

# EDUU

## EDUCATION INQUIRY

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Umeå University  
Sweden

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# EDUCATION INQUIRY

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# Editorial



*Nafsika Alexiadou & Linda Rönnerberg, Editors*

Every issue of Education Inquiry publishes peer-reviewed articles in one, two or three different sections. In the Open section, articles are sent in by authors as part of regular journal submissions and published after a blind review process. In the Thematic section, articles may reflect the theme of a conference or workshop and are published after a blind review process. The Invited section feature articles by researchers invited by Education Inquiry to shed light on a specific theme or for a specific purpose and they are also published after a review process. This issue of Education Inquiry only contains a Thematic section.

The focus of this thematic section is on ethnic diversity and schooling in various national education systems. There are nine articles in this issue, along with an editorial introduction by Daniel Faas who provides an overview of the discussions relating to this very topical theme, and comments on the significance of each of the contributions.

The first article by Yvonne Leeman & Sawitri Saharso draws on research in the Netherlands over the last 30 years, and offers an assessment of the changing political and educational frameworks for inclusion and multiculturalism. They draw lessons to be learned from this research and point towards future research agendas.

Mary Darmanin follows with an article that is highly critical of the dominant discourses around cultural and ethnic diversity in Malta that are rooted in the country's history of domination as a former British colony, and a strong emphasis on Catholicism as a "marker of ethnic identity". The country's small size is also taken into account in the presentation and critique of contemporary education practices in relation to the integration of immigrant and ethnic minority pupils.

In the third article, Farzana Shain presents a critical account of attempts by the British state to manage the 'problem' of ethnic minorities, and the associated English education developments in the post-war period. She examines state policies in relation to race and ethnicity and traces the development and evolution of discourses of 'containment' policies of ethnic minorities and their education.

Staying within Britain, Cecile Wright argues that the neoliberal education policies followed by successive governments have exacerbated inequalities which are particularly stark in the performance of black children in schools. The lack of serious political will to address the issue has led to students attempting to use 'the community' as a resource to overcome the disadvantages conferred by the education system.

In the next article, Christina Hadjisoteriou and Panayiotis Angelides focus their analysis of intercultural education policies in Cyprus on the higher levels of policy-making, and in particular the Ministry of Education and Culture. Their work highlights the

gaps between the rhetoric as expressed in the content of policy documents, and the practice as discussed by Cypriot policy-makers during interviews.

Our next article highlights the institutional mechanisms necessary for the success of second-generation ethnic minority students. Philipp Schnell, Elif Keskiner & Maurice Crul draw on a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of data from research on disadvantaged pupils with a Turkish ethnic background in France and the Netherlands. The article foregrounds individual experiences, and situates these against the structural disadvantages the students face, but also the institutional arrangements and personal interactions that have made educational success possible.

Next, Nathalie Rougier uses a critical discourse analysis approach to study the debate around the hijab in Irish schools. Her analysis highlights the complexity of 'acceptance' of religious and ethnic diversity in schools, in a system that is denominational and has traditionally had a small number of diverse students.

Moving beyond Europe, the next two articles explore aspects of race and gender equality in education. Kalervo Gulson and Taylor Webb present their research on the complex relationships and sometimes unexpected outcomes that are produced by neoliberal education policies intersecting with debates around race and difference. Their research explores these issues as they manifest themselves in the establishment of an Africentric school in Toronto, Canada.

Finally, Audrey Osler and Chalank Yahya discuss the difficulties of implementing human rights education in schools in Kurdistan-Iraq. They present research in the field with teachers and policy-makers who find themselves caught between the tensions involving human rights education in school practice, and a conservative, patriarchal society. Within a context of limited resources, gender equity is compromised.

# THEMATIC SECTION



# **Ethnic diversity and schooling in national education systems**

## **Issues of policy and identity**

*Daniel Faas\**

Societies rely on different models to address ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in education, with different potential consequences for the experiences young people have in schools and different implications for policy and identity. For example, Germany, Greece and Ireland prefer the term interculturalism and intercultural education. In contrast, Britain, the Netherlands, Canada, the United States and Malaysia have historically worked with the concept of multiculturalism (Faas, 2010). These different approaches to accommodating ethnic diversity are also reflected for instance in the ease (or not) with which immigrants can apply for and receive permanent residence and citizenship status. Currently, Switzerland (12 years), Italy (10 years), Austria (10 years) and Denmark (9 years) are among the most difficult countries to obtain citizenship whereas Ireland (5 years), the Netherlands (5 years), Canada (3 years) and Belgium (3 years) have relatively fewer barriers.

The literature suggests that countries can broadly be grouped into at least four categories reflecting their legacies and current approaches to ethnic diversity: (1) old migration societies who have traditionally developed a more monocultural vision such as Denmark or Germany; (2) old migration societies that have historically been more multicultural such as the UK and Canada; (3) new migration societies that who have embarked on a more monocultural road such as Greece or Cyprus; and (4) new migration societies with an arguably more multicultural outlook such as Ireland or Portugal. The notion of culture is taken here to include values, identity, habits, language, religion and citizenship; monoculture thus means substantial sameness within a system such as education, city or country and the promotion of such sameness. Banting and Kymlicka's *Multiculturalism Policy Index* which examined the adoption of eight public policies including multiculturalism in the school curriculum, allowing dual citizenship and the funding of ethnic group organizations to support cultural activities, underscores such a categorisation.

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\*Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. E-mail: daniel.faas@tcd.ie

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In the four Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies carried out to date (a fifth data collection was carried out in 2012 but results will only be available from December 2013), there are large educational performance differences between native and migrant students in Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and Austria and much smaller differences in Britain, Canada, Ireland and Australia. Several of the countries with smaller educational gaps between migrant minorities and ethnic majorities have incorporated diversity into their public policy framework including multicultural (or intercultural) education. However, despite recognition and support for diversity, a country like the UK still faces significant gender, class and ethnic inequalities in education. As the contributions by Cecile Wright and Farzana Shain in this thematic issue indicate, black students continue to be at risk in schools given the absence of any serious political will to address their attainment issues. Similar points could also be noted for several of the Muslim communities in Britain including Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriots (Enneli et al, 2005).

The work of Koopmans et al (2005, 2012) is also indicative of the range of national policy-practice links, arguing that cross-national differences continue to exist due to different historical legacies and that these have not become smaller over the past three decades. While they found divergences across societies in terms of citizenship acquisition, family reunification, access to public service employment, political rights, educational and other cultural rights, the only convergence was around anti-discrimination and expulsion. For example, Athens continues to be the only capital in Europe without a mosque despite year-long debates about feasibility and geographical location of a mosque (Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2009). Several contributors in this thematic issue including Yvonne Leeman and Sawitri Saharso as well as Farzana Shain offer a historical assessment of Dutch and British attempts to dealing with migration-related diversity.

Furthermore, Faas (2011) who compared the geography, history and citizenship education curricula in Greece, Germany and England, argued that the relationship between national and European identities and multicultural values was rather different and dependent on the school subject. Whilst history was found to be ethnocentric in all three countries – albeit to varying degrees – Greek geography and citizenship curricula veered between ethnocentrism and Europeanism. In contrast, in England, macro-political notions of multicultural Britishness were reinforced in geography and citizenship education. Following national political trends, German curricula privileged national and European topics, but attempts were made to address ethnic and cultural diversity, particularly in geography.

The contributions in this thematic issue draw on a range of theoretical approaches and methodologies. For example, Cecile Wright draws on a critical theoretical framework to empower African Caribbean students in the UK similar to the critical policy approach by Gulson and Webb which is attendant to how power issues affect the production and subsequent enunciations of different discourses. Coulby and Jones



(1995) suggest that there is a link between how national education systems appear to reproduce, eliminate and exploit diversity, and postmodernity. Postmodernity 'has shifted from being a way of describing cultural products (allusive, disjointed, pastiche, merging subjectivities) to a way of describing society (fractured, relative, pluralistic, gendered)' (ibid: 3), reflecting the ways in which a society has shifted from notions of capitalism to information and knowledge. For Coulby and Jones, modernist knowledge is mainly white, Western knowledge; it is primarily associated with the concept of nationalism as well as a subject-based teaching approach rather than an integrated multicultural curriculum. By contrast, according to Coulby and Jones, post-modernist knowledge, acknowledges not only the international contribution to European civilisation but also that European knowledge systems themselves must be placed within a global context. This is why two articles in this issue are dedicated to aspects of gender and race equality in education beyond Europe: Canada and Kurdistan-Iraq.

### **Reflections on the contributions in this thematic issue**

The contributions included in this thematic issue include old migration host societies (UK, Netherlands, France and Canada) and new migration destinations (Cyprus, Ireland, Malta and Kurdistan-Iraq). The texts illustrate cases where assimilationist tendencies and minimalist approaches to diversity have dominated public and educational discourses such as in Malta (Mary Darmanin) and Cyprus (Christina Hajisoteriou and Panayiotis Angelides). It is important to note, however, that there is variation in responding and managing diversity not just between old and new host states but also among old and new host states and the contribution by Nathalie Rougier powerfully demonstrates how the Irish case differs from other small new migration destinations such as Cyprus and Malta. At the same time, there are striking similarities around notions of religion with regard to national identity, be it Catholicism in Malta and Ireland or Orthodoxy in Cyprus, which has made it somewhat difficult to reconceptualise national identities along more pluralistic lines. The 'smallness' of several cases in this thematic issue often appears to play an important role with regard to reinforcing national values and identities in education and society at large.

One interesting theme raised in a number of contributions is the issue of *school choice*. For example, Gulson and Webb argue that school choice policies can enable the development and establishment of ethno-centric schools and curricula based on ideas of identities and recognition. They illustrate this by drawing on the establishment of an Africentric school in Toronto. Such school choice policies and alternative schools that educate small numbers of students may be limited in providing mechanisms to address historic inequalities. It is often white middle-class parents and students that are the main beneficiaries of school choice policies. Reay et al (2008) discuss this aspect further and found that middle-class families felt passionate about the need to produce tolerant children and thus chose to send their children to inner-city comprehensive schools in London 'providing multicultural experiences that home

life cannot'. However, while Reay's parents valued the 'ethnic other', many parents feared the 'working-class other' (Reay et al. 2007). This reminds us of the importance of class, particularly in the UK, and specifically what Reay et al. (2008: 240) referred to as 'the socially inclusive middle class as opposed to Giddens's (2000) [idea of the] socially exclusive middle class'. The 'socially inclusive middle-class' student and family actively embraces and chooses diversity and is open to difference. Similarly, Cecile Wright in her contribution concludes that a market orientation based on 'choice' and competition as we have seen it in the UK leads to the exacerbation of class and racial inequalities with the elites not contemplating the state education system for their children.

Another cross-cutting theme relates to *educational attainment* of migrant children and factors affecting achievement. For example, Gulson and Webb in their paper on Canada address the educational disadvantages of Black students similar to Cecile Wright who argues that neoliberal policies in the UK enhance inequalities. Schnell et al. in their paper on France and the Netherlands discuss individual and institutional factors and determinants including family background, peer groups and teachers, as well as institutional arrangements. They conclude that teachers play an important role for successful educational pathways of second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds in France and the Netherlands. The support of peers also proved to be significant. They criticise the early streaming and tracking in the Netherlands and found that Turks in France where selection into tracks is postponed enter the academic oriented tracks in higher numbers. Germany has a similarly early tracking system in several of the 16 federal states. Schnell et al.'s focus on mechanisms of success rather than failure is to be commended and there are few other studies that are framed in a more positive tone. Among these is Faas (2010) who takes identity development as a proxy for successful integration in schools and shows how youth identities vary by institution based on peer group dynamics, school ethos and teachers. In a similar vein, Leeman and Saharso in their contribution also explore how education can enhance a sense of collective identity (in this case identification with Amsterdam rather than Netherlands) that transcends ethnic lines in today's multicultural societies.

A final theme emerging from the contributions in this thematic issue is the *role of Muslims in societies* and national education systems. While race has always been at the fore of debates surrounding multiculturalism in the UK, arguably the focus has shifted somewhat in recent years to religious aspects. In 2001, violent conflicts between native British and Asian Muslim youth took place in various towns and cities across northern England. In 2005, civil unrest amongst France's Muslim Maghreb communities expanded throughout the country. In 2006, the publication of pictures of the prophet Muhammad in Denmark generated the so-called 'cartoon crisis'. Muslim communities have come under intense scrutiny in the wake of terrorist events in the United States (2001), Spain (2004) and Britain (2005). Right wing politicians such as Geert Wilders in the Netherlands and parties such as the Northern League in Italy

gain votes by playing on the electorate's fears of the 'Muslim' or 'immigrant'. Farzana Shain in her paper builds on arguments developed in a recent book which reported an empirical study of Muslim boys and education in England (Shain 2011). The book offers an assessment of how and why working class boys who identify as Muslim in England have come to be seen as modern day folk devils or as symbol of crisis and change. She argues that the targets of containment policies have changed from African Caribbeans in the 1970s and 1980s to Muslim students, in general, since then, and that Muslims, asylum seekers and generally those not in paid employment, are seen as outside the nation and its interests. In this context, Rougier's article makes a very interesting point in that the hijab debate in the Republic of Ireland has been more liberal without any prohibition of religious dress in schools or other public places than in countries such as France or Germany.

Taking a somewhat different angle at first glance, the contribution by Audrey Osler and Chalank Yahya focuses on tensions and challenges facing schools in implementing human rights education in Kurdistan-Iraq, a post-conflict autonomous region. The authors argue that the region's diversity has increased as a consequence of inward migration due to instability elsewhere in Iraq. At the core of their paper however is an already familiar theme, namely roots of gender, ethnic and religious inequalities in schools and society at large. The paper found that teachers are ill-equipped to address persisting inequalities, and calls for a reconsideration of teacher education and curriculum documents. A key point in the paper is the call for students to be educated *in* human rights, not just *about* human rights. Societal conditions often undermine the current teaching about basic human rights. Although the case differs from the other contributions in that it is not a nation-state but rather an autonomous region marked by patriarchal values and lack of democracy, it is yet another example of a multi-faith multicultural society in which factors such as teacher education, policy and curriculum development affect the experiences and identities of young people in schools. The issues discussed in this thematic issue are therefore of relevance to all societies.

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*Daniel Faas* is Head of the Department of Sociology and Member of the University Council at Trinity College Dublin. His research and teaching interests are in the sociology of migration with specific emphasis on the intersection of migration and education. His work focuses on youth identities in relation to immigrant integration, national identity, multiculturalism and social cohesion in Europe, diversity management in educational sites and work places, curriculum design and development, as well as comparative case study methodologies. Daniel Faas is winner of the 2012 Provost's Teaching Award at Trinity College Dublin, and recipient of the 2009 European Sociological Association award for best journal article. He is the author of 'Negotiating Political Identities: Multiethnic Schools and Youth in Europe' (Ashgate, 2010).

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# Coming of age in Dutch schools

## Issues of schooling and identity

*Yvonne Leeman\* & Sawitri Saharso\*\**

### **Abstract**

In this article we compare research we did 30 years ago in Dutch schools among youth of diverse ethnic backgrounds about their identities with today's research evidence. Taking the position that education is a site for implicit and explicit identity development mediated by the social conditions in which young people grow up and the political climate regarding multiculturalism and inclusiveness, we sketch a picture of changing frameworks relating to education and multicultural societies and a picture of developments in the identification with others and society of urban youth of different descent. The possibility to meet in ethnically mixed schools, a meaningful curriculum and qualified teachers to guide the processes of identity development of all students towards the ideal of inclusiveness are among the features of education taken into account. Lessons that can be learned for the research agenda are reflected in the discussion.

*Keywords:* inclusive education, identity development, teachers' professionalism, citizenship education

### **Introduction**

What does coming of age look like for Dutch youth in the last three decennia? About 30 years ago we conducted joint research in schools among young people of diverse ethnic backgrounds about their identities, their lives in and outside of school and their education for the multicultural society (Leeman 1994, Saharso 1992). The solidarity that citizenship assumes requires that citizens in a multicultural society feel connected to their fellow citizens across and above ethnic lines. We were interested in a possible shared identity and mutual solidarity developing among the youngsters of different descent we interviewed. We were also interested in the ways education could enhance this process. We assumed that an ethnically mixed school, a meaningful curriculum and qualified teachers to guide the processes of inclusive identity development are at a minimum among the features of education to take into account. We asked the youngsters about their identifications and about their experiences with lessons in 'intercultural education' and with their ethnically mixed school and

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\*University of Humanistic Studies, The Netherlands, and Department of Education at Windesheim University of Professional Studies, The Netherlands. E-mail: y.leeman@uvh.nl

\*\*School of Management and Governance of the University of Twente, the Netherlands and the Department of Sociology of the VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: s.saharso@utwente.nl

living environment. Now, 30 years later, the newcomers are not that new anymore. Migrants became immigrants. School policies regarding cultural and ethnic diversity developed. Again, we want to pose the question of how urban youth identifies with and in particular whether they have developed a collective identity that transcends ethnic lines. What change, if any, took place? And how have schools developed as sites for inclusive identity development?

## **The Netherlands**

The ethnic composition of Dutch society has changed from the early 1950s onwards. Immigrants came from the former colonies of Indonesia, Suriname and the Antilles and as migrant workers from the south of Europe, the north of Africa and Turkey. The largest minority population consists of Muslims of Turkish and Moroccan descent. Immigrants live concentrated in the Randstad (the region that spans the four largest cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht).

A difference with 30 years ago is that the migrants of that time have become permanent settlers. The broader context has changed. Global economic power relations have shifted. Not only immigration, but also Europeanisation and globalisation have affected national identities. Lastly, the Dutch political climate regarding immigration and multiculturalism has changed dramatically over the past years. When we began our project in the 1980s the majority of the native Dutch population had a neutral to positive attitude to immigrants, but since then the percentage of people who think positively about them has steadily decreased until now 61% of the Dutch population believes there are tensions between native Dutch and people of an immigrant origin and 41% of the native Dutch believe that the Western way of life and an Islamic way of life cannot go together.<sup>1</sup> Since 2002 popular discontent has expressed itself in high voter turnout for populist anti-immigrant parties like the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) and nowadays the Freedom Party led by Geert Wilders. Meanwhile, Islamic violence has not only manifested itself internationally, but also on Dutch soil. In 2004 Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh was murdered by a radical fundamentalist. Since the turn of the century, multiculturalism has officially been replaced by an emphasis on shared citizenship. Governments follow an integration policy in which immigrants are expected to respect and share the central values of the Dutch culture and democratic constitutional state. Measures like compulsory integration courses for immigrants are thought to facilitate integration and to ensure loyalty to the central values of Dutch society. The government has explicitly expressed its discontent with the multicultural society.<sup>2</sup>

In its reaction to immigration the Dutch educational policy shows continuity and change. Striving for distributive justice was and is one of the most important objectives (Leeman and Pels 2006). This policy has mainly attempted to influence the resources (e.g. social and cultural capital) of immigrant students, but left the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion largely untouched. At the time of our study intercultural education was made compulsory to promote the acculturation of both minority and

majority groups. Acculturation was defined as “a bilateral or multilateral process of learning from, accepting and appreciating each other, and of being open to each other’s culture or elements of it” (Ministerie van OCenW 1981: 6). Intercultural education was predominantly embraced in schools that had a student population of mixed origin (Leeman and Ledoux 2003). It was usually aimed at native Dutch students, who had to learn about other cultures and learn not to discriminate against immigrants. One often found a celebration of the cultures of the ‘different other’ and some political critical reflections about processes of migration and immigration. As assimilation has become the dominant ideology, the Ministry of Education no longer actively promotes intercultural education. The focus is now on citizenship education, which has been a compulsory part of the curriculum since 2006. It is aimed at active participation in society and at the acceptance of basic Dutch values, such as democratic decision-making, freedom of speech and respect for cultural and religious diversity (Bron 2006).

Since the 1990s there has been a strong trend towards functionality in education. A focus on qualification for the job market and on socialisation for continuity in society tends to marginalise the subjectivation aim in education (Biesta 2011). In a quest for efficiency and accountability standard tests have become the main means to test students’ knowledge of the basics. Schools are judged on their test results by the inspectorate. These politics limit the opportunities for the development of inclusive identities through schooling in general and citizenship education in particular.

After positioning ourselves theoretically, we will present the findings of the original study and the methodology of the follow-up study that is based on a review of the findings of current Dutch research on youth’s identifications and on education as a site for identity development.

### **Mapping our theoretical position**

As identity development requires separation and insertion into the social world, identity has been described as a synthesising concept that connects the individual and the social environment (Epstein 1978: 101). Our focus is on the social aspect of identity. It is through group identification that individuals develop a social identity. In this idea we follow Tajfel who defined social identity as that part of identity that is derived from a person’s knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) (Tajfel 1981: 255). There are many groups and categories people can identify with. Social Identity Theory (SIT) holds that people can identify with several groups at the same time. We assume that people can and in fact often do have multiple identities and ways of belonging that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. We are in particular interested in collective identity formation among majority and immigrant youth. In this we follow Taylor and Whittier’s definition of collective identity as: “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, and solidarity” (1995: 172) that is narrower than a social identity in that it requires a sense of shared interests and solidarity.

SIT posits that if a group belonging is not experienced as satisfying people will (psychologically) leave, at least if circumstances permit (Tajfel 1981: 256). Hence, if people objectively belong to a category it does not necessarily follow that they subjectively identify with that category. How immigrants and their descendants identify is shaped by a range of factors. The extensive research literature on the subject found that immigrants' identifications are shaped by socio-economic factors such as level of education and social class (Faas 2009, Lee 2004), discrimination impacts negatively on identification with the host country (Verkuyten and Brug 2002, Rumbaut 2005, Berry et al. 2006) and so does ethnic concentration and segregation at the neighbourhood and school level (Butterfield 2004, Rumbaut 1994). In their study of immigrant life in New York city, Kasinitz et al. (2008) found that the second generation is not likely to identify with the American racial and ethnic identities which native born Americans would ascribe to them or with pan-ethnic identities (e.g. Latino for someone originating from Colombia). In fact, many West Indians distanced themselves from African Americans (Butterfield 2004) and Hispanic respondents found it hard to racially identify themselves. These findings underline that subjective identifications cannot be inferred from objective characteristics; immigrant youth (and native youth) are not necessarily unitary categories.

Moreover, the research literature makes it clear that contexts matter. In a study comparing the United States with France and Germany, Alba (2005) claimed that in Europe 'religion' forms a bright boundary comparable to 'race' in the United States separating in particular immigrants from Islamic countries from the host society. Other research suggests that within Europe we further have to differentiate between national contexts (e.g. Phalet et al. 2008, Diehl & Koenig 2009, Ersanilli & Saharso 2011). Apart from national contexts, there are also regional and local differences to consider. Comparing majority and Turkish immigrant youth in Germany and England, Faas (2009) found that the native youth had a national identity encompassing a regional identity (e.g. German and Swabian identity). Youngsters of Turkish origin, however, had a weaker identification with the country of settlement and in particular with the regional identity that they experienced as an ethnic identity. Native German youth also identified as European a supra-national identity. Ersanilli and Saharso (2011) found that despite processes of exclusion (and self-exclusion) from national identity in all three countries they compared, the second generation strongly identified with their place of residence. Applied to our subject, a context-bound approach implies that we see identity development as a process that is rooted in young people's experiences in and outside of school.

As identity development is a reflective process, education can support youngsters in their identity development based on a reflective engagement with the experience of living together in diversity. Shared living conditions, we assume, may be a basis for a shared consciousness. Schools and teachers can offer possibilities for mutual contact between youngsters of different backgrounds and a school climate combined with a



meaningful curriculum that creates possibilities for the development of a collective identity across ethnic lines.

## **Our studies**

Our original research took place in 10 mixed classes in nine schools for secondary education that included the full range of school levels. We stayed in each classroom for several weeks, observing the daily interactions and lessons and the series of intercultural lessons on the multicultural society the teachers had promised to develop and include in the curriculum. Meanwhile, we interviewed 78 pupils of different ethnic backgrounds with a main age of 17. We principally did not differentiate at the outset between native and immigrant youth as this was precisely what we wanted to find out: how did the youth identify and on the basis of what did they differentiate among them? Was having an immigrant or native background a relevant characteristic for the young people's identifications or was it a characteristic structuring their life experiences? We found ethnicity to be a salient factor in many youngsters' lives. Whether it concerned friendships or feuds ethnicity was always present. E.g. in schools with a majority of immigrant youth the fall guy, whatever his ethnic background, could be sure that unpleasant remarks about his ethnicity would be made.

In Saharso (1992) we noticed that the identity of the immigrant youngsters was connected to a specific culture, language and history that made them differ from each other. For the children of colonial immigrants, like Surinamese, their family history was related to the Dutch history as a colonising and slaveholder nation. They were sometimes prepared by their parents that they might meet with racism. For youngsters of Moroccan or Turkish descent the Netherlands still was very much a new country. They were less aware of racism. As children of labour migrants they strongly aspired to carve out for themselves a successful future in the Netherlands and were confident that they would succeed. On the other hand, immigrant youth shared the experience of being excluded as 'foreigners', as they were named at that time, and we saw among them a shared subjective identification developing as 'foreigners' in the Netherlands. This 'foreigner' identity sometimes also included 'white' native Dutch youngsters. There were mixed friendships between youngsters of different immigrant groups occasionally including native Dutch youngsters. Humphrey, for instance, an Indo-European youth, explained that the two native Dutch in his circle of friends were Dutch but just as well could be foreigners because they do not discriminate and they were "cool". We found that in ethnic mixed cities like Amsterdam friends did not act as if ethnicity did not exist. In boys' groups mutual commitment and solidarity was expressed by making in an ironic fashion the 'wrong' sorts of jokes about ethnicity. The girls expressed their solidarity by showing each other that they knew and accepted each other's culture. In this we saw signs of an emerging collective identity.

In Leeman (1994) we found that the indigenous youth who grew up in the heterogeneous environments of the Dutch big cities of the Hague and Amsterdam more

frequently have an ethnically mixed circle of friends than those living in smaller towns. An example is Sietske, an indigenous Amsterdam girl who had a mixed circle of Turkish and Moroccan friends, whom she met every day at the playgrounds around the apartment she lived in. She experienced that native Dutch friends whom she met frequently at a camp-site in the south of the Netherlands and who live in smaller less mixed towns usually did not understand her friendship with immigrants. According to Sietske, they did not know and did not trust immigrants. Like 'immigrant' is not a unitary category we found that neither is 'Dutch' a unitary category among the indigenous Dutch youngsters interviewed. It was differentiated by personal and local differences and also by social class.

Looking for context differences between schools we studied the identity politics of the schools the youngsters attended. We found that the identity politics implicit in the practice of (intercultural) education had a static outlook on ethnic identities and a schematic view of the social positions of the indigenous Dutch and immigrants with regard to each other. This was evident from the content of the lessons and the way the students were addressed: the message usually was that 'we' should not discriminate but should respect 'them' and their cultures. No important differences between schools were found. These politics ran counter to the diversity of interpretation models that the mixed group of youth interviewed had and to the diverse interethnic relations among the youngsters. Some native Dutch youth had the experience of being excluded by the 'foreigners', of 'being discriminated against' as they saw it, but could not bring this forward. On the other hand, youngsters had interethnic friendships. These youngsters often had intricate knowledge of each other's lives, but again they were not encouraged to bring up this knowledge in the discussion. Opportunities, we felt, for mutual learning were missed. How are things now, 30 years later?

To answer this question we studied recent literature. Like in the original study, we focused on studies conducted in the Randstad in the Netherlands. We assumed and still do that the potential influence of education in general and special lessons on young people's identity development is always mediated by everyday experiences in and outside of school influenced by the social conditions in which they grow up and the political climate regarding multiculturalism. It is this position that informed our search strategy regarding the academic literature. We looked for empirical studies published in scientific journals and books in and after 2005. The keywords we used were: youth, ethnic identity, inclusive identity, intercultural education, citizenship education, inclusive education, segregation, teachers' professionalism. As the official circuit did not provide us with enough sources we added a quick search in the grey circuits of studies by MA-students at the main universities in the Randstad.

### **(Immigrant) youth' identifications in the Netherlands<sup>3</sup>**

A common experience of people with an immigrant background is that they are excluded from national identity because of their accent, name or appearance; Zhou

and Lee (2007) call this phenomenon “the immigrant shadow”. This is also true for Dutch youth of immigrant origin; this has not changed in the past 30 years. What has changed is immigrant youths’ perceptions. Their peers of 30 years ago were largely unaware of Dutch racism and full of hope to find a bright future. The current generation born and raised in the Netherlands, as most of them are, know their way in Dutch society. Measured in terms of educational attainment or value orientations they are better integrated, yet they feel not accepted. Both native Dutch and Moroccan youth and to a lesser extent youth of Turkish origin agree that the events of the past years (e.g. 9/11, the success of anti-immigrant parties, the murder of Van Gogh) have drawn the groups apart, according to the findings of Entzinger and Dorleijn (2008).

### ***Local identities***

Local identities have been presented as an alternative to national identity (Uitermark et al. 2008). The big city integrates is the idea; a shared identification and commitment to the city of all living there can promote social cohesion. Several Dutch studies indeed found among youngsters of different ethnic backgrounds a strong identification with the big city (Ersanilli & Saharso 2011, Groenewold 2008). For example, Van der Welle and Mamadouh (2009) found that for many young people of Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese and native Dutch origin in Amsterdam the identity of Amsterdammer is more open to diversity, more cosmopolitan, than Dutch identity and they, including native Dutch, take pride in that. On the other hand, there is a small group of native Dutch (6%) who saw with regret that they had lost their position as a majority group (currently about half of Amsterdammers have an immigrant origin). These nostalgic Amsterdammers perceive the increasing ethnic diversity as a threat to Amsterdam’s identity (Van der Welle & Mamadouh 2009: 34).

Other research suggests that a shared identification with the big city is, however, not a sufficient precondition for social bonding across ethnic lines. Cultural difference has become a taboo subject among schoolgirls, according to Duits (2010). Girls do not ask a classmate why, for example, she is wearing a headscarf as this is considered an inappropriate question. Yet the effect is that they cannot talk about cultural difference which means that the other remains unknown. What young women consider as beautiful is determined by their ethnicity, according to a study by De Rooij (2004). Afro-Surinamese young women do not mirror themselves in the Western beauty image. Overweight is a non-problem for them; a real woman has flesh on her bones (also see Kropman 2007). As beauty is very central in girls’ culture, we can conclude that this is a subject that, instead of uniting, pulls girls of different ethnic backgrounds apart. There exists in the big cities a lively ethno-party scene so urban youth do not necessarily meet on the dance floor either (Boogaarts 2009). Despite their shared identification with the city, these research findings suggest, Dutch urban youth do not necessarily identify with each other.

### ***Islamic identity***

Another alternative for Dutch national identity is for youngsters of an Islamic background to identify as Muslims. Several studies conducted in different Dutch cities and towns confirm that the primary identification of youngsters of Turkish and in particular Moroccan descent is with a Muslim identity (Duijndam 2009, Ketner 2008, De Koning 2009, Verkuyten & Yildiz 2007). This is for them a way out of several identity conflicts: they are not recognised as Dutch and, most importantly, the Muslim identity gives them a positive identity to counter the negative stigmatisation Moroccan youth in particular experience in Dutch society.

### ***Radical identities***

A study on radicalisation among Islamic youth of Moroccan descent (Buijs et al. 2006) again lends more credibility to the picture of Islamic youth experiencing identity conflicts because of the low social position of their community and negative stereotyping. The 38 youngsters interviewed, themselves highly educated but stemming from lower class families, reported feeling alienated from their parents and from Dutch society. As they are more oriented than Turkish-Dutch youth to Dutch society, they are more vulnerable to discrimination and the negative public image of Islam – the researchers speak aptly of an “integration paradox” (Buijs et al. 2006: 202). The radical belief in a superior religion offers them a solution to their identity problems (also see Van der Valk 2010).

We know very little about radical identities of native Dutch youth. The Dutch youngsters appear as objects of research primarily when it comes to subjects such as toleration and racism (e.g. Van der Valk & Wagenaar 2010). Van San, Sieckelinc and De Winter (2010) took a different theoretical stance and showed in their study on radicalising youngsters from native Dutch and immigrant backgrounds that all are persons with extreme ideals about citizenship looking for active participation in society.

### ***Urban street culture***

We found the only identity that seems to transcend ethnic lines in street culture. Street culture is a lower-class youth culture and often a reaction to growing up as a marginalised group in a deprived urban neighbourhood (De Jong 2007 & Paulle 2005). It is in the schools, in particular the lower tracks of schools for middle vocational training that have a regional function, that youth from the city and youth from the smaller municipalities around the city meet. El Hadioui (2010) found a deep gap between the youth who grew up in Rotterdam’s working-class areas and youth from these small towns and rural areas. The latter were confronted with street language they could not understand, an overly masculine attitude, gangster rap texts denigrating females in the classroom, youth carrying weapons and security checks at the entrance of the school building. The demarcation between the young people was not so much along

ethnic lines, but a demarcation between an urban street culture and a suburban civic culture, according to El Hadioui. To illustrate: girls of Antillian and of Turkish descent were teasing each other by reproducing existing prejudices about their ethnic backgrounds. This is done in street language that excludes the students who did not grow up in Rotterdam's working-class areas. When native Dutch youngsters from outside Rotterdam, who do not speak the street language, joined in the conversation their 'wrong' jokes were not appreciated (El Hadioui 2010: 35-36). Those, including native Dutch youth, who speak the street language and act according to the street codes are in the eyes of Rotterdam's youth 'allochthonous'. It should be noted, however, that this street culture is hardly present in higher tracks of vocational education and in schools preparing for academic education. Moreover, not all research reports that street culture transcends ethnic lines. Duijndam (2009) compared the identifications of youth in Amsterdam's Osdorp (a neighbourhood in the new West of Amsterdam) and Le Bourget-Drancy, a Paris banlieue. While in Osdorp there is some identification with the neighbourhood as revealed by names such as 'supermocro Osdorp' (a variant on 'mocroboys', mocro is in street language someone of Moroccan descent) it is much weaker than Paris' youth identification with their city. Another difference is that the youth of Paris refer to themselves in racial terms (noir, beur, blanc), while the Amsterdam youngsters describe themselves primarily in terms of their country of origin (Turkish, Moroccan, Dutch, Surinamese). Duijndam reports for Amsterdam youth group formation on the basis of a common country of origin. There is also group antagonism between Turkish and Moroccan youth and Surinamese youngsters complain that Moroccans jeer at them with racial names ('What are you looking at me, monkey?').

Despite the limited ethnic blending in actual social settings, a shared youth culture flourishes through local (social) media. There are multicultural dance and theatre companies. To a large extent, this shared youth culture is generated by FunX, a radio station partly financed by public funds and founded in 2002 to cater primarily to ethnic youth and provide a media outlet for new types of popular urban music. FunX broadcasts on air in the Randstad. FunX has become highly popular amongst urban youth, both immigrant and native. In addition to daily broadcasting, the radio station has launched an interactive website and actively uses social media. An important ingredient of the station's success is the staff, which in its mixed composition fully reflects FunX's target group.

What now is the overall picture? Bearing in mind that our sources are mostly based on qualitative non-representative data, the picture is: urban youth, whatever their ethnic background, identifies with the city as a cosmopolitan city, yet there also exist many differences among them, including how they perceive their interests and with whom they feel solidarity. This makes it hard to consider this identification with the city as a collective identity. Ethnic background is a salient feature structuring their life experiences and also their identities. The context of the harsher political climate

clearly impacts on the youth's identifications. Youth of immigrant origin continue to feel excluded from a Dutch identity and, compared to 30 years ago, all youth perceive the multicultural society more negatively as inherently problematic and fraught with tensions. Our sources suggest that urban youth culture is divided along ethnic and socio-economic lines. Girls' subcultures are differentiated along ethnic lines and some of the youth of different ethnic backgrounds visit different club scenes. The only urban youth culture in which an urban identity has developed that sometimes seems to transcend ethnic lines is urban street culture, in which youth of an immigrant origin and native Dutch youth of a lower socio-economic origin mix. This street culture is primarily dominated in the Dutch cities by Moroccan and African and Surinamese young men. We caught glimpses of a more positive, creative and hybrid urban youth culture – we are thinking of radio station FunX – but our sources are too limited to draw strong conclusions from that.

### **Education as a site for identity development**

While there is extensive literature on the school careers of immigrant youth the literature on processes of identity development mediated through education is scarce. There are several surveys of the images students have of immigrants and about the students' experiences with ethnic tensions in schools. However, these studies do not inform us about the relation between interventions and developments in knowledge and attitudes. There is some explorative research on the professionalism of teachers to guide processes of inclusion and identity development in the classroom. Case studies inside schools tend to focus on problematic interactions and problematic images of each other. Studies focussing on ordinary classroom interaction in ordinary mixed schools are heavily under-represented. The literature on the curriculum is dominated by policy documents on what ought to be taught.

Policy-makers see compulsory education as an important site for the identification with others and society. Although official policies influence school culture and the curriculum, it is the practice of teaching in interaction with students which makes a contribution to the experiment of inclusiveness. A process of identity development that is open to inclusiveness presupposes the acceptance of ethnic and cultural differences, the development of the art of communication across differences, and thinking and acting in terms of meeting, of trying to understand and of working together without denying differences (Giddens 1991; Gutman & Thompson 1996; Parker 2003) Requirements for this are:

- 1) the possibility to meet in ethnically mixed schools;
- 2) a meaningful curriculum that facilitates the formation of inclusive citizenship;
- and
- 3) qualified teachers to guide the processes of the cognitive, moral and personal identity development of all students towards the ideal of inclusiveness.

Do Dutch schools offer young people such an ideal site for learning?

In relation to 1) above, when we conducted our research in the 1980s and early 1990s it was relatively easy to find secondary schools with ethnically mixed classes, including native Dutch pupils. In those days, the population in Randstad was in the majority of native Dutch descent. Nowadays, more than half of the Amsterdam population aged 0–19 years is of immigrant descent (Herweijer 2010). There is growing ethnic segregation between schools. In primary education this coincides with the existing socio-economic segregation in living areas. In 2006/2007, nearly 40% of primary schools in Amsterdam had more than 80% of immigrant pupils. One out of four primary schools had 80% of pupils of Dutch descent. The way to school segregation is paved by parents' right of free school choice and by market forces in education making schools focus on a specific segment of the pupil population.

In secondary education segregation is partly a different story. Like in primary education, free school choice has an influence, but the connection with the place of living is less strong. The Dutch big cities are (compared to London and Paris) relatively small. As the whole of Amsterdam is easily accessible by public transport, scooter or bicycle, schools cater to pupils in a large area. The segregation in secondary schools is partly due to the system of early (at the age of 12 years) tracking (see OECD 2010). Immigrant students are found more frequently in the lower levels or (pre)vocational track and are underrepresented in the academic track.

Native Dutch pupils in Randstad secondary education have on average 27% immigrant fellow students; for immigrant students themselves, this figure amounts to 64% (Herweijer 2010). This leads us to the conclusion that not for all urban youngsters are schools an ethnically mixed site to meet each other and have full possibilities to identify with each other. At the very top end, there are the categorical grammar schools (in Dutch: *gymnasia*) where native Dutch can live as if in a white enclave while, at the very bottom end, there are schools for lower vocational training of which some have hardly any indigenous Dutch pupils. In-between are schools offering both higher and lower levels of education that have ethnically mixed classrooms.

