curly blond hair, light skin, blue eyes, broad nose, and thick lips—whose features are half "black" and half "white." That is, broad of the person's facial features occupies one end or the other of a supposedly racial continuum, with no intermediary forms (like wavy light brown hair). Such people are living proof that supposedly racial features do not vary together.

Since the human species has spent most of its existence in Africa, different populations in Africa have been separated from each other longer than East Asians or Northern Europeans have been separated from each other or from Africans. As a result, there is remarkable physical variation among the peoples of Africa, which goes unrecognized by Americans who view them all as belonging to the same race.

In contrast to the very tall Masai, the diminutive stature of the very short Pygmies may have evolved as an advantage in moving rapidly through tangled forest vegetation. The Bushmen of the Kalahari desert have very large ("steatopygous") buttocks, presumably to store body fat in one place for times of food scarcity, while leaving the rest of the body unencumbered to radiate heat. They also have "peppercorn" hair. Hair in separated tufts, like tight curly hair, leaves space to radiate the heat that rises through the body to the scalp; straight hair lies flat and holds in body heat, like a cap. By viewing Africans as constituting a single race, Americans ignore their greater physical variability, while assigning racial significance to lesser differences between them.

Although it is true that most inhabitants of northern Europe, east Asia, and central Africa look like Americans' conceptions of one or another of the three purported races, most inhabitants of south Asia, southwest Asia, north Africa, and the Pacific islands do not. Thus, the 19th century view of the human species as comprised of Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid races, still held by many Americans, is based on a partial and unrepresentative view of human variability. In other words, what is now known about human physical variation does not correspond to what Americans think of as race.

In contrast to the question of the actual physical variation among human beings, there is the question of how people classify that variation. Scientists classify things in scientific taxonomies—chemists' periodic table of the elements, biologists' classification of life forms into kingdoms, phyla, and so forth.

In every culture, people also classify things along culture-specific dimensions of meaning. For example, paper clips and staples are understood by Americans as paper fasteners, and nails are not, even though, in terms of their physical properties, all three consist of differently shaped pieces of metal wire. The physical variation in pieces of metal wire can be seen as analogous to human physical variation; and the categories of cultural meaning, like paper fasteners versus wood fasteners, can be seen as analogous to races. Anthropologists refer to these kinds of classifications as folk taxonomies.

populations may well result from purely random factors; this random change in the frequencies of alleles is known as genetic drift.

Genetic drift is most likely to occur in small populations. In a large population, those who survive to reproduce are likely to differ from the population as a whole in many ways. Similarly, if a group divides and a subgroup moves away, the two groups will, by chance, differ in the frequency of various genes. Even the mere fact of physical separation will, over time, lead two equivalent populations to differ in the frequency of genes. These randomly acquired population differences will accumulate over successive generations along with any others due to mutation or natural selection.

A number of differences in physical appearance among populations around the globe appear to have adaptive value. For example, people in the tropics of Africa and South America came to have dark skins, presumably through natural selection, as protection against the sun. In cold areas, like northern Europe or northern North America, which are dark for long periods of time, and where people covered their bodies for warmth, people came to have light skins—light skins make maximum use of sunlight to produce vitamin D.

The indigenous peoples of the New World arrived about 15,000 years ago, during the last ice age, following game across the Bering Strait. (The sea level was low enough to create a land bridge because so much water was in the form of ice.) Thus, the dark-skinned Indians of the South American tropics are descended from light-skinned ancestors, similar in appearance to the Eskimo. In other words, even though skin color is the most salient feature thought by Americans to be an indicator of race—and race is assumed to have great time depth—it is subject to relatively rapid evolutionary change.

Meanwhile, the extra ("epicanthic") fold of eyelid skin, which Americans also view as racial, and which evolved in Asian populations to protect the eye against the cold, continues to exist among South American native peoples because its presence (unlike a light skin) offers no reproductive disadvantage. Hence, skin color and eyelid form, which Americans think of as traits of different races, occur together or separately in different populations.

Like skin color, there are other physical differences that also appear to have evolved through natural selection—but which Americans do not think of as racial. Take, for example, body shape. Some populations in very cold climates, like the Eskimo, developed rounded bodies. This is because the more spherical an object is, the less surface area it has to radiate heat. In contrast, some populations in very hot climates, like the Masai, developed lanky bodies. Like the tubular pipes of an old-fashioned radiator, the high ratio of surface area to volume allows people to radiate a lot of heat.