Students differ in their opinions on segregation. Researching student opinions on citizenship education, Veugelers and Schuitema (2009) interviewed 42 pupils from four secondary schools (academic track). Two of these (one all immigrant and one a mix of immigrants and native Dutch) are located in Amsterdam, while the other two (native Dutch with a small immigrant student population) are in communities very close to Amsterdam. They found that all youngsters are interested in learning about youngsters of another ethnic descent. They prefer to learn through real encounters and are not that much interested in abstract lessons about cultures. One of them said: "We can learn about other youngsters in real life situations. In meeting them at school and while working in the supermarket for example". For the youngsters attending the school with only immigrant peers incidental meetings are not enough. They very strongly express their preference for an ethnically mixed school where they are able

to associate with native Dutch youth. They feel that ethnic segregation is linked to issues of equity. The centre-left coalition government that held office between 2007 and 2010 stimulated desegregation and allowed municipalities to experiment with interventions. In several Dutch cities an official policy towards desegregation and integration developed. The initiatives incorporate the system of student application and acceptance by schools and parent initiatives aimed at developing neighbourhood schools (Bakker, Denessen, Peters and Walraven 2011). However, in the Randstad these initiatives were not very successful. Yet mixed schools are an important but not a sufficient condition for the development of a collective identity. This learning has to be organised in a meaningful curriculum.

In relation to 2) above, 30 years ago we found in mixed schools examples of intercultural education aimed at the preparation of youngsters for life in a multicultural society. Intercultural education did not become a regular part of the curriculum in all schools and in teacher education either. It has been replaced by citizenship education which has been framed in a national educational policy focused on Dutch core values, democracy and active participation in society (Onderwijsraad 2012).

Several possibilities exist for shaping citizenship education. It can be incorporated in the regular subjects or find a place in the extracurricular activities. Incorporation in the core curriculum has more status and subsequently more possible influence. Recent reports of the Inspectorate show that citizenship education is not yet developed and implemented in Dutch schools. There is an abundance of extracurricular activities such as short periods of service learning, participation of students in decision-making inside school and events to meet 'other' people or to serve or help poor and disadvantaged people. Among these there is a practice of student exchange between segregated schools over a short period of time. Research (Schuitema & Veugelers 2010) showed that it is a pedagogical illusion that learning about the complexities of living in diversity and learning to appreciate multicultural contacts can be realised in such short projects. The material provided to assist teachers to develop citizenship education and the existing 'good practices' show diverse approaches. These include lessons on abstract knowledge delivery about democracy, lessons in character education, lessons in which debating skills or social interpersonal skills are trained (Onderwijsraad 2012). Ethical inclusiveness as a lived practice is not among the mainstream of these approaches.

In relation to 3) above, in our previous research (Leeman 1994) teachers liked teaching in mixed schools but lacked the professionalism to address identity and diversity issues. We saw a lot of avoidance of sensitive issues among fixed identity policies. In our previous research all teachers were of Dutch origin. It is very likely that the teachers in Randstad's schools are still in the majority native Dutch as nowadays less than 5% of the Dutch teacher force is of immigrant descent (OECD 2010).

With the start of the new millennium we see a national political climate of problematising the multicultural society and of reinforced dichotomous thinking on religious



and ethnic differences. This is the context for students and teachers living with diversity and commonality in ethnically diverse classes. There are a few studies (Radstake 2009; Stichting Voorbeeld 2005; Veugelers, Derricks and de Kat 2010) available on the opinions of teachers about teaching in an ethnically mixed class. Since September 11 there has been a focus in the national media on problematic interethnic relations in schools and on separatist tendencies among Muslim youth. Stichting Voorbeeld (2005) conducted a quick scan of the intercultural relations at schools for general secondary and intermediate vocational education in Amsterdam. The interviewed teachers of Amsterdam secondary schools sketched a far less problematic picture of the actual intercultural relations in their schools and classrooms than the media. These findings correspond with research (Roede et al. 2008) conducted in a representative group of schools in the Netherlands into the importance of ethnicity and culture in the few escalated conflicts inside schools. It was found that ethnicity and culture were only important in the escalation of a conflict but not at the start of it. Research among students of ethnically mixed schools offers a mixed picture of their companionship inside schools (Verkuyten en Thijs 2002; Bakker et al. 2007). Ethnically segregated groups of friends exist alongside mixed groups. According to a national study, 85% of immigrant youth claims to have a close native Dutch friends against 44% of the native Dutch who state they have close friends of immigrant origin (Vieveen et al. 2009:20). Radicalising students present teachers with questions about the best approach to “keep communication open” (van Eck 2008) and youngsters who identify with an urban street culture prevent teachers in the lowest track of vocational education from serious teaching (Paulle 2005).

Teachers are aware that it is necessary to prepare pupils to live in an ethnically diverse society. There is a broad consensus that education for diversity is necessary for social cohesion, but there is a lot of misunderstanding and debate regarding the content of it. Education for diversity requires a relationship of trust between pupils and between teacher and pupils. In mixed classes with a teacher from the dominant group, it cannot be automatically assumed that mutual trust exists between the teacher and all pupils (Hermans 2004; Ogbu 1992). It is indeed the experience of Amsterdam secondary school teachers that this is not always the case (Stichting Voorbeeld 2005).

Immigration and the multicultural society are nowadays considered as very sensitive issues. This makes an explicit discussion in class difficult. There are teachers who avoid the subject. Teachers mention insufficient professionalism and a lack of societal support (Stichting Voorbeeld 2005; Leeman 2006). “How to balance diversity and commonality” and “how to address separatism” – these are new questions for teachers. Major incidents like 9/11 and the murder of Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam have had an impact on teaching. These incidents have a great emotional load and can give rise to tensions between students of different descent and between students and teachers. According to the study of Veugelers and Schuitema (2010), these are new requirements for teachers.

The recent study by Radstake (2009) offers new empirical evidence about the objectives and actual behaviour of teachers guiding discussions on diversity issues in their classes. The results show that the five Amsterdam teachers researched are very much aware of the possible constraints on guiding discussions about such topics in ethnically diverse classrooms. They demonstrate a variety of opinions and perspectives on ethnic diversity. Four of them did not have any experience with discussions on diversity issues and only decided to guide such a discussion after the encouragement and help offered by the researchers. They preferred to avoid this kind of issue in the classroom out of a fear of emotional reactions and trouble. The only teacher who had experience with guiding discussions on these topics was a teacher with a Surinamese background. She assumed that her origins automatically gave her an insight into a broader range of perspectives on ethnic diversity in society and she felt that her origins had a positive influence on her relationship with pupils of immigrant origin.

In sum, the mixed schools of the 1980s turned into ethnically segregated schools where in the lower tracks of vocational education immigrant youngsters meet immigrants' peers. There are mixed schools where urban youth of different descent can meet each other, but in comparison to 30 years ago these schools are more of an exception. The turn in the political climate toward a plural society and the turn from intercultural education to citizenship education present teachers with fewer incentives to focus on ethnic inclusiveness. Democracy and ethnic inclusiveness as a lived practice are not among the mainstream of citizenship activities in schools. Teachers mention here insufficient professionalism and a lack of societal support. The majority of the teachers still love to teach in the Randstad and subscribe to the ideology of the former Amsterdam Mayor Cohen "to keep things together" and react in a distanced way towards the current political hype in which the multicultural society and the immigrant youth are disqualified as problems. However, street culture and radicalising youngsters pose challenges for which they lack professionalism.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

What does coming of age look like in the Dutch ethnically mixed urban environment? We compared the 1980s with the present. There is now a more negative political climate regarding ethnic diversity and a school context that leaves less space for inclusive learning. Immigrant youth in the 1980s were newcomers who were full of hope to build a future for themselves in the Netherlands. The current youth of immigrant origin know their way in Dutch society, are better integrated than their peers of the 1980s, but feel alienated from Dutch society. Native Dutch youth still feel cultural gaps between themselves and immigrant youth.

The identity of Amsterdammer or Rotterdammer has a cosmopolitan flavour to it that is attractive to all urban youth, including indigenous Dutch youngsters. Native Dutch can integrate that urban identity with a national Dutch identity. Youth with an immigrant origin feel excluded from Dutch identity. For them an urban identity next

to, for those who adhere to Islam, a Muslim identity offers a way out from conflicting identity claims. Their joint identification with the big city does not imply that young people with different ethnic backgrounds identify with each other. If we look at the lived identities in the big city, our sources suggest that urban youth culture is divided along ethnic and socio-economic lines. Girls with different ethnic backgrounds find talking about cultural differences inappropriate, they are not united around shared beauty ideals and part of the youth of a different ethnic background visits different club scenes. Ethnicity is still a salient feature structuring their life experiences and identities. The only urban youth culture that occasionally seems to generate an identity that transcends ethnic lines is urban street culture in which youth of an immigrant origin and native Dutch youth of a lower socio-economic origin mix. This street culture is, however, far from the ideal of collective identity that we expected to find or resembling the creative multiculturalism that Kasinitz et al. (2008) observed in New York. There is a shared consciousness based on shared underclass experiences, and group loyalty, but the experiences are negative and the consciousness is in opposition to Dutch society. Rather than an ideal to pursue this, in its violence and sexism street culture is more reminiscent of the oppositional culture that Portes and Zhou (2003) found among American native black and Latino youth, and among immigrant youth of colour, and in an earlier decade Willis (1977) found among white British working-class boys. We suspect there may exist a creative and hybrid youth culture in the cities in the Randstad. The existence of the FunX radio station in Amsterdam and the mixed youth dance and theatre companies bear witness to that, as do the smooth mixed school cultures that do exist next to the (over-exposed) problem schools, but our sources do not allow us to draw firm conclusions on this.

We asked ourselves how schools have developed as sites for inclusive identity development. In the Randstad, segregation in primary and secondary education has increased over the years. The possibilities for everyday encounters inside schools between immigrant and native Dutch youth have diminished. Meanwhile, teachers' professionalism in addressing identity and diversity is an issue. They do not feel well-prepared to address ethnic and racial tensions, to realise a meaningful curriculum for all and to guide processes of cognitive, moral and personal identity development towards the ideal of inclusiveness. Some teachers stay away from teaching about identities and issues of inclusion and exclusion. They limit themselves to an instrumental perspective on education. Others want to place an inclusive identity development on the curriculum agenda. In comparison to 30 years ago this is less easy. National education politics tend to emphasise the basics and a concept of citizenship education with a focus on assimilation has replaced the multicultural ideology of intercultural education. Problematic situations inside schools have been reported. In some 'black' schools the situation is, according to some research, dramatic with the street culture invading the school preventing the students from learning and the teachers from teaching (Paulle 2005). Other research paints a different picture. Teachers in mixed

urban schools are positive about the general school climate and relations among the students. But, again, research is scarce. It may well be that our picture of the way diversity is played out in Dutch schools is therefore distorted. The same counts for our portrait of urban youth. The youth studies tend to focus on problem youth and studies on ordinary classroom interaction in ordinary ethnically mixed schools are heavily under-represented.

Our sources are mostly based on qualitative non-representative data. Research into the identity development of Dutch youth has been rare and studies on youth of immigrant descent tend to focus on those who are perceived as problem groups. How ordinary young people of both native Dutch and immigrant origin identify is therefore an issue that still needs to be researched. Likewise, education as a site for inclusive identity development is seriously under-researched as educational research tends to focus on measuring school results and the comparison of educational success among youngsters of different descent. This points to new and important subjects for the Dutch research agenda and, more generally, the research agenda of those interested in how education can enhance a sense of collective identity among youth of different origins in a multicultural society.

## Notes

- 1 COB Kwartaalbericht 2010/1 (SCP).
- 2 Integratienota 'Integratie, binding en burgerschap'. Ministry of Home Affairs, 16 June 2011, <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/notas/2011/06/16/integratienota.html> (downloaded 6 June 2012). For a more extensive reconstruction of the retreat of multiculturalism in the Netherlands, see Prins and Saharso 2010.
- 3 We included in this section both studies that directly address identity development and studies on urban youth cultures assuming that how they spend their leisure time tells us about who they are.

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*Yvonne Leeman* is a Professor in Education at both Windesheim University of Professional Studies and the University of Humanistic Studies in the Netherlands. She works in those areas of education which relate to social justice, cultural and ethnic diversity, the curriculum and the professional identity of teachers. She is a convenor of the network of Social Justice and Intercultural Education of the European Educational Research Association.

*Sawitri Saharso* is Professor of Intercultural Governance at the School of Management and Governance of the University of Twente (Enschede, the Netherlands) and the Department of Sociology of the VU University Amsterdam. Her research fields include the governance of migration, religious diversity and citizenship within a European comparative perspective, with a special focus on migrant youth and gender. She is editor of *Comparative Migration Studies*.

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# The ‘smallness’ of minimalist tolerance

*Mary Darmanin\**

This article critically examines how Malta, the smallest EU state, has developed specific ‘small’ or ‘minimalist tolerance’ discourses and practices in the education of ethnic minorities and immigrants. As a previous colony of Britain, now a ‘new’ host country with, relative to its size, the largest influx of undocumented immigrants, Malta faces particular challenges in adjusting to new forms of ethnic diversity. Whilst not arguing a path dependency, Malta’s history of domination and its resort to Roman Catholicism as a marker of ethnic identity position it in particular discursive practices which generate ‘small’, minimalist, even negligible and negligent approaches to cultural and ethnic diversity in its schools. Starting with a brief history and an account of contemporary education policies, the article constructs the theme of ‘smallness’ through an analysis of the discourses of key education policy-makers and school principals. With contradictions between the declared policy objectives and the implementation, or lack thereof, in schools, there is a ‘discretionary’ model in place. The educational experience of ethnic minority and immigrant children is at the discretion of school principals and teachers and their ‘classes of toleration’ (Dobbernack and Modood, 2012:2). Obstacles to an expanded concept of tolerance derive mainly from a definition of the national identity as Roman Catholic, as well as specific ‘smallness’ discourses. On the ground, actors argue that the ‘smallness’ of Malta and its attachment to its Catholic identity makes it unable to move beyond this very minimalist toleration of ethnic diversity. The article deconstructs these discourses.

*Keywords:* ethnicity, immigration, minimalist tolerance, smallness, discretion

## Introduction

This article critically examines how Malta, the smallest EU state, has developed specific ‘small’ or ‘minimalist tolerance’ (Dobbernack and Modood, 2012) discourses and practices in the education of ethnic minorities and immigrants. ‘Smallness’ is one of the tropes adopted by education actors on the ground to account for the very minimalist policies and practices currently in place. From a critical realist perspective, ‘smallness’ is seen to combine dimensions of ‘objective factors’ such as ‘fixed size’ and ‘economic size’ as well as ‘subjective perceptions’ or ‘perceptual size’ (Thorhallsson, 2006). A second discursive element that will be examined is that of a ‘Roman Catholic’ national identity (Mitchell, 2003) which to date disallows a re-conceptualisation of the ‘nation’ as culturally and ethnically diverse.

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\*Faculty of Education, University of Malta. E-mail: mary.darmanin@um.edu.mt

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Thorhallsson and Wivel (2006) discuss three theoretical positions regarding small (EU) states and their behaviours: the realist position which seeks to identify the material parameters of smallness; the liberal position which is concerned with how interest groups manoeuvre relative power; and the constructivist position which explores how smallness is discursively constructed. Within the realist paradigm, Baldacchino's (2011) comprehensive account of small, mainly island, states has moved away from the duality of 'small is beautiful' or 'small is vulnerable' to a more nuanced critical realist approach. A critique of the vulnerability paradigm is made whereby Baldacchino (2011) appeals for a positive reading of the action capabilities that such states may have through the "power of jurisdiction" or sovereign power such states usually command. More importantly, Baldacchino (2011:2) argues against the dytopic/utopic, reductionist, structuralist and determinist elements of the current realist work. Constructivists such as Andreou (2006) hold that "smallness" is "not an objectively definable category but a construction" in which the meaning actors "attribute to size" should be privileged over material factors. Whilst 'smallness' is considered "an empty signifier" (Andreou, 2006:2), the discourse of 'smallness' is seen to include not only linguistic or non-linguistic elements but "both social practices and material factors" (Andreou, 2006: 4). The spatio-temporal context is not simply a background to but constitutive of discourse/s. Thorhallsson's (2006) conceptual framework of six categories which includes fixed size and territory, sovereignty size, political size, economic size, perceptual size and preference size combine material and discursive elements in a framework which is consistent with the critical realist (Fairclough, 2010) position adopted in this article. How 'objective factors' are constituted discursively to produce 'perceptual' and 'preference' sizes which suggest certain policy options over others is explored here. This is not to say that 'objective factors' determine any one set of policy options; rather, it is to deconstruct how 'objective factors' and 'subjective perceptions' together lead actors and states to choose some options over others. Malta has currently chosen the 'smallness' option when it could (and should) choose an expansive or egalitarian tolerance option with regard to the education of ethnic minorities and immigrants.

Recently, Dobbernack and Modood (2012:4) and other contributors to the Accept Pluralism Project revisited the "idea of toleration", arguing that in the face of liberal and other forms of intolerance there may be a useful engagement with toleration which "requires a qualified defence". This would not only explore the boundaries between the "refusal and concession of tolerance" but also the limits inherent in the concept, such as the "discretionary exercise of power" vested in the tolerator, as well as "looking beyond toleration" to "more demanding responses such as equality, respect or recognition" (Dobbernack and Modood, 2012:2 *passim*). Tolerance and toleration are used interchangeably, although Dobbernack and Modood (2012:8) hold that tolerance "usually signifies a normative principle" whilst toleration refers to a raft of institutional and individual attitudes and practices. They explore three

“modalities of acceptance” which are intolerance or non-toleration where group or individual claims or practices “are not granted”; toleration where they are granted but always subject to the discretionary power of tolerators to grant them; and the space of accommodation where there is respect and recognition “as normal” and “admission as equal” (Dobbernack and Modood, 2012: 5, 21). In this classification of degrees of acceptance, Dobbernack and Modood (2012:21) insist that there is no “inherent *telos*” or moral superiority. In different circumstances different norms prevail. However, substantive equality presumes institutional accommodation and adjustment, and the removal of the threat of “interference” and “an absence of domination” (both missing in toleration) (Dobbernack and Modood, 2012:9). For ethnic minorities and immigrants to achieve this substantive equality, including respect and recognition, “a self-reflexive, re-consideration of national identity” is required (Dobbernack and Modood, 2012:7). Unless the majority population is willing to engage in a reciprocal exercise of reconstructing this identity with minorities, it is unlikely that ‘acceptance pluralism’ can develop. This conceptual framework allows for an analysis at different levels. It can be applied at the institutional level of legal frameworks, school systems and policy text analysis, as well as at the level of group or individual practices and discourses. Moreover, it is amenable to the common-sense understanding of actors who themselves often use the concept of ‘toleration’ in its different modalities to describe and justify their actions and attitudes.

The framework is used to discuss ethnicity and education through three interrelated themes. The first concerns the way immigration and undocumented migration have shaped current education discourses, and what policy and other responses have been made to this. The second theme explores the historical hegemony of the Catholic Church and its impact on religious education and other curricula, as well as of the size of its school sector on the prospects of minority faith children. The third theme contrasts the rhetoric of education policy texts and other ‘diversity’ discourses with the mono-cultural imaginary of the ‘nation’ as Catholic (Baldacchino, 2002). It is argued that the ‘discretion’ model currently prevailing as a result of a *laissez faire* attitude regarding the education of ethnic minorities and immigrants, where the *faire* is also about a lack of *fairness*, is currently the hallmark of this ‘new’ host EU member state, as it is in other states with a similar profile (Jordan, Stråth and Triandafyllidou, 2003).

## **Methodology**

Apart from the brief history and the analysis of policy texts, this article draws on data generated from an EU-funded project<sup>1</sup> [REMC] on the place of religion in education systems across Europe. Primary data were collected on the relative role of school and home in the religious socialisation of primary school children aged 9–11 (Smyth, 2010). The theoretical perspective was informed by concepts of multicultural accommodation (Modood, 2007, 2010) and substantive equality. A number of questions were asked about accommodation to minority faith or secular perspectives, such as about the

school ethos, general school climate, religious and moral education, time and places for prayer, events, celebrations and school calendars. Adult informants were asked whether they thought schools should accommodate to diverse belief systems or none, and how schools could change to become accommodating.

Here I draw on interviews<sup>2</sup> with two school principals of state primary schools<sup>3</sup> with some of the largest populations of ethnic minority and immigrant children in local schools. In addition, interviews with key policy-makers, including the Commissioner for Children, the Chief Executive of the National Commission for the Promotion for Equality, the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta and the Chair of the Commission for Catechesis which, with their consent, are attributable, capture current discourses surrounding local interpretations of ‘diversity’, toleration and accommodation in education. The interview schedules were designed jointly by the REMC project team; adjustments were made to the Malta schedule through translation into Maltese with questions about local practices, terms and meanings. The interviews were transcribed<sup>4</sup> and analysed using critical discourse analysis.

### **Constructing the present**

Malta’s contemporary ethnicity and diversity discourses cannot be understood without reference to the impact its size and geophysical location has had on its history (Mitchell, 2002, 2003). At only 316 square kilometres and sitting nearly in the centre of the Mediterranean, Malta has a history of creative adaptation to the challenges presented by small island vulnerability. Whilst not arguing for a historicist, path-dependent interpretation of present ‘smallness’ policies, it is clear that these two factors of size and location have contributed significantly to the cultural formation of identity, and this in successive periods. As Dobbernack and Modood (2012:10) find, in relationships of toleration, parties “do not usually encounter one another *ex novo*”. Modood (1997, p. 4) provides five possible models of the “multicultural state”. These include the decentred state, the liberal state, the republic, the federation of communities and, finally, the plural state. As a country that was directly colonised up until the 1960s, Malta does not fit easily into any of these categories. In the face of domination by diverse occupiers, Roman Catholicism became an ethnic religion as in the collectivistic religions described by Jakelić (2010). Following a republican phase in the 1970s, the present<sup>5</sup> government’s political alliance with the Catholic Church has continued to accord it the “institutional authority structure” (Jakelić, 2010:1) of collectivistic religions.

Mitchell’s (2002) anthropological ethnography of the Valletta parish of St Paul’s Shipwreck [L-Arcipierku] demonstrates that the collective memory of the parishioners (and the general population) has been shaped by attachment to the idea of a continuous Christianity dating back to the shipwreck of St Paul on Malta in 60 AD (St Luke 28:1), whilst Woolner’s (2002) finds that in present day Malta social memory regarding the Ottoman Turk attacks in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Cassar, 2002) still fashions attitudes to

local Muslims. In his study of the Europeanisation of the Maltese islands during the medieval period, Wettinger (1993:144) finds “[a] heritage of absolute ignorance of, and profound repugnance for, anything Arab”, despite an Arab administration from 870 AD to at least 1127 AD (Wettinger, 1986, 1993). Regarding myths of uninterrupted Christianity, Wettinger (1993:150) argues that the religious lexicon of Semitic provenance (with words such as “priest”, “baptism” and “mass” coming from the Semitic) do not antedate the Arab conquest of Malta, but entered in post-Islamic or Norman times. The Norman myths of origin were most successfully propagated during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, justifying the claims of Maltese notables to rights overruled by the Knights of St John, as well as serving the purpose of mobilising popular feeling against the threats of Ottoman invasion and North African attacks (Cassar, 2002).

Malta has had its own history of “Othering” as Borg and Mayo (2006) have pointed out in their account of Malta’s representation of the Saracen in its iconography, in public sites as well as in popular discourse. Malta has had a long Muslim period which was “virtually obliterated” by the Knights of Malta (Order of St John) who left “a Eurocentric imprint” on the island (Borg and Mayo, 2006:153). According to Borg and Mayo (2006:154), Islam “becomes the object of repudiation in the Maltese psyche” where the Ottoman Turk is “replaced by the Arab neighbour”. Well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Maltese were known to the Knights of the Order of St John as “Saracens” (Wettinger, 1993:154) on the basis of their language and possibly their ethnic origins, rather than their religion, which was by then Christian. It is this psychic denial of self (typical of others so colonised) which has seen repeated periods of rejection of a common Semitic (and Muslim) heritage, most recently in the discourse surrounding Malta’s accession to the European Union when, despite a claim of a European *ethnos*, a peculiar Catholic imaginary was about to derail membership since Europe was seen by many as not sufficiently Christian, rather as more “riskily” secular (Mitchell, 2002). If the Malta of the 1960s and more recently of these last few years has spent most of its energies looking for evidence of an aboriginal and an uninterrupted Christianity, then this needs to be explained in terms of the present ‘psyche’. What history does imply though is that ‘Islamophobia’ as we now know it as both a religious and racial and ethnic prejudice was not present in this form in the past. Indeed, the religious rights of minorities, even of slaves, were protected throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Wettinger, 2002).

During the British colonial period<sup>6</sup> a form of concordat was established between the Protestant colonial power and the Maltese Catholic leaders, including the Archbishop, which led to the Religion of Malta Declaration Act of 1922, the first Act of Malta’s first Constitution (Fenech, 2005). Chircop (2001) argues that the Maltese education system was fashioned by the collibration of the British Imperial project with the interests of the new local élites and the upper ranks of the Catholic Church who were instrumental in both design and implementation. In the first, *laissez faire* or passive phase of the project, the British gave the Catholic Church near total monopoly on education. In the second phase, a strategy of cultural colonisation through public education was

employed (Chircop, 2001). From the 1840s the Maltese were administered as one of “the Coloured Races of the British Colonies” (Sultana, 2001).

In 1974, during Malta’s more republican phase under a Labour government, an amendment to the Constitution enshrined individual freedom of conscience and free exercise “of their respective modes of religious worship” for all persons in Malta. Though the Constitution then, as now, obliged the state to provide Roman Catholic religious education to all pupils in state schools, an opt-out clause was guaranteed by sub-article 2 of Article 40. Subsequently, a number of agreements with the Vatican<sup>7</sup> have given the Maltese Episcopal Conference total control of the Religious Education curriculum in state schools, a curriculum which is doctrinal and catechetical (Secretariat for Catechesis, 2008). The Episcopal Conference determines the religious education of Roman Catholic students in any school within the national system in which Roman Catholic pupils attend. The most recent draft National Curriculum Framework (2011) “*An Education of Quality for All*” has left intact this status quo despite discourses of “inclusion”, “diversity” and “intercultural education” (see below).

### **Visible and invisible minorities**

Aspinall (2009) argues that without ethnic monitoring it will be difficult to achieve “race” and other equalities. It is a challenge to develop cross-national concepts and terms relating to ethnicity and “race” robust enough for the “statistical proportionality” claims that may be made in the service of equality (Aspinall, 2007). Scholars make different uses of the term “ethnicity” or “ethnic minority”. Referring to Britain, Myers (2009:801) refers to as “immigrant” “those settled in Britain but born elsewhere”, whilst for him “minority” refers to those “born either in Britain or elsewhere but who are identified or self-identify as belonging to an ethnic group”. For Triandafyllidou (2012), the difference between ethnic minority and migrant populations is that native minorities are seen to have a “historical” presence in a territory. Neither of these distinctions has been used systematically in Malta, where no self-reflexive concept of ethnicity exists (Baldacchino, 2002). A very recent study of education and ethnic minorities in Malta (Calleja, Grech and Cauchi, 2010) laments the lack of reliable statistics on religious belonging, and on ethnicity, pointing fingers directly at the National Statistics Office for failing to collect data through the Census and other surveys. Ironically, due to their own inability to distinguish between immigrants and ethnic minorities, they (and the college principals who were asked to supply data on pupils) conflate “foreigners” with [native] religious minorities, thus rendering it impossible to determine whether the figures for Muslim children in state schools include or exclude Maltese (ethnic minority) Muslims.

Discourses regarding ethnicity were largely absent from the public sphere until the last decade for a number of reasons. As an island in the middle of the Mediterranean, Malta has, in different periods, had waves of small populations of peoples from all over the Mediterranean and, since the arrival of the Knights in the 1500s, of western

and other European ruling groups, including the British. Whilst operating with an idea of the 'Other' as non-Roman Catholic (either Saracen or Muslim or Protestant), the Catholic identity acted as an imaginary which allowed the Maltese to consider themselves an European, rather than Semitic, people. The relatively stable co-existence of different ethno-religious groups on the island, as in Ottoman Turkey, made the question of ethnicity in its modern form superfluous to the discursive field, though Baldacchino (2002) and Mitchell (2003) show how politicians have played with this imaginary of a Christian European ethnicity.

Moreover, and notwithstanding the settling here of proportionately large groups of Italians and British in the recent past, until the last decade Malta had considered itself to be more of a place of emigration than a place of net immigration (Attard, 1989, 1997). A more recent group of settlers who were the first to experience intolerance and even racism (Borg and Mayo, 2006) were the Arab, mainly Libyan, labour migrants employed in the sector of new technologies of the 1970s and 1980s' first industrial phase as specialist workers. At the same time, tourist routes to Libya and other North African states opened Malta to the first wave of non-European newcomers. Media reports on disturbances by these tourists served to fuel intolerance also of the resident 'Arab Muslims', many of whom are now naturalised, an intolerance which has been transferred to the religion as well as to the 'race'. Zammit (2009) estimates that the total Muslim population of around 5,000 is about 1.2% of the current population. Of these, 1,000 hold Maltese citizenship, 300 of whom are converts from Catholicism (Zammit, 2009). Whilst a very small group with numbers yet to be accurately established, this group, especially Maltese Muslim children, should, despite the fact that their history as Maltese is very recent, be considered an ethnic minority as the term is applied in Myers (2009). These are Maltese citizens who identify as both Maltese and Muslim (Darmanin, 2011a). There are other religious minorities in Malta such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants and Evangelical churches with approximately 600 members each, as well as other very small congregations of Mormons, Zen Buddhists and the Baha'i Faith (Department of State, 2005) who could also be considered ethnic minorities rather than immigrants. However, where religious ethnicity is also 'racialised' as with visible minorities, it is the Muslim minority and immigrant groups that are most subject to intolerance and racist attack (ENAR, 2008).

In 2010 Malta had an estimated population of 417,617 people with a density of 1,322 people per square kilometre, making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world<sup>8</sup>. Figures from the latest Census publication<sup>9</sup> (National Statistics Office, 2006) show a very small non-Maltese population of 3% to 4% or 12,112 of whom 74.7% are European (over one-third, or 4,713, are British), 4% are Libyan, whilst 12% of the 12,112 are classified as "other citizenship". Certain regions of Malta have larger populations of immigrants than others, a distribution also reflected in school populations. In 2005, 94% of the population enumerated were born in Malta. It is likely that others born in places like Australia (3,893) are returned migrants. Many

of these have acquired naturalisation (NSO, 2007). Since EU accession a number of skilled and other workers from the member states have moved to Malta. Gauci (2010:207) finds that “contrary to popular belief, the majority of migrants arriving in Malta are from the EU” – most of these are of working age and highly skilled. By 2008, 4% (18,137) of the population was immigrant (Gauci, 2010). In 2009 there were 3,725 EU migrants with active employment licences compared to 2,495 held by Third Country Nationals and 1,213 held by refugees, asylum-seekers and those with subsidiary protection (Gauci, 2010). Legal Notice 259 of 2002<sup>10</sup> accords education rights to the children of immigrant workers where there are agreements between the state of origin and the Maltese state. However, there is no school-based evidence that any assistance is available.

In their study of ethnic minority and immigrant pupils in Maltese state schools in 2008–09, Calleja et al. (2010, p. 20 *passim*) found that 34% or 221 were from Western Europe and 23.1% or 153 from Eastern Europe, 8.5% or 56 from North Africa, 6.5% or 43 from Sub-Saharan Africa and 9% or 61 pupils from the Middle East. In all, and on the basis of nationality, in 2008 there were 555 non-Maltese pupils in state primary and secondary schools. Calleja et al. (2010) were shocked to find that neither the Education Directorate nor staff in detention and open centres were ensuring that unaccompanied minors were in school. Whilst the Refugees Act of 2000<sup>11</sup> states that those recognised as refugees or granted humanitarian protection have the right to free education and language learning support, on the ground it is felt that there is no minimal policy to even ensure these children are in school. The study did not survey state-dependent Church and independent schools. These two sectors now take up 40% of all school-age pupils.

National statistics give a somewhat more reliable, but less disaggregated picture, albeit omitting data on religious belonging. Numbers of immigrant children have varied from 1,097 in 2005 (NSO, 2007), to 1,589 in 2007<sup>12</sup> (NSO, 2011). Of this population, there are 739 or 46.5% in state schools, 138 or 8% in church schools and 712 or 45% in independent schools. In the same year, the education sector share<sup>13</sup> of the state schools was 62%, of church schools 26% and of the independent schools it was 12%, indicating that state-dependent church schools take a disproportionately small percent of immigrant (and ethnic minority) pupils compared to other sectors. The considerable state-financed support this sector enjoys without concomitant obligations to share in the education of ethnic minorities and immigrants jars with the prevailing ‘diversity’ or ‘inclusive’ discourses. In 2010 this sector was encouraged by the government to expand to about 40% of the education market, making it even more likely that there would be more ethnic diversity in state and independent schools and more homogeneity in these church schools, a situation that is in sharp contrast with policy discourses of acceptance and accommodation.

An independent Muslim faith school operates in the education market; however, there is no state funding of it even though this is the only place where an Islamic



education may be had (Chircop, 2010; Darmanin, 2010, 2011a). The school offers a number of heavily subsidised places. A planning application for a permit to expand has been pending for over six years, suggesting some indirect discrimination when compared with the haste with which Catholic church schools have been able to extend their premises. If the extension is not built, Muslim children will have to attend Catholic, state or independent schools. Since the war in Libya, external funds have nearly dried up, leading the Imam to ask for government support. In contrast to the financial arrangements recently made for the expansion of the state-dependent church school sector<sup>14</sup>, on petitioning the government the Muslim school was only able to secure a bank loan<sup>15</sup>.

At each level of compulsory education across all three sectors, the immigrant proportion does not exceed 2.8%. This figure excludes Maltese 'visible' and 'invisible' minorities such as Maltese Muslims or African children who have been adopted by Maltese parents. Between 2001–2009, for example, there were 102 adoptions from Ethiopia and 44 from Pakistan compared to 142 from Malta itself (NSO, 2009). Though an extremely small number of children fall into these categories, as visible minorities they suffer from "everyday racism" (Essed, 1991). Parents of Maltese Muslim children and the children themselves have reported this (Darmanin, 2010, 2011a).

It was with Malta's reactivation of its application for European Union (EU) membership in 1998 and difficulties with the old ally Libya that in 2002 the first wave of undocumented, locally known as 'irregular' or 'clandestine' immigrants started to arrive. It is Europe which is the destination; landing on Malta is 'accidental', although often fortuitous. Malta is now a 'new host' country, similar to other new hosts in its "close link between national identity and the Catholic identity" and its "difficult naturalisation policies" (Triandafyllidou, 2012:17). Since accession to the EU in 2004, Malta has also been receiving immigrants from old and new member states, especially Eastern European countries.

The sight of boatloads of 'irregular' immigrants landing on Malta's beaches has been increasingly common as are tales of drowning in Malta's seas. Between 2002 and 2009, over 12,110<sup>16</sup> such immigrants landed (NSO, 2009). In 2008 alone, 2,775 people landed by boat. Asylum applications filed with the Commissioner for Refugees are high; in 2009 there were 2,387 of which 46<sup>17</sup> were made by unaccompanied minors (NSO, 2009). Of these applications, 2,317 were made by irregular immigrants from Africa, 73% of whom are young males aged between 18–34. In 2009 only 20 people were granted refugee status whilst 1,671 or 65% were granted subsidiary or other forms of protection; 34% had their petition rejected (NSO, 2009). In Open Centres, where people who are given very basic protection live, in conditions harshly criticised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), there are 232 minors out of a population of 2,783 (NSO, 2009). The absolute majority (98.7%) of these are from Africa.

Since the first arrival of asylum-seekers and undocumented immigrants by boat, there has been much consternation not only amongst the NGOs caring for these im-

migrants and individuals concerned with their welfare, but also amongst that section of the population that feels Malta's resources are being stretched beyond capacity. Those Maltese whose own lives are 'precarious' feel threatened by the seemingly overwhelming influx. Media reports<sup>18</sup> that regularly announce large landings or report that Malta's "migration burden [is the] biggest in the EU" generate a large amount of online comments on blogs, some of which are not simply critical of the EU and its lack of 'burden' or responsibility sharing, but are explicitly racist. A recent European Parliament (EP) report (Thielemann, Williams and Boswell, 2010) confirmed what most Maltese know: Malta faces disproportionately high asylum costs relative to its GDP. Its costs are 1,000 times higher than Portugal's, even when the cost of living is taken into account. They are higher in relation to pressure and capacity when one includes other undocumented immigrants apart from asylum-seekers. At 0.26% of its GDP in 2007, Malta had the highest spending across the EU on a proportional basis (Thielemann et al., 2010) when factors such as population density are also taken into account. Not only do the authors of the EP report recognise that this is a grossly disproportionately high burden that Malta has but that, conversely, other EU states are not sharing the responsibility. In 2011, the EC presented a Strategy Paper with new initiatives regarding resettlement programmes<sup>19</sup> such as Eurema. It was reported locally that in its first 24-month phase only 227 people from Malta were relocated to just six EU member states; more people were relocated to the USA than to the EU "putting the EU's solidarity initiative to shame"<sup>20</sup>.

Policy-makers such as the Executive Director of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality<sup>21</sup> are concerned that the concept of cultural diversity is now being limited by a focus on 'irregular' immigration, excluding not only other factors of difference but also ethnic minorities and regular immigrants. Alarming, this produces in the public the idea that difference is threatening.

But now I think the general public is associating all these diverse, these differences, to irregular immigration and is defining that as threat. And that is what is worrying to me. Because they are defining anything that is not, that is different, that is not as, as usual, as a threat.

Ms Felice<sup>22</sup>, the principal of a primary school with one of the largest populations of ethnic minority and immigrant children was with one breath claiming that it is a "richness" to have such diversity while, at the same time, bemoaning the fact that although there are no "irregular immigrants" in her school, in the popular perception of the visible differences of her pupils these were "clandestine immigrants". Whilst attempting to distance herself from the "prejudice" of her friends, her comment about a "multicultural" school "losing its social status" suggests a very limited type of toleration, bordering on non-toleration.

Now it is a multicultural school. But I think a school loses its social status when it becomes multicultural. Because you have a lot of foreigners. Even here in [my town] 'So you have children of clandestine [irregular] immigrants, children of [clandestine immigrants]?' [I was asked]. I replied 'Not even one child is the child of an clandestine immigrant'. My own friends ask me, they ask with a certain prejudice.

Like many other Maltese nationals, this school principal finds the challenges faced overwhelming. "My God, that's where we are too", she exclaims to a colleague from America who describes multiculturalism in American classrooms, continuing that "[W]e have only just begun to feel it more". She feels let down by the EU which on one hand has a policy of free movement and at the same time expects Malta, "a small island in a big sea", to refuse boatloads of immigrants.

And you cannot close Malta off, not just because they [EU] say 'Don't accept them' [irregular immigrants]. You don't accept ... free movement? The EU is free movement, of people, of capital, of whatever. That is the essence of the EU. You cannot close yourself [off]. This phenomenon has taken place everywhere. In America. Everywhere there is this phenomenon.

For Ms Felice, and others like her, the lack of reliable statistics that would tell her about the status of the children in her school and most importantly their religion makes her job more difficult. She herself has been told that it contravenes the Data Protection Act to collect such data at the school level, a practice of omission which makes ethnic and minorities invisible for the purposes of planning, visible in the prejudices directed at them.

Yes, [I want] to know what minorities I have. What precisely are the denominations that I have. I would know better where I am. I would know better what they require. I would know, Prof., I would know where the school is, what amount [of ethnic minority and immigrant pupils] it has.