In terms of American's way of thinking about race, lanky people and rounded people are simply two kinds of whites or blacks. But it is equally reasonable to view light-skinned people and dark-skinned people as two kinds of "lankys" or "roundets." In other words, our categories for racial classification of people arbitrarily include certain dimensions (light versus dark skin) and exclude others (rounded versus elongated bodies).

There is no biological basis for classifying race according to skin color instead of body form—or according to any other variable, for that matter. All that exists is variability in what people look like—and the arbitrary and culturally specific ways different societies classify that variability. There is nothing left over that can be called race. This is why race is a myth.

Skin color and body form do not vary together: Not all dark-skinned people are lanky; similarly, light-skinned people may be lanky or rounded. The same can be said

Brazilian culture. At one point in the interview I asked her, "Are you black?" She said, "Yes," I then asked him the question, and he said "No."

Psychologists have begun talking about race again. They think that it may be useful in explaining the biological bases of behavior. For example, following publication of the *Bell Curve*, there has been renewed debate about whether black-white genetic differences in scores on IQ tests reflect racial differences in intelligence. (Because this article is about race, it will mainly use racial terms, like black and white, rather than cultural terms, like African-American and European-American.)

Europeans have a problem with debates like the one over race and IQ is that psychologists on both sides of the controversy make a tonally unwarranted assumption: that there is a biological entity called "race." If there were such an entity, then it would at least be possible to argue that differences in behavior between "races" might be biologically based.

Before considering the controversy, however, it is reasonable to step back and ask ourselves "What is race?" If, as happens to be the case, race is not a biologically meaningful concept, then looking for biologically based racial differences in behavior is simply a waste of time.

The question "What is race?" can be divided into two more limited ones. The answers to both questions have long been known by anthropologists, but seem not to have reached other social or behavioral scientists, let alone the public at large. And both answers differ strikingly from what we Americans think of as race.

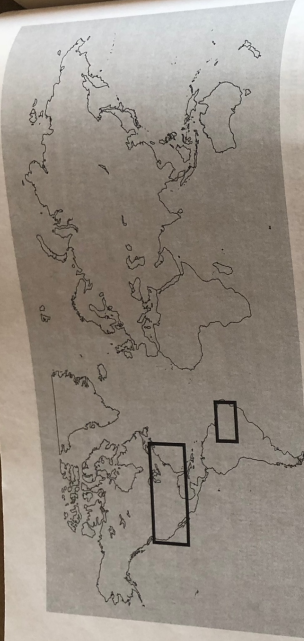
The first question is "How can we understand the variation in physical appearance among human beings?" It is interesting to discover that Americans (including researchers, who should know better) view only a part of the variation as "racial," while other equally evident variability is not so viewed.

The second question is "How can we understand the kinds of racial classifications applied to differences in physical appearance among human beings?" Surprisingly, different cultures label these physical differences in different ways. Far from describing biological entities, American racial categories are merely one of numerous, very culture-specific schemes for reducing uncertainty about how people should respond to other people. The fact that Americans believe that Asians, blacks, Hispanics, and whites constitute biological entities called races is a matter of cultural interest rather than scientific substance. It tells us something about American culture—but nothing at all about the human species.

The short answer to the question "What is race?" is: There is no such thing. Race is a myth. And our racial classification scheme is loaded with pure fantasy.

Let's start with human physical variation. Human beings are a species, which means that people from anywhere on the planet can mate with others from anywhere else and produce fertile offspring. (Horses and donkeys are two different species because, even though they can mate with each other, their offspring—mules—are sterile.)

Our species evolved in Africa from earlier forms and eventually spread out around the planet. Over time, human populations that were geographically separated from one another came to differ in physical appearance. They came by these differences through three major pathways: mutation, natural selection, and genetic drift. Since genetic mutations occur randomly, different mutations occur and accumulate over time in geographically separated populations. Also, as we have known since Darwin, different geographical environments select for different physical traits that confer a survival advantage. But the largest proportion of variability among