## **Education policy texts**

As policy guidelines, the three most recent (1998, 1999, 2011) versions of the National Minimum Curriculum articulate positions regarding difference, diversity, social justice and multiculturalism. However, they do this in markedly different ways. The 1998 Draft National Curriculum (Vella, 1998) produced during the short term of a Malta Labour Party led government was authored after a vast consultation process with over 300 organisations or individuals. It involved two main discourses regarding difference, including ethnic difference, which entered the policy field for the first time ever with this document. These were a very strong social equality and democratic process discourse as well as a 'diversity' discourse regarding the respect and recognition to be accorded by right to different cultures and individuals. The emphasis on democratic process, fundamental human rights and values such as "social justice, loyalty, love, solidarity, democracy, respect, responsibility and tolerance" (Vella,

1998:9) permeated the vision. Democratic participation in a school of parents and pupils, and the school as a community school, were viewed as tools leading toward the development of a “democratic culture in the country” (Vella, 1998:48). The vision not only encompassed the needs of minority groups, for example, their language needs, or their representation in curricula texts, but also envisioned a change in the attitudes of majority pupils.

In a society that is increasingly multicultural, the education system has to prepare students in the arts of respect, cooperation, tolerance and solidarity between cultures (Vella, 1998: 9).

Global, regional and local peace and stability was seen to depend “on how much people are ready to live convivially in spite of differences” (Vella, 1998:10). The concept of inclusion was introduced not only “to affirm and celebrate the concept of difference” but to ensure, through a social justice perspective, the entitlement of all children to an education that attended to their particular needs.

... not only children with disability, but also children of refugees, the particular needs of children of emigrants, and the needs of children whose development is not progressing within the norms established by the education system (Vella, 1998:17).

Remarking that children of non-Maltese parents may know neither Maltese nor English<sup>23</sup> upon entering school, the 1998 draft document recommended that schools assess the different linguistic competencies of their intake and provide for their needs. It was suggested that complementary teachers could become “linguistic experts” who would support children in language learning.

Most significantly, however, this draft abandoned the religious-nationalistic discourse seen in previous National Curricular documents. It did not discuss the teaching of religion. Borg and Mayo (2001) recognise the significance of such a discursive shift taking place in what they call “a nonsecular environment”.

When a political crisis in the summer of 1998 led to the re-election of a nationalist government, the incoming Minister of Education set up a second round of consultations during which time the powerful Church lobby raised objections to the lack of a denominational discourse, as well as to a specific reference to the Roman Catholic religion in the 1998 draft. Directly intervening in the drafting process, the Minister of Education significantly changed the text of the 1998 draft in a number of ways, as discussed in Borg and Mayo (2001, 2006). These changes led to the insertion of a hegemonic Catholic discourse permeating the whole NMC. Borg and Mayo (2006:49) refer to the October 1999 parliamentary debate during which the Minister of Education criticised the 1998 White Paper for failing “to include anything about the teaching of religion”. He added:

[T]he majority of Maltese are practising Catholics and there are constitutional and contractual obligations on the government to respect Malta’s Catholic identity. Anyone who wants

to get to know Malta's identity must also understand that the Catholic faith is an essential component of this (cited in Borg and Mayo, 2006:49)

In the final document (Ministry of Education, 1999), Religious Education is amongst the educational "objectives" listed. The "Maltese identity" is seen to rest on both religion and family. The section on "Values in Socialisation", whilst paying lip-service to a "multi-cultural" society, and the need for students to develop "a sense of respect, co-operation, and solidarity among cultures", is rigidly mono-cultural.

Several studies have shown that the family is a key feature of the Maltese identity. From its early stages, education should affirm the value of the Maltese family that is adapting itself to different ways of life... The family lies at the heart of the process of solidarity. One of the important aims of education should be the preparation and sound formation for marriage and family life. This National Minimum Curriculum recognises that knowledge of Religion is in itself essential for the moral and spiritual development of a society around values that lie at the heart of social conviviality and understanding.

Here a discursive shift has occurred whereby the 'social conviviality and understanding' seen in the 1998 draft to be matters of a global dimension regarding the peaceful co-existence of peoples of different cultures, which would also require a move away from a Catholic monopoly culture, now allow for a reassertion of Catholic RE and values. In this 1999 NMC, the knowledge that students are expected to acquire through the curricular experience includes:

[T]heir rights and responsibilities in relation to the Creator (for those who believe), to others, themselves, the community, the country, the natural environment and animals (Ministry of Education, 1999: 48).

The insertion of this 'strong' Catholic perspective is justified by reference to the fact that education in the Catholic faith is stipulated in the agreements between the Holy See and the Republic of Malta (1989, 2003, below).

In the 1999 text (Ministry of Education, 1999:30 *passim*) the section on diversity talks about pupils from "different social contexts", "students who learn differently" or who "develop at a different rate". There is no mention of different ethnic, religious or cultural groups. Similarly, a section on inclusive education mentions children who "sign", those at risk of failure and the need to develop bilingualism in schools. Whilst there is a repetition of some of the goals and values expressed in the 1998 draft, the 1999 (Ministry of Education, 1999:24) version's call for a system that "should enable students to develop a sense of respect, cooperation and solidarity amongst cultures" sounds hollow or, as Borg and Mayo (2006: 43) put it, in contradiction with other sections of the same document, especially with its overtly Roman Catholic vision of the Maltese people "conceived as an undifferentiated mass, a unitary subject, with one belief system".

The latest National Curriculum Framework [NCF] “Towards a quality education for all” (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011a) has moved further away from the recognition of group rights and cultures toward an individualising discourse of individualised learning, learning areas, quality and others. At the centre of the project is the individual/individualised “child”. Supporting principles such as “entitlement” and “diversity” are articulated through this individualising discourse, in which the cultures or rights of groups are washed away. Differences are considered to be “individual”:

The NCF acknowledges Malta’s growing cultural diversity, and values the history and traditions of its people. It recognises the heterogeneous nature of the community of learners, thereby acknowledging and respecting individual differences of age, gender, beliefs, personal development, socio-cultural background and geographical location [sic] (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011a:22).

Previous discourses which emphasised recognition where difference was “to be celebrated” (Ministry of Education, 1999:30) are absent from this document. The “Diversity” principle groups together children from different ethnic backgrounds with those with learning difficulties. Other principles such as those regarding “learner-centred learning” shift away from a recognition of the needs of groups of pupils *qua* their group membership to their needs as “individuals”. Regarding diversity and difference, “respect” is to be achieved by treating individual learners as atomised individuals, that is, “irrespective” of their group characteristics and, it could be argued, group claims.

The inclusive school should cater for every child irrespective of gender, religion, race, ability and beliefs, but should set as one of its aims the promotion of the potential of each learner through individualised attention and support (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011a:31).

A section on bilingualism and multilingualism is remarkable in that it does not even refer to the learning needs of immigrants. It is only in the fourth volume on “The way forward” that the recommendation appears, suggesting “a focus on mastery of English in the language learning of young immigrants or refugees” (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011b:15).

Calleja et al. (2010) remark that the most common form of support is that given by the Complementary or Language Support teacher who is also there to support the learning of Maltese pupils; however, “as a general rule support is still the exception” (Calleja et al., 2010:24). In her in-depth study of one state college of six primary and two secondary schools, Valentino (2011) found that the College Principal does not “believe in a policy for minority children as they should not be different from us”. Neither at college nor at school level was there in place a policy for the language learning of immigrants. The current situation is *ad hoc* in the extreme where some principals may, if they tend toward toleration or better still respect recognition and

accommodation, labour to acquire some human and other resources to support language learning, as did one of the school principals in the REMC study reported below. Valentino (2010:77) finds, however, that in her case study college “funds and resources that are available are not used for non-Maltese children” unless a class teacher is pushy enough so that some are diverted to these pupils.

In the 2011 NCF so taken for granted is it that RE will be Roman Catholic RE that it is referred to as “Catholic Religious Education (CRE)”. For those “opting out” of CRE it is suggested that they follow an “Ethical Education programme”, which is “preferred over a Comparative Religious Education” (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011:43). This implies that the NCF Curriculum Committee felt that those who are not Catholic need an ethical education which the majority Catholic children do not. A Comparative Religious Education has not been ‘preferred’; this could limit the power of the Episcopal Conference over RE, as well as attracting majority children of more liberal parents to it.

A critique of the 2011 NCF from the Department of Education Studies, Faculty of Education<sup>24</sup> commented about the “social de-contextualisation of the concept of an ideal-type ‘child’”. It argued that the proposals regarding CRE and the alternative Ethical Education programme contradict other sections of the same document. The 2011 NCF lacks a “critical reappraisal of notions of diversity”, especially regarding a culturally responsive education and a distributive justice and entitlement curriculum. Finally, it was argued that “we should avoid categorising ethnically diverse students and migrant children as children with learning disabilities”. This point is also made by Calleja et al. (2010: 17) who find that since the type of language and learning “help” currently provided to immigrants is the same as that provided to those with learning difficulties it

[M]ight reinforce the perceptions that children of migrant background suffer from a form of unfitness due to their ethnic origin, family, socio-economic background or another reason.

## **Institutional agreements**

Given the constitutional entrenchment of Roman Catholicism as the religion of Malta, the mandatory provision of (only) Roman Catholic RE in all state schools, and of agreements<sup>25</sup> with the Holy See and the Episcopal Conference on religious instruction, the current RE settlement in Malta can be described as one of monopoly Catholicism. Halsall and Roebben (2008: 20) categorise Malta’s approach to Religious Education as a “denominational RE system for all” within a “uniform solution with strong state intervention”, this being in contrast to the “pluriform or mixed solution with weak state intervention” of a number of other EU member states. Within this settlement, the Constitution protects freedom of conscience and of worship through clauses permitting the ‘opt-out’ of Catholic RE. In 1991, 0.08% children opted out of the confessional RE in state schools (Vella, 1992); in 2009<sup>26</sup>, out of 36,000 pupils in state primary and secondary schools, 876 or 2.4% did not take [Catholic] RE.

In the state school sector, the Maltese Episcopal Conference “establishes the teaching methods, programmes and texts for students” (Secretariat for Catechesis, 2008:22). The Episcopal Conference also regulates teacher appointments in Religious Education and in primary education. The settlements reached between the State and the Holy See and the Episcopal Conference, however, bind all schools with Catholic pupils to a prescribed RE programme. State-dependent church schools and independent schools have more curricular freedom than do state schools.

In most primary schools, there is currently neither an alternative RE or Values Education programme for those who opt-out nor is there a separate space for them to engage in other work. Moreover, the Catholic school culture of state and other schools which permeates everyday life in schools functions as an “integrated curriculum” (Mawhinney, 2007). Parents of ethnic minority or minority belief immigrant children contest the way the ‘opt-out’ of RE clause is implemented. Ms Sacco of the Vassalli State School talks about how she negotiated with a Muslim parent to let his child remain in class during prayers and RE as well as take part in assembly. She drew on the fact that with its Semitic use of the word “*Alla*” for God, Maltese Catholics are praying to the same *Allah*. Here, and on other occasions, this principal uses her discretion, a discretion borne of toleration, to accommodate requests for other faith prayers to be said in the assembly, but this remains a concession rather than a right granted.

For example, when you first say to them [parents] ‘Listen, the child has to remain in class [during RE]’ [he replies] ‘Because I don’t want him to learn about this or that’. I reply ‘There is one Alla<sup>27</sup> and He is the same for all’. Because even Assembly. Sometimes they do not want to participate in Assembly. ‘There is one Alla’. So we are praying in our language, and they are praying in their language. I have a class in which a parent asked that the prayer before break is said in his language for his religion. Why not?

For many parents of Muslim children, however, this is a minimal toleration that is so much like assimilation that it is unacceptable (Darmanin, 2010). Not only is no alternative provided for religious minorities or those with no faith, but in state schools principals argue that, because they do not have the staff to supervise other activities or rooms in which these pupils may be safely looked after, the only alternative is that the children actually remain in class during RE. During the 2008 period of fieldwork, I observed a number of RE lessons in two state schools in which up to six children per class were given other activities to pursue whilst their peers followed the RE lesson. As Ms Sacco puts it, despite the ethno-religious diversity in her school, children are kept in class during Catholic RE.

I have children, off my head I can’t tell you. However, I have Muslims, Orthodox, Buddhist, Anglican – I have diverse religions. So far, the same [class], thank God, I have no problems. What we do, I don’t have the staff so that every time they have RE I can take them out of the class to do something else. So I make it clear to parents as soon as they come to register [the children] that they are going to be in class, but doing something else. For example, I know



that in class, at the time of religion, I mean Catholic faith, the children look things up about their own faith on the Internet. Some colour things in, others write.

According to her, “parents have become accustomed to it”, an expression which carries the trace of the implicit subordination or adjustments made by minorities that toleration presumes.

The Episcopal Conference has other rights, such as to indicate to the Minister of Education any teaching in syllabi or texts in other subjects “which is at variance with the Catholic Church”. Borg’s (2006) study of other curricular subjects such as social studies and history demonstrates the hegemony of the Catholic perspective and culture in many school subjects and practices.

Policy-makers’ awareness of this ethos indicates both a taken-for-granted element as well as the evolution of a discourse which is moving from one of toleration to one of recognition and respect. The Dean of the Faculty of Education<sup>28</sup> talks about the morning assembly with prayers and singing of the national anthem as “typical” of schools. She goes on to discuss whole school projects, outings and blogs and websites set up all around the theme of the Pauline Year.

You know, religious hymn as well, then it’s time for announcements and, depending on whether there are particular festivities or the time of year ... for example, I’m sure that yesterday, since it was Ash Wednesday there must have been, if not an assembly, children who had Mass, or who actually had the putting of the ashes on the forehead or the head. If it was ... if this year we’re celebrating the Pauline year, I know that some schools have had school projects about the Pauline year. They even had blogs and websites set up, it was an entire school project. So children were taken on outings, if they went to Valletta they visited St Paul the Shipwrecked Church. Again, it will vary...

Ms Sacco, of the Vassalli State School, who in many other ways indicates she would like to go beyond toleration to the respect and recognition of egalitarian tolerance, shows how she too internalises a dominant discourse in which religious minorities “obviously” do not participate.

Hmm, let me put it this way. As religious practice in the school, we have Mass every [first Friday] of the month. Coming up to Christmas we have a Novena, where even the children – it has become customary for the children to make [Advent] wreaths. They are blessed [by the parish priest]. ... During Holy Week we set up an Apostles’ Table. A complete exhibition and the children prepare for it. Then we launch the Opening of it, and the Priest explains the praying, and so on. Children of other religions, they come down [to the Hall] or do some work, but obviously they do not participate.

Some of her ‘concessions’ include that on a Wednesday the ‘special assembly’ is held in English. The prayer is prepared by all the children whose class is responsible for this.

Similarly, Ms Felice of the Patri Said State school declares that she has no “alternative space” for withdrawal during RE. She considers that it is up to the Directorate

of Education to provide “a structure in place” so that whoever opts out of RE is provided with an alternative. Also in her school, as in the two schools with large groups of religious minority pupils reviewed by Calleja et al. (2010), Catholic prayer is said throughout the day, in the morning assembly, before a break in class. Minority religion children often say it along with the majority children.

The teachers lead it [lunch break] in the hall. No, sorry in the yard. They gather all the Year 5, 6 ... and there the 3 and 4 and they say the prayer. Then everyone goes up and has a snack. After that, they all say a prayer before they start the lesson. And this repeats itself in the morning break.

Typical of the state and church schools studied in the REMC project, Patri Said<sup>29</sup> school is not only dedicated to the monk whose name and biography adorn a plaque as one enters the school, but other religious symbols, especially the crucifix which occupies practically every room in the school, visually surround every pupil, Catholic or not. Ms Felice condenses the significance of this symbolic capture thus: “that’s Catholicism, the heart of it”.

The signs, the symbols. As you enter you realise it is Catholic [school], because of the Crucifixes. In each class there is a crucifix. Through the prayers we say, we make the sign of the cross. Symbols all the time, here they are. We celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus, His death, resurrection. That’s Catholicism, the heart of it.

## **Language policy and immigrants**

Lacking a clear language policy on the language learning of immigrants, by default schools adopt the ‘softer’ ‘inclusion’ discourse now circulating. They become drawn into pathologising discourses, failing to recognise group identities as the basis from which to design policies and programmes. Ms Sacco of the Vassalli State School talks about the provision she makes for the learning of her “foreign” pupils, at the same time that she repeats the mantra of “individual needs”.

This state school, however, I have to say, it’s a multinational school. Because it has a lot of foreigners. We have a Mission Statement where we say we cater for the needs of every child. And in fact even the SDP [School Development Plan] that we prepared for this year is about ‘inclusion’. Inclusion for everyone. The emphasis comes from the Department [Division of Education] or the Director.

On her own initiative, she has redeployed the school’s Complementary Teacher to withdraw some of these children to offer them extra support in the learning of English. This programme, which gives the children time to learn some basic English by the end of the first term, is wholly at her discretion and does not come as a directive from above.

It's ours, ours. Our initiative. I want to thank Ms Julia who looks after them. Apart from giving support in class, as she does to Maltese children who need help with Maltese and English, with these children she continues on their own. She gathers together a small group, depending on the case, and uses a lot of visual aids and words so that they learn these, they copy them and read them. Usually, I can say nearly all [the pupils] by Christmas know how to communicate in English.

Later on in the year the children are introduced to Maltese. So successful is their programme that one Chinese boy won the prize for Maltese in his first year in school. Ms Sacco recounts that since the Complementary Teacher is not meant to be dealing with the needs of immigrants or refugees, she was going to be "shared" with another school. She managed to persuade the Directorate that she would be "lost without her".

As a complementary teacher, they may redeploy her, as they were going to do this year. Make her 'shared' with another school. Apart from the foreigners, she has a lot of Maltese children to take care of. If they take her, I am lost. Because this has become so much part of our system, and she works so hard with the children, that I'd be lost without her.

At the Patri Said State primary school a similar system is in place. Ms Felice talks about the difficulty the school faces when children know neither English nor Maltese.

So we have a Language Support Teacher who helps them on a withdrawal basis. Either English or Maltese, or both. Withdrawal basis. She gives them lessons consistently, systematically.

This school has the services of two Complementary Teachers and one Language Support Teacher, but they are not sufficient to deal with its population of immigrants, nor of children with additional support needs.

### **Celebrating or accommodating?**

In the two case study schools, two orientations to ethnic minorities and immigrants were evident as mostly determined by the individual dispositions of Ms Sacco and Ms Felice, respectively, and their 'translation' of the dominant discourses. For Ms Felice from the Patri Said State School who takes the policy texts' definition of diversity and multiculturalism to mean the celebrating of different cultures rather than equality or a hard form of respect and recognition, even the tokenism of the celebratory culture is seen to generate problems to do with 'smallness'. Having had a Language Day and an Awareness Day which "includes a lot of languages", she feels she cannot keep repeating this yet she has "dreams" in her mind.

Or we could have a Language Day, and gather everyone. ... Or flags. The flags of the countries. And celebrate. And we would respect each other more because we would know who they are. Not as if they are hidden amongst us. I have a new girl here, I have ... So I have all these dreams in my mind, these thoughts.

The “dreams” are however only dreams; Ms Felice thinks it would be an excessive strain to have celebrations for every group of immigrants in school.

How can we have, for example, Africa Day, come to mind. Or Russia Day, because we have a lot of children from Russia. And would be doing anything wrong? Because sometimes you have to consider, do you understand? Because if you have one [national] day, how will you have the time to have others for each nationality?

A similar attitude is adopted regarding the question of RE. Asked whether she thinks that a faith education could be provided for non-Catholic children, she replies that the demands on a small state may be too large to bear, especially when each school only has very small numbers of different minority faiths in school.

I think it will be a big strain on the state to provide for everyone. Because everyone would want their own [RE]. If I provide for this one, for this nationality, I would have to provide for all. How, how? Imagine how more complex school would become, life at school. At the same time, I also feel that I am welcoming these children [Catholics] and not welcoming those children [religious minority].

Colleagues are even less tolerant than Ms Felice; the comment of one regarding Muslims upsets her and she can see the intolerance of it. Yet, abandoned as she is and lacking the back-up of national policies, she finds it hard to articulate a discourse with which to counter these objections.

There are some people who say ‘Let them go to their own schools’. We have, we have a [Islamic] school here. He [a colleague] said to me ‘Why don’t they go there?’ But it’s not free. They have to pay to go there. ... There are those who take this stand, give it straight ‘We have no need for foreigners here. They should leave’.

According to her, ‘her’ teachers do not want to consider accommodation and are hardly in favour of toleration, citing the Constitutional ‘obligations’ they have to run a ‘Catholic’ school to absolve them of any duty toward ethnic minority or immigrant children, ‘there [in the Constitution] it is entrenched’.

Ms Felice’s own ambiguity regarding toleration is captured in the narrative of how she dealt with a request from the Muslim community to hold a celebration at the end of Ramadan in the school courtyard. Lacking clear policies on who should be included in the concept of ‘the school as a community’, Ms Felice asked superiors for guidance. Initially, she appeared disappointed with the negative reply received.

Firstly, I always request permission from my superiors, and I say because the school is not mine, I say, understand? And then I came to the ... imagine the parish priest wants to organise a pilgrimage and asks for the school premises? Now should I say ‘Yes’ to him? And I said to Mr Borg [her superior] and he said ‘No, no, no, no!’ He said ‘No’ [regarding the Muslim request]. And I sent this Muslim to him, and it was a ‘No’. But now if the parish priest comes to ask, I will say ‘No’. Now I will say ‘No’.

Ms Felice goes on to argue that to “be fair” she will also refuse any requests from the parish priest. However, this is not a rights- or equality-based approach because it lacks accommodation. In contrast to the Muslim community, the parish priest is unlikely to require school premises for religious activities given the Church resources available in the locality.

I will use the same measure. I will say ‘No’ because for these [religious] activities the school will not be used. Because otherwise it is not fair.

Ultimately, this school principal recognises that the present situation in which she has more discretion and less guidance than she wants leaves her unable (and alone) to deal with the “challenge” of having a new population of minority ethnic and immigrant children in school.

We have to have a ‘phasing in’ regarding how we can deal with these new realities. We need direction. We need direction. Because sometimes you cannot get a direction on your own. This requires expertise, expertise, not me [alone]. How are we going to deal with the challenge?

Ms Sacco of the Vassalli State School is more ready to use her discretion to move from tolerance toward accommodation, but she too is constrained by the policy context. What prevents the embracing of egalitarian tolerance is the education system which gives her the power to tolerate but not the duty to accommodate.

I take this as a challenge. In the sense that obviously, if those leading a country are of one faith, they have to tolerate those who are of another faith. I do not have the mentality of those, who if you are like this or if you aren’t like that, you are bad, you are damned<sup>30</sup>, or whatever. You must tolerate and you must cooperate. You have to provide facilities and you have to provide certain times [for prayer, language support etc.]. You have to give help.

Ms Sacco spoke with some regret about not having a quiet room where Muslims and other minority faith children could have a space for prayer “if only I had at least a room, even just have the size of this one, a *quiet room*”. She feels that having minority faith prayer in school would be of benefit to majority children too as “they would appreciate what the others are doing”. She has received requests for minority faith children to be excused from school to attend religious services or celebrations elsewhere. These included requests to do with Ramadan or the Orthodox New Year. She always acceded to these as long as the parents sent a note explaining why the child would not be in school. She would then “take responsibility myself, but I need to be covered”. There are some limits to her willingness to ‘accommodate’ which demonstrate the limits of a discretion which is not founded in a national policy of accommodation. A parent has asked for her son to leave school early every Friday to attend Mosque. Ms Sacco thinks that this is maybe “taking it too far”. She would like a written request on the basis of which she would present the case to her superiors.

Similarly, she has told parents that they may send what food they wish to school, but they may not come and supervise the consumption of it themselves. During Parents' meeting and other public functions she uses English as much as Maltese, hoping that most parents will be able to follow. She is in the process of asking embassies or other entities to provide the school with translations of school documents; this is also in keeping with the way she deals with parents of incoming immigrant children, even offering transport for them to come and see the school, to engage in a mutual exchange of information. Although she never had a request for this, she is upset when a superior tells her not to allow the wearing of the *hijab* in school. Most significantly, her understanding of toleration is that it requires a dispositional adjustment on behalf of the majority group. They need to be "educated" to be able to create a different social environment.

And you have to, not simply tolerate, you have to show and educate the public – the public. I mean the Maltese, through the media and so on. How one can tolerate, or how we can create a different environment that we can all aspire to? And it isn't just about religion. After all, everyone has a right to his or her religion. But you have to help as well.

Ms Sacco's idea of "help" was to offer by right and not by discretion those services which should pertain to ethnic minority and immigrant children and their parents, a policy shift which would require a shift in national identity regarding "how can we create a different environment that we can all aspire to?"

### **Policy-makers, Catholic identity and 'smallness'**

It is of concern that key education policy-makers who have some power in setting policy direction accept the status quo, and appear to be led rather than leading in policy formation. Tolerance is a normative principle that each of the policy-makers interviewed subscribed to within a continuum of inflection from the more accommodating ideas of the CE of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality to the 'smallness' of the perspective of the Chair of the Secretariat for Catechesis. A cautious approach to toleration is justified by reference to the burdens of smallness, to Catholic historical traditions, and to constitutional obligations amongst others.

The Chair of the Secretariat for Catechesis<sup>31</sup> did not think that the expansion of the state-dependent church school sector would have a negative impact on the education of ethnic minorities or immigrants, arguing that from "my experience, it doesn't seem that the composition or the mixture in faith schools is different from that in State schools". Uncomfortable with the exclusion of non-Catholic children from RE, his response is that "the State should provide an alternative". Repeating the official line, however, he thinks that such a provision could not be made "on a technical point"; the populations of pupils requiring these alternative RE programmes would be too small to make them feasible.

Ok, so according to the Permanent Secretary, when he was asked this question in front of the UN Committee on Human Rights, the official position of the Government was: 'It's a technical point, if we have enough students, we will provide for other forms of religious education'. That was the official answer.

With this, the Chair argued directly against any constitutional changes unless the composition of the populations had changed dramatically. That the majority could, together with minorities, reconsider what it means to be 'Maltese' cannot be contemplated; to be Maltese is to have a "Catholic identity".

Again, the Constitution should reflect the will of the majority. As soon as the majority ... the majority in the sense of ... not a simple majority, I mean, the will of the population. So if the population has a Catholic identity, not just a religious practice etc., I don't find any problems with that. However, the Constitution does actually try to take into consideration other minority groups.

The Dean of the Faculty of Education<sup>32</sup> at the University of Malta makes reference to "smallness" when referring directly to the Muslim minority, ironically capturing how Muslims are both visible and invisible. In her opinion, Malta is not sufficiently heterogeneous to warrant a radical revision of policy.

Somehow, although we have spoken about heterogeneity, you know, in this respect I think – maybe I'm wrong – we're still pretty much homogenous. Although, you know, we speak about ... Yes, there are Muslims, they're not that apparent at all.

Even for this actor the lack of official statistics allowed her to doubt the size, and thereby, the claims of this constituency.

But how many immigrant children do we actually have? I know that the Education Directorate – it still was a division then – we had one of our ex-students as a teacher, who was doing work with immigrant children. When I had questioned her about it or asked for more information about it, at one stage I think she told me that it had stopped because there weren't more immigrant children in the state schools.

However, the Dean is extremely concerned about the lack of a policy for mother tongue learning, noting how despite legal obligations, such as the Migrant Workers (Child Education) Legal Notice 259 of 2002, "this is where the pitfall is". She recognises that the state can bypass its obligations on the grounds of 'smallness'.

I believe that it's in the regulations that they have the right to at least get classes in their mother tongue, but when I had searched further it was as long as there were a group, ten, twenty, whatever. And this is where the pitfall is. You might get one child from – I don't know – ex-Yugoslav countries, one child from here, one child from there. So where is mother tongue maintenance going for these children?

The CE of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality had personal views that could be considered to be of egalitarian tolerance: “diversity is good, is beneficial”. She argued that an interfaith RE would benefit all pupils; it is “telling somebody that it’s ok to have a faith, to follow your faith, but it’s also ok to tolerate and respect other people’s faiths”. Whilst recognising that in the short term faith schools may offer minority faith pupils solutions to the present assimilationist situation in state and other schools, “segregation” is more “negative” than positive; “I really think they need to come together”. As “tax-payers”, ethnic minorities and immigrants have a right to have a say in policy formation and a right to services designated for them. Reflecting on how the Constitution could be “widened to include Catholic and other religions”, the CE concludes that “it will bring major reactions”; she is not sure that “these reactions are the way forward”. On the one hand, she acknowledges the long arm of ‘tradition’, on the other, that Maltese society has now changed, and the Constitution should reflect this change.

Maybe we should no longer be keeping it as the state religion. However, we know from a historical perspective how life has developed in Malta in a certain way and we need to acknowledge where we are coming from. If we are looking towards a diverse society, a multi-cultural society, we need to stop and rethink the situation.

How this ‘rethink’ is to occur is not clear; the NCPE works to eradicate individual and institutional ‘race’ and religious discrimination but it does not lobby policy-makers to develop an egalitarian tolerance.

For the Commissioner of Children, who admitted that she had not “had the time” to consider the rights of ethnic minorities and immigrants, the present situation is delicate. Acknowledging that a Catholic ethos permeates all of school life and not only RE, the Commissioner recognises that this does not award respect and recognition. Dubious about whether policy guidelines were in place, the default method of allowing the school principal discretion in decisions as to what should be the educational rights and experiences of these children appeared unfair.

However, I don’t know if there is a policy. For example, from Education. And it would be interesting to know, if Education, the Ministry, if some policy has been issued on this. It isn’t fair because to leave it completely in the hands of the decisions and discretion of the Head of School depends very much on her beliefs, and I mean, the way she thinks about this. So I think there should be General Guidelines. A policy, you give a bit of leeway so that whoever can ... the General Guidelines have to be there, and they have to be respected all over.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The approach to ethnic diversity in Malta’s schools lacks coherence. In successive policy texts such as the National Minimum Curriculum there appear in different periods both a ‘celebratory’ approach of respect and recognition and a more ‘rights-based’ discourse of egalitarian tolerance. However, neither of these two discourses



have led to any structures or programmes for ethnic minority and immigrant children. Where there have been some weak attempts in schools to 'celebrate' ethnic cultural or linguistic diversity, this has been at the discretion of school principals which, as we have seen with the differences between Ms Felice and Ms Sacco in the case-study schools, may be considerable. Similarly, language support is also at their discretion; this notwithstanding the legal framework which, consistent with international conventions, obliges Malta to implement a language policy for minority language pupils whether they are children of immigrants or refugees.

Two obstacles are subjectively perceived to stand in the way of a tolerance beyond minimal tolerance. The first is the attachment to a Catholic national identity which has politically suited the ends of the Nationalist party in government since 1987 (bar 22 months). Agreements signed with the Vatican give control over the RE curriculum to the Episcopal Conference. The Church continues to exert influence in other curricular areas and to effectively render the ethos of all schools Catholic in nature. State schools operate as Catholic schools, such that minority belief children can opt-out of RE but cannot opt-out of the everyday school ethos. Referring to Ireland in the context of EU human rights rulings, Mawhinney (2007:394) argues that where there is no "availability of acceptable alternative schooling" for these pupils, then the conscience clauses in state schools "cannot operate to protect freedom of religion in a situation where a child is exposed to doctrinal teaching throughout the school day". For her, this situation is a contravention of provisions of both the EU convention and UN treaties.

In Malta, the opportunity to give state financial support to the only Muslim school now operating was not taken. In contrast, a recent agreement with state-dependent church schools which have a disproportionately low intake of ethnic minority and immigrant children has seen the sector expand with more public funds channelled to it. As a denominational sector, it is unlikely that the church school sector will contribute significantly to toleration, respect or recognition. Nor will it choose the option of substantive equality, despite the fact that many Church NGOs are working with asylum-seekers and refugees. The funding of and the giving over of control over curricula to the Episcopal Conference clash with the policy text discourses of the National Curriculum Framework, and suggest that policy-makers only pay lip-service to a minimalist toleration idea of 'diversity'.

In schools, school principals use their discretion to deal with claims made by pupils and their parents regarding the opt-out from RE clause in different ways. In these case-study schools, perceptual size allowed school principals to construct a 'lack' of alternative spaces and staff as an obstacle to minority faith or any children leaving the classroom during Catholic RE. With a more accommodating type of toleration, Ms Sacco has made concessions regarding prayer (allowing minority belief children to say their own prayers publicly), religious holidays and others. However, these remain concessions, exemplifying the limits of toleration. As Dobbernack and Modood (2012:9) argue, "the discretionary exercise of power, based on the arbitrary will of the

tolerator” leaves the claimants subject to “interference” should the tolerator “change his or her mind”. Both school principals often felt they had to consult superiors before being more accommodating, and in most cases the superior was non-tolerant.

Key education policy-makers regard the Catholic heritage as monolithic, and incapable of being incorporated into a more pluralist idea of nation. The Chair for the Secretariat for Catechesis felt justified in arguing that the Constitution which entrenches Catholicism as the religion of Malta “should reflect the will of the majority”, after having admitted that this religious “majority” is rapidly decreasing. In 2012 a referendum on the introduction of Divorce into Malta was won by the ‘for’ group, indicating a shift toward secularisation (Darmanin, 2011b). There are now new movements such as the Movement for Divorce (Deguara, 2012) and the Humanist Society which indicate that the “internal difference within the national majority” Dobbernack and Modood (2012:7) considered vital in the project of the “self-reflexive re-consideration” of national identity is not that remote a possibility. However, policy-makers such as the CE of the NCPE, herself militating for religious and other equalities, thought that a move to amend the Constitution would provoke a counterproductive “reaction”.

Actors argue that the second obstacle to an expansive concept of diversity is Malta’s ‘smallness’. Objective factors such as the regular landings of ‘irregular’ migrants and the lack of responsibility or ‘burden’ sharing of the larger EU states create a subjective perception of ‘threat’ or ‘vulnerability’. The absence of official statistics on ethnic minorities, on the faith of immigrants and other data on language minorities allows for many misconceptions on the size of the challenge, which actively contributes to feelings of “incapacity” in “capacity action” (Thorhallsson, 2006:8). That key education policy-makers themselves are ignorant of the proportions of ethnic minority and immigrant children in schools, such that they cannot articulate policies to accommodate these children or that they can ‘excuse’ the lack of toleration and accommodation by reference to ‘smallness’ is disturbing. Is it acceptable to argue as these policy-makers have, repeating the official line, that smallness is objectively limiting? Clearly, there are specific demands on small states that can be seen to be objectively and relationally more burdensome than those made on larger ones. However, many of the adjustments needed in education policy and practice can, with better normative frameworks and better planning, be made with less ‘sacrifice’ than is being assumed. The expansion of the state-dependent church school sector is, since these schools do not share the education of ethnic minority (Muslim) and immigrant children, a counter sign to ‘acceptance pluralism’. It is also extremely costly. Conversely, the only alternative Muslim school does not receive state funding, a clear example of minimalist toleration, which is also discriminatory.

Without excluding the place of religion and faith in schools, it would not be impossible to reconsider the solely Catholic character of school ethos. Respect and recognition, which are principles currently advocated in curriculum policy texts, cannot be had within the prevailing monopoly Catholic school climate. The majority, which

is becoming internally more religiously differentiated (Darmanin, 2011b) is now at a stage where it can consider a re-conceptualisation of the nation as religiously diverse. There are many alternatives to the current denominational RE in schools, as the REMC project found (Smyth, 2010), that need not be as costly as providing a separate faith education for every minority belief pupil in a school.

Individualising discourses such as those permeating the latest National Curriculum Framework make it impossible for educators to think of group needs or respond to group claims. These discourses lack a social and cultural dimension yet have been adopted uncritically by many educators. Finally, on the ground, policy-makers such as the Commissioner for Children, as well as the two case-study school principals, recognise that a culture of discretion, a characteristic of “minimalist toleration” (Dobbernack and Moddod, 2012), gives total power (albeit experienced as a burden) to ‘tolerators’ which leaves claimants without rights *qua* rights. Although some policy-makers and school principals realise that shifts in the attitudes of the majority can be achieved through changes in the current policies and practices of toleration and diversity in education, these require a change in the attitudes (and may be the persons) of education policy-makers. If Malta is to move beyond a minimalist toleration to the “acceptance pluralism” (Dobbernack and Moddod, 2012) its now diverse population should be entitled to, it must reject a unitary national identity as Catholic and the discourses of ‘smallness’ that make it small-mindedly ungenerous and rejecting of those of its population it has ‘Othered’. It must instead reject ‘Othering’.

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*Mary Darmanin* is an Associate Professor, Department of Education Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Malta. Her doctoral research was the first ethnographic study of Maltese schools. Darmanin has researched class pedagogies in schools, gender in education, education policy making and markets in higher education. Following participation in the REMC project, papers on religious identities, religious education and Muslim children in Malta have been presented at the BSA, ECER and other conferences. She has recently worked as a Ethics Reviewer for the EU’s FP 7 research proposals.

## Notes

- 1 This study was co-funded by the EU and the University of Malta. "Religious education in a multicultural society: School and home in comparative context". [REMC] Topic SSH- 2007 - 3.3 .1 Cultural interactions and multiculturalisms in European societies.
- 2 Teachers, parents and children in five primary schools in the state, independent and state-dependent church school sector were interviewed in 2008-09. In addition, some ethnographic observation was carried out in each of the schools. Key policy-makers were interviewed in 2009.
- 3 Two school principals from the independent sector, including a Muslim faith school, and one from the state-dependent church school were also interviewed, but the resulting data are not reported here.
- 4 Transliteration from Maltese into English is my own.
- 5 Barring 18 months in 1996-98, in government since 1987.
- 6 From 1802 to Independence in 1964.
- 7 The 1989 *Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Malta for the Best Organisation of Roman Catholic Religious Instruction and Education in State Schools* and the *Modes of Regulation on Catholic Religious Instruction and Education in State Schools* were the first in a series initiated by the Nationalist Party in government. In 2003 an *Additional Protocol* reasserted the rights of the Episcopal Conference to regulate RE in state and in other schools wherever Roman Catholic pupils are present.
- 8 Where Italy has a density of 19.2 and the UK 244.3 per square km.
- 9 Currently, no data are available from the 2010 Census. No questions on religious belonging were included in this latest Census, although questions on country of birth and citizenship were included.
- 10 Legal Notice 259 of 2002 as amended by LN 358 of 2002, "Migrant Workers (Child Education) Regulations", <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=9902&l=1>
- 11 Refugee Act XX of 2000, [http://www.mjha.gov.mt/MediaCenter/PDFs/1\\_chapt420.pdf](http://www.mjha.gov.mt/MediaCenter/PDFs/1_chapt420.pdf)
- 12 These are the latest available official statistics.
- 13 Pupils from pre-primary to secondary education (NSO, 2011).
- 14 Calculated at €20 million "Church schools reform as a result of expansion project", *The Times of Malta* online, 22 January 2010; "Church school expansion sets off alarm bells in private sector", *Maltatoday*, 20 January 2010
- 15 The Imam El Sadi, in an interview with Lousia Bartolo, "Leap of faith", *Sunday Circle*, October 2011.
- 16 From figures provided to the NSO by Police General Headquarters.
- 17 The majority are from Somalia.
- 18 "Malta's migration burden biggest in EU – study", *The Times*, 4 March 2010; "Too early to sound alarm on migration", *The Times*, 13 June 2012
- 19 Reported on the EC website "Special meeting to tackle Malta's migration resettlement issues", Retrieved 10 June 2012, [http://ec.europa.eu/malta/news/malta\\_migration\\_resettlement\\_issues\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/malta/news/malta_migration_resettlement_issues_en.htm)
- 20 "Denmark is still resisting sharing the burden of Malta's migration problem", *The Times*, 4 January 2012
- 21 In an attributable interview with Ms Sina Bugeja, NCPE, March 2009. She has since moved to take on the CE post in another agency.
- 22 Interviewed in October 2008, the name is a pseudonym
- 23 The two official languages of instruction
- 24 This can be found at [http://www.um.edu.mt/\\_data/assets/pdf-file/0014/143033/Curriculum\\_Review\\_Meeting\\_-latest\\_21\\_December\\_no.2\\_2011.pdf](http://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf-file/0014/143033/Curriculum_Review_Meeting_-latest_21_December_no.2_2011.pdf)
- 25 Referred to in endnote 6
- 26 Parliamentary Question 11995 of 2009.
- 27 This interview was held in Maltese. I have not translated 'Alla' to 'God' to keep the meaning of the use of the common Semitic name for both Maltese Christians and Muslims.
- 28 Interviewed in 2009
- 29 "Patri" means "Monk" or "Reverend" as in the name of a monk.
- 30 In Maltese "int mishut"
- 31 Dr Adrian Gellel, interviewed 26 February 2009. He has recently resigned the post.
- 32 Professor Valerie Sollars, still in her post.

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# Race, nation and education

## An overview of British attempts to ‘manage diversity’ since the 1950s

Farzana Shain\*

### Abstract

This paper reviews the recent history of English education in connection with British state attempts to ‘manage diversity’. It offers a new analysis on points of coherence and tension between the role of education and state policies in relation to race and ethnicity. Drawing on the *Prevent* strategy as an example, the paper highlights the role that education has played in the construction of ethnic minorities as ‘problems’ to be managed or contained. It is argued that assimilation into a (superior) British culture has remained a constant theme (Grosvenor 1997), but has been more pronounced in periods of economic uncertainty and geopolitical dislocations (Gilroy 2004). The targets of containment policies have also changed, from African Caribbeans, predominantly, in the 1970s and 1980s to Muslims, in general, since then, but race (albeit re-coded through ethnicity, community and/or faith) has been a central reference point in state discourses on minorities.

*Keywords:* race, nation, prevent strategy, managing diversity, empire, post-colonial melancholia

### Introduction

Since the 1950s, British state policies for the management of ethnic diversity have been based on a range of ideologies including ‘assimilation’ (the expectation that immigrants will abandon their language and cultural norms and practices in favour of those of the host society), ‘integration’ (acceptance of the majority culture’s laws, customs and values through partial assimilation) and ‘multiculturalism’ (the recognition of a plurality of cultures) (Cheong et al. 2007). In much of the established literature (Mullard 1982; Troyna 1985; Tomlinson 2008) a linear progression has been identified, from assimilation in the 1950s to integration in the mid-1960s and multiculturalism since the 1970s. There has also been academic debate about the extent to which state policy responses since 2001 signal the end or the death of multiculturalism (Kundnani 2001) and a return to ‘assimilation’ (Back et al. 2002). This debate followed the launch of a new official state strategy of ‘community cohesion’ (Cantle 2001) in the immediate aftermath of the disturbances that took place in towns and cities in the summer of 2001. More recently, the Coalition government, elected

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\*School of Public Policy and Professional Practice, Keele University, UK. E-mail: f.shain@keele.ac.uk

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in 2010, has unveiled 'integration' (DCLG 2012) as its official approach to managing ethnic diversity.

This paper draws on Ian Grosvenor's (1997) contention which identified that linear shifts in policy "are more apparent than real" (1997, 49). Grosvenor argues that "they exist in the sphere of articulation rather than in practice" and that assimilation has in fact been a coherent, consistent and uniform policy goal running through government circulars, advisory notes, select committee documents and political speeches since the 1960s (1997, 49-50).

While agreeing with Grosvenor, and drawing on this framework for analysing the role of education in the management of ethnic diversity in the latter part of the 20th century, I also argue that since 2001 national policy responses have been much more strongly focused on the concrete detail of unacceptable 'Otherness' and have been translated via an expanded state apparatus into policies for managing and containing 'problem' populations. Ministerial speeches and policy pronouncements on, for example, veiling, 'not being able to speak English', forced marriages and 'extremism', and the solutions proposed – citizenship classes and ceremonies, detention without trial, visa restrictions and the targeted policing and surveillance of 'suspect communities' – have been aimed primarily at Muslims, asylum-seekers and foreign students. I argue that education has played a key role in the intensified state control of disadvantaged populations through the racialised construction of ethnic minorities as 'problems' to be managed and contained. Ethnic minority students have, since the 1950s, been constructed in policy discourses through discourses of 'deficit' as culturally deprived (Archer and Francis 2007). However, in recent years, educational professionals have additionally been asked to engage in direct surveillance of ethnic minority students, and this paper sets out to locate these current developments historically in the context of broader economic, political and social change since the 1950s. The paper builds on arguments developed in a recent book which reported an empirical study of Muslim boys and education in England (Shain 2011). The book offers an assessment of how and why working class boys who identify as Muslim in England have come to be seen as modern day folk devils or as symbol of crisis and change. In the book, I trace and locate the emergence of current discourses of Muslim students as 'problems' in the context of a wider set of economic political and cultural forces including the end of the Cold War and the geopolitical change that has followed. The present paper offers a deeper analysis of the interconnections between the development of education policy and British state attempts at managing diversity since the 1950s. In doing so, my overall goal is to offer a historically informed analysis of the impact of the war on terror on education – an issue that has to date received relatively little attention.

My analysis is framed by the following theoretical assumptions: first, that education policy does not exist in a vacuum. It is shaped by and contributes to wider processes of economic, political and social change. The 1944 Education Act, based on the mantra 'education for all', emerged in a period of relative optimism underpinned by economic

policies which were committed to full employment and a political and social commitment to the redistribution of equality. However, despite the stated aim of increasing opportunities for all children, the middle classes were the main beneficiaries of the Act. The role played by educational processes in sorting and sifting children through processes of labelling and setting, as well as the embedded middle-classness of the education system, contributed to the reproduction of existing inequalities. The 1988 Education Reform Act arrived at a time of significant economic decline, following the recessions of the 1970s. Resorting to a market model and open competition set in motion policies and processes that would contribute to an exacerbation of inequalities experienced by disadvantaged communities. In relation to both Acts, the designs of education systems reflected the processes of wider social change, but education policies and processes were also significant in producing new forms of classed, racialised and gendered inequality. The aim here is not to suggest linear or straightforward connections between the development of race and education policies and this wider contextual background, but to understand how broader patterns of economic, political and social change have underpinned the role of education in state attempts to manage ethnic diversity.

The second assumption is that the economic, political and social forces that underpin state policies are first and foremost global and systemic. Two major and interlinked developments have impacted on the course of education policy in England in the last 50 years and are pertinent to making sense of state attempts at managing ethnic diversity; the first is the significant economic decline that has followed on from the end of the initial boom of the post-World War II period. This decline is associated with the economic restructuring that involved a shift in the economic base from a manufacturing to a service sector, which started in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of increased competition from other national economies such as Germany in the 1970s and China in the 1980s, and entailed significant costs in terms of unemployment and job insecurity. The second development is the loss of Britain's colonies at the end of World War II, which was largely followed by the active recruitment of workers from the former colonies to fill labour shortages created in the immediate aftermath of the war. However, the loss of its colonies did not necessarily lead to a post-colonial state identity and culture for the British state in the initial decades. As Gilroy (2004) has argued, a post-colonial melancholia – the repeated failure to let go of its imperial past – has shaped British state relations and policy in relation to ethnic minorities. Imperial and colonial notions of a 'superior British way of life' and the racialised inferiority or difference of minority groups have been re-worked through modern day constructions of the minorities as 'backward' and 'refusing to integrate', 'untrustworthy' with criminal tendencies, hyper-sexualised and prone to over-breeding (CCCS 1982; Layton Henry 1992; Gilroy 2004). As in colonial times, some categories, primarily middle-class Indians, have been accepted as 'model minorities' (Gillborn 2008; Mirza 2009) and education has been a major vehicle for the further success of these groups.

The third assumption is that education is generally shaped, but not exclusively determined, by economic changes. As Jones (2009) argues, “schools are places where attempts occur to realise the designs of policy – to produce responsible citizens and capable workers. But they are also places where these policies and processes have been resisted”. Multiculturalism, for example, was born out of the resistance of parents and teachers to the racist assumptions embedded in education systems in the 1950s and 1960s and the unequal educational outcomes that followed. Education has recently been the site for organised student resistance to imperialism and war (Cunningham and Lavellete 2004) as well as the neoliberal reform of higher education (Gokay and Shain 2011).

The core argument of the paper is that education and race policies have sometimes developed coherently and sometimes in tension with each other and also with the underlying economic, political and social change that has given rise to them. While assimilation into a (superior) British culture has remained a constant theme (Grosvenor 1997), it has been more pronounced in periods of economic uncertainty and geopolitical dislocations (Gilroy 2004). The targets of containment policies have also changed from African Caribbeans, predominantly, in the 1970s and 1980s to Muslim students, in general, since then, but race (albeit re-coded through ethnicity, community or faith) has remained a central reference point in state discourses on minorities.

The paper is organised into three sections: the first briefly reviews the major economic, policy and social developments that form the backdrop for race and education policies; the second highlights key policy developments in the field of education in relation to state attempts to manage diversity; and the final section focuses in more detail on recent policy developments, specifically the British government’s *Preventing Violent Extremism* strategy, known as *Prevent* which currently implicates educational professionals in the surveillance of particular groups of ethnic minority students.

### **The economic, political and social context for ethnic minority settlement in the UK**

In 2001, ethnic minorities made up 8% of the population, but this figure has been predicted to rise to 20% by 2051 (Tran 2010). Britain has a long history of black immigration going back 500 years (Fryer 1984). However, it was specifically in the post-Second World War period that large numbers of black workers were actively recruited by the British state to fill labour shortages following the economic boom of this period (Anwar 1986; Layton-Henry 1992). In the 1950s and 1960s, African Caribbeans, Indians and Pakistanis (and later Bangladeshis) arrived to take up jobs – a small minority in professions as doctors and teachers but the majority in unskilled labouring work such as manufacturing and textiles. These were often the jobs the indigenous workers were not prepared to do, and involved immigrants working un-social hours often for less pay than white workers (Solomos 1992).

The conditions that gave rise to this active recruitment of black labour are set out below. Immediately after the Second World War, Britain, like other similar industrialised economies in the West, witnessed a period of economic expansion accompanied by social welfare policies of both the Labour and Conservative governments (1945–60). Internationally, this was the most sustained period of economic growth, and it was in this context that black labour was actively recruited to address labour shortages (Anwar 1986; Layton-Henry 1992). In Britain, the Labour government of 1945 to 1951 laid the foundations for the ‘post-war consensus’ by establishing the welfare state and adapting the labour movement to policies of full employment. The Conservative government in 1951 continued this trend, becoming slightly more interventionist in order to achieve economic expansion. By distributing shares and bringing (coal, steel, automobile) industries under state control, they claimed to have a national property-owning democracy. Whether identified as Keynesian (following the principles of economist John Maynard Keynes) or ‘embedded liberalism’ (e.g. Harvey 2009), this set of policies was the result of high rates of economic growth which, accompanied by a period of political and ideological consensus, lasted until the end of the 1960s when the growth slowed down and more and more crises affected the economy.

Britain lost competitive advantage in the global market place from the 1960s onwards as unemployment and inflation rose at home, as a result of which the previous political consensus appeared to be unsustainable. Politically and ideologically, the shaky consensus was also threatened in this decade by the arrival of new social movements, including feminism, black power and the student movement, and by the resistance to racism of immigrant workers and students. It was in this context that the state played an active role in racialising immigration, that is, immigration was constructed as a ‘black’ problem, and this in turn was linked to social problems such as overcrowding and crime (Solomos 1992).

Hall et al. (1978) argue that the end of the post-war liberal consensus created space for a new form of political leadership but one that required a more coercive form of state to manage the crisis caused by the decline of Britain’s manufacturing base in the global economy. The conservative ‘New Right’ government led by Margaret Thatcher took up that space in 1979, with the explicit intention of finding a radical solution to the economic decline and accompanying social and political problems. The policies of the Thatcher administration created consent for what later came to be known as a ‘neoliberal’ and ‘post-welfarist’ agenda which set out to free capital from the constraints of state ownership and investment. What followed was a radical restructuring of workers’ rights and real wages in order to keep investments profitable for the capitalist economy. These policies were underpinned by a global monetarism which was promoted by neoliberal economists such as Friedman, whereas the Keynesian phase had emphasised state planning and in some instances state ownership of key sectors. The neoliberal project set out to disembed capital from these constraints (Harvey 2009).

Race was a central political symbol in the rise of the New Right. It was “mobilised to explain the demise of the post-war liberal consensus, economic decline, welfare dependency and a general lapse in social order and traditional moral value” (Ansell 1997, 26). The classic study by Hall et al. (1978) develops in detail an argument about how, through the use of moral panics around race, youth and crime, the New Right manufactured consent for its economic and political project of ‘rolling back the state’. Racialised stereotypes about black ‘criminals and muggers’ helped to legitimate coercive state measures aimed at the population in general, but particularly targeted disadvantaged groups that were also the most severely affected by the rising unemployment. The increased surveillance of the population in general was achieved through measures such as ‘stop and search’, but this disproportionately targeted African Caribbean men, and as a consequence led to further unrest in towns and cities in the 1980s. By the mid-1980s, African Caribbean youth were being characterised in policy and media discourse as a ticking time bomb (Solomos and Back 1996) and a threat to the ‘British way of life’.

Race and nation were also central themes for the New Labour government elected in 1997. Thatcherite constructions of ‘two nations’ had divided Britain into a privileged nation of ‘good citizens’ who were ‘hard working’ and a contained and subordinated nation which included ethnic minorities and much of the unskilled white working class outside the South East (Jessop 2003). The Blairite ‘Third Way’ between neoliberalism and social democracy promoted the idea of Britain as a ‘single’ nation in which opportunity could be shared by all. Yet New Labour governments also, especially from 2001, posed multiculturalism and ethnic identification as a threat to ‘the nation’, and introduced some of the most draconian anti-immigration and anti-terror legislation that the country has ever seen. New Labour’s ambitious project of redefining Britishness around notions of ‘active citizenship’, ‘rights and responsibilities’ and paid work (Worley 2005) positioned some groups, notably Muslims, asylum-seekers and generally those not in paid employment, as outside the nation and its interests.

By the time the New Labour government was elected in 1997, concerns were being expressed about the growing inequalities resulting from the neoliberal reforms pursued by three successive Conservative governments. There have been various debates about New Labour’s legacy and the extent to which New Labour’s policies marked a continuation of Thatcherite neoliberalism. Giddens (2010) disagrees that they mark any such continuation arguing that New Labour demonstrated a genuine commitment to social justice which was missing from Conservative agendas. It is certainly the case that New Labour’s policies and measures such as the *New Deal for Lone Parents*, *Working Tax Credits*, *Child Tax Credits* and *Surestart* aimed for redistribution, albeit by ‘stealth’. Policies such as *Aim Higher*, *Widening Participation* and the *Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant* also targeted disadvantaged white and ethnic minority youth, aiming to ‘raise aspirations’ and educational achievement and thereby help people to get jobs. New Labour did manage a significant rise in higher

education participation (15% between 1997 and 2012), but research evidence also shows that ethnic minority students end up in 'new' post-1992 universities and on vocational courses. As with the 1944 Education Act, the middle classes made the most of the opportunities offered by the expansion of higher education (Raey et al. 2001; Archer et al. 2003; Modood 2006). There were also increases in the levels of educational achievements of all groups, but the gaps between groups increased and class and ethnicity have consistently been found by researchers to be the biggest predictors of educational and economic success (Gillborn 2008; Mirza 2009). The UK's social mobility rates have also declined over recent decades (Blanden et al. 2004), so that New Labour's policies did much to slow down the onset of the 2008 crisis but did not alter the broad patterns of structural inequality, let alone prevent the crisis altogether.

The 2008 economic and financial crisis was the platform for the election of the new Coalition government in May 2010. With the mantra of 'clearing up the mess inherited from the previous government', the Conservative-Liberal Democratic coalition has pursued austerity measures with the assumption that the private sector will step in to provide jobs for the large numbers of unemployed as a result. But the real priority has been to satisfy the financial elite, bond markets and financial assessors. The government's 2010 Green Paper, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Welfare*, and the White Paper, *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works*, reflect a renewal and deepening of neoliberalisation in the context of the current financial crisis and persistent economic recession. Indeed, Hall (2011) argues that the Coalition government has taken the neoliberal agenda further than any of the three regimes since the 1970s. This intensification of neoliberal policy measures, based on punitive conditionality and economic rationality, is portrayed by the government as 'new and innovative' to restore Britain's economic competitiveness. Education was first in line for cuts in spending: the *Future Jobs Fund*, the cancellation of school building and refurbishment, the abolition of the *Education Maintenance Allowance* and funding cuts in university teaching budgets, fewer university places and a massive increase in university tuition fees. These draconian measures have disproportionately affected poorer communities the most.

Race has not been mentioned overtly by the Coalition government, but the continuation of debates about forced marriages, 'extremism' and immigration have targeted racialised groups, namely Muslims and asylum-seekers, while the targeted cutting of public services has and will disproportionately affect all disadvantaged groups but especially poorer ethnic minorities because of their reliance on public services.

### **Education policy and state attempts to 'manage diversity'**

Against the background of economic boom and political and ideological consensus in the 1950s and 1960s, education was viewed as a key means of integrating the children of immigrant workers, but this integration was to be achieved by assimilationist goals. Over 50 years later, the Coalition government's official strategy for managing diversity still promotes the same goal of assimilation, albeit labelled as 'integration' (DCLG 2012).

As is well documented in the literature (Troyna 1992; Grosvenor 1997; Tomlinson 2008), two key policies confirmed the assimilationist project of British governments in the 1960s. The first was ‘English as a Second Language’ (ESL); the second, which followed on from the first, was the policy of ‘dispersal’.

ESL was ostensibly introduced to help ethnic minorities ‘integrate’ into British society. Language was seen as essential to this integration; however, ESL was seen not just as linguistic assimilation but also as cultural and social assimilation (CIAC 1964). The Department for Education and Science in 1967 referred to “immigrant groups” as “formed by different breeding and ordered by different manners” (cited in Grosvenor 1997, 52). Further, this ‘difference’ was also constructed as threatening to the educational prospects of indigenous children. Linguistic diversity apparently disrupted the learning experiences of indigenous children, but also caused a decline in educational standards. The localised concentration of immigrants in some areas was constructed as inherently threatening to educational standards, as the 1964 report of the Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council (CIAC) stated:

The presence of a high proportion of immigrant children in one class slows down the general routine of working and hampers the progress of the whole class, especially where the immigrants do not speak or write English fluently. This is clearly in itself undesirable and unfair to all the children in the class ... if a school has more than a certain percentage of immigrant children among its pupils the whole character and ethos of the school is altered. .... Moreover, the evidence from one or two areas showed ... a tendency towards the creation of predominantly immigrant schools, partly because of the increase in the number of immigrant children in certain neighbourhoods, but also partly because some parents tend to take native-born children away from schools when the proportion of immigrant pupils exceeds a level which suggests to them that the school is becoming an immigrant school. If this trend continues, both the social and the educational consequences might be very grave (CIAC 1964, para. 25).

The above paragraph reveals early concerns about the effects of concentrations (segregation) of minorities in some localities and about the resultant ‘white flight’ from these neighbourhoods. The concerns led to the introduction of the policy of ‘dispersal’ through the 1965 government White Paper (Home Office 1965). This recommended that immigrant children should make up no more than one-third of a school and that dispersal between schools should be adopted by local authorities. Few local education authorities actually took up the suggestion of dispersal by ‘bussing’ children out of the locality, mostly because of costs rather than because they disagreed with the policy of ‘bussing’ and only 11 authorities had ‘bussed’ children by 1970 (Tomlinson 2008).

By the mid-1960s, teachers and parents were challenging the racist assumptions underpinning education policies such as dispersal and in 1966 the British state moved towards an official strategy of ‘integration’ which was defined as “not a flattening process of assimilation” but one of “mutual tolerance” of cultural difference (Jenkins 1966). In reality, assimilation remained a key policy goal. Integration was the aim,



but it had to be accompanied by the acceptance of assumed superior shared British values. The language of the decade in both official documents and academic work referred to ‘immigrants’, ‘coloured populations’, ‘second language speakers’, and as ‘problems’. Ethnic minority children were constructed as culturally deprived, and as having ‘special needs’, and too many of them were defined as educationally subnormal (Coard 1971). This cultural pathologising, or the construction of the familial and/or cultural background of minorities as inferior or inadequate (Shain 2003), continued in the 1970s through notions of ‘culture clash’ and ‘intergenerational conflict’, and helped to shift the blame for material (racialised and classed) inequalities that were emerging as a result of New Right reforms onto the cultural background of the child.

### ***Multiculturalism and its critique***

Multiculturalism initially emerged, in the 1970s, as a form of resistance on the part of parents and teachers to previous assimilationist policies. However, multiculturalism was not officially adopted by the state until after the publication of the *Scarman Report* into the inner-city disturbances of 1981. The state institutionalised funding of separate ethnic groups and emphasis on culture difference that followed produced not only a backlash from the right-wing press but also from the left and the anti-racists (neo-Marxists), who saw it as a deliberate state attempt to weaken the solidarity that had been built across the left and the black community. From an anti-racist perspective, multiculturalism was always a double-edged sword (Kundnani 2001). It had started out as a defensive survival strategy against New Right popular racism but was now institutionalised as a mode of social control of ethnic minorities:

Multiculturalism now meant taking black culture off the streets – where it had been politicised and turned into a rebellion against the state – and putting it in the council chamber, in the classroom and on the television, where it could be institutionalised, managed and reified (Kundnani 2001).

Despite the state institutionalisation of multiculturalism during the Thatcher and Major years, multiculturalism and its counterpart, anti-racism, were subjected to a “discourse of derision” (Ball 1990). The explicitly ‘colour-blind’ approach to policy pursued by Conservative governments in the 1990s (Tomlinson 2008; Gillborn 2008) fed New Right critiques of multiculturalism as a “looney left” obsession (Grosvenor 1997).

The Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988, enacted in the context of this multicultural backlash, provoked further tension between official state policy (multiculturalist) and education policy, which was profoundly assimilationist. The 1988 ERA “re-made” education (Jones 2003) through its introduction of the market and ‘choice’ into education. However, this ‘modern’ agenda was accompanied by, and indeed a product of, a regressive conservative nationalism with decidedly melancholic imperial undertones. The Act was based on a conception of the ‘nation’ as politically and culturally indivisible. Kenneth Baker, its architect, when introducing the Conservatives’

educational reform programme in September 1987, stated: “children are in danger of losing any sense at all of a common culture and a common heritage. The cohesive role of the national curriculum will provide our society with a greater sense of identity” (Kenneth Baker, cited in Grosvenor 1997, 86).

The 1992 White Paper and the 1993 Education Act, *Choice and Diversity, a New Framework for Schools* took conservative nationalism a step further, stating that “proper regard should continue to be paid to the nation’s Christian heritage and traditions”. And, in the context of wider policies of opting out, parental choice and competition between schools, racism in education became accepted under the New Right as a market force (Gewirtz 2001). As Apple (1999) has argued, race became an “absent presence” in education.

### ***New Labour: Tackling institutionalised racism?***

Against the background of the backlash against multiculturalism, the incoming New Labour government’s decision to commission a public enquiry into the racist murder in 1994 of black teenager Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson 1999) seemed to mark a significant break with the previous Conservative approach to race. The Macpherson enquiry’s finding that “institutional racism” was rife in public services marked a watershed for British politics. It led to the strengthening of existing policy through the Race Relations (Amendment) (RRA) Act 2000 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Under the RRA Act, which came into force in September 2002, educational institutions were legally required to prepare written policies on race equality; to assess the impact of their policies on ethnic minority pupils, staff and parents, with the emphasis on the attainment of ethnic minority pupils; and to monitor levels of attainment in relation to the school population.

Only a handful of authorities actually complied with the new RRA Act’s requirements (CRE 2003), and the Ajegbo review of *Diversity in the Curriculum* (DfES 2007) noted that “issues of ‘race’ and diversity are not always high on schools’ agendas” (2007, 34). Even before the end of New Labour’s first term in office, institutional racism and equal opportunities had been compromised into concepts such as “valuing diversity”, which in practical terms overemphasised the “celebration of differences” at the expense of tackling inequalities and material disadvantage (Mahony and Hextall 2000). By 2003, Home Secretary David Blunkett was arguing that the concept of institutional racism had “missed the point”, and while education policy was out of sync with the legislative context in relation to equality, the neoliberal restructuring of education confirmed the absent presence of race in government policy.

### ***Back to integration or more assimilation?***

New Labour’s approach to dealing with racism from 2001 to 2005 has been described by Back et al. as “the new assimilationism” (Back et al. 2002, 452) but also as “naïve multiculturalism” (Gillborn 2001, 19). As both authors note, New Labour’s

early flirtations with multicultural democracy were combined with melancholic appeals to imperial grandness with these paradoxical impulses, according to Back et al., producing a contradictory vision oscillating to the past and future by turns. Institutionalised racism virtually disappeared from the agenda in this period as the Community Cohesion agenda emerged – as a direct response to the civil disturbances that had occurred in some northern towns in June 2001. This new assimilationist cohesion agenda was given further fuel after the 9/11 terrorist attacks were officially connected to Muslim ‘extremists’ and the USA and Britain officially declared a ‘war on terror’.

Education was seen having a central role to play in “mythbusting” (DCLG 2006) or challenging mutual misunderstandings between “communities”. The official reports (Cantle 2001; Denham 2002) into the causes of the 2001 riots identified the “self-segregation” of Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities as a major cause of the riots. The argument put forward in the Cantle Report was that the geographical separation of white and minority communities was nothing new but the fact that white and Asian people’s lives barely touched was a major factor in causing the ‘misunderstandings’ that had led to the outbreaks of violent protest. This segregation did not just threaten academic standards, as in the 1960s, but potentially presented a threat to the security of the nation. Segregation, it was argued, prevented young people from actively participating in processes of local democracy, leaving them open to misinformation at best and potential radicalisation and ‘extremism’ at worst. In addition to the citation of the lack of language proficiency as a major factor in the cultural segregation of communities, Cheong et al. (2007) note a shift in terms of the policy reading of Muslim communities. What was once seen as ‘good’ social capital – the tightness of Asian family ties – is now being recast as ‘bad’. In Robert Putnam’s terms, Asian communities possessed too much “bonding capital” and not enough “bridging capital” (ibid.), that is, they were constructed as too tightly knit and not outward facing enough; they needed to build both on their social networks if they were to work their way out of marginalisation.

Calls for a more open and honest debate about Britishness (Home Office 2002) led to the engagement of the British government in a project of redefining British citizenship around notions of cohesion and integration and ‘British values’. For New Labour, this was largely conceptualised and pursued through its policies on immigration, namely the White Paper *Secure Borders Safe Haven* (Home Office 2002). In the foreword to this White Paper, Home Secretary David Blunkett justified a new robust system for managing migration, with reference to the need for “us” “to be secure within our sense of belonging and identity” (Home Office 2002). However, as Back et al. argue (2002), the core of this Britishness, or what is really Englishness, was never clearly defined. At times, Britishness was cast as the Other of genital mutilation or forced marriages.<sup>1</sup> At other times, it referred to “fair play and tolerance”.<sup>2</sup> In Gordon Brown’s speeches (2006), ‘hard work, effort and enterprise’ were reframed as core

British values, again betraying New Labour's realignment of British citizenship with a neoliberal state.

Gillborn (2008, 81) describes new Labour's final term (2005–2010) as an era of “aggressive majoritarianism”, when “the rights and perspectives of a white majority were asserted” and, in the context of the ‘war on terror’ and its securitisation of everyday life, they now felt able to freely voice these prejudices in the name of ‘integration’ or ‘security’. The *hijab*, *niqab*, forced marriage and genital mutilation became the subject of intense and detailed debate, not only in Britain but across Europe. However, Britain has not quite taken the steps that France has in banning the *niqab*. Parallels can be drawn here with colonial strategies and the emphasis on ‘winning hearts and minds’ over brutal suppression. However, this ‘winning hearts and minds’ approach also needs to be read alongside reports about the evidence of horrific mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners in what has been called Britain’s “Abu Ghraib” (Cobain 2010). This judicial abuse, torture and war crime, alongside ‘home’ measures, including forced repatriation and detention without trial, keep the threat of state violence ever present alongside a series of ‘soft’ or consensual measures to manage and contain ‘problem’ populations. In the next section, I explore some of the implications of the war on terror for education through the example of one of the most contentious national policies that has implicated educational professionals in the state surveillance of ethnic minorities.

### **The ‘war on terror’, ‘suspect communities’ and education**

In Britain, Muslims have been subject to intense scrutiny since the Rushdie affair in 1989 but concerns about the supposed radicalisation of Muslims, and young men in particular, escalated following the July 2005 London bombings, when Muslims came to be identified as a new “enemy within” (Kundnani 2007, Shain 2009). Whereas the early Ministerial response to the 2005 bombings characterised ‘extremists’ as a tiny fraction of the larger Muslim community, direct links were nonetheless made between ‘terror’ and Islam:

The principal current terrorist threat is from radicalised individuals who are using a distorted and unrepresentative version of Islam to justify violence. Such people are ... a tiny minority within the Muslim communities here and abroad. Muslim communities themselves do not threaten our security; indeed they make a great contribution to our country (Home Office 2006).

As I have argued (Shain 2011), the view that Muslims communities do not themselves threaten our security has largely been swamped by the more provocative notion, of a ‘supportive community’ for terrorism. For example, Home Office Minister John Denham suggested that “few terrorist movements have lasted long enough without a supportive community”. A supportive community does not necessarily condone violence but sees “terrorists as sharing their world view part of the struggle to which

they belong” (Denham 2009). Communities Minister Hazel Blears spelled out in more detail who the individuals might be in a supportive community:

It’s the stay-at-home mum, the taxi driver, the neighbour, the dinner lady ... the student – all of those whose decisions and actions contribute towards making an environment in which extremism can flourish or falter (Blears 2009).

In other words, any ordinary Muslim, even when not directly involved, could potentially provide support for terrorism. This construction of a ‘supportive community’ not only positions *all* Muslims as complicit in terrorism, but articulates in detail who is Other to Britishness and a threat to the British nation. The notion of a supportive community is premised on the assumption of a unified Muslim community based on faith and working directly but covertly against the interests of the British community and has been central to the new racist discourse that constructs Muslims as a “suspect community” – “a sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being ‘problematic’” (Pantazis and Pemberton 2009, 649). The construction of Muslims as suspect has not only been applied to adults but, as I argue below, through the *Prevent* strategy, a pre-emptive and increasingly coercive and punitive state approach towards young people is currently in operation. Justified through a ‘security’ discourse, this strategy implicates education professionals in the surveillance and containment of ‘problem’ ethnic minority students.

### ***The Prevent strategy and education***

Established in 2006 as one of four elements of the government’s counter-terrorism strategy, *Prevent* was officially defined as a strategy that aims to stop “people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism”, and part of an approach to build “strong and positive relationships between people of different backgrounds and a sense of belonging to a shared vision of the future” (DCLG, 2006).

*Prevent* was launched by means of a series of documents and toolkits aimed at supporting schools, colleges, universities and other public bodies in the task of challenging ‘extremist’ behaviour. Extremist behaviour in this context is a term which is simultaneously too vaguely and too specifically defined as a problem of Islam (Shain 2011). This strategy was revised in 2011 following criticism that it alienated rather than co-opted Muslims. The revised *Prevent* strategy, however, has failed to address the criticism that it criminalises and stigmatises Muslims. Rather, it has further extended the definition of ‘extremism’ to any ideology that opposes ‘Britishness’ (Cameron 2011). The focus of the strategy remains on Muslims despite escalations of right wing ‘extremism’ across Europe. *Prevent* funding (£140 million in 2009) has been targeted to areas with high Muslim populations and has included partnerships between the police and community and faith groups, mentoring for vulnerable, ‘at risk’ students, faith awareness weeks in colleges, English-language courses to teach Imams about the importance of issues such as child protection (Shain 2011).

*Prevent* has also been supported by contentious militaristic language. “Winning hearts and minds”, the subtitle of the *Prevent Action Plan* (DCLG 2007), was a key slogan of the British Army, coined to distance the British response from the heavy-handed tactics employed by US soldiers in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. However, as stated earlier, slogans such as ‘winning hearts and minds’ sit uneasily with evidence of the brutal repression of prisoners of war. The *Prevent* strategy has been a central tool in the construction of a ‘war at home’ with a ‘new enemy within’ through its underlying assumption that all Muslims may be susceptible to condoning terrorism. John Denham (cited earlier) went on to suggest that “silence can be interpreted as acquiescence or tacit acceptance”. In other words, as Spalek et al. (2008) point out, the ‘responsible’ and ‘active’ (and gendered, since the onus has been on women to carry this out) Muslim citizen is required to engage in internal community surveillance. If they fail to challenge words and deeds that may be considered to offer support for terrorism, they may themselves be seen as complicit in extremism.

Educational institutions are seen as having a vital role to play in rooting out this terrorism, and a significant part of the *Prevent* programme has involved the embedding of counter-terrorism police within the delivery of local services, including schools, for the purpose of gathering intelligence on Muslim communities (Kundnani 2009). Workshops have been delivered to local schools and colleges by police to assist teachers to ‘spot’ pupils ‘at risk’ of ‘extremism’. In one report, children as young as four were identified as “at risk” (ibid.). Educators and youth workers have expressed concerns that they were expected to be the “eyes and ears” of security policing (ibid.).

In the higher education sector, a number of high profile cases have confirmed suspicions that universities have been required to “spy on students” (Dodd 2006). University campuses have been identified as breeding grounds for terrorism, and vice chancellors asked to monitor the activities of their Muslim students in the interest of ‘security’. *Promoting Good Campus Relations* (DIUS 2007), for example, warns against the dangers of permitting external speakers invited by Islamic societies onto campuses. It is suggested within this paper that such invitees “are able to fill a vacuum created by young Muslims’ feelings of alienation from their parents’ generation by providing greater ‘clarity’ from an Islamic point of view on a range of issues, and potentially a greater sense of purpose about how Muslim students can respond” (DIUS 2007, 21).

This repeats familiar themes of a culture clash that have dominated policy frameworks in relation to Asian and Muslim communities since the 1970s at the same time as it introduces the discourse of ‘grooming’ for extremism. In stark echoes of ‘bussing’, the authors of an ‘independent’ report recommended to the Blair government that universities curtail their Muslim populations in an effort to combat extremism (Glees and Pope 2005). As the *Times Higher Education Supplement* noted at the time, the *Prevent* initiative smacked of “the Cold War use of academics in counter-insurgency activities – essentially using academics as spies” (Baty 2007). Fekete (2008,

102) has described this surveillance as a “revamped version of McCarthyism, with its highly public loyalty reviews and congressional hearings... being injected into the body politic, with particular mutations being developed in particular contexts”. The dominant discourses of global security have affected the broader priorities of educational institutions, especially the research culture and practice of universities, not just through this surveillance but also through the targeted funding of terrorism studies (Jackson et al. 2007). Giroux (2012) refers to this as the militarisation of higher education.

### ***Nation-building and education***

Pre-emptive modes of control have been justified through the discourses of the ‘war on terror’, which in turn have supported a renewed project of nation-building. With the appointment of the new Obama–Brown coalition in 2008, the language of the ‘war on terror’ dissipated,<sup>3</sup> but it continues to impact on the schooling of all young people, especially Muslim children. At the same time, there has been little provision for the safeguarding of Muslim pupils, who have been subjected to increased surveillance and harassment. In 2002, Citizenship Education was made a compulsory part of the curriculum for all 11–16-year-olds in state-maintained schools. The Ajegbo review of *Diversity in the Curriculum* (DfES 2007) was commissioned in 2005 in the aftermath of the London bombings and fears about “‘home grown’ terrorism” (Osler 2009). The review added a fourth pillar, “Identity and Diversity: Living Together”, to the existing three strands of the citizenship curriculum. However, as Osler (2009) argues, contemporary racism is barely mentioned in its suggested schemes of work. Citizenship education, from its inception, was seen as a possible arena for promoting anti-racist education. But it has maintained the social control functions associated with the New Right’s initial attempt to introduce it, in the 1990s, as a “cross curricular theme” (Cunningham and Lavellete 2004). Children are encouraged to be “good” citizens and to engage with a narrow domestic notion of politics, but not to become “too political” (ibid.). Cunningham and Lavellete argue that the contradictions at the heart of the citizenship education curriculum were revealed when school students took to the streets to protest at the prospect of war in Iraq in March 2003. Rather than being seen as ‘active citizens’ exercising their rights to legitimate protest, they were branded by the chief inspector of schools as “irresponsible truants” (ibid.). Some of those engaged in these and other anti-war protests were boys who I interviewed as part of my research that examined educational experiences in the context of the ‘war on terror’ (Shain 2011). At the time of the research, in 2003, citizenship education had just been introduced as a compulsory subject. The boys reported a spontaneous attempt to deal with the ‘war on terror’ through a history lesson when two of them reported, “for a joke”, that they would join the Taliban. The history teacher’s preparedness in this case to discuss the issue was greatly appreciated by the boys. Outside of the assemblies there had been little coverage of 9/11 and wars in Afghanistan and

Iraq. The absence of curricular discussion around the wars further contributed to the stigma that the boys were already feeling within their schools for being associated with Islam (ibid.).

In 2006, just before the current financial and economic crisis reared its head, there was a creeping defence of empire in Ministerial speeches. In 2006, Tony Blair argued that “this country is a blessed nation. The British are special. The world knows it; in our innermost thoughts, we know it. This is the greatest nation on earth” (cited in Gillborn 2008, 722). Gordon Brown reportedly said, “we should be proud ... of the Empire”, that “the days of Britain having to apologise for our history are over”, and that “we should celebrate much of our past rather than apologise for it, and we should talk, rightly so, about British values” (Kearney 2005a; 2005b). Claiming that the empire had given Britain a greater global reach than any other country, Brown specifically linked imperialism with enduring British values of enterprise and internationalism (Lee 2006).

Empire has been a significant theme of the current Conservative Education Secretary Michael Gove’s agenda for the review of the history curriculum. In his speech to the Conservative party conference in 2010, Gove attacked the current approach to history teaching, claiming that it denied children the opportunity to learn about “our island story”:

Children are growing up ignorant of one of the most inspiring stories I know – the history of our United Kingdom. ... Our history has moments of pride and shame, but unless we fully understand the struggles of the past we will not properly value the liberties of the present.

Gove sought the advice of empire-apologist Niall Ferguson in 2010 to help rewrite the history curriculum for English schools. Ferguson is known for politically championing British colonialism, stating that “Empire is more necessary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than ever before”. Andrew Roberts, also approached by the Conservatives, spoke of the British Empire as an “exemplary force for good” (Milne 2010).

Patriotic appeals to Britishness and empire at this moment, alongside a detailed caricature of the Other, need to be analysed in an economic and political context. Back et al. (2002, 450), writing about the contradictions inherent in the New Labour project on ‘race’, suggest that its cohesion policies attempted to reconcile an “aspiration for a model of neoliberal economic growth, based on a rhetoric of globalised economic forces, with an attempt to protect the social integrity of the nation-state”. Britishness tests, citizenship ceremonies and Britishness taught in the school curriculum read from this perspective offer a way of hanging on to a sense of national identity in the face of global economic competition. However, the ‘inclusive’ politics of community cohesion also represents the ‘softer’ consensual face of coercive state attempts to contain and manage problem populations (Burnett 2009). From the latter perspective, educational policies such as Lifelong Learning and Widening Participation which



have targeted poor ethnic minority students, ostensibly offer extended transitions for young people as they face increasingly 'risky and complex' futures as a result of the decline in heavy industry and the growing casualisation of work since the 1960s – as outlined in theories of 'risk' and 'reflexive modernity' (Beck 1991; Giddens 1991). However, critics argue that these policies are also 'soft' tools of containment of the very people who are most disadvantaged by changes in the labour market and growing job insecurity (Brine 2006).