22

Mixed Blood

Jefferson M. Fish

Many Americans believe that people can be divided into races. For them, races are biologically defined groups. Anthropologists, on the other hand, have long argued that U.S. racial groups are American cultural constructions; they represent the way Americans classify people rather than a genetically determined reality. In this article, Jefferson Fish demonstrates the cultural basis of race by comparing how races are defined in the United States and Brazil. In America, a person's race is determined not by how he or she looks, but by his or her heritage. A person will be classified as black, for example, if one of his or her parents is classified that way no matter what the person looks like. In Brazil, on the other hand, people are classified into a series of *tipos* on the basis of how they look. The same couple may have children classified into three or four different *tipos* based on a number of physical markers such as skin color and nose shape. As a result, Fish's daughter, who has brown skin and whose mother is black, can change her race from black in the United States to *moreno* (*brunette*), a category just behind *branca* (blond) in Brazil, by simply taking a plane there.*

Listen to the **Chapter Audio** on myanthrolab.com

Last year my daughter, who had been living in Rio de Janeiro, and her Brazilian boyfriend paid a visit to my cross-cultural psychology class. They had agreed to be interviewed about

***"Mixed Blood" by Jefferson M. Fish. Reproduced with permission from *Psychology Today*, copyright © 2008 www.psychologytoday.com

Conclusion

Like members of all societies, Maria's family members operated according to social norms and cultural assumptions that are so ingrained that they are often unconscious. According to their cultural logic, if a person is Spanish, then that person is not Muslim, and vice versa. Since Maria continued to engage in practices seen as "typically Spanish," it did not occur to them that she might have converted to Islam. Her friend Jasmina faced a different situation, but with a similar underlying issue. The Moroccan woman who initially doubted that Jasmina, a Muslim woman in a headscarf, could be Spanish, operated under the same assumption: that people are *either* Muslim or Spanish, but not both.

Yet people like Maria are working hard to show others that they are perfectly able to inhabit Muslim religious identity and Spanish national identity at the same time. For Maria, these questions of identity were raised by her marriage to a Muslim migrant, which prompted her to reconsider her religious identity. She wanted to share a religious tradition with her husband, but feared becoming Muslim would threaten her national identity. Maria eventually changed her own beliefs about the possibility of incorporating Muslim religious beliefs into her Spanish identity and today she works to convince her fellow Spaniards to accept Islam as a valued part of Spanish history and to incorporate Muslims into Spanish society. Maria and her fellow converts' experiences highlight the complexities of cultural identities and membership in social groups. People are at once constrained by strongly held cultural assumptions about identity, even as they are also sometimes able to modify their own understandings of their identities and the ways they live them.

Study and Review on myanthrolab.com

Review Questions

1. What is meant by religious conversion?
2. What historical factors shape the relationship between Islam and a Spanish national identity?
3. What was Maria's family's perception of Islam and how does that differ from the way Maria perceived its meaning?
4. How did Muslims react to Maria's status as a Muslim?

refused to believe they were Muslim, or in which someone who met them as a Muslim (for instance, at a mosque) was later shocked to find that they were Spanish.

Maria's friend and fellow convert Jasmina acutely felt this failure of recognition—that is, people's inability to understand over time, she described in an argument both Spanish and Muslim. During an interview over tea, she described an argument she had recently had with a Moroccan woman at a bus stop. Jasmina was waiting for the bus when the Moroccan woman arrived at the bus stop. Seeing Jasmina's headscarf, the woman must have assumed that Jasmina was a fellow Moroccan or an immigrant from another Arabic-speaking Muslim country, and began to speak to Jasmina in Arabic. Jasmina politely explained in Spanish that she was not an Arabic speaker and did not understand the woman. At this, Jasmina recalled, the woman became angry. She continued to speak to Jasmina in Arabic, and shook her head in disbelief when Jasmina insisted that she was from Spain and did not speak Arabic. Finally, exasperated, Jasmina pulled out her Spanish ID card and showed it to the woman, who finally agreed that Jasmina must really be Spanish, and expressed shock. Jasmina was disappointed by this encounter, both because of the unpleasantness of the exchange—the woman had been offended that Jasmina refused to engage her in Arabic—and because she took it as a sign that her deeply felt religious beliefs were not taken seriously by Muslims born into the religion. She said, "The thing is, the Moroccans know that Islam is just a religion, but they still sometimes don't realize that Spaniards can be Muslim."