Against the background of rising unemployment and growing economic uncertainty, current appeals to Britishness and the history of empire can be read as desperate attempts to instil national pride in the British public. This comes at a time when Britain's imperial power and status as a leading Western economy is being challenged by strong competition from countries such as China and India and other emerging economies (Gowan 2009, Gokay 2009). The forging of a renewed British identity can be read in this context not just as melancholic (Gilroy 2004) but as an ideological mechanism to deflect attention from a British economy in decline. Patriotic appeals to a mythic Britishness help to create the illusion of a cohesive society at a time when disadvantage and class inequalities threaten to become stark as a result of savage cuts to public funding in the context of significant economic decline.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that since the 1950s successive British governments have characterised minorities as 'problems' to be managed and contained. In the 1950s and 1960s, ethnic minorities in general were blamed for declining educational standards. In the 1970s and 1980s, cultural deprivation and intergenerational conflict positioned African Caribbean young men as largely responsible for the inequalities that had emerged as a consequence of the onset of neoliberalisation of education. Since the 1990s, Muslims, foreign students and asylum-seekers have been the targets of racism and intense disciplinary measures, and have been posed as a threat to the security of the nation. From the 1950s to the present, themes of race and nation and appeals to ethnic minorities to conform, respect or integrate, or rather assimilate, to a 'British way of life' have been a constant thread.

Despite the promise of 'equality' and 'fairness', successive governments since the late 1970s have mobilised 'race', albeit coded through notions of 'ethnicity' and 'community' (Worley 2005) to justify increasingly coercive state approaches to the management of problem populations. At the same time as calling for 'equality', 'fairness' and integration, recent governments have also ideologically segregated the communities they seek ostensibly to unite. Themes of race and nation remain as significant today as they were in the 1950s and 1960s, if not more so. The unacceptable Otherness of particular minorities is being spelled out in detail like never before via the operation in education of strategies such as *Prevent*. Education has become suffused with counter-terrorism and surveillance at the same time as the government's appeal

to 'fairness' in a 'big society'. I have argued that such appeals provide a convenient distraction from the current realities of economic downturn and the further decline in Britain's global power.

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## Notes

- 1 David Blunkett's speeches in the aftermath of the inner-city disturbances in 2001 called on Muslims to abandon such practices. In June 2010, the prime minister announced the criminalisation of forced marriage and a £500,000 fund to be made available to help teachers in schools and colleges to 'spot' victims of forced marriage. Although the legislation has been welcomed by women's and children's rights campaigners, there have also been concerns that the legalisation itself could send the issue underground and risk stigmatising communities (Gill 2009).
- 2 Blair's 'Duty to Integrate' speech (2006); also see Blears (2009)
- 3 After the failed bomb attacks in 2007, Gordon Brown is said to have developed new guidelines for ministers directing them to 'drop' the 'war on terror' language and 'banning' them from connecting Muslims with terrorist attacks due to concerns of undermining cohesion (*Daily Express* 2007); there was also a shift in language adopted by the then Home Secretary Jacqui Smith in 2008 when she referred to alleged terrorist activities as anti-Islamic activity (*Daily Mail* 2008, January 17); in 2007 (*Guardian*, January 17), David Miliband described the government's use of the 'war on terror' terminology as 'a mistake'.

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*Farzana Shain* teaches and researches in the School of Public Policy and Professional Practice at Keele. She has published widely on educational inequalities and identities including the books *The schooling and identity of Asian girls* (2003: Trentham Books) and *The new folk devils: Muslim boys and education in England* (2011: Trentham Books).

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# Understanding black academic attainment

## Policy and discourse, educational aspirations and resistance

*Cecile Wright\**

### Abstract

This article is a contribution to the ongoing issue and debate concerning the performance of black children in British schools. The issue of under-performing black students is longstanding and persistent. There has been a lack of political will to rectify the matter. On the contrary, the inculcation of neo-liberal education policies with their emphasis on competition and choice is exacerbating existing inequalities. It is argued that an understanding of inequalities can be enhanced by intersectional analysis. The post-school experience of black students indicates a desire to transform their relative school failure through the use of wider community resources. A case study reveals the attempts of black students to move beyond their negative school experience. Critical social capital in the black community can foster a proactive approach in access to post-school education.

*Keywords:* black students, neo-liberalism, educational desire, community

### Introduction

The presence of black and minority ethnic children within the British education system has been viewed as an “educational problem and a threat to the educational standards of the White community” (Osler, 1997 p. 18). Black and minority students entered an education system over 50 years ago that was biased by social class but which then became racially biased (Tomlinson, 2008). This paper is concerned with understanding the continued inequalities of school experiences and outcomes of African Caribbean (hereafter “black”) students. It has three parts. The first discusses the issues of low attainment at school and explores the policy response and context relating to the educational outcome of black children. The second part discusses the theoretical framework concerned with ‘embodied intersectionality’ of race, gender and social class in making sense of the role of education in the (re)production of inequality and the narrative struggle relating to the materiality of educational experience. The third part asks: “why, despite the context of endemic, race, gender and class inequality,

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\*School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, UK. E-mail: [cecile.wright@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:cecile.wright@nottingham.ac.uk)

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is there a persistent expression of educational aspiration and optimism among black students?” This is akin to what Mirza (2006) describes as “educational urgency”. This is examined through a case study of black students permanently excluded from school who during post-compulsory schooling were able to adapt, survive and succeed in spite of their negative experience. In essence, it examines education as a “transformative mantle” (Mirza, 2006).

### **Background: School attainment, policy discourse and contexts**

The enduring inequalities experienced by black students in schools in England have been extensively documented (Coard, 1971; Rampton, 1981; Swann, 1985; Eggleston, 1986; Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Wright et al., 2000; Wright, 2010; Wright, 2012; Mocombe and Tomlin, forthcoming). The literature shows that black students attain persistently lower outcomes at age 16 than their white peers. Recent reviews of research indicate that black children commenced their schooling with high ability and show themselves to be capable students but, as they get older, their achievements decline (see Wright, 1987a; Archer et al., 2007; Rhamie, 2007). Although black students persistently achieve lower outcomes at age 16, in 2007 their outcomes were slightly higher than those of children of Pakistani origin (DEF, 2012). The variation in educational achievement (particularly for black male students) is also linked to high exclusion (or suspension) rates (Wright et al., 2010).

What are the explanations and responses to the plight of black students within the British education system? Wright argues, “Within general educational discourse black children’s schooling experiences and underperformance have been ascribed to, inter alia, deficits, cultural differences and family practices.... Moreover, the discourse in Britain concerning black children as a problem to be managed is also reflected historically and contemporaneously through social policy. For example, social policy initiatives employed to respond to black children in British schools have taken the form of assimilation to the current ‘colour blind’ approaches which have entailed the erasure of ‘race’ from policy...” (Wright, 2010, p. 306). Further, Tomlinson has argued “Although there have been some positive legislative and policy developments, particularly the use of civil law and human rights legislation to penalise racial discrimination, the education system over the past 50 years has developed within a socio-political context in which there has been a lack of political will to ensure that all groups were fairly and equitably treated”.

In relation to the evident continuing discrimination and racial inequality prevalent in education, and more widely in contemporary British society, attention is drawn to the neoliberal and management directions of policy within the education sphere (Ball, 2008; Tomlinson, 2008).

Neoliberalism is a theory of practices that suggests that the well-being of people is best served by freeing individuals’ entrepreneurship from regulation and state interventions within a framework of private property rights, free markets and free trade (see Harvey, 2007). The role of the state is to create this framework. In addition, if

markets, i.e. competition, do not exist then they must be created, if necessary, by the state. State interventions should be minimal. Individualism should be paramount and forms of social solidarity minimised. This is coupled with an emphasis on ‘freedom’, the essentials of which are free enterprise and private ownership. In practical terms, the state should be used to privatise utilities and industries, curb trade union power, reduce public spending especially on welfare, reduce taxation, sell off public housing, deregulate the financial sector and deregulate labour laws.

In the UK it was the Conservative government elected in 1979 that began the process of neoliberal reform. This included reform of the education system. This was part of a long-term process of ‘modernising’, i.e. dismantling the welfare state. The aim was to extend the ideal of personal responsibility and cut back on the role of the state. After 30 years of neoliberal policy it has proved difficult to dismantle public sector education. For example, it took a Labour government in 2003 to succeed in introducing payment (tuition fees) for access to higher education. In general terms, a culture of entrepreneurialism, managerialism, financial accountability and productivity has been imposed on schools (e.g. see Ball, 2008). The role of the local state (local education authorities: LEAs) has been reduced and market principles – especially competition – have been introduced. The attempt by the present Coalition government (Taylor, 2012) to persuade/force/direct/bribe all schools to be free of LEAs and become ‘academies’ (i.e. semi-privatised schools) often sponsored by private business is a move along the path of competition between schools and ‘freeing’ them from the state. Education is thus becoming a competitive enterprise.

Accompanying this is the concept of ‘choice’, i.e. the right of parents to choose the school they want for their child. In practice, this means that those parents with greater financial and cultural capital are far more likely to receive their choice of school than others. Hence, white middle-class parents are more likely to reinforce their own educational advantage while black parents and children are disadvantaged (e.g. Weeks-Bernard, 2007). Thus a market orientation based on ‘choice’ and competition leads to the exacerbation of class and racial inequalities with the elites not contemplating the state education system for their children. It was the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) that intensified notions of choice, competition between schools and reduced LEA influence. From this date onwards, individuals would be blamed for low attainment along with ‘failing schools’ and certain ethnic minority students, i.e. black students. The introduction of state set tests (SATs) and league tables increased the competition. As a result, a hierarchy was created between more and less desirable schools, the latter being disproportionately attended by black and minority ethnic students.

At the school level, the selection and separation of students is part of the neoliberal agenda (see e.g. Gillborn, 2010). This is based on the supposed natural differences in intelligence. In UK schools this results in students being placed in particular sets across the curriculum. This leads to disproportionate numbers of black students being placed in lower sets (see e.g. Gillborn, 2010).

Neoliberal education policy as applied to British education has resulted in schools and universities becoming competitive enterprises with parents/students competing for the 'best' institutions (Weeks-Bernard, 2007). It has led to greater class and ethnic segregation. The system is increasingly driven by market forces, competition and group self-interest.

### **Intersectionality, educational inequality and resilience**

This section explores the theory of intersectionality and social locations alongside a discussion of social action in relation to the black communities' political mobilisation around racial inequality in education. In the main, intersectional analysis was created by black feminists as an attempt to counter work by feminists to "homogenize women's situations" (Yuval-Davis, 2011). It developed as an integrated analysis of interlocking systems of oppression and specifically the intersection of gender, race and social class in the lives of black women. In essence, the approach examines the ways in which race, gender, class and so on intersect to affect social behaviour or people's lives. The term "intersectionality" was introduced by Crenshaw in a discussion of black women's employment (Crenshaw, 1989). As mentioned, there was increasing use of the concept in feminist work on how women are simultaneously positioned as women and as black working class and so on. This was an attempt to avoid individuals being reduced to one category at a time and therefore to treat social positions as relational, since "multiple positioning constitutes everyday life" (Yuval-Davis, 2011). It is important to note intersecting dimensions of race, class and gender can result in privileges or penalties depending on their positioning. Gender is racialised, race is gendered. What it is to be a working-class white male is very different from what it is to be a working-class black male. Moreover, black and minority groups have experienced patterns of discrimination irrespective of social class and gender.

Yuval-Davis (2011) raises questions about intersectional analysis' lack of influence on stratification theory. In particular, she sees intersectionality as a proxy for stratification theory and vice versa. She explains, "stratification – or social stratification, relates to the differential hierarchical locations of individuals and groupings of people on society's grids of power" (p. 12). In her analysis she outlines the essence of the key stratification theories in relation to intersectionality. For example, as she explains, social power in Marxist terms varies according to the access people have to the means of production. Weberian approaches to stratification relate people's access to status, power and economic resources. In effect, the struggle for status and a closing of ranks by superior status groups was as important as market domination. However, for Bourdieu there is no sharp differentiation between stratification levels in a hierarchy as there is an emphasis on consumption relating to cultural and social capital; "Class boundaries become linguistic constructions" (p. 15). For Yuval-Davis, Bourdieu's work can be seen as intersectional analysis in that men and women interact to produce, for example, male domination.

With regard to debates concerning the nature of the relationship between the power structure and education (Arnot, 2002), an intersectional stratification approach can assist in framing our understanding of this nature. Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical framework is primarily concerned with the ways in which social and educational inequalities can be understood as contextually produced, within and across social fields, through interactions between the "habitus" and forms of resource, or "capital" (economic, social and symbolic).

The application of Bourdieu's concepts/notions of capital to education has highlighted how social class inequalities are produced within schooling and post-compulsory education. For example, money and economic forms of capital are invariably important to the reproduction of educational inequalities as they can be utilised to purchase various forms of advantage and mobility (or deployed to protect against risks, costs and fixity (Archer et al., 2007). Social capital indicates forms of social participation and connection such as membership of networks, groups, communities, facilities and so on. Cultural capital refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups, credentials used by employers and elite groups as a way to unfairly and arbitrarily screen out some individuals and subordinate groups from privileged jobs and social positions. In essence, in the use of Bourdieu's analysis attention has been brought to bear on how middle classes generate and defend their privileged positions thanks to their possessions and deployment of dominant, symbolically legitimated, forms of economic, cultural and social capital which they use to successfully negotiate educational markets (see Ball, 2008, p. 26).

As mentioned, the application of Bourdieu's concepts of capital to education has been formulated with reference to white communities, and hence caution needs to be taken when extending these notions to black communities. It is recognised that caution should be applied to extending Bourdieu's theoretical contributions to understanding of the achievement of black boys and girls – who often appear to 'overcome' classed inequalities (Archer et al., 2007).

For example, it follows that the issue of the low school attainment of black students is at odds with their post-compulsory school experience. According to this view, black students with GCSE results around or below the national median are more likely to go on to higher education than white students with similar results (NEP, 2010a, p. 15). Bourdieu's emphasis on cultural capital as the source of educational success for middle-class children has its limitations. Halsey et al. (1980) found that material factors were far more significant than cultural ones in working-class educational failure. Whilst this factor may be true to an extent for some black families, their quest for a better life through the education system is paramount irrespective of their class. In the discussion of the experiences of the long established black/Caribbean community in Britain it should also be noted that considerable debate has taken place with regard to how the black community has engaged with and responded to inequalities

of 'race' particularly in relation to education (Goulbourne, 2002). The remainder of this paper applies an intersectional stratification theoretical consideration to a case study which examines how young black people manage, survive and transform school 'failure' through requisite resources and opportunities made available via social capital facilitated through institutional relationships such as family, kin and community-based organisations.

## **The study**

The issues referred to above were highlighted in a study of young black people's post-compulsory school experiences. The research was documented over a two-year period and combined quantitative data with qualitative interviewing. The data upon which the article is based include 100 narrative interviews conducted with 33 young people (21 male, 12 female) between the ages of 14 and 19 who had experienced permanent school exclusion [1]. The young people were drawn from those residents in Nottingham and London who had been excluded from both state and independent schools. The young people were interviewed on a maximum of three occasions over a period of two years. Participants were asked to talk about various aspects of three themes: their view on self-following exclusion, sources of support and coping strategies for transforming school exclusion and their views on current personal circumstances and ambitions for the future. Additional data are provided from over 60 interviews with contacts nominated by the young people, including community and social workers, mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings and friends.

Traditionally, these young people are often described as hard to reach (Merton, 1998). Thus a snowballing sample method was used to access the young people for the study. These included contacts with African Caribbean community groups, black organisations, supplementary schools and the black church. The nature of this snowballing process meant that it was impossible to secure an equal number of young people in terms of gender and age. Meetings with the young people were conducted in varied locations including their homes, university and community venues.

Integral to the research design was the desire to both engage and empower the young people. In this vein, the use of visual methods was valuable in the following respects. Firstly, we anticipated that traditional one-to-one interviewing would not necessarily be the best way to carry out the research with the young excluded people because they are likely to have experienced many interview situations where the aim was to prove their responsibility for the exclusion. After considering other methods, visual research methods, namely participant photography, were chosen to place the young people at the centre of the research process.

The empowerment of the research participants was at the core of the research design so further discussion of the efficacy of the status of the researcher within the research process is required. This form of reflexive thinking accords with black feminist researchers' concerns with understanding the intersection of race, class, gender

and age in the research process (Hooks, 1989; Reynolds, 2005). Our experiences as black female, middle-class researchers interviewing young black females and males, in essence our 'insider/outsider' status, meant that we were attentive to how gender, race, class and age status impacts on the research process and interactions with the young people. For instance, whereas our racial and gender ascription minimised our outsider status in our interaction with the young women, our age and assumed class affiliation may have been taken as sources of potential domination. As a result of our occupations, during the interviews we were perceived to be middle-class because it was felt by the young people that we had access to certain information and resources to which they had restricted access. Some of the working-class young people sought our opinion about social and educational aspects of further and higher education. They also asked for advice on career matters!

## **Findings**

The paper focuses on the ways in which young black people resist and work to transform their negative school experience. Building on the notion of 'grassroots' civic citizenship, it identifies how agency, individual response, resistance and challenge are linked to the requisite resources and opportunities made available through social capital facilitated through institutional relationships such as the family, kin and community-based organisations. Employing an intersectional stratification analysis offers new insights about black students' educational aspirations, and the circumstances within their lives that inform their educational experiences/attainment of post-compulsory schooling.

## **Identity formation and 'educational desire'**

A key theme arising from the study was how the young black people having been labelled as 'failing' transformed this label into a desire to have a positive educational outcome. Thomson et al. (2002) explain young people's diverse reactions to significant turning points in growing up. This is captured by the idea of 'critical moments'. An equally apt analytical framework to capture the perceptions of change as a cause/effect or catalyst-to structure and/or agency is the notion of recovery and redemption or what Harding (2010) refers to as the "turnaround narrative". In his study of adolescent boys living in black neighbourhoods in the US context, Harding (2010) explains the narrative of "recovery and redemption" as denoting someone of humble origins who achieves success through hard work and ingenuity. This is considered to be a widespread American idea. It involves recovery from a setback or personal failure. Key elements of the "turnaround narrative" include recognising previous errors – addiction or street crime; getting away from people or places that contribute to past problems; participating in schooling, churches or community programmes; becoming economically independent through work; gaining a family; recognising the importance of gaining educational qualifications to make a turnaround. In es-

sence, the “turnaround narrative” is about making a change in one’s life and having the desire to change. Certainly the findings of this study highlighted how the young people became engaged in pursuing the turnaround narrative. The desire for change, overcoming adversity and possibilities for success are highlighted in the comments of Leon, Lucinda and Keenan [2]:

I want a decent job ... and anything that pays ... then look for an office job when I get a bit older and wear a suit and tie and everything ... it’s not like I’m dumb ... I’ve got plans. I got ideas for the future (Leon).

I’ve done my work experience and I’m doing Business and Finance now ... I want to go to university and study a degree in Business and Finance. Then hopefully get a job like in Financial Services or an accountant or something in that area (Lucinda).

I need to go back to college, go to school and don’t get kicked out. It’s not good in the long run ... it’s hard to find a decent job without qualifications (Keenan).

The young black people’s narratives are suffused with notions of culture, individual agency, familial/community responsibility, subjectivity and becoming. Their narratives suggest why, despite low attainment at age 16, young black people participate disproportionately more in higher education. Overlooking the differential outcomes of ethnic minorities in education, the drive for social progression through educational attainment is demonstrated by the fact that while ethnic minority communities account for 8% of 18–24-year-olds in Britain, they make up almost twice this proportion of university entrants (Shiner and Modood, 2002, p. 210). The National Equality Panel found that those from minority ethnic groups with GCSE results around or below the national median are more likely to go on to higher education than white British pupils with similar results (2010a: 15). Building on the idea that working-class university students seek to better the occupational position of their parents, Mirza argues that for members of the black community this “educational urgency” is a racialised process (2006, p. 144). Reflecting on findings from her study of second-generation young Caribbean working-class women, she suggests that while on the surface they wanted to climb the career ladder and were seeking academic success by gaining qualifications, as she dug deeper she found their motivation was not simply driven by a desire for educational credentials but “educational urgency”, a desire to succeed against the odds and forge new identities that were grounded in a refusal to be quantified as failures (2006, p. 144). In this sense, education was a “transformative mantel” (Mirza, 2006, p. 143).

### **The role of family and parenting in models of success**

Studies have highlighted the influence of families in transitions. For instance, Ball and Maguire’s (2000) studies of post-16 youth in new urban economies found how important the influence of families was in offering and generating resources for iden-



tity formation. Within Britain the black family is stereotyped as lacking the values which are likely to achieve educational success (Fordham, 1998; Reynolds, 2006). Contrary to black parental cultural capital being a barrier to educational success, the critical race theory perspective, particularly the work of Yosso (2005) and Carter (2003) suggests that, instead of positioning the culture of young black people and their family's engagement as being in opposition to educational success or lacking the dominant cultural capital necessary for academic success, theoretical space should be made for a different set of values and behaviour to coexist. Rollock et al.'s (2011) "Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Class" study in the UK examines the educational perspectives, strategies and experiences of Black Caribbean heritage middle-class families as they attempt to navigate their children's success through the education system. Black middle-class parents in the study were active in supporting their children's education outside school. They draw on their social networks, often with other black middle-class professionals, in order to provide children with positive representations of black people, and obtain practical help and advice (Vincent et al., 2011, p. 6). They enrol their children in a range of extra-curricular activities or tutoring. Activities include music, sport, dance, drama, black mentoring and youth organisations (Vincent et al., 2011, p. 5). Notably, extracurricular activities have been identified as interventions with some demonstrable impact on the aspirations, attitudes and behaviours of children in relation to academic attainment and participation (Cummings et al., 2012, p. 4).

The findings in this research resound with the Rollock et al. (2011) study. The young black people unanimously agreed that they had received support from their parents. This support included advice about how to tackle racism and how to succeed in their education. The young people asserted that the strategies fostered a 'sense of belonging' and served as a powerful driving force for educational aspirations and participation.

"They (the family) kept me up and encouraged me a lot ... they were always there for me and from the beginning they believed in me" (Tony).

Below, David recalls how his father had sought legal advice after he was excluded:

...because he cared and wanted to help me out of the situation... (David).

Many of the young people had reported that the negative educational experiences and the endeavour to forge success and the family support later offered had led to an improvement in familial relationships:

She (the mother) believed in me. I think it might have brought us closer together closer because she actually believed me and trusted me ... showed me how to cope ... I was happy that she believed me. I was glad that she was there to support me (Nelson).

My mum was helping me, she's there all the time for me, she was pushing me like 'you need to get back into another school or centre or something at least to carry on your education' and she did help me ... I had good support from my family (Miranda).

Thus parents were considered to have played a role in steering their children towards successful academic success through the employment of various strategies including the effective capitalisation of the social capital they had developed through their family network. Moreover, the mothers were observed to be at the forefront of everything. Reay (2000) posits that mothers' emotional support of their children's academic success transfers to educational and social prestige. According to Ball and Maguire (2000), class and economic factors might affect mothers' ability to "divert their emotional involvement into generating academic profit for their children".

### **Community solidarity, grassroots citizenship and their possibilities**

Historically, in the UK urban black communities have been critical sites for black-Caribbean individuals forging a politics of struggle and resistance (Goulborne, 1989). The critical mass of black Caribbeans in these urban spaces facilitated political organising and protest. It is argued that the community bonds in these urban spaces/neighbourhoods created spaces for the development of day-to-day strategies and networks of survival and self-reliance (Reynolds, 2008). Through such urban spaces social solidarity was formed. The historically successful role and impact of community-led initiatives in shaping the transitional experience of young people (Wright et al., 2010) were a recurring theme in the interviews with many of the black young men in this study. A particular theme was their concern about the limited social and economic opportunities they faced as part of their everyday lives and also the restrictions placed on their ambitions and expectations for economic success and inter-generational social mobility. Building on the theme of community solidarity, the findings suggested that the young people engaged with community-based organisations which facilitated a work ethos, attitudes of self-worth and black identity. As the remarks by Peter suggest:

... the ISSP, they giving me help as well ... they like keeping off the streets like ... more constructive things to do like more positive things in my mind (Peter).

A recurring theme in the young black men's narratives was their encounters with black professionals, as exemplified by attempts to challenge negative images of black masculinity by positive self-identity. This was done by encouraging black boys away from the symbols of negative stereotypes and providing them with emotional and educational support. This was predicated on seemingly unconditional mutual respect, as this comment asserts:

...it made me do a lot of thinking for myself, it made me self-conscious and not so arrogant ... because there are two paths for me in the situation that I was in ... I had to decide which one I had to take, and I took a lot of stick but was given a lot of advice, suggestions ... (James).

The black professionals in the study highlighted the pivotal role of community-based organisations in achieving a sense of inclusion within the young black men. Further, this was seen as a prerequisite for achieving success. The black professionals did this by attempting to provide the opportunities denied the young men by education and other mainstream organisations:

I just have a team that is trying to support the young people for what they have been through and supposed to get and have been denied of, and try to do the best we can do within the parameters and move the boundaries and knock the door hard and move the doors off the hinges to make changes (Youth Advocate Manager, ISSP, London).

Any gaps in society, try and help plug those (Community Development Officer, Nottingham).

Moreover, Reynolds (2008) suggests that localised community programmes such those offered by black community organisations, churches etc. play a pivotal role in ameliorating the effects of the social exclusion of young black people. It should be recognised that despite the apparent problems associated with black locality, such as for example poverty or limited social mobility, these spaces hold intrinsic values in the lives of young people.

Broadly speaking, the community-based organisations highlight the impact of community, cultural, social and capital on the young black people's attempts to achieve progress. In particular, the evidence demonstrates how community-based organisations in black communities provide the young people with critical social capital in the form of connections to community-based organisations. It is observed that organisations' work with the young people includes fostering a pro-active approach to accessing educational opportunities, strategies for social progress, activities devoted to developing a constructive racial and cultural identity and a focus on achieving success through personal transformation (Wright et al., 2010).

## **Conclusion**

This paper began by examining the "enduring inequalities experienced by black students in England". The permeation of educational policy by neoliberal theory will undoubtedly enhance inequalities in educational provision and outcome as it has in UK society as a whole over the last 30 years (Harvey, 2007). Under the guise of freedom of choice the white flight towards 'better' schools is leaving black families with only one choice – their local school (Weekes-Bernard, 2007). It can be argued

that black children are being viewed as an 'educational problem' and a threat to the educational standards of the white community. Hence, we are witnessing increasing educational segregation.

The use of intersectionality to explore issues underlying racial inequality in education has revealed the interfacing of social identities – race, gender, class – and the increasing structural inequality. Neoliberal education policies tend to reinforce Bourdieu's notions on how middle classes – predominantly white middle classes – enhance their privileged positions in education through their access to economic, social and cultural capital. These are the assets that disproportionately benefit white middle-class families in an educational marketplace increasingly based on competition and choice.

The paper has also shown that, despite the unequal outcomes between white and black students in schooling, black students are disproportionately more likely to go on to higher education. This suggests that the inequalities in access to cultural and economic capital do not determine access to higher education. Black families have long persisted in their endeavours to improve their livelihoods via the education system.

The case study highlights the desire of black students to transform their negative school experiences. For the 'black community' educational attainment can be seen as a proxy for social mobility and a counter to the structural inequality embedded in the education system.

The present trends in the UK education system will pose serious challenges for the black community in its attempts to counter this inequality. Although the British state has legislated against racial discrimination the state has done little in recent years to develop fairness and equity for black and minority ethnic students in education. The education system has not actively sought to provide a fair and equal education for all. Indeed, population segregation by area results in segregated education. This is allied to growing media and political hostility to 'multiculturalism' (see e.g. Tomlinson, 2008). Further, black males are predominately demonised as the main elements in gun and drug culture and crime (Wright 2010). The attempts by teachers and LEAs to develop a more equitable system has been replaced by competition between schools (Taylor, 2012). Multicultural, anti-racist education now appears to be in the past as the market decides what schools will teach and who their students will be.

The increase in the market of 'faith' schools (i.e. schools of predominately one religion) further exacerbates segregation. In addition, the increased labelling of schools as 'failing schools' with its agenda of closing them and re-opening them as 'academies' is occurring under the guise of 'increasing standards' (e.g. Taylor, 2012). In practice, there is likely to be more selection and exclusion of pupils on grounds of behaviour. This has for many years disproportionately affected black students (Wright, 2012).

A market-based system driven by an ideological commitment to consumer demand will result in more private sector involvement. Such a system based on group interest inevitably benefits those parents most able to use their resources to gain access to the

'best' schools for their children (Weeks-Bernard, 2007). In such a system, the principles of addressing inequality, black educational underperformance and 'education for all' are likely to be unimportant. The resilience of the black communities in supporting children deemed to have failed in the school system will be a major challenge.

## **Notes**

- 1 The findings are drawn in a study funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, "Overcoming school exclusion and achieving successful youth transitions within African Caribbean Communities, 2003–2005".
- 2 All the names of the interviewees are pseudonyms.

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*Cecile Wright* is Professor of Sociology, Independent Researcher and honorary lecturer, at the School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, UK. Her research focus is on race, ethnicity, gender and social class, youth, education and postcolonial theory.

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# The politics of intercultural education in Cyprus

## Policy-making and challenges

Christina Hajisoteriou\* & Panayiotis Angelides\*\*

### Abstract

The main goal of this study is to examine the politics of the development of intercultural education policy in Cyprus. More specifically, it examines the content of intercultural policies developed by the state and particularly the Ministry of Education and Culture. In addition, the study focuses on the challenges that may impede the development and implementation of such policies. The analysis draws upon policy documents collected from the Ministry of Education and Culture and interviews carried out with Cypriot policy-makers. The Ministry has initiated an educational reform, including a reform of the national curriculum, leading towards a more intercultural orientation. Nonetheless, the findings of this research indicate there is a gap between policy rhetoric and practice.

*Keywords:* intercultural education, intercultural policy, Cyprus education

### Introduction

The socio-historical context of Cyprus entails various consequences for intercultural education. Since 1960, Cyprus has been an independent, sovereign republic of a presidential type. The 1960 constitution of the Republic of Cyprus recognises the Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot groups as the two major communities of the island and establishes Greek and Turkish as official languages. Armenians, Maronites and Latins constitutionally belong to the Greek-Cypriot community, while the Turkish-speaking Roma (Gypsies of Cyprus) are affiliated to the Turkish-Cypriot community. Nonetheless, the division of the island in 1974 led to the massive relocation of Greek-Cypriots to the South and Turkish-Cypriots to the North. Even though since 1974 the Greek-Cypriot government has only controlled the southern part of Cyprus, it is recognised as the *de jure* government of the whole island. The current paper thus focuses only on the officially recognised state.

The 2000s proved to be a watershed for changes in the Cypriot socio-political environment and thus for intercultural education. In 2004, Cyprus became a member of the European Union (EU). Cyprus forms part of the ‘Southern European bloc’ along

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\*University of Nicosia, Research Foundation, Nicosia, Cyprus. E-mail: hadjisoteriou.c@unic.ac.cy

\*\*University of Nicosia, Cyprus. E-mail: angelides.p@unic.ac.cy

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with countries that are geographically located around the Mediterranean Sea and politically situated in the 'South' (i.e. Italy, Spain and Greece). Southern European states share a semi-peripheral/peripheral status within the EU due to the economic and power disparity between the 'north' (geographically located in the central-northern region of the EU) and the 'south'. They have transformed from being net sources of immigration to 'importers' of immigrants. However, their own people's former experience of discrimination (due to their status as immigrants in the past) does not necessarily restrict their current role as 'oppressors' (Trimikliniotis and Fulias-Souroulla 2006). On the contrary, the Southern European states have been called upon to become the 'frontier' of 'Fortress Europe' by eliminating the inflow of 'outsiders' into the EU. Cyprus's participation in the European endeavour under these terms has seemed to "act as an additional layer of nationalism as European Unionism creating a boundary in this 'new' identity and politico-cultural space vis-à-vis the non-European other" (Trimikliniotis 2001, 61). Consequently, Eastern Europeans and Asians, who form the largest proportion of immigrants in Cyprus, are in danger of being excluded or subordinated on the basis of their non-EU citizenship.

In education, the debate about educational provision in diverse school communities – at the level of compulsory education – only appeared on the Cypriot political agenda towards the end of Cyprus' accession negotiations with the EU. Immigrants were not originally recognised as a group at risk of exclusion due to their temporary residence status. This has led to a shortage of research focusing on intercultural policies. Prior to Cyprus' accession to the EU, immigrant workers did not have the right of family reunification. This meant they often migrated to Cyprus without their partners and children. Previous ethnographical studies indicate that the Cypriot education system has fostered policies and practices promoting the assimilation of immigrant pupils (Angelides et al. 2004, Panayiotopoulos and Nikolaidou 2007, Hajisoteriou 2010). Notably, Angelides and Stylianou (2005) argue that Cypriot schools function as a pot of assimilation by merely marginalising immigrant pupils, who are presented as an obstacle to the smooth operation of society and the school. The aforementioned considerations trigger further questions about the ways in which Cypriot schools may develop and implement inclusive practices fostering intercultural education.

Further, previous research reports various barriers to the development and implementation of intercultural policies that mainly derive from the content and structure of the Cypriot education system (i.e. curriculum, teacher training, infrastructure). Thereafter, research in the field also engages with initiatives that could potentially promote the development of intercultural education in Cypriot schools. The need to develop school-based curricula is a suggestion that emerged from all of the above studies. Angelides, Stylianou and Leigh (2004, 313) suggest that the curricula of all pupils should include "programmes to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination". Such programmes may develop teachers' awareness and teaching methodologies within diverse settings, and they can also encourage students' collaboration

and interaction. Moreover, Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou (2007) propose that school-based curricula should promote teaching of the Greek language to pupils and their parents, and that reception and tutoring classes should be created for immigrant pupils' preparations to enter mainstream schools. Papamichael (2008) goes a step further in recommending the introduction of bilingual education by teaching in the languages of both the host society and the countries of origin.

In this context, the current research seeks to examine the content of intercultural policies in Cyprus initiated and/or developed by the state and particularly the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). Further, it examines the ways in which Cypriot policy-makers conceptualise such policies, and the implications of this process for national constructs of intercultural education. Last but not least, the study focuses on the challenges that may impede the development and implementation of intercultural education policy. The contribution of this paper therefore is that it advances theory in terms of the ways in which Cypriot policy-makers: (a) conceptualise policies for intercultural education; and (b) understand the ways these policies influence the practice of intercultural education. Building on international literature and discourse and looking at what happens in other countries (i.e. Greece), we attempt to conceptualise the politics of intercultural education in Cyprus.

### **The reform of intercultural policy in Cyprus: Politics and challenges**

The strong critique of the policy for intercultural education developed by the MEC necessitated a reinterpretation of the assimilationist direction of education. Moreover, prior to Cyprus' accession to the European Union in 2004 European influences mainly coming from European institutions – such as the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), which was later renamed the Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) – pressured the MEC to refrain from monoculturalism (Hajisoteriou 2010). On that account, the state had to evidence its capacity to design an intercultural policy. To this end, during the 2003–2004 school year the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) launched the Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) programmes on a pilot basis. The policy of the Zones of Educational Priority constitutes a strategic choice of the MEC in order to fight functional illiteracy, school failure and school marginalisation in schools with high concentrations of immigrant pupils (Giannaka et al. 2007). In addition, in 2004 the MEC began a campaign to address issues related to intercultural education. The slogan “Democratic Education in the Euro-Cyprian Society” was adopted to describe the efforts to give the national education system an intercultural orientation (CER 2004, 1).

The Committee of the Educational Reform reinforced the following educational goals (CER 2004): (a) eliminating the ethnocentric and monocultural elements in Cypriot education; and (b) promoting an intercultural ideology that connects the Cypriot

tradition with knowledge of other cultures. In order to explain its policy guidelines, the MEC sent various circulars to the schools. Such circulars suggested the:

- revision of the curriculum in terms of intercultural education;
- teaching of the musical tradition, history, literature and the religious rituals of minorities; and
- launching of Greek-language programmes that smooth the inclusion of immigrants in local society (MEC 2004).

In addition, in 2008 the Council of Ministers of Cyprus approved the “Policy Document of the Ministry of Education and Culture for Intercultural Education” (MEC 2008, 1). The ‘new’ policy directive aimed to create an intercultural school that does not exclude but seeks to promote immigrants’ inclusion in the education system and society of Cyprus. Instead, intercultural schools should be conducive to the success of all students despite their socio-cultural, linguistic or religious diversity. The MEC declared its willingness to promote social justice in education, while eradicating stereotypes and prejudices (MEC 2008c). Although the MEC adopted the rhetoric of intercultural education, its documentation still failed to provide a concrete definition of intercultural education (Hajisoteriou 2011). Further, the MEC referred to knowledge of other cultures, instead of the interaction and interchange between Greek-Cypriot and other cultures. Gregoriou (2010) argues that the MEC still adhered to monocultural notions of education since it conceptualised cultural difference as an exclusive characteristic of immigrant pupils. Thus “the migrant student and not the multicultural class, the cultural difference of the ‘other’ and not ethnicity and ethnic borders became the focus of educational policy” (ibid., 39).

Last but not least, during the 2011–12 school year, a ‘new’ national curriculum was put in practice in Cyprus on a pilot basis. Arguably, we are not yet able to examine its impact on educational practice in Cyprus. However, we can draw some preliminary observations regarding the dimensions of intercultural education in the ‘new’ curriculum. Discourses of intercultural education appear to emerge in the ‘new’ curriculum. Hajisoteriou et al. (2012) argue that intercultural education is mediated through the notions of the “democratic and humane school”, which are set to be the cornerstones of the ‘new’ curriculum. As defined in the official curriculum, the democratic school is a school that includes and caters for all children, regardless of any differences they may have, and helps them prepare for a common future. It is school that guarantees equal educational opportunities for all and, most importantly, is held responsible not only for the success but also the failure of each and every individual child. On the other hand, the humane school is a school that respects human dignity. It is a school where no child is excluded, censured or scorned. It is a school that celebrates childhood, acknowledging that this should be the most creative and happy period of human life (MEC 2010, 6).

In the context of educational reform, the current paper seeks to analyse how policies for intercultural education are developed and implemented. To this end, we firstly establish the theoretical framework of our analysis by conceptualising the notion of intercultural education.

### **Conceptualising intercultural education**

In general, intercultural education encompasses the development and implementation of official policies and reforms that aim to promote equal education opportunities for culturally (and/or ethnically) diverse groupings, regardless of their origin, social rank, gender or disability (Banks and McGee Banks 2009). Different typologies and discourses of intercultural education attempt to conceptualise its goals and classifications (Banks and McGee Banks 2009). For the purposes of this research we examine the categories of monoculturalism, multiculturalism and interculturalism as the different dimensions that underpin policy for intercultural education in Cyprus. However, in real-life situations (i.e. policy development and implementation at the national levels) these categories tend to overlap and are always tentative.

The ideology that lies behind monoculturalism suggests that “the formation of public ethnicity by immigration [...] would be discouraged, and there would be strong expectation, even pressure for individuals to assimilate to the national identity” (Modood 2007, 22). In education, monoculturalism operates as an assimilation mechanism which seeks immigrant children’s adjustment to the local culture and the school values and not a change of social and school stances and practices in order to meet their needs (Banks and McGee Banks 2009).

Partasi (2011, 373) argues that the formation of modern multicultural societies across Europe has challenged the appropriateness of traditional monocultural curricula, leading to debates over “the degree they must be expanded and revamped in order to incorporate different viewpoints”. The inadequacy of monoculturalism to evoke concerns of social injustice has been the reason behind its rejection (Modood 2007). Such debates have led to the development of pluralist agendas which have sought to legitimise multiculturalism (Gallagher and Pritchard 2007). The multiculturalist ideology suggests that different communities have separate, self-contained and unified cultural identities that can co-exist in a specific social setting. Hence each grouping demonstrates a single homogenous and enduring culture that is independent of interaction with other groups or the economic and political context. To this end, multiculturalism aims to promote awareness about the cultural “other” (Leclercq 2002). Multiculturalism focuses on the celebration of diversity, which appears to compel spurious attention to the cultural differences of minorities (Tiedt and Tiedt 2002).

On the other hand, interculturalism stresses the dynamic nature of cultures, which are an “unstable mixture of sameness and otherness” (Leclercq 2002, 6). Cultural boundaries alter and overlap to create a third space within which locals and immigrants share a hybrid cultural identity. Moreover, the model provides an active and

periscopic approach by empowering minorities through, *inter alia*, education. It aims to challenge power relations and promote social change (Tiedt and Tiedt 2002). With this in mind, intercultural education asserts that teachers and students ought to recognise oppression by promoting education for empathy, moral consciousness and an examination of discrimination from the victim's perspective (Banks 2006).

In the Cypriot context, previous research has suggested that national education goals pertained to monoculturalism. Due to the island's division in 1974, education became inextricably linked to the nation-building project that aimed to promote the sovereignty of the state (Hajisoteriou 2009). According to Damanakis (2002), national education goals suggested the teaching of traditions and attitudes that may contribute to the "survival" of Greek-Cypriot Hellenism; the raising of a "fighting" consciousness for national liberation; and the conservation of Greek-Cypriots' memory of their history and lost land. Similarly, Spyrou (2002) argues that in an ethnically divided society such as Cyprus education has drawn upon *nationalism* to define a political sense of "self" in contrast to "others". This assumption has legitimated "attempts to 'cleanse' the national body [...] from such elements" (Papadakis 1995, 57). Nonetheless, the significant change in the island's demographics due to the mass influx of immigrants in the 1990s necessitated a reinterpretation of the monocultural direction of education. Moreover, in the light of Cyprus' accession to the European Union in 2004 supranational influences mainly coming from European institutions seemed to pressure the MEC to refrain from monoculturalism (Hajisoteriou 2010). The restriction of monocultural agendas reinforced a general expectation that the MEC would launch an educational reform.

In 2004, the Committee of Educational Reform echoed this expectation and pointed to "the ideological re-orientation of the goals of the Cypriot education through the elimination of the nationalistic, monocultural and chauvinist elements [...] in response to the trend of multicultural education" (Committee of Educational Reform 2004, 4-8). Multiculturalism in Cyprus "has assumed a descriptive meaning: the existence of multiple cultural groups in the same context" (Partasi 2011, 374). Nevertheless, the focus on differences enhances multiculturalists' refusal to question the impact of these differences on individuals' lives (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997). They thus fail to establish social emancipation because of their inability to reveal and abolish institutional discrimination. The year 2008 officially marked a shift towards the discourse of *interculturalism*, which was ratified by the decision of the Council of Ministers. Intercultural education policy primarily emerged from attempts to ensure an equality of resources and access, while not acknowledging the need to reform systemic and school structures which allowed for immigrant students' exclusion within physically integrated settings. Consequently, there was an absence of systematically thought-out initiatives to develop and implement a coherent intercultural policy. As a result, the Ministry reinforced the development and implementation of *symbolic* interculturalist (or *covert* multiculturalist) policies seeking the celebration of cultural differences and

ultimately the maintenance of Greek-Cypriot identity (a discourse which refers back to monoculturalism) (Hajisoteriou 2010).

## **Methodology**

Our study reports on an analysis of the policy dynamics influencing intercultural education in the Greek-Cypriot context. We aimed to examine the context and content of educational policies and directives initiated and/or developed at the Greek-Cypriot level. To this end, we drew upon a policy-as-discourse approach. Policy-as-discourse is about “the production of knowledge and evolution of practices through language and interaction, with policy embracing a set of tacit assumptions determined by its relationship to a particular situation, social system or ideological framework and representing a struggle over ideas and values” (Shaw 2010, 198). Therefore, we not only examined the historical development of policy discourses of intercultural education within the socio-political context of Cyprus, but also the values, interests and power mechanisms that influence the development of such discourses. Therefore, we set out to examine the ways in which social processes and interactions shape discourses which, in turn, influence policy development.

In the context of this research, we sought to examine the context and content of educational policies and directives initiated and/or developed at the Greek-Cypriot level. Therefore, we drew upon policy documentary and data derived from interviews conducted with Greek-Cypriot policy-makers and education officers. Given the scant literature examining the field, policy documentation was a crucial data source. Interview data were also essential, as we regarded “the information yielded through the spoken word as a matter of ‘filling the gaps’ left by an incomplete documentary record” (Gardner and Cunningham 1997, 38). Triangulating these data through a comparison process provided an insightful understanding of intercultural policy, its contradictions and transformation.

We firstly examined a wide range of official documents from the MEC published within the last decade. In our selection of policy-related documents, we included: (a) documents conducted by policy-makers, including legislation, recommendations and directives; (b) external documents, such as circulars sent to schools; and (c) internal documents like reports and meeting minutes. Thereafter, we examined the respective website of the MEC and its archives to identify policy-related documents using its search engines and electronic archives. The sampling strategy that guided the collection of these documents was purposive. Denscombe (1998) defines purposive sampling as an attempt to select documents according to a predefined set of criteria. We selected our documents according to the following criteria: (a) documents published by state bodies pertaining to diversity and intercultural education; (b) documents published over the last decade; and (c) documents that are publicly available. Although our sample was not exhaustive, we gathered a large data corpus. In order to select a sub-sample for further in-depth analysis, we followed a purposive

selection of the policy documents taking into consideration “their importance within the ongoing debates and historical configurations” through which the Greek-Cypriot state is re-constructing intercultural education (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2001, 32). We thus selected documents directly relating to intercultural education and migrant education. In the event, a total of 30 documents published primarily in the past ten years was selected for thematic analysis (see Table 1 below).

Secondly, we identified the bodies involved in the development of intercultural education initiatives during the last decade. Such bodies include the office of the Minister of Education and Culture, the Bureau of Primary Education, the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, the Committee of Educational Reform and the European and International Affairs Office. It is noteworthy that all of these bodies operate under the auspices of the MEC. Thereafter, we conducted interviews with Greek-Cypriot policy-makers and officials working within the bodies involved in the development of intercultural policy. The small size of the Greek-Cypriot education system, numbering less than 400 schools, explains the restricted manpower working in the central education authorities. We thus purposively selected only one policy-maker or official from each of the identified bodies, according to the level of his/her involvement in the development of intercultural policy. Ultimately, we interviewed three male participants: the first had a managerial position in the Bureau of Primary Education (PM1); the second was an official at the European and International Affairs Office (PM2); while the third was appointed in the Committee of Educational Reform (PM3). Moreover, we interviewed two female participants: the first came from the office of the Minister of Education (PM4) and the second from the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus (PM5). All interviewees had more than 20 years of experience in the education field. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview questions focused on the interviewees’ understandings of the content of intercultural education policy in Cyprus; the development and implementation processes of intercultural policy; the implications of educational reform for intercultural policy; and the European influences on intercultural education policy in Cyprus. All interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed so that no verbal information would be lost. To maintain credibility, we adopted a member check measure (Creswell, 2003). The interviewees were thus asked to review and revisit the interview transcripts and the themes that emerged from their interview accounts.

In our analysis, we firstly identified the ‘story’ of intercultural policy developments in the Greek-Cypriot context. To document this narrative, we sought to provide a descriptive account of intercultural education initiatives. The narrative also identified the educational and other institutions involved in the formulation of each initiative. Nonetheless, Neuman (2007, 335) argues that the ‘story’ of what occurred presents “concrete details in chronological order as if they were the product of a unique and ‘naturally unfolding’ sequence of events”. Thus, “by reading the official texts alone, sometimes the reader is given the impression that the author [...] holds a single position on a topic”



**Table 1.** Overview of policy documents produced by the MEC and analysed for this study

<p><b>1999:</b> Criteria for the Provision of Time for Support Teaching to Schools. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2001:</b> 12 October. Other-language Speaking Students in Cyprus Schools. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. 3 November. Intercultural Education. 3 November. Memo sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. 3 November. Policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture for Other-Language-Speaking Students in Cypriot Primary Schools. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2002:</b> 14 March 2002. Visit of Officials from the Bureau of Primary Education in Athens for Issues of Intercultural Education. Report by the Bureau of Primary Education. Proceedings of Seminar for Intercultural Education. 8 April. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. Proceedings of Seminar for Intercultural Education organised by the Pedagogical Institute. 15 October. Intercultural Education. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2003:</b> 30 April. Intercultural Education. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. 26 September. Intercultural Education. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. Question No. 23.06.008.03.304, Date 30 December, Posed by the Member of the Parliament Mr George Perdikiis. Communication with the Parliament.</p> <p><b>2004:</b> Intercultural Education in Cypriot Schools. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. Ayios Antonios Primary School. Intercultural Education. Communication letter sent to Ayios Antonios Primary School by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2005:</b> Foreigners/Turkish-Cypriot Students. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. Plan for a Bicommunal Intercultural Educational Programme. Memo circulated within the MEC. 18 October. Support Teaching for Other-language-Speaking Students for the School Year 2005-2006. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2006:</b> 30 June. Support Teaching to Other-Language-Speaking Students. Circular sent to primary schools by all District Bureaus of Education. 21 November. Programme of Greek-Language Teaching to Asylum Seekers. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2007:</b> 24 October. Intercultural Education. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. Support Teaching to Other-Language-Speaking Students for the School Year 2006-2007. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2008:</b> 28 August. Intercultural Education. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. 6 February. European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2009:</b> Support to Children Coming from Families of Immigrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education. 5 October. Greek-Language Programme offered to Repatriate and Other-Language-Speaking Students. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2010:</b> Curricula of Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education. Vol. A. Intercultural Education for the Smooth Integration of Students with Immigrant Biographies. Booklet. 10 September. Greek-Language Programme offered to Repatriate and Other-Language-Speaking Students. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>2011:</b> Intercultural Education. Post on the MEC official website. <a href="http://www.moec.gov.cy/dde/diapolismiki.html">http://www.moec.gov.cy/dde/diapolismiki.html</a> Reception Guide in Cypriot Education. Booklet published by the MEC. 10 January. Support Teaching to Other-Language-Speaking Students. Circular sent to primary schools by the Director of Primary Education.</p> <p><b>Total number of documents analysed: 30</b></p>
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(Hoskins 2008, 320). In order to examine the multiple positions and viewpoints included in the policy, we carried out an inductive analysis of our interview data in order to identify the thematic priorities of each interview. These priorities were compared and contrasted across the different interviews so common themes could emerge. Thus, we began examining our data for groups of meanings, themes and assumptions and tried to locate how they were connected within a theoretical model (Creswell 2003). We examined our interview data looking for the continuities, discontinuities, silences and contradictions in the discourses of intercultural education. This enabled us to identify similarities and differences in the definitions of intercultural education and intercultural policy goals that were proposed by the interviewees.

In trying to establish the trustworthiness of the data, we examined and triangulated our data from multiple angles and different perspectives, continually looking for alternative possibilities and different explanations, trying to develop a richer understanding of them (Creswell 2003).

## **Educational responses to immigration in Cyprus**

Drawing upon the previously described data collection and analysis, we firstly identified the discourses of intercultural education in the Greek-Cypriot context. The themes emerging in response to this question were: intercultural education and inclusion; language learning; and the Zone of Educational Priority. Thereafter, we identified the challenges to the development and implementation of policies regarding intercultural education. In the following sections, we analyse the themes that emerged from our analysis and substantiate them with data.

### ***Intercultural education and inclusion***

The state and particularly the MEC appeared to adopt the rhetoric of intercultural education and inclusion as the preferable educational responses to immigration. They deployed the discourse of intercultural education as the establishment of a democratic school which includes and does not exclude, meaning the provision of equal educational opportunities for access, participation and success for all students. The MEC seemed to envision the creation of an education system which respects diversity and cultural, linguistic and religious pluralism. Thus, it claimed to provide the right of all immigrant families to enrol their children at their neighbouring school, despite their legal or illegal status of immigration in the country:

The MEC's objectives regarding intercultural education entail the smooth inclusion of all other-language-speaking pupils in the Cypriot education system. No distinction should be made for any group (MEC 2003, 1).

Human rights that are discussed in Part II of the Cypriot Constitution, including the right to education confirmed by Article 20, are not delimited to the citizens of the Republic but are conferred on immigrants (MEC 2002, 4).

Drawing upon the above extract, the MEC seemed to argue that intercultural education should become a process which enables the inclusion of all students. Inclusion, in turn, focuses on the re-conceptualisation of educational norms in order to meet all students' individual needs such as their different starting points, interests and learning styles. Accordingly, the school system should become conducive to the success of all students despite their socio-cultural, linguistic or religious diversity. The MEC declared its willingness to promote a social justice agenda while eradicating stereotypes and prejudices.

However, all the policy-makers participating in the current study argued that the elimination of stereotypes and prejudices is merely becoming rhetoric expressed by the MEC, which is poorly implemented in practice, meaning in schools and classrooms:

We should ask ourselves to what extent the declared policy is turning into practice. At this moment, we need an ambulance to save us. There is an official rhetoric but there is a gap between the official rhetoric of the state and its implementation at a practical level. The gap between rhetoric and practice leads to a bipolar policy, according to which the label syndrome is expanded to each different group (PM4).

We have developed some intercultural policies but, in my own opinion, they are just rhetoric. They are not a firm framework of reference within which schools may develop a series of measures (PM5).

Most of the participant policy-makers appeared to contend that the lack of change in the attitudes of Cypriot society entailed a barrier to putting the MEC's rhetoric into practice. PM4 explained that the existence of monolithic blocs based on ethnocentrism has perpetuated stereotypes and prejudices; for example "all Muslims just breed children" or "all Cypriots are Greek Orthodox". In this context, PM2 claimed that "restructuring" the education system cannot promote intercultural education by itself. Therefore, he called for "reculturing" the stakeholders and actors involved in the implementation process such as head-teachers, teachers and pupils. To this extent, some of the interviewees suggested that the ongoing educational reform including the development and implementation of the 'new' national curriculum could "set a different ideological framework" within which these stakeholders could potentially operate (PM1). The educational reform could potentially bridge the gap between policy and practice and therefore promote intercultural education (i.e. PM1 and PM3).

On the other hand, Cypriot researchers are not only concerned about the lack of a clear implementation plan but caution about the absence of an integral policy on the part of the MEC (e.g. Trimikliniotis and Fulas-Souroulla 2006, Hajisoteriou 2010). They assert that, although the MEC has developed innovative measures in order to address ethnic diversity, it has failed to introduce these initiatives in all primary schools. The MEC's policy appears to be oriented to transformation of the education system into a genuine intercultural system. Nevertheless, previous research in the field shows that the process of educational reform is relatively slow and contradictory

due to the generality of the policy goals, the contradiction between the concept of intercultural education and the ethnocentric character of Cypriot education, and the lack of policy implementation (Papamichael 2008, Hajisoteriou 2009). It is therefore crucial to examine whether the ethnocentric character of Cypriot education has affected the policies and practices for Greek-language learning (targeting immigrant students), which are discussed in the section below.

### ***Greek-language learning***

It is noteworthy that in all the analysed policy documents, children of minority or immigrant origin are exclusively referred to as *other-language-speaking pupils*. The MEC deployed the term *αλλόγλωσσοι μαθητές* “other-language-speaking pupils” in all the circulars it sent to schools, which replaced the previously used term *ξενόγλωσσοι μαθητές* “foreign-language-speaking pupils”. It thus placed an increased emphasis upon Greek-language learning in order to promote immigrant pupils’ inclusion in Greek-Cypriot society:

Language teaching is necessary in order to maintain the inclusion of other-language-speaking pupils. Pupils are evaluated in order to be grouped together for the purposes of language teaching (MEC 2006, 1).

The problems faced by immigrant pupils are usually bounded to their lack of proficiency in the Greek language. For the purposes of language teaching to other-language-speaking pupils, pupils should be divided into two levels: beginners and non-beginners. The programme should be completed in two years (MEC 2009, 1).

The MEC appeared to discuss language proficiency as a precursor to greater inclusion. It argued that immigrant pupils could overcome any barriers to their inclusion through Greek-language learning. The teaching of Greek as a second language has taken the form of support classes which take place within mainstream schooling. Although language learners co-attend classrooms with local Greek-speaking students, they attend separate Greek-language classes for some hours of the week. However, literature suggests that a purely language-barrier approach to immigrant pupils’ education is inadequate for establishing inclusive environments (Banks and McGee Banks 2009). Educational policy should also take into consideration cultural elements other than language. International research suggests that cultural norms and expectations, the cultural situation of the family and individual learning styles (Banks and McGee Banks 2009) are factors that should be acknowledged in educational policies.

Similarly, almost all the policy-makers who participated in the current study seemed to perceive diversity as a ‘linguistic problem’ located within the immigrant pupils. They attributed the problematic situation caused by the immigrant pupils’ presence in the Cypriot schools to the immigrant pupils’ inadequate knowledge of the Greek language, which causes behaviour and learning disorders.

When they come to our schools they have huge communication problems, and therefore they usually have adjustment and behaviour problems too (PM2).

Their presence holds negative implications for our schools as these children bring with them their adjustment problems and their learning problems which are bounded to their language inadequacies (PM5).

Drawing upon the above quotes, it is striking that most of the interviewees appeared to conceptualise language difference as a deficit that resembles learning difficulties and/or special needs. We may argue that most policy-makers' observations were grounded in a cultural-deficit perspective that stemmed from monoculturalism and blamed immigrant students for the (perceived) 'problematic' situation in which they found themselves.

It is worth mentioning that previous research in the field criticises the language policy developed by the MEC as monocultural since it again forces the dominant linguistic norms upon non-Greek-speaking pupils (e.g. Gregoriou 2010, Hajisoteriou 2012). Such a type of language policy promotes cultural assimilation via a linguistic homogenising project. In addition, in their study of Greek-Cypriot teachers' perceptions of Greek-language support teaching Elia et al. (2008), were critical of the implementation of support teaching in practice. They asserted that teachers responsible for support teaching are not properly trained, nor do they have the necessary experience. In addition, they argued that the lack of time and the absence of appropriate teaching materials constrain implementation of the programme.

To sum up, most of the analysed policy documents, but also most of the participant policy-makers, argued that the primary goal of schooling should be to immerse newcomers in the Greek language. It is notable that none of the documents or the participants referred to the teaching of minority and/or immigrant languages. On the other hand, in examining the overlap between language teaching and intercultural education, Chamberlin-Quinlisk and Senyshyn (2012, 15) "question language practices that exclude or downplay the benefits of developing students' heritage languages while learning additional languages". They therefore urge teachers to promote the native speaker identity by avoiding narrow perceptions of language ownership.

### ***The Zone of Educational Priority***

The Zone of Educational Priority (ZEP) is a further policy adopted by the MEC which aims to eliminate social marginalisation through positive discrimination towards 'disadvantaged' pupils. The Permanent Work Team for the Promotion of Literacy and School Success ascribes particular schools to ZEPs according to the following criteria: geographical location, socio-economic background of the families, presence of immigrant students, school dropouts and the percentage of students with special needs (MEC 2012, 1). Networks of Educational Priority are created on the basis of these criteria. Each of these networks includes one high school, the main primary schools

of the area and the pre-schools linked to those primary schools. According to official documentation, the MEC ought to provide ZEP schools with additional means and resources, such as extra time for Greek-language teaching and increased funding, on the basis of the principle of positive discrimination:

The policy of the Zones of Educational Priority draws upon **the principle of positive discrimination**, meaning the unequal treatment of inequality based on the priority needs of children. We provide more to those who are at greatest risk of leaving school early (MEC 2012, 4).

The MEC declared that the operation of ZEPs should adhere to a holistic approach, recognising the fact that marginalisation, school failure and early school leaving are associated both with that occurs inside and outside school (i.e. the socio-economic environment). Further, the MEC claimed to operate the ZEP schools according to the principle of partnership, meaning that ZEP schools should become “learning communities, involving and engaging the school staff, pupils, parents, the local community and other social partners” (MEC 2012, 4).

In contrast, the policy-makers who participated in this study cautioned that ZEP schools are experiencing the ‘flight’ of their Cypriot pupils to other schools. They pointed out that Cypriot parents are concerned about the quality of education provided by ZEP schools because of the high shares of immigrant pupils. Thus, they suggest that ZEP schools have become physically segregated settings within mainstream education:

Cypriot parents did not approve of the ZEP-status that was ascribed to some schools. They did not want immigrant pupils in their schools. Although they were not allowed, they were transferring their children away from ZEPs in case that more immigrants enrolled. Some of these schools became ghettos (PM3).

More than 90% of the pupils in ZEPs are immigrants. When some schools became ZEPs, Cypriots moved their children out of these schools. They believed that educational provision became inadequate in ZEPs because of the increased immigrant presence (PM4).

In Cyprus, all pupils are obliged to attend their neighbouring schools according to particular catchment areas defined by the MEC. Nevertheless, the MEC appeared to ‘tolerate’ Cypriots pupils’ ‘flight’ away from ZEP schools. As a result, non-ZEP schools could remain *relatively* homogenous, satisfying Cypriot parents’ demands. The rationale seems to lie in the MEC’s definition of intercultural education as a procedure that solely benefits immigrant pupils:

Intercultural education is a special educational procedure that substantially advantages children who belong to cultural minorities, while it is marginally advantageous for the majority (MEC 2004, 1-2).

On the basis of the aforementioned definition, the MEC appeared to conceptualise intercultural education as a compensatory measure for the immigrant pupils’ increased

presence in the ZEP schools. However, PM1 and PM4 argued that, in mainstream education, intercultural education was left at the discretion of schools and their personnel. The ZEP policy may be characterised as multicultural (and not intercultural) as it singularly targets immigrant students, while it is not concerned with combatting the stereotypes of the majority. On the other hand, literature in the field contends that intercultural education should target *all* students by promoting their intellectual and personal development (e.g. Banks and McGee Banks 2009, Hajisoteriou 2011). Similarly, Luchtenberg (2005) argues that intercultural education should aim to provide both local and immigrant students with the competencies to meet hybridism within cultural identities and within individuals. We may then argue that the educational policy suggested by the MEC was far from an intercultural approach.

### **Challenges to intercultural education in Cyprus**

In the interview data, we identified a series of structural barriers appearing to impede the development and implementation of intercultural education in Cyprus. It is worth mentioning that none of the analysed documents referred to any challenges to the development and implementation of policy for intercultural education. In addition, we could not identify any evaluation of the policy per se, and/or its implementation. First and foremost, most of the interviewees argued that the highly-centralised character of the education system has added to the slowdown of intercultural policy change. The quote below echoes the policy-makers' concerns regarding the centralisation of Cypriot education:

We still have a long way to go. Our progress regarding intercultural education is slow but steady. These are the drawbacks of our centralised system. Decisions have to be taken centrally at the level of the Ministry. Schools are obliged to follow our decisions (PM3).

Because of the centralised character of our education system, change cannot occur unless generic educational reforms are launched by the MEC. This happened in the case of intercultural education. For this reason there was such a big delay (PM4).

The interviewees argued that, since Cyprus is a power-concentrated state with a centralised education system, the most influential voices are those of policy-makers. The MEC and its officials bear the responsibility for educational provision and regulation. Thus teachers ought to comply with the MEC's guidelines as there are control mechanisms monitoring teachers' work, such as school inspection and evaluation procedures. However, PM2 clarified that as the school-based curriculum is quite weak in Cyprus intercultural policies have to be introduced by the central stakeholder, thus the central state, through a top-down approach. Similarly, PM3 explained that the centralisation of Greek-Cypriot education presupposes the centralised design and top-down implementation of intercultural policies. Accordingly, the MEC has to explicitly communicate the know-how to grass-roots implementers, including teachers.

Previous research in the field has indicated that decentralisation increases the number of decision-making gatekeepers administering the induction of innovative ideas, such as intercultural education, into the policy system (Bleich 1998). Therefore, “a greater number of gatekeepers may lead to an increased likelihood of policy change” (ibid., 81). On the other hand, in centralised systems with a single gatekeeper an innovative idea would be dismissed if that gatekeeper’s values and interests are hostile to change. Moving a step forward, the participant policy-makers were critical of the provision of adequate intercultural training to teachers. They pointed out the shortage of resources resulting in poor intercultural training for teachers and a lack of guidance for intercultural policy implementation:

Teacher training is a precondition for the successful implementation of intercultural education policies. The Pedagogical Institute is responsible for the organisation of workshops and seminars for teachers. However, they organise seminars for intercultural education only once or twice a year and on a voluntary basis. Teachers are not competent to implement the policies that we develop (PM1).

They rarely organise teacher training programmes focusing on intercultural education. In most cases, whatever teachers know derives from their own experience. They are left alone in the implementation process of intercultural education (PM4).

The participant policy-makers argued that Cypriot teachers themselves do not feel adequately trained to manage diversity within their classrooms. Most teachers do not receive any official training or guidelines on the teaching of Greek as a second language beyond generic seminars organised sporadically by the MEC. In-service teacher training pertains to centralised and not school-based procedures. The Pedagogical Institute, which is a state institution, is responsible for the provision of teachers’ in-service training. Nonetheless, the Institute organises in-service teachers’ training in terms of out-of-school seminars that run on a non-compulsory basis. Training on intercultural education involves no more than two seminars per year, which usually take place only in Nicosia, the capital of the country. On the other hand, literature asserts that teachers’ intercultural skills and, in turn, practices are largely being shaped by teacher training (e.g. Montecinos 2004, Hajisoteriou 2011). McNeal (2005) proposes that teacher training may actually help teachers to develop practical skills (such as time management, management of mixed-group classes, collaboration with parents, and/or teaching in mixed-ability classes) in order to facilitate the implementation process of intercultural policies.

The interviewees’ critiques also encompassed the school level. They particularly referred to the low levels of immigrant parental involvement, while pointing out that the language barrier and immigrant families’ low socio-economic status often inhibit the development of school-family relations:



Partnerships between schools and immigrant parents could promote intercultural education as long as immigrant parents are interested in collaborating with the school. Immigrant parents usually work for many hours and do not have time to visit the school (PM2).

Immigrant parents do not speak the language, they are under-educated or do not have the means to support the work carried out by the school. They are not really involved in the implementation of intercultural education at the school level (PM4).

The participant policy-makers appeared to suggest that immigrant parents seem disinterested in their children's education, while they adopted deficit-oriented approaches to explain the parents' lack of on-site presence at school due to their low socio-economic situation, deprived educational background and limited proficiency in the Greek language. Despite their favourable stance on school-parent collaboration, most policy-makers asserted that immigrant parents were often distancing themselves from the school.

Similarly, international research has shown that immigrant parents have lower levels of school involvement compared to local parents (Marschall 2006, Theodorou 2008). Hill et al. (2004) draw an interconnection between low parental involvement and immigrant parents' income, educational level and ethnicity. They go on to explain that socio-economic difficulties, such as transportation, child-care arrangements and tight work schedules, often inhibit immigrant parental involvement. Moreover, Lareau and Shumar (1996) add other contributory factors such as immigrant parents' lack of proficiency in the official language, limited cultural knowledge about school rules and lack of higher education. Nevertheless, in their review of literature regarding the importance of family involvement in culturally-diverse school settings Hidalgo et al. (2004, 632), argue that "family practices and involvement activities are more important for helping students succeed in school than are family structure; socioeconomic status; or characteristics, such as race, parent education, family size and age of child". They suggest that parents' willingness and determination to support their children may overcome factors such as parents' formal education, income level, and family culture or language.

## **Conclusion**

Cyprus – as a culturally diverse state – needs to construct its own contextualised political structure within which social policy, in general, and intercultural educational policy, in particular, can emerge. It should therefore deploy educational institutions and curricula in order to respond to the new politics of interculturalism. In this context, Cyprus has initiated an educational reform, including a reform of the national curriculum leading towards a more intercultural orientation. Therefore, since 2008 the state and particularly the MEC have replaced the previously used term of multicultural education with the rhetoric of intercultural education and inclusion as the preferable educational responses to immigration. Papamichael (2008) concludes that the MEC deployed the discourse of intercultural education as the establishment of a school which provides equal educational opportunities for access, participation

and success for all students. According to the new curriculum goals, the MEC envisioned the creation of a “human” and “democratic” school which includes and does not exclude, by respecting diversity and cultural, linguistic and religious pluralism.

Arguably, the turn in the policies of intercultural education in Cyprus seemed to derive from supranational influences, including ‘pressure’ from the EU. Being part of the Southern European bloc along with Greece, Cyprus often models its educational policies on those of Greece on the basis of the two countries’ close cooperation in the education field (Hajisoteriou 2009). In consideration of the historical antecedents of educational policy over the post-independence period, Cypriot education has relied on textbooks, curricula and teachers’ guides freely provided by the Greek state (Trimikliniotis 2001). It is justifiable to assert that this long-standing ‘cooperation’ has reinforced the MEC’s dependence on the Greek Ministry of Education. Arguably, Cyprus’ collaboration with a state such as Greece, which has had a brief experience of immigration, may have impeded the transformation of its intercultural policy. In contrast, national cooperation with other European states which have a longer experience of immigration may potentially become an impetus for the formulation and implementation of more coherent and successful intercultural policies. To this end, we may argue that European countries belonging to the Southern European bloc could start collaborating with central European countries with longer traditions in developing and implementing education policies to address diversity.

Beyond the development of formal policies, the policy-makers participating in the current study asserted that there is a gap between policy rhetoric and practice and between policy intentions and outcomes. For example, they explained that although the ZEP policy aims to promote the further inclusion of immigrant pupils, it has resulted in the creation of ghetto schools. Further, although the official state policy includes humanistic wording about respect for human rights, justice and peace, in practice immigrant pupils are seen as being in need of assimilation in order to overcome their deficiency and disadvantage, which mainly relates to language issues (Gregoriou 2010). Similarly, Cypriot researchers go on to suggest that the MEC has deliberately omitted developing effective initiatives leading towards implementation of the state-derived intercultural policy in order to maintain immigrant pupils’ full assimilation in the Greek-Cypriot culture (e.g. Angelides et al. 2004, Papamichael 2008, Hajisoteriou 2009). Moreover, Hajisoteriou (2010) asserts that the “symbolic” implementation of intercultural education by the MEC is part of its drive towards the nation-building project. In conflict areas such as Cyprus, education is becoming the means for the nation-building project. As education strictly patrols the boundaries of citizenry and belongingness, subordinated groups including immigrants are under-recognised and excluded.

Damanakis (2002) argues that educational policy in Cyprus has been inextricably linked to the nation-building project, mainly because of the unresolved political problem. In this sense, intercultural discourses in Cyprus have been counteractive to monocultural and nationalistic notions of identity. Thus, education in Cyprus still

maintains its nationalistic character by supporting the perpetuation of a homogenous Greek-Cypriot culture (Trimikliniotis and Fuliias-Souroula 2006). This, in turn, raises the question of how intercultural education should develop in an area characterised by ethnic conflict. The discourse of intercultural education in Cyprus excludes the goal of rapprochement between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities, as envisioned by the concept of reconciliation. It is notable that the state exclusively regards intercultural education as an endeavour to provide immigrant children with equal educational opportunities. Although intercultural education policy primarily emerged from attempts to ensure an equality of resources and access; it has not acknowledged the need to reform the systemic and school structures which currently allow for immigrant students' exclusion within physically integrated settings. The consideration of the socio-political situation in Cyprus indicates the need to develop context-specific discourses of intercultural education.

Further, the current study has drawn attention to the barriers impeding implementation of the intercultural education policy in Cyprus. The participant policy-makers contended that the inadequate implementation of the proposed intercultural initiatives is the outcome of the centralised character of the Cypriot education system. The participants also cited the inadequate teacher training and the absence of collaboration between the schools and the immigrant families as additional impediments to the successful implementation of intercultural policies. The findings of this study suggest that the development of intercultural education requires the re-conceptualisation and re-structuring of the Cypriot education system and schooling. The state should adopt a balanced governance model between school autonomy and centralised management (Hajisoteriou 2010). Consequently, it should communicate coherent policies to schools that allow for clear understandings of intercultural education, while also allowing teachers to bring their experiences into the planning of such policies through the development of intercultural school-based curricula and initiatives. The content of such policies and curricula should reflect upon teaching methodologies within intercultural settings; teaching the language of the host country; bilingual education (Papamichael 2008); and collaborations between schools and immigrant families (Theodorou 2008).

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*Christina Hajisoteriou* received her MPhil in Educational Research from the University of Cambridge, UK. She was also awarded the Degree of the Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Cambridge, UK. Her research interests relate to intercultural education, migration, Europeanisation, identity politics and social justice. She teaches Intercultural Education and Sociology of Education at the University of Nicosia, Cyprus.

*Panayiotis Angelides* is professor and the head of the department of education at the University of Nicosia, Cyprus. Previously he served as an elementary school teacher. His research interests are in school improvement, inclusive education, school cultures, teacher development and qualitative research methods. He has published widely in his areas of interest. His latest book is entitled *Pedagogies of Inclusion*.

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# Success against the Odds

## Educational pathways of disadvantaged second-generation Turks in France and the Netherlands

*Philipp Schnell\**, *Elif Keskiner\*\** & *Maurice Crul\*\*\**

### Abstract

By drawing on comparative analyses of successful second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds in France and the Netherlands, this article examines pathways and mechanisms that lead to educational success against the backdrop of structural and familial disadvantages. We foreground the experiences and practices of successful second-generation Turks in both countries and demonstrate the importance of institutional arrangements and their interactions with individual resources to account for their success. We use data from the “The Integration of the European Second Generation” (TIES) survey to reconstruct school careers and to inventory opportunities and constraints presented to them in the most important selection processes. We illustrate our findings with life stories drawn from qualitative interviews with TIES respondents in both settings. Combining the results of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis allows us to unravel the mechanisms of the educational success of second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds.

*Keywords:* second-generation Turks, success, TIES, France, the Netherlands

### Introduction

Numerous studies in the past two decades have drawn attention to the prospects of second-generation immigrants in North-western Europe (e.g. Crul & Vermeulen, 2003; Penn & Lambert, 2009). Social science researchers have consistently reported significant interethnic differences in school outcomes among youth of immigrant backgrounds. Ethnic groups that perform at below-average levels have received particular attention, especially the children of labour migrants from Turkey in North-western Europe which represent one of those risk groups. Previous studies have reported on high drop-out rates of Turkish youth, parallel to a higher tendency to repeat grades and generally lower levels of access to higher education (Dustmann, Frattini & Lanza, 2012; Heath, Rethon & Kilpi, 2008). Nonetheless, a small but visible number of Turkish origin youths from disadvantaged family backgrounds have managed to

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\*Corresponding author, Department of Sociology, University of Vienna, Austria. E-mail: philipp.schnell@univie.ac.at

\*\*Department of Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Holland. E-mail: keskiner@fsw.eur.nl

\*\*\*Department of Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam and Free University of Amsterdam, Holland. E-mail: crul@fsw.eur.nl

beat the odds and achieve remarkable success. They have made it to the top, earning a university degree and moving into a profession. While they may be exceptional, there are simply too many of these cases to ignore.

Yet despite the growing number of successful cases, researchers and policy-makers have focused on the causes of failure rather than the mechanisms of success (for exceptions, see Crul et al., 2012b; Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008a, 2008b; Zhou et al., 2008). Our aim is to shift the focus over to these anomalous cases to identify the pathways and mechanisms that lead to success against the odds, drawing on comparative analyses of successful second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds in France and the Netherlands. Immigrants from Turkey and their descendants are among the largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands and France. In the Netherlands, they account for the largest (non-western) ethnic minority group with close to 400,000 people (Beets, ter Bekke & Schoorl, 2008) and the majority of them are concentrated in bigger cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam. In France, immigrants from Turkey and their descendants make up around 350,000 people in total. They have settled in the capital and in the Alsace-Lorraine and Rhone-Alpes regions and become highly concentrated in urban settings (Danis & Irtis, 2008) such as Paris and Strasbourg.

The research strategy behind this comparative approach is to identify similarities and differences in the way second-generation Turks achieve educational success in the two contexts against the backdrop of structural and familial disadvantage. We foreground the experiences and practices of successful second-generation Turks in both countries and demonstrate the importance of institutional arrangements and their interactions with individual resources to account for their success. Crucial to this effort are the detailed reconstruction of school careers and the inventory of opportunities and constraints presented to them in the educational selection process (Crul 2000; Schnell 2012; Zhou et al. 2008). We analyse both quantitative and qualitative data collected in France and the Netherlands to explain what enables some Turkish youths of disadvantaged family backgrounds to succeed, how they have tapped into extra resources in their quest to get ahead, and which institutional and social settings have helped promote their success.

### **Determinants of educational success: Preliminary evidence**

A large number of studies have analysed the determinants of school success for children of immigrants. We will describe the individual and institutional level factors and determinants that lead to (exceptional) educational outcomes among second-generation youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. In particular, we review literature on the role of the resources of specific agents (parents, siblings, teachers or peers) and country-specific institutional arrangements within school systems. We will argue that they provide the situational contexts that influence patterns of achievement.



### ***Family of origin***

When explaining the educational success of the children of immigrants, most research attention has been on family background characteristics. The educational level of the parents, in particular, is considered the most important background characteristic. However, for children from disadvantaged social backgrounds educational success necessarily depends on other than formal educational resources available in their families or beyond.

Parental involvement could be one of such factors by showing children that education is valued and important for the family, which may ultimately translate into a greater appreciation of education on the part of the children themselves. Moreover, parental involvement may also provide parents with more possibilities of control. They will be more aware of what their children should do for school, control the time their children spend on homework and get to know other parents and teachers with whom they can discuss their children's performances. Parent-school involvement and inter-generational closeness have been found to be positively related to the educational outcomes of children of immigrants (Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Sun, 1998).

Most research, however, frames family influence in a narrow way. Especially in immigrant families, it is often the older siblings who provide their younger brothers and sisters with information and support, making them as effective as parents. Older siblings can act as intermediaries between younger children and their schools and can play a crucial role as a role model (in both positive and negative ways) for younger siblings. Qualitative research has shown the effect of older siblings in a number of areas (Crul, 2000). Older siblings provide practical help with homework, give advice on study choices, attend teacher contact evenings together or without the parents, control homework and often provide emotional support at crucial moments in the school career. Quantitative research has also shown the significant effect of the practical help and school involvement of older siblings (Schnell, 2012). Support is especially effective when older siblings are highly educated themselves and becomes important when parents are incapable of supporting their children practically with homework or due to language limitations.

### ***Peers and teachers***

Previous studies of the second generation in the United States have revealed that outside-family networks can also provide important additional resources (Gándara, O'Hara & Gutiérrez, 2004; Gibson, Gándara & Koyama, 2004; Kao, 2001). Specifically, close friends and teachers have been recognised as significant agents in supporting the upward mobility of children of immigrants with disadvantaged backgrounds (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008b; Stanton-Salazar, 2001, 2004).