Maria Martínez has had a slightly different experience. Because she was married to a lifelong Muslim from an Arab country, she had more contacts with Muslim immigrants, who knew her well and welcomed her as a new Muslim. In contrast to Jasmina, Maria felt the misrecognition of non-Muslim Spaniards more keenly. Her former co-workers had refused to believe she had become Muslim for weeks after her conversion, until she finally showed them a headscarf she wears to pray at the mosque. Her family proved a further challenge. Given all of her activism on behalf of the Muslim community in Granada, I was surprised to find out about a year into my fieldwork stay that Maria still had not broken the news of her conversion to her family, who lived far outside the city and therefore were not privy to her role in the conversion movement there. Maria had already told me about her family's strongly negative reaction to her relationship with a Muslim immigrant. Her mother had half-jokingly threatened to "have a heart attack," and her brother-in-law had banned her from his house, and had even started a brawl with her husband during a family visit. Because of this, Maria was sure her family was not ready to find out that she herself had become Muslim. She sensed that the idea that she and her future children might not share a religious identity with the rest of the family was beyond the scope of her family's worldview. And so, she took care to hide her new religion when she visited them. She attended Catholic mass, crossed herself, and pretended to eat pork and drink wine, two staples of her family's (and of many Spanish families') meals. In order to fulfill her commitment to her religion without alarming her family, Maria took fake sips of wine from a wine glass, and cut up pieces of pork on her plate and moved them around so that her food looked partially eaten. She would describe this to me with a heavy sigh, and express hope that in the future, she might be able to tell her family that she was Muslim that she found spiritual fulfillment in her new religion, and that she was just as Spanish as before.

Maria felt that this “huge job” of reminding Catholic and secular Spaniards about their country’s Muslim heritage was a crucial remedy to popular assumptions that Islam and Spanishness were diametrically opposed. She believed that if people knew more about the historical role of Islam in Spain, they would come to see Islam as part of, rather than a threat to, Spanish national identity.

In addition to rooting Islam in Spanish history, the second element of Maria’s message was a discourse of Islam’s “everydayness.” When talking about Islamic practices, she almost always described them using carefully chosen phrases that normalized Islam as part of everyday life. She described how Islamic prayer fit into *la vida cotidiana*, (everyday life), and how Muslim Spanish girls were “*chicas muy normales y corrientes*” (very normal and common girls) who went to Spanish schools, spoke Spanish, and had non-Muslim Spanish friends, a far cry from the image of Muslim women and girls closed off from society, secluded at home. When asked by co-workers about the Muslim headscarf (which she does not wear except when praying at a mosque), she compared the headscarf, known as *hijab*, to scarves worn by pious Catholic women in Spain, who—like some Muslim women—covered their heads out of modesty. When Muslims used the Arabic phrase *Insh’allah* (God willing) in reference to something they hoped for, Maria would point out that this is just like Spanish-speaking Catholics’ penchant for adding “*si Dios lo quiere*” (God willing) to the end of hypothetical statements, such as, “My favorite soccer team will win tonight, God willing!” In this way, Maria tried to demystify Islam and defuse fears of its foreignness by pointing out that Catholic and Muslim Spaniards actually engage in many similar practices on a daily basis, ranging from the way they talk, to covering for modesty.

Finally, Maria worked to spread this message of Islam’s Spanishness as widely as possible, though she did not try to convert others to Islam. She brought the topic up frequently with her co-workers, happily fielding questions about headscarves, prayers, and the Koran from skeptical or curious colleagues. She also invited the media to events held at the NGO where she worked so that the press would cover stories about Islam in Spain. She even posted YouTube videos of herself wearing a headscarf and talking about how easy and “normal” it is to be a Muslim in Spain, taking on common concerns about Islam, such as the fear that Islam is by nature oppressive to women, and explaining why such stereotypes were not true, one by one.

Despite converts’ own firm belief that Islam forms part of Spain’s national identity, and that it is thus perfectly possible for Spaniards to embrace Islam, the reactions of other members of society (both non-Muslim Spaniards and non-Spanish Muslim immigrants) illustrate the difficulty of Maria’s task. Because of widespread ideas that pit Europe (understood as Christian or secular) against an imagined Muslim world, the idea of Spanish Muslims is shocking to some people in Granada. Converts face many questions about whether their new religious identity might jeopardize their national identity as Spaniards. Conversion of course does nothing to legally change their full social time, because they are migrants from Muslim-majority countries, who also are not used to the idea that a person could be both members of Spanish society. At the same time, because they are migrants from Muslim-majority countries, who also are not used to the idea that a person could be both Muslim and of Spanish origin. Maria and many of her fellow converts told countless stories of social encounters in which someone who knew them to be Spanish

accompanied her husband to the mosque and saw several Spanish women praying there. She later recounted to me:

I asked the women if I could look around, and I asked one fair-skinned woman where she was from. She said, "I'm Irish." And I said, "And you're Muslim?" And she goes, "Yeah, yeah, and this woman over there is Spanish, and this one too." And I was shocked, obviously. I was like, "There are Muslims that aren't Arab?" It was the first time I realized that

With this realization that Spanish women could be Muslim, María felt more free to ponder her own religious future, a topic that had begun to worry her since marrying a man of a different religion than her own. She had begun to wonder what it would be like if she and her husband were to have children. Would it be complicated to have parents of different faiths? The fact that she and her husband came from different religious traditions began to trouble her more and more. At the same time, she was very curious about Islam. Growing up, she was not exposed to information about Islam beyond stereotypes, and as she gained familiarity with the religion through observing her husband's religious practices, she became fascinated. Since her belief that Muslim men all mistreated women had proven false, what else might surprise her about Islam? She began asking her husband to explain Islamic teachings, and to show her how to practice the five pillars of the Islamic faith: the recitation of the *Shahada*, daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, annual charitable giving, and pilgrimage to Mecca once during the lifetime of those who are able. She was not a very observant Catholic, and she felt saddened by her Catholic family's closed-mindedness about her mixed marriage. Eventually, after periodically attending events at the mosque, reading the Koran, and as she put it, "pestering" her husband with infinite questions about Islam, María decided that she found Islam's central messages of peace and submission to God very beautiful, and not entirely foreign to the values of her Catholic upbringing. So, she decided to convert.

As she learned more about her new religion, María's belief in the links between Muslim religious identity and Spanish national history and identity grew stronger. As someone who had always been part of the mainstream religion of her society, and now found herself in the minority, it was also important to María to promote acceptance of Islam in Spain by educating Spaniards about Islam's compatibility with Spanishness. Over the two years that I worked with her, during interviews, social hours, and downtime at the NGO, she often talked to me about this passion.

María had a three-pronged approach to insisting on the harmony between Islam and Spanish national identity. The first was a new take on Spanish history. While Islam is often seen as coming from outside of Western Europe, María (along with many fellow converts) had come to believe that because of Spain's long Muslim history, Islam is in fact not foreign to Spain, but indigenous to the country, especially to cities like Granada that were originally built by Muslims. Over tea in her apartment one evening, María told me about her participation in local festivals celebrating Spain's Muslim history, saying:

You know what, Mikaela? It's very strange because, you realize, they were here for 800 years. 800 YEARS, living here, *Muslims!* We're not talking about 80 years or five years. No, 800. It's incredible how a country can turn around and renounce its past, its origins. When the Catholic Kings finally captured Granada, they started this promotional campaign to replace Islam with Christianity. So that people would forget Islam. And now it's stuck there in peoples' heads. So now we have a huge job.

for Spain. Over the course of several hundred years, Spain's Jews and Muslims were forced to convert, or be killed or exiled. Since then, Spaniards have struggled to figure out how Muslim Spain should be remembered, and how Muslims might fit into modern Spanish society.

In more recent history, Spain experienced the dictatorship of Francisco Franco from 1939 until 1975. Franco enforced Catholicism as the national religion during his reign. After Franco died in 1975, Spain became a democratic nation in which people are allowed to choose their own religious practices. Some people have chosen to convert to Islam and have formed Muslim communities, especially in southern Spain, the part of the country most associated with the Muslims of Spain's history. Converts report many reasons for adopting Islam, ranging from personal dissatisfaction with Catholicism, to feeling spiritually moved by the beauty and history of Spain's Muslim legacy, to wanting to share a religious identity with their spouses after marriage to Muslims. This last reason largely explains María's conversion, which she felt would align her identity with that of her husband.

Converts to Islam in Granada must face reactions from family, friends, and fellow Spaniards that are shaped by the historical debates in Spain about the relationship between Islam and Spanish national identity. Some people in Granada, including most converts, see Islam as foundational to Spain. They point to buildings like the Alhambra, a prominent castle and fortress built by medieval Muslims that still towers over the city of Granada, as well as the influence of Arabic on the Spanish language, and the fact that Spanish cuisine, music and dance traditions all draw on Arab roots or have parallels in Islamic traditions. Others see Islam as a constant, foreign threat to a Spanish identity they see as fundamentally Catholic, and are fearful of Islam returning to Spain.

Bridging Religious and National Identities

Convert Muslims in Granada often embody this tension themselves. Many converts started out viewing Islam as fundamentally opposed to Spanish identity, and only later came to see the two as compatible. María, who grew up in a rather homogeneous Catholic town several hours' drive from the city of Granada, first encountered Islam in Spain when she met the Jordanian immigrant who later became her husband. She recalled to me humorously how she had believed stereotypes about Islam, assuming all Muslim men were "*machista*" or sexist, and equating Muslims with Arabs, not realizing that many Muslims around the world are not ethnically Arab and that many Arabs are Jewish or Christian. Laughing, she said, "The first thing I said to my husband when we met was, 'So you're Arab? Well they say you Arabs are terrible, you know!' And he said, 'Oh, really? And I said, 'Yes, they say you treat your women very badly.'" But her now-husband insisted this was not the case. The two began to date, and eventually decided to get married, but because María's family did not approve of her dating a Muslim, Arab man, they were married in secret. Even though María had learned that Muslim men are not necessarily any more "*machista*" than Spanish men, it never crossed her mind to become a Muslim woman.

María's eventual decision to convert to Islam came from both her desire to share a religion with her husband, and her slow realization that it was possible to become Muslim Spanish and Muslim. She only became aware of the possibility of becoming Muslim when she discovered the existence of Spanish converts to Islam in Granada. Prior to this, she saw being Muslim and Spanish as incompatible. But one day she

man that prompted her to confront these basic questions of personal, religious, and national identity head-on.

Anthropologists are interested in how people in different cultures view their religious identities in relation to other aspects of identity, like their nationality, city, socioeconomic strata, or even group of friends. Sometimes, cultural beliefs about the links between religious identities and other kinds of identity become especially clear when people convert to other religions. This is because changes in religion often entail changes in how people identify themselves or how other people view them in ways that go far beyond spiritual beliefs or practices. In Spain, where the vast majority of people have been Catholic for the past several centuries, Catholic identity has been closely tied to how people understand their national identity as Spaniards. For many Spaniards, their culturally specific worldview makes it hard for them to even imagine that Spaniards could be Muslim. As a result, converts to Islam face misunderstandings and judgments from other members of society who see Islam and Spanish identity as mutually exclusive. While many converts to Islam adopt the religion on their own, some convert after falling in love with and marrying Muslims, either fellow Europeans who have already converted, or as in the case of Maria, Muslim migrants from the Middle East or North Africa.

Conversion to Islam in Spain

Conversion to Islam is notable in a number of ways. Globally, conversions to Islam are on the rise. Islam is the world's fastest growing religion, due in part to births in Muslim societies, but also to new Muslims who have adopted the faith. In contrast to some religions, such as Judaism, in which would-be converts must enroll in classes, or receive official acceptance from religious authorities, Islam requires only the recitation of the *Shahada*, a formal declaration of the Islamic faith. This recitation is often done in the presence of Muslim witnesses. María Martínez pronounced the *Shahada* in a mosque in Granada, and now she regularly supports and welcomes others who come to her mosque to recite the *Shahada* and join the Muslim community.

Many people are adopting Islam in places where it is a minority religion, such as in Western Europe and the United States. In these contexts, Islam is sometimes a stigmatized or marginalized religion that many people associate with erroneous stereotypes about fundamentalist terrorism or the oppression of women. Converting from a mainstream religion to a minority religion that is poorly understood and often maligned means that converts to Islam in Europe sometimes face particularly strong political and social challenges. Given such challenges, it is especially important for anthropologists to consider why and how Westerners like Maria are choosing to become Muslim.

In Spain, the compatibility of Islam with Spanish national identity is a longstanding question that has preoccupied religious and political leaders, as well as ordinary people, for centuries. In the middle ages, Spain formed part of a vast Muslim empire that included what today we call North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and Mauritania). For roughly eight centuries, Spain was predominantly Muslim, with Jewish and Christian minorities. At the turn of the 15th century, Catholic leaders concluded what had been a centuries-long battle to claim southern Spain from Muslim and Arab rule. They then initiated the Spanish Inquisition: a project of ethnic and religious cleansing meant to ensure a uniformly Catholic population

this is most obvious is in the case of inter-cultural or inter-religious marriage, when people fall in love with someone from a different background and are immediately confronted with a basic difference. For example, in the United States, a frequent confrontation is between Jewish and non-Jewish people who wish to marry or between Catholics and Protestants. But, perhaps, in today's world, the biggest contrast of all is between Muslim and non-Muslim marriage partners. The Mediterranean country of Spain, a majority-Catholic country with a growing Muslim minority, provides us with a key example of this phenomenon.