Beginning with the former, research into the role of peers has long demonstrated that age-mates and close friends play a crucial role in influencing adolescents'

behaviour and cognitive processes, such as academic engagement and achievement (Campbell, 1980; Duncan, Boisjoly & Harris, 2001). They meet their closest friends at school or during their leisure time to exchange information about common experiences in daily life and peers are commonly seen as almost as important for adolescents as their nuclear families (Raley, 2004). The significant impact of social interaction with peers in the educational attainment process has been intensively shown in qualitative studies of Mexican descendants in the USA (Gibson, Gándara & Koyama, 2004; Raley, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2004). Close friends are important for immigrant youth from disadvantaged family backgrounds because they give them access to alternative resources and information that foster educational attainment. Compared to native-born students, second-generation immigrants have to rely more on peer contact in the educational achievement process because of a lack of pro-scholastic networks and embedded resources in their own families. But peer influence on educational behaviour might also vary in terms of intensity and direction. Peers can act as supportive relationships, or they can be a major source of distraction. A prime example of the negative impact of friends' educational behaviour is the share of peers who drop out or leave school without any diploma at all. Growing up in a peer group with a large number of school drop-outs has a strong negative impact on a young person's view of the value of education, as well as on the motivation of the person in question.

Turning to the role of teachers, student-teacher relationships play a crucial role in daily interpersonal social relations and can be seen as the second key dimension of outside-family ties (Croesnoe, Johnson-Krikpatrick & Elder, 2004). Their significant impact has been demonstrated in a number of studies and their role can be described on two levels: Firstly, teachers generally serve as mentors, feedback and advice givers and can provide moral support for almost all students in the classroom. Previous studies have shown that strong student-teacher relationships are especially important for migrant youth to overcome alienation or feelings of disconnection through intense relationships with their teachers, which in turn had a positive effect on their educational careers (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Secondly, apart from motivation and direct pay-offs, teachers play a central role as a result of their ability to place young people in resource-rich social networks. They have the capacity to negotiate (directly or indirectly) institutional resources and opportunities, such as information about school programmes, academic tutoring, admissions, and career decision-making (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Further, social ties with teachers are also important for the children of immigrants from disadvantaged backgrounds because of their often structurally disadvantaged position (Schnell, 2012).

### ***Institutional arrangements in education systems***

Over the past two decades, some scholars have argued that differences in national and local contexts may contribute to the explanation of the diverse outcomes of children of immigrants across Europe, given the very different institutional arrangements.

European countries are geographically close to each other, but are often structured very differently. Crul, along with various colleagues (Crul & Schneider, 2010; Crul & Vermeulen, 2003), recently argued that this institutional approach might be of substantial value in explaining variations in the position of second-generation immigrants in different European countries. They concentrate on how the institutional arrangements of education systems shape and create different opportunities for the children of immigrants. They argue that the outcomes across countries are the result of the interaction between these institutional arrangements and the agency of individuals and groups. Analysing differences in school trajectories across a number of selected European countries by applying this “comparative integration context theory”, Crul and colleagues (2012a) documented that early selection and tracking negatively affect children of a lower-class background and that inequalities become magnified for second-generation Turks. Moreover, they identified four more factors influencing differentiation: the starting age in school (attending pre-school or not), the number of school contact hours in primary school, the permeability of the school systems, and the way the transition to higher education is organised.

In a detailed analysis of the educational mobility of second-generation Turks in Sweden, France and Austria, Schnell (2012) examined how these institutional arrangements interact with family and non-family agents and their resources. He argues that, in order to explain differences in educational outcomes by second-generation Turks, it is important to consider the combinations of institutional arrangements within each education system, which together form country-specific institutional constellations. These give rise to various interactions with individual-level factors and resources, determine their magnitude and direction, and set the point in time at which educational resources become relevant. For example, the Austrian institutional constellation makes the start of the school career an important period in which the level of interaction with family resources is particularly high. While family resources are especially important in the early phase of schooling, outside-family agents and related resources become more important later. In order to climb to the top of the educational ladder, access to the resources provided by non-immigrant peer networks, as well as to the support offered by teachers, is becoming crucial for the children of Turkish immigrants in Austria.

## **Methodology**

The empirical results for this article are drawn from the “The Integration of the European Second Generation (TIES)” (2007–2008) survey (Crul, Schneider & Lelie, 2012; Groenewold & Lessard-Phillips, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. The TIES survey is the first systematic collection of data about children of immigrants from Turkey (as well as from former Yugoslavia and Morocco) in 15 European cities in eight countries. The participating countries are Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Within this study, we use data from the TIES survey for second-genera-

tion Turks in the Netherlands (Rotterdam and Amsterdam) and France (Strasbourg and Paris). The term “second generation” refers to children of immigrants who have at least one parent born in Turkey, and who were themselves born in the survey country and have had their entire education there. At the time of the interviews, the respondents were between 18 to 35 years old. The total sample size was  $N=500$  for second-generation Turks within each country ( $N=250$  per city).

We restrict our sample to children from disadvantaged educational backgrounds by only considering respondents if their parents completed a lower secondary educational level at the most. In the majority of cases, however, parents only finished primary school. The restrictive definition of disadvantage pertains to 384 cases (76.8%) of the Dutch and 338 cases (67.6%) of the French sample<sup>2</sup>.

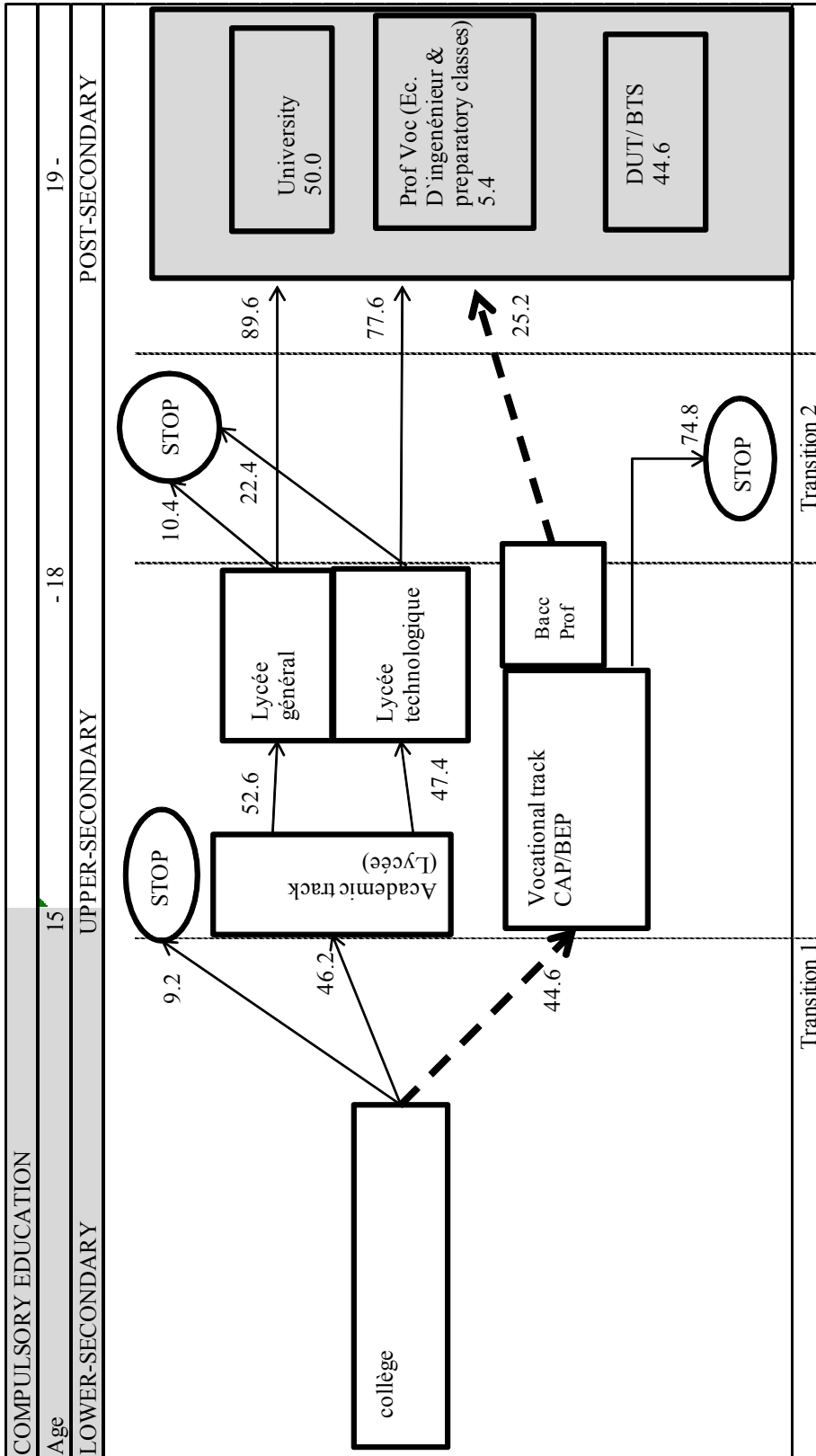
Our empirical analysis begins by focusing on the educational pathways of second-generation Turks with disadvantaged family backgrounds. We describe how they make choices in favour of certain educational options in the two education systems, and how these decisions are pre-determined by given opportunities which, in turn, are defined by structural configurations and institutional arrangements. Afterwards, we pay particular attention to the first transition point in both education systems. We conduct multivariate regression analysis to explore the role of within and outside family members and their resources in this transition process.

The second part of our results section turns to second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds who have been streamed into the lower ability tracks at the first transition point but travelled through ‘indirect routes’ towards higher education. We descriptively examine the resources that are relevant to move upwards in these indirect routes. We illustrate our findings with life histories of second-generation Turks drawn from qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with TIES respondents in France (Strasbourg) and the Netherlands (Amsterdam) during 2008–2009 by Elif Keskiner<sup>3</sup>. The qualitative information amplifies our quantitative findings and unravels the mechanisms of educational mobility among second-generation Turks with disadvantaged family backgrounds.

## **Navigating the education system**

In order to identify similarities and differences in the way second-generation Turks reach educational success in the two contexts against the backdrop of structural disadvantage, detailed reconstructions of their school careers are crucial. The results are depicted in Figures 1 and 2. Each figure shows outflow rates from one educational track into the following one at the next level, conditionally on having successfully completed the previous track.

We begin by describing the educational pathways in France. After leaving primary school at the age of 10, pupils in France move on to the second stage of compulsory education, called *collège*. Students follow this comprehensive track for six years until the age of 15/16. The most important decision point takes place at the end of *collège*.



Source: TIES (2007-2008). Notes: The dashed line denotes the 'indirect route'. Outflow rates are calculated as the ratio of students who entered point 2 over all students who successfully left point 1, and so on. N=338.

**Figure 1:** Educational pathways in France (Paris and Strasbourg), in %

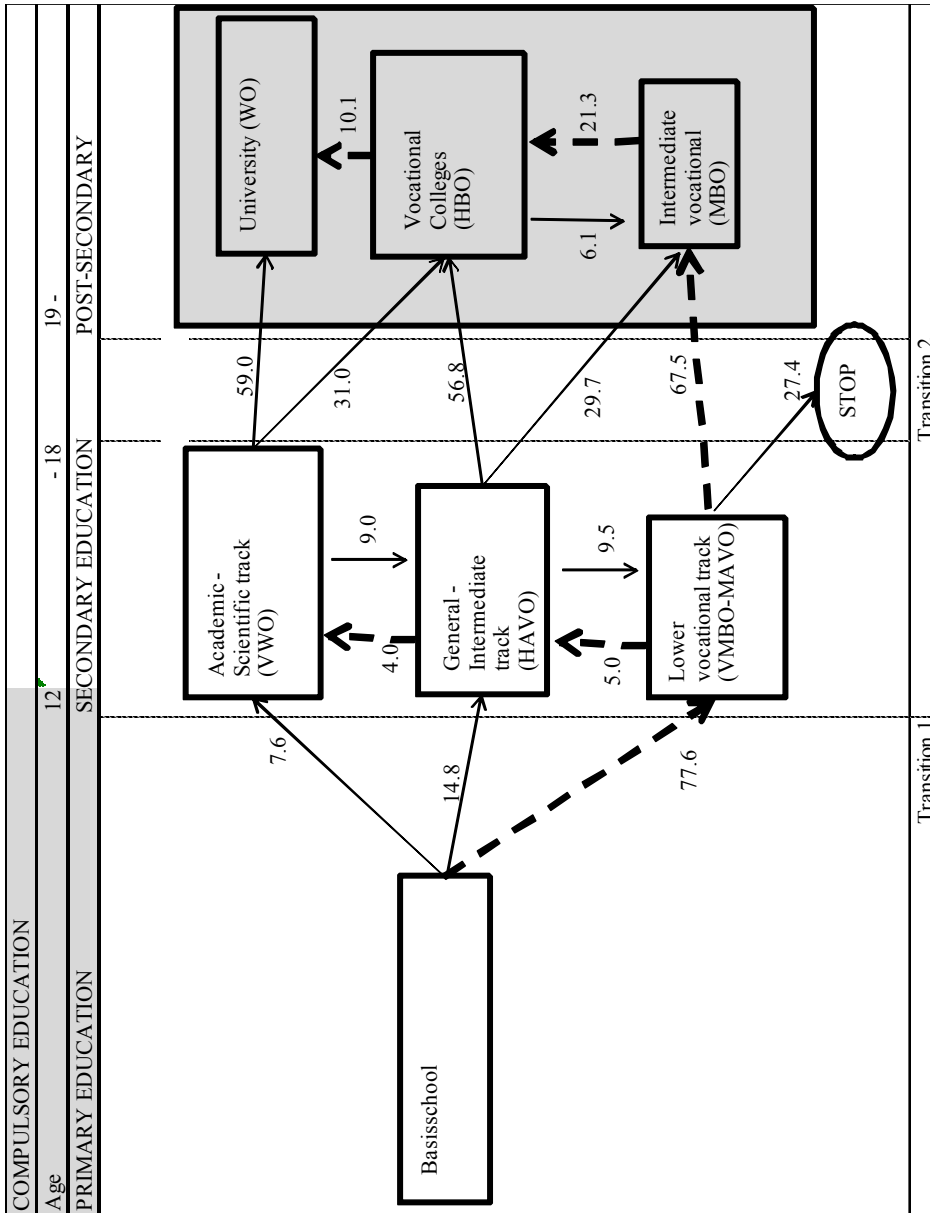
It links compulsory and non-compulsory education and is called the “orientation process”. Schools give their recommendations as to which students are assigned to academic or vocational lycées at the next education level. Turning to the results for France (Figure 1), we find that 46.2% of the Turkish second generation continue into the academically oriented Lycées after compulsory education, while almost the same proportion enters the less prestigious vocational track CAP/BEP (44.6%). Only less than 10% of the Turkish second generation from disadvantaged backgrounds does not continue in education after compulsory schooling and subsequently drops out of school.

Those students who make it into the academically oriented Lycée have chosen either the general or technical type of Lycée after the first year in upper secondary education which both leads to the baccalauréat certificate. This diploma allows students in France to enter higher education. The French education system has moved to a mass system of higher education during the past three decades. It is thus not surprising that roughly more than two-thirds of the Turkish-origin student population continues in some sort of higher education after successfully completing the Lycée. The numbers are slightly higher for students from the general over the technically oriented Lycée.

Second-generation Turks who did not get advice regarding the Lycée at the age of 15/16 and follow the vocational track (CAP/BEP) overwhelmingly stop their educational career and enter the labour market after two years of training. It is worth noting, however, that a substantial number of second-generation Turks attend an additional two-year course to obtain the professional baccalauréat which allows them to enter higher education as well.

Figure 2 shows the results for the Netherlands. At the end of primary school, all children have to take a national examination that is crucial for their further school career in secondary school. On the basis of this test result and the recommendation of their teacher, they will be assigned to different tracks in the secondary school system. Children with the least advice enter the prevocational secondary education (VMBO - *praktijk* or *kader*) which are the lowest and least attractive streams of secondary education. Children with more advice usually go to schools that offer three streams: Lower General Secondary Education (VMBO - *theoretisch*), and two streams preparing children for tertiary education: Senior General Secondary Education (HAVO) or pre-university Education (VWO). Figure 2 shows that the majority of second-generation Turks with disadvantaged backgrounds in the TIES survey (almost 78%) is streamed into the lower vocational tracks in upper secondary education (VMBO tracks). Only 22.4% obtain the relevant advice regarding an academically-oriented track in the Dutch education system. More precisely, among those following the academically oriented tracks, 14,8% enter the general intermediate track (HAVO) while only around 8% continue directly in the academic-scientific track (VWO).

Pupils with a HAVO diploma can continue on to a higher vocational educational school, while pupils with a VWO diploma go on to university. Out of the 14.8% of



Source: TIES (2007-2008). Notes: The dashed line denotes the 'indirect route'. Outflow rates are calculated as the ratio of students who entered point 2 over all students who successfully left point 1, and so on. N=384.

**Figure 2:** Educational pathways in the Netherlands (Amsterdam and Rotterdam), in %

students who started in the general intermediate track (HAVO), roughly 57% continue their education in post-secondary vocational colleges while the remaining proportion steps down to less prestigious vocational schools. The majority of the small group of Turkish-origin students which entered VWO continues directly into higher education afterwards (59%). These educational trajectories represent the direct route to higher education.

Another characteristic of the Dutch school system is that pupils can move from one stream to another in secondary education (Tieben & Wolbers, 2010). In principle, one can start at the bottom in lower vocational education and move up step by step via middle vocational education to the highest stream of vocational education, taking what we call the 'long route' through the education system. The educational trajectories depicted in Figure 2 show that some second-generation Turks take advantage of this 'stepping stone system' (see the dashed lines). Compared to the direct route to higher education, this indirect path takes between 1 and 3 years longer. Previous studies have shown that many children of immigrants in the Netherlands have moved up the educational ladder in this way (Crul et al., 2009) and our results for second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds confirm this finding.

Taken together, the results displayed in Figures 1 and 2 highlight two major commonalities in both education systems: the first transition point is a crucial moment which sorts students into subsequent educational tracks which largely determine their later educational trajectories. Those who make it into the academic stream overwhelmingly continue in higher education. At the same time, both systems offer indirect routes through vocationally oriented tracks and additional qualifications which allow students to enter higher education on an indirect path. Although it takes students longer, these indirect routes provide 'second chances' for students who have been streamed downwards earlier in their educational career. But our descriptive results indicate one major difference between the two education systems: the timing of the first selection into different ability tracks appears at different points in time which seems to have consequences for the chances to enter the academically oriented (and direct) tracks. In the Netherlands, this first transition point appears when students are aged 12. As shown above, only around 22.4% of the Turkish second generation with a disadvantaged family background continue into academically oriented tracks. In France, this first selection moment appears three years later when students are aged 15. Here, 46.2% of the Turkish second generation with similar family backgrounds enters the academically oriented track (lycée).

### **Passing the first transition**

The examination of educational pathways revealed that the first transition point in the Dutch and French education systems is crucial. Once they successfully pass to the academically oriented tracks, they are most likely to continue on the direct routes into higher education. However, the chances to access this direct route for second-gen-



eration Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds are low. Particularly in the Netherlands, they are overwhelmingly streamed into the lower ability tracks. Let us now see which factors and resources are associated with successfully managing this transition towards the direct path. Table 1 presents the results of a logistic regression analysis of entering the academically oriented track at the first transition point, conducted separately in the two countries. Track placement is a dummy variable set equal to 1 when the final decision is the academic option (VWO and HAVO in the Netherlands; general and technical lycée in France) and 0 otherwise (vocational track(s) and dropping out of school<sup>4</sup>).

The figures displayed in Table 1 (left side) underscore the association of parental characteristics and entering the academic track in secondary education in the Dutch school system. The chances of entering the academically oriented track for those second-generation Turks with disadvantaged family backgrounds but whose parents both read and write Dutch very well are almost two times higher than for those Turkish-origin students whose parents are illiterate in Dutch. A positive significant effect is also found for the constructive engagement of parents with the school-related activities of their children (parental educational support), which includes the time the parents spent on their children's homework, how often they helped them with their homework or talked with them about their studies and how often they met with or talked to their teachers<sup>5</sup>. Interestingly, a medium level of support from parents in the school activities of their children increases the odds of entering the academic track.

We do not find any significant influence of support and educationally relevant aspects by older siblings at this first transition point, holding all other variables constant<sup>6</sup>. Instead, what seems to be extraordinarily important for making this transition are peers and their characteristics as well as teachers. In particular, the stronger the bonds between teachers and second-generation Turks, the higher the odds of successfully passing this first transition. We also include five additional control variables in the multivariate analysis (age, gender, above-average family size, school segregation<sup>7</sup> and living in the capital city). Two results are worth highlighting. First, holding all independent variables constant, girls are half as likely to enter the academically oriented track. This finding is in line with previous studies showing that female second-generation Turks are frequently under-advised by teachers at the most important transition points (Pásztor, 2010). Secondly, second-generation Turks in highly segregated schools show greater likelihoods to be streamed into vocationally oriented tracks at the age of 12. Their odds of accessing the academic track (rather than vocational orientated tracks) are only one-third of those of their peers in less segregated primary schools.

Turning to the results for second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds in France, we do not find significant associations between parental characteristics, such as their language abilities in French or levels of educational support.

**Table 1**

Logit: Entering the academically oriented track at the first transition point  
(0= vocational track/drop out; 1= academic track), odds ratio

	The Netherlands		France	
	Exp [B]	(s.e.)	Exp [B]	(s.e.)
<b>Parents</b>				
<i>Survey country language abilities</i>				
Both parents cannot read and write	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
One parent reads and writes	1.28	(0.49)	1.38	(0.60)
Both parents read and write	<b>1.96+</b>	<b>(0.75)</b>	1.21	(0.56)
<i>Parental educational support</i>				
low	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
medium	<b>2.81+</b>	<b>(1.64)</b>	1.70	(0.69)
high	2.05	(1.34)	1.35	(0.63)
<b>Siblings</b>				
<i>Has older siblings</i>				
No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Yes	1.63	(0.73)	<b>2.30*</b>	<b>(0.96)</b>
<i>Has older siblings without a diploma</i>				
No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Yes	0.67	(0.25)	<b>0.50+</b>	<b>(0.18)</b>
<i>Siblings' educational support</i>				
low	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
medium	0.79	(0.33)	0.86	(0.35)
high	0.75	(0.35)	0.8	(0.34)
<b>Peers</b>				
<i>Peers were highly important in supporting studies</i>				
No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Yes	<b>1.68+</b>	<b>(0.47)</b>	<b>0.56+</b>	<b>(0.18)</b>
<i>Has closest peers who dropped out of school</i>				
No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Yes	<b>0.61+</b>	<b>(0.17)</b>	1.39	(0.37)
<b>Teachers</b>				
<i>Most teachers really listened to me</i>				
Disagree	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Neither agree nor disagree	<b>3.99*</b>	<b>(2.53)</b>	1.42	(0.68)
Agree	<b>3.84*</b>	<b>(2.39)</b>	<b>2.91*</b>	<b>(1.30)</b>

**Table 1** continued*Received extra help from teachers when needed*

	Disagree	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	Neither agree nor disagree	1.40	(0.91)	1.38	(0.60)
	Agree	0.66	(0.40)	1.40	(0.64)
<b>Control Variables</b>					
<i>Age group</i>					
	18-26	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	27-35	0.75	(0.23)	<b>0.48*</b>	<b>(0.14)</b>
<i>Gender</i>					
	Male	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	Female	<b>0.47**</b>	<b>(0.14)</b>	1.17	(0.30)
<i>Family size</i>					
	below or equal group average	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	above group average	0.78	(0.23)	1.05	(0.28)
<i>City</i>					
	Second survey city (Rotterdam/Strasbourg)	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	Capital city (Amsterdam/Paris)	0.96	(0.27)	<b>3.38***</b>	<b>(0.91)</b>
<i>Attended a school with more than 50% immigrants in the student population</i>					
	No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	Yes	<b>0.34***</b>	<b>(0.10)</b>	<b>0.47*</b>	<b>(0.14)</b>
<hr/>					
	Constant	0.08**	(0.07)	0.08**	(0.06)
	McFadden R2	0.13		0.14	
	Nagelkerke's R2	0.20		0.23	
	N	384		331	

Source: TIES (2007-2008).

Notes: Significant results are indicated in bold. Significance levels: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Standard errors in brackets. Values above one indicate a positive while values below one a negative effect.

This non-significant association might be explained by the later timing of selection and the integrated track system before this transition point. Since students in France follow one common integrated track with full-day teaching until the end of compulsory education, the relevance of parental support at home might be minor because they receive the necessary support within schools (Schnell, 2012).

Interestingly, second-generation Turks who have older siblings who completed school with a diploma show higher odds of entering the academic track at this first transition point. They benefit from the knowledge of their older siblings and receive relevant information and support regarding school activities. Focusing on outside family members who may make a difference for second-generation Turks with a disadvantaged family background, we find – similarly to the Dutch school context –

positive student-teacher relationships significantly increasing the likelihood to enter the academically oriented Lycée.

A second similarity with the analysis for the Dutch school system can be found with respect to our control variable ethnic school segregation. When the ethnic segregation in their compulsory schools was above average, their odds for accessing the academic track at the next level were only half of those from less segregated schools. The last point to take away from the results presented in Table 1 is that the chances of not continuing in the vocational path are much higher for second-generation Turks in Strasbourg than in Paris. Even after holding all other variables constant, the odds for second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds continuing in the academically oriented Lycée were three times higher than for their counterparts in Strasbourg.

The qualitative interviews from Amsterdam (the Netherlands) and Strasbourg (France) also underlined the importance of teachers as gatekeepers in both education systems. Firstly, teachers' advice is an important institutional selection mechanism that operates in both settings and influences the educational destinies of the students. Secondly, the absence of instrumental parental assistance in homework and courses renders teachers' help crucial for second-generation students. Below we will provide one profile from Strasbourg. However, also in Amsterdam students who benefited from such instrumental aid of teachers highlighted similar mechanisms.

Deniz was born and raised in Strasbourg. Her father was a labour migrant who worked as a house painter on construction sites. Her mother was a homemaker and has never worked. The family lived in social housing situated in one of the ethnically segregated neighbourhoods of Strasbourg. Both parents were very supportive of their children's education but their help fell short of homework aid and advice on educational decisions. In primary school, Deniz had to repeat a class in the second year. She recalled how her teacher in primary school had humiliated her in front of the other classmates, saying it was only Deniz who would repeat that year because she had not studied hard enough. This event had a positive effect on Deniz's educational career as she became very ambitious and hard-working so as to 'prove' that her teacher was wrong. Her perseverance and dedication not only earned her good grades but were also spotted by her teachers later in College. She established very good communication with her history teacher who helped her but also provided critical advice on educational pathways. She inculcated in Deniz that she should pursue the academic track and go to a prestigious lyceum. However, Deniz was advised to follow the vocational track despite her high grades. The school board argued that Deniz could only achieve these grades with very hard work so she would not be able to cope with the harder courses in the academic lyceum. At that point, the history teacher objected to the decision of the school board and made sure she received a positive advice for a prestigious lyceum, which later Deniz successfully pursued and graduated into vocational tertiary education.

## **Accessing higher education through the indirect route: What makes the difference?**

Students who successfully manage to enter the academically oriented tracks follow this direct route and frequently continue in higher education<sup>8</sup>. But the analysis of educational pathways presented in Figures 1 and 2 indicates that a small number of second-generation Turks who have been channelled into the less academically oriented tracks at the first transition enter higher education through an indirect route. Which resources are relevant to them on these indirect routes? Table 2 provides some insights into this question. It divides second-generation Turks in vocational tracks into those who finally enter higher education through the indirect route and those who left school at the end of secondary education. Given that this analysis is focusing on a relatively small subsample consisting only of second-generation Turks in vocational orientated schools, we refrain from presenting a multivariate regression analysis and therefore do not test causal relationships. Instead, we provide descriptive evidence on the relevance of certain resources and add results from qualitative research to support our descriptive findings.

Second-generation Turks in the Dutch indirect route who finally entered higher education received more educationally relevant support from their parents at home compared to students of Turkish origin who left school before. Moreover, they more often originate from families in which at least one of their parents speaks and writes the Dutch language well. Both parental characteristics are related since strong language skills have been found to be an important aspect for Turkish parents to be able to support their children in school-related matters and help their children with homework (Schnell, 2012). Turning to the significant role played by older siblings, at the descriptive level we hardly find differences between the two compared groups. Roughly 50% of the Turkish second generation reports medium to high support from their older siblings. However, support from older siblings seems to be quite a common pattern in Turkish families but does not tip the scale to move up to the highest level of the educational spectrum. Clear dissimilarities are observable with respect to peer group characteristics. In particular, the lower the share of drop-out peers in the closest circle of friends, the higher the proportion that continues with education at the post-secondary/tertiary level. Finally, when turning to the role played by teachers in supporting second-generation Turks to stay on the indirect route until higher education, we do not find significant effects of teachers in the Dutch school system. Indeed, teachers are overwhelmingly evaluated as important and supportive.

Turning to the results of second-generation Turks in France (the right side of Table 2), we find that both internal and external family factors matter when it comes to staying on the indirect route to higher education. To begin with the former, second-generation Turks originating less often from illiterate parents show higher

**Table 2**

Students in the 'indirect (vocational) route' entering higher education (or not), in %

	The Netherlands		France	
	Did not enter higher education	Entered higher education	Did not enter higher education	Entered higher education
<b>Parents</b>				
<i>Parents can read and write in survey language</i>				
None of the parents can read and write	30.9	19.5	21.1	11.1
One or both parents can read and write	69.1	80.5	78.9	88.9
<i>Parental educational support</i>				
low	19.7	8.7	17.8	14.0
medium/high	80.3	91.3	82.2	86.0
<b>Siblings</b>				
<i>Has older siblings without a diploma</i>				
No	74.1	69.6	64.1	77.8
Yes	25.9	30.4	35.9	22.2
<i>Siblings' educational support</i>				
low	48.2	43.5	55.5	40.0
medium/high	51.8	56.5	44.5	60.0
<b>Peers</b>				
<i>Perceived importance of peers</i>				
Not important	57.3	60.8	82.2	77.7
Important	42.7	39.2	17.8	22.3
<i>Having peers without a diploma</i>				
No	38.4	47.8	32.2	55.6
Yes	61.6	52.2	67.8	44.4
<b>Teachers</b>				
<i>Most teachers really listened to me</i>				
Disagree	14.5	13.1	20.0	11.1
Agree	85.5	86.9	80.0	88.9
<i>Received extra help from teachers when needed</i>				
Disagree/Neither agree nor disagree	8.6	8.7	33.3	18.9
Agree	91.4	91.3	66.7	81.1

Source: TIES (2007-2008)

Notes: Some categories of our independent variables presented in Table 1 have been merged in order to avoid small case numbers. Control variables are not included.

shares of those entering higher education through the indirect route. In contrast to the findings from the Netherlands, older siblings seem to matter in France. In particular, having siblings who did not drop out of school but instead gained knowledge on the workings of the French education system and support their younger brothers and sisters in school-related activities is more frequently related to access to higher education through the indirect route. Besides these internal family factors, having few drop-out peers and supportive teachers in schools is related to the educational success of children of Turkish immigrants on these vocational paths.

In order to gain a further insight into the ‘indirect route experience’, we provide more detailed information from two profiles from the qualitative interviews about the mechanisms involved. The first profile is from the Netherlands.

Volkan is a second-generation Turkish student studying Business Economics in higher vocational education. Volkan’s mother arrived in the Netherlands in her early twenties and gained a good command of Dutch by undertaking vocational education. Together with Volkan’s father, the couple started their own company and achieved considerable success in their business. As a working mother, Volkan’s mother has frequent access to Dutch society and was actively involved in Volkan’s school activities. Both parents supported their children’s education not only financially, but they also helped them pursue their objectives in life. In the beginning Volkan was not very motivated to study. His grades were average at the end of primary school, and he was advised to go into the lowest track in secondary school (lower vocational education). He attended physical education and sports in a vocational track since his dream was to become a professional soccer player and his mother supported his passion for sports. Volkan’s ambition of becoming a professional soccer player was hampered after an injury. Following this incident, he decided that betting on soccer as his only career choice was too risky. After he finished his middle vocational training (MBO) in physical education, he changed his occupational orientation drastically and enrolled himself in a four-year higher vocational (HBO) education school. Since almost all his friends and some of his cousins were studying economics at that time, and considering the prospects of expanding the family business, Volkan decided that business economics would be a good choice. His family supported his decision. He signed up for the most prestigious Business Economics School in Amsterdam. As is the case with many students who take the long route into higher education in the Netherlands, Volkan had difficulty with some of the course work that presumes secondary school academic preparation. Since his friends and cousins were also studying economics, he was able to turn to them for help with his schoolwork, and his parents helped by providing extra assistance through a paid tutor. Once he finished his tertiary vocational training, Volkan aspired to follow the university preparatory track (*HBO propedeuse*) and continued towards a university business degree.

We see that Volkan’s experience highlights most of our descriptive findings: he received strong family support as well as peer and external help in prolonging his ed-

education career. We should also underline the fact that Volkan was not under financial constraints which could have forced him to enter the labour market.

Among the qualitative interviews conducted in Strasbourg (France) some respondents had also extended their studies into higher education through the indirect route. These interviewees exemplified similar patterns as those observed in our descriptive analysis. Teachers and their support were emphasised in particular. As they reported, it was mainly through the advice and encouragement of their teachers that these students mustered the courage to access higher education. The life story of Sebnem, whose parents arrived in France as guest workers with meagre educational attainment and experiences, illustrates these findings.

Sebnem was born and raised in Strasbourg as the eldest child of the family. Thus, she was the first family member to travel through the French education system. At the end of lower secondary education (collège), she had average grades but she was willing to attend the vocational education track since she wanted to gain a trade and enter the labour market as soon as possible. Further, she did not see herself as the 'studying type', meaning she did not believe she could succeed in the academic track.

While at vocational school (BEP) she achieved relatively good grades and her teachers advised her to continue her studies into a professional lycée to achieve the 'bacc prof' diploma. Together with her best friend, with whom she had been studying together since lower secondary education, she entered the professional lycée. Afterwards, and again with the support of her teacher, she and her best friend decided to enrol in a (non-selective) university track. She wanted to pursue sociology since she thought this was the least demanding major and its broad array of topics would provide her with enough flexibility to choose between different professions afterwards.

Sebnem's educational trajectory exemplifies both the importance of teachers and closest peers (her best friend) which encouraged her to pursue further education. In addition to these vital agents and their resources, Sebnem's risk-averse behaviour, by making sure that she guaranteed each degree on her pathway in case she failed to complete the next step, was another significant aspect of her success.

## **Conclusion**

We investigated the experiences and practices of successful second-generation Turks by analysing quantitative and qualitative data. Our results highlight commonalities and differences between the two countries in the explanation of what enables some Turkish youth with disadvantaged family backgrounds to achieve educational success against the odds.

To begin with the similarities, our findings underline the important role of teachers in the successful educational pathways of second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds in France and the Netherlands. Interpersonal social relations between students and teachers increase the chances to successfully manage the first transition point in both countries and that teachers are significant agents



for second-generation Turks with disadvantaged backgrounds when successfully navigating through the indirect routes of these systems.

Since the parents possess relatively few means to instrumentally support their children's education, teachers play a very vital role in their school careers. They serve as motivators reinforcing the aspirations of second-generation Turks. The qualitative data further showed that this role is not only in the form of providing advice or motivating, but also involves them acting as gatekeepers in advising to pursue more prestigious tracks.

A second commonality between the Dutch and French cases is that children who were unable to directly access more selective and academically oriented institutions have found alternative routes. Vocational pathways in the Netherlands and France offer alternative routes to higher education. In both countries, these indirect routes are less often studied because education is still considered a linear development, from compulsory to upper secondary schools to higher education. Our descriptive findings were amplified by the qualitative material showing that the support of peers also proves to be critical in both countries while travelling along the indirect (vocational) route towards higher education. In particular, best friends with similar educational levels play a crucial role in influencing the academic engagement by helping with homework and with career decision-making. However, future research should further investigate the interplay between travelling the 'long route' and relevant resources in order to establish causal relationships with access to higher education in both countries.

Besides these similarities, the pathways and mechanisms that contribute to success vary in the two different contexts. These variations come to the fore when examining the interplay between the institutional arrangements of the education systems and the different individual- and group-related resources that are relevant in terms of successfully navigating through these systems. In the Dutch case, students are streamed into different ability tracks at the age of 12 and passing this important transition point towards the more prestigious track relies heavily on the parents' ability to assist their children with homework and their ability to speak and write the Dutch language well. When parents are unable to fulfil this role, their children suffer the consequences since they are underprepared and more often streamed into the less prestigious tracks. In France, where selection into tracks is postponed, it seems that students are able to compensate for their disadvantaged starting position. Second-generation Turks with disadvantaged family backgrounds enter the academically oriented tracks in higher numbers. Our findings also indicate that passing this branching point does not significantly interact with characteristics and support from the parents. Instead, what matters is the information and support provided by older siblings and peers.

This comparative study demonstrates that exceptional student-teacher relationships, support from parents and siblings, the influence of the peer and school context, and access to alternative routes are critical to the successful educational pathways of second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds. The examination

of educational pathways in a comparative perspective provides a glimpse into why second-generation Turks pursue certain pathways in the face of limited opportunities and structural constraints, and how they navigate the myriad of choices in their quest to get ahead. In both countries, educational success cannot be limited to a single set of factors. Instead, it is the interaction of the individual- and institutional-level factors that determines successful educational pathways. But, as shown in the comparative analysis, in terms of their institutional arrangements and the way they determine the relevance of individual-level factors, education systems matter more for successful educational pathways. Those systems that provide more favourable institutional arrangements make the upward mobility process of second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds less dependent on individual-level factors and resources, thus leading to higher numbers of second-generation Turks who beat the odds. Future studies investigating these aspects further would benefit greatly by shedding light on additional patterns and mechanisms that might have been beyond the scope of our study and empirical material.

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*Philipp Schnell* is a Post-Doc at the Sociology Department of the University of Vienna, and a research associate at the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies. His research focuses on the sociology of education, ethnic educational inequalities and social mobility of children of immigrants in a comparative perspective.

*Elif Keskiner* is a Post-Doc at the Sociology Department at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her research interests cover youth sociology, the school-to-work transition and descendants of immigrants coming from Turkey with a comparative focus.

*Maurice Crul* is a Professor of Sociology at the Erasmus University Rotterdam and the Free University of Amsterdam. He has published extensively on the educational careers of children of immigrants and was the general coordinator of the international TIES project and the principle investigator of the Children of Immigrants in School (CIS) project. His latest research project, ELITES, looks at successful youth with an immigrant background.

## Notes

- 1 Please consult [www.tiesproject.eu](http://www.tiesproject.eu) for further details.
- 2 The restriction of our sample to children from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' is equally distributed across the four survey cities and across gender.
- 3 Keskiner's study included 55 interviews with children of Turkish immigrants from diverse backgrounds in Amsterdam and Strasbourg. However, in this paper we concentrate on cases that are illustrative of our quantitative findings. Keskiner is responsible for any questions and inquiries.
- 4 We replicated the analysis using ordered logit models to differentiate between the categories dropped out and vocational track (available upon request). These additional analyses yielded very similar results to those presented in the article. For the sake of simplicity, we decided to show the results of the logit regression analyses.
- 5 All four survey items were combined into an additive index capturing parental support during secondary school ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ). This index was then reduced to three categories: no support, medium support, high support.
- 6 We measure older siblings' support by summing up survey information on the constructive engagement of older siblings with the school-related activities of the respondents. We combined the survey items "older siblings help them with their homework" and "older siblings talk with them about school or studies" when they were in secondary school into one summarising index ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ). This index was reduced to three categories ranging from "no support", "medium support", to "high support". Those respondents who did not have older siblings available to support them were put in the "no support" category. To partially check for biases, we replicated the regression models without respondents who have no older siblings available to support them. These additional analyses did not yield substantially different results from those presented in this article (available upon request), justifying the applied approach.
- 7 School segregation is a dummy variable coded as over 50% immigrants at the school (1) or below (0). The threshold of 50% was estimated by taking the overall mean on this segregation scale (ranging from 0 to 100), separately for each country and city. The relatively high mean value (of 50%) is not surprising given that we focus on second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds and that, on average, ethnic segregation in local schools is highly collinear with low parental socio-economic status in European neighbourhoods.
- 8 This result was confirmed in additional multivariate analysis in which we estimated the likelihood of entering higher education controlled for prior track placement and the set of independent variables presented in Table 1. Following the academic track in secondary education clearly determines the chances of entering post-secondary/tertiary education while most of the remaining independent variables were insignificant (the results are available upon request).