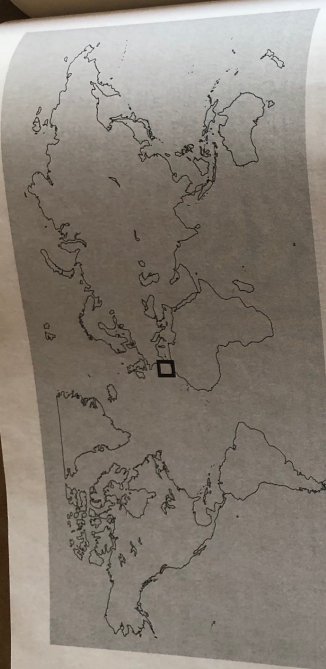
Maria Martínez

When I first met Maria Martínez in 2006, she was a Catholic who could not imagine becoming Muslim. I was a researcher studying Islam in Spain, and by chance we met outside a mosque in Granada, a southern Spanish city famous for its many architectural remnants of Spain's medieval Muslim period (711 to 1492). Maria told me that her husband was inside the mosque praying. He was Jordanian and Muslim, but she was Catholic. "like all Spaniards," she informed me. A chatty and vivacious woman dressed in a trendy pink and purple pantsuit with perfectly arranged hair, Maria enthusiastically insisted we walk downtown together. The path through the narrow, winding streets of the Arab-built medieval quarter was long and best traversed with company.

As Maria and I left, we ran into one of the leaders of the mosque and his wife, both Spanish converts to Islam. The mosque leader wore a long tunic over western-style pants, and his wife wore a headscarf covering her hair. They asked if Maria was thinking of converting to Islam as well. "No!" Maria replied emphatically. She was "just too typically Spanish" to consider becoming Muslim. She couldn't possibly give up the Spanish traditions of consuming pork, wine, and beer, all beloved in Granada but prohibited in Islam. "Impossible. I can't even think about it," she concluded. And with that, we headed off toward downtown.

Fast-forward two years. In 2008, I returned to Granada to conduct more field research on Spain's growing Muslim community, including participant observation at NGOs working to promote tolerance of religious, racial, and cultural diversity. To my astonishment, when I knocked on the door of one such organization, Maria opened it. We had not kept in touch, but I recognized her immediately, and we became fast friends as I worked with her at the NGO where she served as a volunteer lawyer, helping with cases involving Muslims who had experienced religious discrimination. The first day there, Maria confided that despite her earlier certainty that conversion was not for her, she had in fact become Muslim about one year after our first meeting. She now attended a mosque on a semi-weekly basis, she was studying Arabic in order to read the Koran, Islam's holy book, in its original language, and she was an avid advocate for Islam in Granada, taking every opportunity to explain and defend Islam to her fellow Spaniards. She was quickly becoming an active member of Granada's local Muslim community, made up of European converts to Islam and Muslim migrants from outside of Europe.

Maria's story raises a number of questions, including: Why did becoming Muslim seem so impossible to her at first? How did she change her mind? In a predominantly Catholic country like Spain, what does it mean to adopt a minority religion like Islam, which is often viewed as inimical, or in opposition to, Western European religious and social values? For Maria, ultimately it was her marriage to a Muslim



21

Becoming Muslim in Europe

Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar

*In this article, written for Conformity and Conflict, Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar delves into changing Spanish society by examining how a Catholic, Spanish woman decided to convert to Islam. Considering the incompatibility of Islam with Spanish national identity over many centuries, the decision to convert is a loaded one. Her article discusses what happens when people's identities come into contact through globalizing processes like immigration. Through her marriage to a Jordanian Muslim immigrant man, Maria was faced with an unexpected occasion to change her religion. Using Maria as a case study, Rogozen-Soltar explores how Maria is able to inhabit both a Muslim religious identity and a Spanish national identity at the same time, and how she advocates for the ability of others to do so as well.**

Listen to the **Chapter Audio** on myanthrolab.com

Increasingly, as people from different backgrounds come into contact due to globalization, their basic identities can come into contact as well. This can lead to conflict or to mutual influence, as people create new identities that draw on diverse backgrounds. One place where

*Original article written for *Conformity and Conflict* from Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, "Becoming Muslim in Europe," (c) 2014. Used by permission of the author.