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# The hijab in the (denominational) Irish education system – tolerated or accepted?

Nathalie Rougier\*

## Abstract

This paper explores the subtexts of the controversy generated by the hijab in Irish schools and, more specifically, what these reveal about the Irish education system's level of acceptance of (religious) diversity, as assessed on a spectrum of *non-toleration*, *toleration* and *respect-recognition*. Using a critical discourse analysis approach, the study highlights and examines the main argumentative strategies through which the hijab controversy and its repercussions have been constructed and debated in Ireland. These reveal that, while the Irish education system has been able to offer a level of structural and practical accommodation to (religious) minorities – including Muslims – acceptance of religious diversity can be dependent on a number of factors, including the limited nature of the claim and the size of the minority, and is also conditional on the consequences of such diversity for the schools' self-perception.

*Keywords:* schools, diversity, tolerance, Muslims, hijab

## Introduction

Religious diversity has made accommodation in education a long-standing issue in Ireland. The position of religion has been distinctive among European countries; it was framed originally by the constitutionally favoured position of the Catholic Church and simultaneous recognition of other religions, in a settlement different from the strict separationist, establishment, and other accommodational models found in various European countries. Education has been organised on a largely denominational basis, while primarily funded by the state.<sup>1</sup> Most schools are managed by the Catholic Church, but there are also Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and multi-denominational schools. This constitutes a level of recognition for majority and minority religious groups in education and pluralism can thus be seen as a foundational principle of the Irish education system – enshrined in the Constitution (Arts 42 and 44).

Trends in religious belief have however brought about pressures of various kinds on these structural arrangements, and recent immigration to Ireland has led to increasing

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\*School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin, Ireland. E-mail: [nathalie.rougier@ucd.ie](mailto:nathalie.rougier@ucd.ie)

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diversity, as immigrants increased from 3% of the population in 1993 to 6% in 2002 to reach 12% in 2011 originating now from more than 190 countries (Ruhs 2006; CSO 2008, 2012). While immigration has benefitted Ireland economically and provided a welcome cultural diversity, it has posed certain challenges for schools with little prior experience of dealing with ethnic, cultural, linguistic and to a certain extent religious diversity (Devine 2005; Smyth et al. 2009; Gilligan et al. 2010). According to the latest available figures, in 2009/2010 approximately 9% of students at post-primary level, and in 2007 10% at primary level were migrants (DES/OMI 2010).

In line with the Office of the Minister for Integration's perception that "efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society", the Department of Education was designated as having a central role to play in "dealing with the integration of migrants into Irish society" (OMI 2008, 67) and a dedicated 'integration unit' within the Department of Education was established in October 2007. Intercultural educational materials and guidelines have been produced by various statutory and non-statutory agencies in recent years. Most notably, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), an advisory body to the Department of Education, published intercultural guidelines for both primary and secondary schools (NCCA 2005, 2006).

While overall perceived as enriching the schools' "cultural capital" (Devine 2009), the incorporation of newcomers has not always been a smooth process and some minorities have generated particular attention and required special accommodation. This paper explores how the growing contingent of Muslim pupils in particular has raised new challenges to the tolerance and flexibility of the (denominational) Irish education system and how these have been perceived, framed and responded to by different social, political and education actors.

## **Muslims and education in Ireland**

According to the 2011 census, there are 49,204 Muslims living in the Republic of Ireland. The community has increased by 51.2% since 2006, a slower rate than between 2002 and 2006 when the number rose by 70% (from 19,147 to 32,539) (CSO 2007, 2012). Although Muslims can claim to be Ireland's third largest faith group, Islam is still relatively insignificant, representing only 1.07% of the total population. Muslims are however an important part of the growing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in Ireland; it is a rapidly growing minority, one which is potentially 'visible' and may be the only 'new religious minority' with the potential truly to challenge Irish society.

There has been limited research on Muslims in Ireland, and few surveys on the *perception of Muslims* in Ireland. A 2006 poll of Muslims themselves revealed that more than two-thirds felt Islam was compatible with Irish life and that 77% felt accepted (Lansdowne Market Research 2006). In general, the Irish media has been relatively indifferent, which may reflect a certain 'isolation' of Muslims from the 'mainstream community' – a separation which can be both chosen and suffered. However, the



experience of living in Ireland has been generally positive for Muslims. For Ali Selim (2005), spokesperson for the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland (ICCI), Muslims have integrated well into Irish society and have avoided the assimilation model, preserving their faith and way of life.

There are currently two Muslim state-funded primary schools in Dublin: the Muslim National School, set up by the Islamic Foundation of Ireland (IFI) in 1990 and now hosted by the ICCI in South Dublin, and the North Dublin Muslim School established in 2001. Both schools follow the ‘normal’ Irish school curriculum, but have an Islamic ethos, teaching Arabic and Qur’anic studies. For Ryan (1996, 58), “The Muslim National School was the first such school to be recognised in these islands and will stand as a monument to the respect accorded by the Irish State to the religious beliefs of minority groups”. In an alternative view, these schools also represent Muslims simply making use of the denominational nature of Irish education. There are no Muslim secondary schools in Ireland and therefore Muslim children in secondary education (as well as the majority in primary education) attend mainstream Irish schools, which are mainly denominational (over 90% Catholic). The presence of a religious ethos and of a large number of single-sex schools is often attractive to Muslims; however, students can encounter a number of issues regarding food, prayer and religious dress (especially the hijab).

Religious garments and symbols to be seen in Irish schools include Christian crosses, the Sikh turban and Kara (bangle), and the Jewish kippah (NCCRI 2007). Some school uniforms include crests with religious symbols including the sacred heart and crosses. Regarding the hijab, most schools came to permit it as long as it is in the school’s uniform colours, although there is no consensus on the issue. Controversy arose in May 2008 after the parents of a 14-year-old girl requested that she be allowed to wear the hijab to school in Gorey, Co. Wexford. The principal accommodated her, but was concerned about the absence of national guidelines or policy on religious dress, and wrote to the Department of Education seeking guidance and requesting ‘official’ guidelines on the matter. The issue came to public attention when the *Irish Times* published the correspondence between the Department and the principal, catapulting the matter into a national debate. The issue quickly gained momentum, sparking off controversy and extensive media coverage. Columnists, politicians, Muslim representatives, NGOs and ordinary people argued for and against in newspapers, radios and on the Internet, and even the international news channel Al Jazeera paid a visit to Gorey (Enniscorthy Guardian 2008).

The Office of the Minister for Integration undertook a consultation in order to devise a formal set of Departmental guidelines for future reference. On 23 September 2008, the Ministers for Education and for Integration jointly agreed recommendations on school uniform policy. The recommendations were that:

1. The current system, whereby schools decide their uniform policy at a local level, is reasonable, works and should be maintained.

2. In this context, no school uniform policy should act in such a way that it, in effect, excludes students of a particular religious background from seeking enrolment or continuing their enrolment in a school. However, this statement does not recommend the wearing of clothing in the classroom which obscures a facial view and creates an artificial barrier between pupil and teacher. Such clothing hinders proper communication.
3. Schools, when drawing up uniform policy, should consult widely in the school community.
4. Schools should take note of the obligations placed on them by the Equal Status Acts before setting down a school uniform policy. They should also be mindful of the Education Act, 1998. As previously mentioned, this obliges boards of management to take account of ‘the principles and requirements of a democratic society and have respect and promote respect for the diversity of values, beliefs, traditions, languages and ways of life in society’ (Department of Education 2008).

In September 2010, further Guidelines for Catholic schools on how best to integrate students of other faiths were issued by the Joint Managerial Body of Catholic secondary schools (JMB). They too emphasised “accommodation and dialogue” between schools and parents and, most significantly, drew a distinction between the hijab, which is accepted in Catholic schools, and the niqab, the full veil worn over the face, which is not.

### **Focus and methodology of the study**

The hijab has attracted much academic attention over the past 30 years. Scholars in many disciplines, from law to religious studies, have examined its growing presence and visibility in Europe and its socio-political implications in different contexts (Bowen 2007; Joppke 2009; Mac Goldrick 2006). In several European countries (France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK), the hijab has become a very sensitive issue, giving rise to legal disputes and political controversies, and schools have been the primary arena for the explosion of clashes since the mid-1980s. While it has never reached the turbulent proportions of some of its EU counterparts, the Irish ‘hijab affair’ has also generated some academic interest, mainly from the perspective of constitutional and legal issues, human rights and citizenship claims/implications (Enright 2011; Hickey 2009; Hogan 2005, 2011; Mullally and O’Donovan 2011).

This paper focuses on the subtexts of the controversy generated by the hijab in Irish schools. Exploring how the public, political and media debate was framed, it investigates underlying meanings in the discussions regarding the presence of Muslims and Islam in Irish schools and, more specifically, what these reveal about the Irish education system’s level of *acceptance* of (religious) diversity. Acceptance is here assessed on a spectrum of *non-toleration*, *toleration* and *respect-recognition*

(Dobbernack and Modood 2011; 2013), representing a particular conceptual perspective on contestations of religious (or cultural) diversity in European societies. These three classes thus provide an analytical tool to locate and classify responses to the challenges of diversity; “they allow us to explore the critical boundary issues in-between the refusal and the concession of tolerance *and* between toleration and more demanding responses such as of equality, respect or recognition” (Dobbernack and Modood 2011, 21).

The study combined secondary data from desk research and an empirical study. The desk research included over 80 media items (newspaper articles, TV and radio recordings), Oireachtas (Dáil and Senate) debates, official reports, position papers and academic works. The empirical study comprised 11 semi-structured qualitative interviews with two educationalists; a school principal; a former representative of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism; a representative of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals; a Fine Gael politician; a spokesperson for the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland; a Muslim mother; two Muslim students wearing the hijab (one born and raised in Ireland and one originally from the Middle East); and a high ranking member of the Catholic Church. An interview guide was developed from the initial desk research and adapted to each respondent. Interviews were carried out between March and June 2011 and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. They focused not only on the issue of the hijab but also on the broader issues of tolerance and diversity in Ireland. With the exception of one interview conducted by phone, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A discussion group was also organised with eight experts in the field of education and/or immigration in June 2011. With the participants’ agreement, the two-hour session was also recorded.

The data were analysed using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach (Wodak 2001; Wodak and Meyer 2009). CDA was chosen as it highlights the discursive nature of social relations of power in societies, and especially the labelling of social actors and the construction of ‘us’ and ‘them’. These discursive constructions proceed to the generalisation of positive or negative attributions and the elaboration of arguments to justify the inclusion of some and exclusion of ‘others’. These, in turn, can intensify or mitigate society’s levels of acceptance of religious and cultural diversity. The analysis involved a multilayered process of reading, coding and interpreting each of the texts to derive recurring patterns and themes and extract the main argumentation strategies – discursive topoi – through which the event and its repercussions have been constructed and debated. Topoi (singular: topos) are “specific ‘structures of arguments’ which are linguistically ‘realized’ through argumentative strategies leading – quasi as ‘short-cut’ (frequently without providing data and warrants) – to a particular (logical and intentional) conclusion intended by the author of a text” (Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak 2009, 9).

## **Analysis of the hijab debate**

While the hijab issue has involved an intricate web of stereotypes, prejudices and discriminations with regard to gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality and citizenship, three main discursive topoi can be identified in the Irish debate: *'gender rights'*, *'integration vs. segregation'*, and *'Religion in schools – and beyond'*.

### ***The 'gender rights' topos***

This topos encompassed debates about 'protecting vs. rejecting the veiled woman'. Media commentaries covered the full spectrum of feminist perspectives, with contributors voicing either support for or absolute opposition to the hijab in Irish schools (and Irish society), while invoking women's and/or individuals' 'rights'. In the Irish Independent, for instance, Devlin (2008) asserted that the headscarf is inherently oppressive and that accepting it would open the door to "even more repressive" practices, evoking arranged marriages and female circumcision, while Edwards (2008) equated the hijab with child abuse. In the Sunday Business Post, O'Connor (2008) argued that "No matter how you spin it, this is such a visible sign of inequality, it can only harm women's efforts in furthering equality. Just ask women in Afghanistan or in Iran". The Department of Education's (2008) report similarly acknowledged that: "There was also some concern expressed that the hijab is worn by some women as recognition of a second class status in society and is enforced by some parents to emphasise the lower status of women. (...) Schools should seek to counteract such attitudes in their work in the area of intercultural understanding" (para. 2.2.).

Here a discourse of protection is equated with the promotion of gender equality through the protection of Muslim girls from oppressive and patriarchal foreign practices. Within this discourse of 'protection', it is perceived as Ireland's duty, as an 'enlightened' and 'liberal' nation, to counter such tendencies by, for instance, banning the hijab from schools. This resonates with other European hijab debates and European Court of Human Rights rulings<sup>2</sup> that view the Muslim headscarf as incompatible with gender equality and necessarily oppressive (Evans 2006). This type of discourse can be interpreted as undermining the status of the veiled girl/woman as an autonomous agent and relegating her to a category of 'woman in need' of the state's protection while her personal desires and aspirations are simply ignored. This discourse construes the veiled girl as not only 'different', but also 'inferior'.

However, in the media debate a minority were supportive of Muslim girls' choice; their discourse focused on the protection of the girls' rights: their rights to religious freedom and to freedom of choice. O'Brien (2008a), for instance, regarded the demand to wear the hijab in Irish schools as an indication of autonomy, stating that "a girl who makes the request to wear [the hijab] in school is likely to have thought about it and be clear about what it means to her. She is doing something brave and countercultural". Here the notion of protection is centred on individual rights and freedoms. In this perspective, the hijab is perceived and construed as empowering,

as enabling girls to take control of their bodies, giving them a distinct identity and a sense of belonging to a wider Muslim community.

Despite their presence in the media debate, neither the issues of gender rights nor arguments portraying the hijab as either oppressing or liberating Muslim girls featured strongly in the interviews, underlining the lack of prominence of this issue in the Irish school debate. None of the three respondents who wore the hijab themselves emphasised the ‘gender issue’ although the Muslim mother emphasised that she would “fight for future generations’ right to wear the hijab” in schools should that right be challenged again. Interestingly, one interviewee highlighted a different ‘gender issue’ with regard to Muslims in schools – some Muslim boys’ attitude towards female teachers and their potential “lack of respect” or “lack of recognition of the authority” of female teachers.

The opposing views apparent in the media debate reflect conflicting perspectives and interpretations of human rights. While those opposing it perceive women’s rights as endangered by the hijab and what it (supposedly) represents, those who support the wearing of the hijab in Irish schools perceive a ban to be an infringement of individuals’ right to (religious or cultural) self-expression.

### ***The ‘integration vs. segregation’ topos***

The issue went beyond the question of the hijab in schools to embody the first controversy concerning Muslims’ presence and their potential claims for recognition in Ireland. The second topos that emerged – the *‘integration vs. segregation’* topos – encompassed debates about the nature of *Irish interculturalism*. These debates originated mainly from statements made by the girl’s family and the opposition parties (one of which, Fine Gael, is now in government). Speaking on Al Jazeera, the girl’s father accused the government of repressing minority rights, stating: “It is time the world witnessed the true face of Ireland. It has silently repressed Muslim rights while flaunting itself as the bastion of democracy for far too long. The issue of the hijab is a reflection of how Ireland treats its minorities” (Murphy 2008). He argued that it was not an immigration issue but was about freedom to practise religious beliefs and the importance of tolerance. To the argument that he should assimilate, he responded that he was Irish *and* Muslim.

The education spokesmen of the two main opposition parties at the time argued that the hijab raises crucial questions around the Irish approach to cultural difference, and called for a ban on the hijab in Irish schools. Labour’s Ruairí Quinn (now Education Minister) indicated that he was no longer a supporter of multiculturalism but a believer in integration, following his study of other European countries’ experiences. He stated: “If we want to avoid the problems associated with other countries, we have to be as integrationist as possible”. As a result, his stance on the hijab was also clear: “If people want to come into a western society that is Christian and secular, they need to conform to the rules and regulations of that country... In the interests of

integration and assimilation, they should embrace our culture... Irish girls don't wear headscarves" (McDonagh 2008). Fine Gael's Brian Hayes also gave his support for banning the hijab in schools, adding that "[t]here is enough segregation in Ireland without adding this to it" (McGee 2008).

In the context of schools themselves, the accent was also on 'integration/assimilation' with a strong emphasis on downplaying differences and on 'treating everybody the same' and, in that spirit, most schools have been reluctant to develop a formal policy on cultural diversity (Smyth et al. 2009). The Department of Education's (2008) report also emphasised school uniforms as an instrument of integration: "School uniforms are generally viewed by schools as a means of providing a group identity for pupils, thus eliminating possible competition amongst students in matters of dress and the wearing of jewellery, etc.". Views downplaying differences were also deliberately expressed in the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland's submission to the government on the hijab issue: "To focus on difference can encourage the development of fundamentalist viewpoints... The emphasis should be on our common humanity and shared human experiences in the context of our tradition of respect for equality and liberty" (ASTI 2008). Apart from diminishing the value of difference – and indeed problematising it – in one sentence "difference" was equated with "fundamentalism". While it does not directly link the Muslim headscarf with fundamentalism, this connection echoes an underlying fear that allowing the hijab in schools could lead the way to the greater visibility and greater affirmation of Muslims in Irish society, and could possibly represent a first step towards the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism.

Throughout the debates, members of the government rarely commented on the Hijab issue and, beyond the consultation with school principals and selected stakeholders, no real public 'debate' was engaged in by the government. Integration Minister Conor Lenihan simply stated that he had no problem with students wearing the hijab, while Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe indicated he did not regard the hijab as "a serious issue" in Ireland (Donnelly and Riegel 2008). Public opinion appeared relatively evenly split. A poll showed that 48% of those surveyed felt that Muslim students should be allowed to wear the hijab in schools, with significant differences of opinion between men and women, younger and older people, different socio-economic groups and supporters of the main political parties (O'Brien 2008b).

While the interviewees did not engage in an abstract debate about 'integration', 'assimilation', 'interculturalism' or 'segregation', some touched on these issues on a more 'grounded' 'pragmatic' level. Two respondents involved in the education system in particular highlighted the issue of the relative numbers of Muslim pupils in any given school as an important concern:

...the difficulty is if they drift towards a smaller number of schools... there are some schools where, for various reasons, they were made very welcome and the parents like those schools...

but if the Islamic population in the school becomes half the school then it's no longer the school that it's originally set out to be... [...] I think tensions could emerge and, strange thing, the result could be that the quality of the school would go down...

...I think it was just when... when they became more than 10 in a school or something... the management started to get anxious... once parents start coming in then as well and making demands and saying, you know... "We know our rights"... you know, that's when the difficulty starts...

This issue of the 'number of Muslim pupils' in any given school – and thus of their 'visibility' but also of their potential 'strength' or 'weight' as a group capable to formulate requests – relates directly to the 'pragmatics' of accommodation and integration. These refer to 'how much' one is prepared – as a school but also as a society – to welcome, to accommodate, to integrate – and possibly to assimilate, and can represent an indication of the nature (and 'quantity') of diversity one can deal with/accommodate.

The only answer to the multitude of questions raised by the hijab controversy were the "Guidelines" to schools released in 2008. The main teacher unions welcomed the Minister's statement. For the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI), the recommendations "fully respect the various religious backgrounds of students in our schools while taking account of the legal position", while the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) described them as "sensible and practical" (Mac Cormaic 2008). However, these guidelines, representing a relative 'laissez-faire' approach, did not fully satisfy either the supporters or the opponents of the hijab. The Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) officially criticised the government for "passing on" their responsibilities to school principals. For Director Mark Kelly: "This would appear to be a policy not to have a policy... In the absence of a nationally-agreed and enforceable policy, there remains a danger that individual principals could interpret this to permit them to exclude a child for wearing religious dress, such as the hijab. The Ministers should live up to their responsibility to close this loophole" (Carr 2008). In September 2010, they released a consultation paper highlighting the potential issues – not addressed by the government – of Muslim girls being turned down by a school for requesting to wear the hijab, and of school policies becoming opposed to hijab after students' enrolments (ICCL 2010).

Similarly, two Muslim interviewees emphasised that the absence of a strong "legal basis" could not only raise problems in the future but had already done so. A Muslim mother, whose five children have gone through the Irish education system, gave concrete examples where schools simply refused to accept the hijab or to accommodate certain demands or, more "subtly", ostracised Muslim students. She explained how her eldest girls were allowed to wear the hijab in their secondary school (after being refused in a previous one) but were "not allowed in the school photo", and how her youngest girl was not allowed to take part in the school play when wearing a hijab. She emphasised that the issue of accommodating Muslim pupils in secondary schools

was not restricted to girls and that, despite the “encouragements to accommodate” made in both sets of guidelines, some issues could still prove problematic and even “backfire” if the challenge proved too great for the school. Describing how a “Christian ethos school” had refused to allow her son and his friends to have an area to pray at lunchtime, she explained that since the last request had been denied the school had “stopped taking Muslims altogether”.

One of the underlying concerns emerging was of the loss of ‘Irishness’ through the dilution of Irish culture and identity – starting within the schools, then potentially spreading to Irish society. We can see in statements such as Quinn’s assertion that “Irish girls don’t wear headscarves” the emergence of a politics of belonging which defines Irishness, if not in terms of birth or blood, in terms of behaviour. However, as one Muslim interviewee emphasised: “What about Irish Muslims?”. Within the discourses of integration, the hijab was indeed clearly associated with ‘foreignness’ and the veiled (Muslim) girl construed as a symbol of ‘otherness’ within Irish schools; Irish Muslims were largely ignored. The overwhelming assumption seemed to be that there non-Christians are clearly seen as ‘others’, and their presence permitted on condition that they behave – and dress – according to the overwhelmingly Christian ethos of Irish schools, revealing not only boundaries but also conditions of acceptance.

### ***The ‘religion in schools – and beyond’ topos***

As we have seen, the hijab debate is not *only* about religion. It is *also* about religion, about how faith and religious beliefs are expressed, acknowledged and valued/respected – within schools but also within society at large. Unlike France or Turkey where the state has consciously been constructed as secular, Ireland has always enjoyed a close relationship with religious institutions, notably the Catholic Church. This special history has resulted in quite unique arguments both *for* and *against* the hijab in Irish schools.

Articles 44 and 42 of the Irish Constitution have tended to be interpreted as making pluralism and tolerance an integral part of the Irish education system; and guaranteeing “freedom of conscience and freedom of profession and practice of religion” would seem to translate into permitting wearing Muslim headscarves and other religious symbols in schools. However, in order to fully understand the issues faced by minority religion students in Irish schools, we need to consider the denominational nature of the education system. Within the secondary sector (where the hijab emerged as an issue) over half of all schools are denominational institutions; the majority being owned and controlled by Catholic religious orders or trusts set up by them who represent in effects the ‘patrons’ of the schools. The educational philosophy of the patron is reflected in the distinctive character of the education provided in the school, usually referred to as the *ethos* and is upheld by its board of management. Through the Constitution and the Education Act 1998, patrons are given significant latitude to manage their schools and all rights and obligations are therefore subject to their chosen ethos.



The denominational nature of schools and the primacy attributed to the maintenance of their ethos are significant factors which can conflict with the rights of religious minorities in Ireland and potentially lead to discrimination (Hogan 2005). A significant example is the exemption from equality legislation for religious-run institutions, where schools can refuse admission based on ethos.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Employment Equality Act 1998, while in general outlawing discrimination on the grounds of religion, contains a provision allowing schools to discriminate on a similar basis.<sup>4</sup> These provisions can be seen as perpetuating a tradition of segregated education and thus, when a pupil of a religious belief other than Catholic is admitted into a Catholic secondary school, it can be regarded as a 'privilege' rather than a 'right'. Thus, while the Education Act 1998 clearly outlines the rights and obligations of the state and of schools, these are somewhat 'qualified' by what has been termed the "ethos let-out clause" (Lodge and Lynch 2004, 49).

The importance of maintaining – or 'fitting-in' – the 'ethos' of a school was mentioned by several interviewees. As we have seen earlier, the issue of the 'number' of Muslim pupils within a school was perceived as potentially challenging. As a Church representative explained, "an Islamic minority in Catholic schools is one thing... as it grows it's changing the ethos of the school and it could become more difficult". The 'visibility issue' was also raised by two Muslim respondents. The Muslim mother indicated that, in the (Catholic) schools her daughters had attended, the issue of maintaining the image/perception of the school as a *Catholic* school had often been emphasised by the school management. The (Irish) Muslim student similarly recalled that her hijab had attracted particular attention while attending an open day at a prospective school: "I was sitting in the front and the principal of that particular school she... kind of pointed towards me and was like 'this is a CATHOLIC school'".

It can be suggested that it was not religion which was under attack by those who demanded a ban on the hijab, but the presence of religious and cultural 'others' who, as we have seen earlier, are likely to be construed as 'outsiders' within the 'established multi-denominational' education system. One Muslim student highlighted the presence of other religious emblems in Irish schools and argued that "with most schools in Ireland they have a crest... in the crest there's a cross... so if the crest has a cross that's kind of representing your religion, why can't we wear our thing". The NCCRI (2007) argued that those who advocated a ban on the hijab "might not have fully considered the consequences of such a ban with regard to *all* religious symbols and obligations in the schools". For its (then) director, Philip Watt, "The banning of religious symbols or obligations solely aimed at one religious community or indeed all religious faiths is potentially discriminatory and likely to be tested in Irish law" (Neville 2008). Others in the Muslim community emphasised the distinctiveness of the hijab in Islam, in an attempt to 'exempt' it from the 'religious symbols debates' that have been raging in other European countries. Imam Hussein Halawa of the ICCI emphasised that the hijab was not just a religious symbol but "an Islamic obligation",

adding: “Just as nobody had the right to prevent people going to church, nobody has right to prevent Muslim women wearing the hijab” (Irish Times 2007).

Finally, some used the debate to criticise the very presence of religion in Irish schools and argued that schools should not only ban *all* religious symbolism but should be wholly secular (Groarke 2009; McCrea 2009). More recently, Daly (2011) argued that a “universal model of non-denominational education” was needed in contemporary Ireland, suggesting that only such an approach could provide an effective protection of religious freedom in Irish schools. However, while the idea of a fully secular education system was mentioned by (only) two of our interviewees, neither of them could foresee such a development in the near future. As one (educationalist) explained:

...it might be lovely in theory... but the rights, the constitutional rights of the vast majority of the people at the moment, their rights are to have a denominational education if they want to believe in it... they do... that’s constitutionally secure... and I don’t think you would get a constitutional referendum passed on those lines in contemporary Ireland...

While a strictly secular school system is unlikely to come about, the current debate on the patronage of primary schools<sup>5</sup> may however be accompanied by a reconsideration of the structure of post-primary education. In July 2012, the Minister for Education announced the patrons for 14 new post-primary schools (Gartland 2012). For the first time, the multidenominational patron Educate Together will have responsibility for a secondary school (and share patronage of another). As an application from the Muslim Primary Education Board was turned down, the incorporation of Muslim students in secondary Irish schools will remain a live issue.

## Conclusion

Providing a microcosm of how states grapple with the challenges posed by (social, cultural, ethnic and religious) diversity, debates around the hijab in schools reveal not only the education system’s capacity for flexibility and openness in the face of increased diversity, but also the dominant socio-political culture and national models governing the reception of immigrants, and the space granted to minorities to challenge the rules. As Joppke (2009, 1) suggested, “each country has the headscarf controversy it deserves”.

Occurring in a country which has not seen any prohibition on religious dress in schools or public places, and in view of the fact that it did not lead to any regulation, the Irish hijab debate provides an interesting contrast with those European countries where the headscarf has been a major issue or has been banned in schools. This debate brought out to a greater extent than any previous event a range of views on the new religious and cultural diversity in Ireland. It offers thus a “magnifying glass” to examine how diversity is perceived, interpreted and managed on the spectrum of *non-toleration*, *toleration* and *respect or recognition* (Dobbernack and Modood 2011).

At the time of the debate, the official emphasis was on the integration of diverse religious and cultural communities, framed in Ireland in terms of ‘interculturalism’, defined by the NCCRI as the “development of strategy, policy and practices that promote interaction, understanding, respect and integration between different cultures and ethnic groups on the basis that cultural diversity is a strength that can enrich society, without glossing over issues such as racism” (NCCRI 2006, 29). Such a definition would seem to require schools to go beyond mere tolerance to provide respect/recognition to the diversity of their new student populations. Prior to the debate, there appeared to be a broad tolerance of diversity in most schools and, in its aftermath, there is relatively little change. Schoolgirls were and are widely allowed to wear hijabs, and there is no public prohibition of such dress. The only element of intolerance that emerged was a virtual consensus that the niqab/face covering would *not* be tolerated in schools, if and when this arose. This level of acceptance of Muslims is also clear in the recognition of two state-supported Muslim primary schools.

However, the Irish hijab issue represented a touchstone in discussions on the growing Muslim presence in Ireland. Until then, the Muslim community had been not only ‘well integrated’ but, in a sense, relatively ‘ignored’ and this event sparked a questioning about the potential for controversy of Muslims and Muslim practices in Ireland. It also highlighted that, as Hopkins argues, Muslims in Europe are often placed in a difficult position as “they are routinely viewed as ‘in’ Europe, but not ‘of’ Europe” (2011, 253). This was demonstrated in the Irish debate by the frequent conflation of ‘Muslim’ and ‘foreigner/immigrant’ and the tendency by both the opponents and the supporters of the hijab to overlook the existence of Irish Muslims (both Irish-born children and Irish converts). This could be construed as an indication of the (*mere*) *tolerance of religious diversity* in Irish society; while Muslims are *accepted* in Ireland, they are not perceived as being *part of* the Irish nation.

As we have seen, the issue was discussed mainly in terms of respect for religion and acceptance of (other) religious beliefs and religious minorities. However, the issue of the *relative numbers of Muslim pupils* (and thus of their ‘visibility’) in any given school also gives an indication of *the nature and limits of such acceptance*. The arguments that a growing number of Muslim pupils can ‘challenge the ethos of a school’ and affect ‘the perception of the school as a *Catholic* school’, for example, could indicate that *acceptance of religious diversity is dependent on a number of factors* including the limited nature of the claim and the relatively small numbers of the minority, *and is also conditional on the consequences of such diversity* for the schools’ self-perception. This could be an interesting indication of *the kind of diversity Ireland is prepared to deal with*.<sup>6</sup>

While the Irish education system has been able to offer a level of structural and practical accommodation to (religious) minorities, a substantial recognition of diversity as an integral component of Irishness is still lacking and, although a relatively brief affair, Ireland’s hijab controversy has left many questions unanswered. The

issue involved both a legal and a practical challenge, and while the ‘practical’ side was dealt with through accommodation of the hijab in most schools, the legal aspect was not clearly addressed. The 2008 government guidelines and the 2010 JMB guidelines have no legal standing. While there could be a concern that legally binding guidelines could be used to express intolerance in some contexts, and that the law can send a signal of exclusion to some sections of the population, the government’s stance means that schools do have the capacity to exclude students wearing the hijab if they so wish. This leaves Muslims girls in a state of precariousness in terms of both accessing and/or remaining in the school of their choice. The implications of this situation in terms of potential school dropouts and alienation of Muslims girls from education, or indeed in terms of their struggle to negotiate both their faith and their ‘ethno-religious’ identity between the potentially conflicting messages they receive from their home and school environments (Hamzeh 2011; Zine 2006) have not (yet) been fully considered in the Irish context. This led to criticisms by the ICCL (2010) and by some interviewees who have been directly affected by this. It also leads to a broader questioning of the place and recognition granted to minorities in the education system. For Enright (2011), the decision not to ban the hijab in Irish schools is not synonymous with inclusive politics and the lack of legislation may in fact have “disempowering and exclusionary effects”; for Hickey (2009), this represents a kind of “domination without interference”, while for Hogan (2011) Muslim students’ rights should not be conditional on “the elasticity of Catholic ethos”.

The recent Intercultural Education Strategy (DES/OMI 2010) proposed a comprehensive agenda that highlights diversity as a “normal part of the Irish society” – interestingly, it did not address the issue of the hijab or of any other religious symbols in schools. Most significantly, it clearly confirmed that the onus is on local schools to effect change. This perpetuates a controversial ‘distribution of power’ between the key actors of the Irish education system – while the state (government) is responsible for national education policy, schools patrons/boards of management are free to manage their schools in accordance with their chosen ethos (Enright 2011). This disjunction of roles and power might account for the fact that, despite the prevalent rhetoric of ‘interculturalism’ in most educational policy documents, the practical implementation of such an approach is left to the command of each individual school, allowing the state to ‘opt out’ of sensitive questions and controversial debates and remain a “neutral arbiter” (O’Sullivan 2005).

As both guardians of the past and socialising agents of future generations, “caught between processes of ‘production’ and ‘reproduction’” (Devine 2011), schools are thus left to determine the reception they give to minority children and determine whether 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland will simply *tolerate* – or *respect* and *recognise* – Muslim’s (and other religious and cultural minorities’) identity and practices within its midst.

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## Notes

- 1 There are no state-run or ‘public’ primary schools in Ireland, almost all primary schools are run by private bodies, but are financed by the state; 98% of these schools are religious (90% Catholic). Within the secondary sector, over half (57%) of all schools are denominational institutions, there too the majority are owned and controlled by the Catholic Church (Lodge and Lynch, 2004). For a detailed (historical) presentation of the Irish education system, see Coolahan (1981) but also O’Sullivan (2005), Devine (2011) and Fischer (2011) for more recent analyses of its evolution.
- 2 *Leyla Sahin v. Turkey*; *Dahlab v. Switzerland*, *Dogru v. France*
- 3 Under section 7(3) of the Equal Status Act 2000 schools can discriminate by giving preference in admissions to children of a particular denomination, or by refusing to admit a child where such refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.
- 4 Under the Employment Equality Act 1998 “certain religious, educational and medical institutions may give more favourable treatment on the religion ground to an employee or prospective employee where it is reasonable to do so in order to maintain the religious ethos of the institution”.
- 5 In March 2011, the Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, established a Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector; the report of the Advisory Group to the Forum was published in April 2012 –<http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector/> (Accessed 2012-06-10).
- 6 It is interesting to note that the hijab was not the only example of challenges posed to the Irish denominational education system by growing religious and cultural diversity. In September 2007, an ‘emergency school’ had to be opened under the auspices of the non-denominational patron Educate Together in Balbriggan, Co Dublin to cater almost exclusively for children of migrant origin who could not access any local Catholic schools as they did not possess the necessary Catholic baptismal certificate (McDonald, 2007; Boland, 2007). The spectre of educational segregation along racial as well as religious lines emerged then, following denominational schools’ recourse to their right to discriminate (on religious grounds) with regard to enrolment in order to preserve, here again, the ethos of their schools. This event highlighted then a relatively defensive reaction to diversity from Catholic schools.

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*Nathalie Rougier* holds a Licence, Maîtrise and DEA in Social Psychology from the Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, France, and a PhD in Psychology from the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, Northern Ireland. She is currently the researcher for the ACCEPT Pluralism Project (<http://www.eui.eu/Projects/ACCEPT>) in the School of Politics and International Relations at University College Dublin. Her main research interests revolve around issues of identity construal and (re)definition over time and across socio-cultural contexts; inter-group and inter-cultural relations; integration and acculturation processes; stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

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# “A raw, emotional thing” School choice, commodification and the racialised branding of Afrocentricity in Toronto, Canada

*Kalervo N. Gulson\** & *P. Taylor Webb\*\**

## Abstract

In this paper we contend neo-liberal education policy which supports the creation of schooling choices in public education systems is reshaping, conflating and branding ethnicity. We make these points in reference to school choice in Toronto, Canada, and the establishment of an Africentric ethno-centric school. We argue that one of the registers within which education and ethnicity in Toronto operates relates to the conflation of commodification, ethnicity and geography, and that this conflation indicates one of the limits of school choice as a possible way to redress Black student disadvantage. We suggest education policy, which enables the establishment of ethno-centric schools, enters the realm of other debates about race, equity and difference that include the practices of marketing and branding.

*Keywords:* education policy, ethnicity, markets, Canada

Demands for change are often framed in the language of school choice and markets, but they can also be seen as a demand for recognition in a plural democracy and a critique of the cultural assumptions that underpin current versions of the common school... (Gaskell, 2001: 32)

Mark this term: *empowerment*. In the post-colony it connotes privileged access to markets, money, and material enrichment. In the case of ethnic groups, it is frankly associated with finding something essentially their own and theirs alone, something of their essence, to sell. In other words, a brand. (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009: 15, original emphasis)

In September 2009, just over 100 students entered the classrooms of the Africentric Alternative School (AAS) for the first time. The AAS opened as an elementary school within the existing Sheppard Public School in Brookwell Park in the north-west of Toronto, Canada. This school was one of four elementary schools that opened in September 2009 as part of a Toronto school choice policy framework – the ‘alternative

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\*Corresponding author, School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales UNSW, Sydney, NSW, Australia. E-mail: k.gulson@unsw.edu.au.

\*\*Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. E-mail: taylor.webb@ubc.ca

schools' programme – that allows for the *establishment* of new schools by parents and other interested parties.

School choice in Canada is the remit of the provinces, and then reconfigured and enacted at school board level (Davies, 2004). Toronto, like many other cities, has a local education quasi-market, with a combination of state control and market mechanisms (Taylor, 2009). Quasi-markets engender a focus on the role of the individual as a responsible consumer, and the processes and outcomes of choice (Olssen et al., 2004). While a quasi-market valorises the 'consumer-parent', there is less emphasis on the idea of the 'producer-parent' who can play a role in establishing schools. This is a particular formation of choice policy that permits the creation of separate, publicly funded educational spaces (Wells, Lopez, Scott & Holme, 1999). In the case of Toronto, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) supports the development of alternative schools, which not only presumes parents can choose to send their children to existing schools, but provides the capacity to establish schools. There are now more than 40 elementary and secondary alternative schools in Toronto (Toronto District School Board, 2012).

And yet, in the case of the latest alternative schools established in 2009, *only* the AAS – a small school in a city-wide Toronto District School Board system with 600 schools and close to 300,000 students – near the intersection of Keele Street and Sheppard Avenue West, an intersection in an area of the city not often included in any tourist guides for Toronto, isolated by the surrounding gargantuan urban freeways and adjacent to the mid-town airport, only this small school managed to evoke equal parts support and outrage when it was proposed. The other three 'alternative' schools were proposed and approved with nary a whimper of controversy.

In this paper, we use the example of the differential treatment of the AAS to contend that neo-liberal education policies which supports choice, like the alternative school programme, are reshaping, conflating and branding ethnicity in racialised quasi-school markets. In so doing, school choice policies provide new conditions for, and have reshaped the possibilities of, equity. We suggest this is similar to Fraser's (2009) proposition that forms of politics such as second-wave feminism are far more complicated, and possibly contradictory, under neo-liberal conditions; that is "[a]spirations that had a clear emancipatory thrust in the context of state-organised capitalism assumed a far more ambiguous meaning in the neo-liberal era" (Fraser, 2009: 108). While we might quibble over whether state-organised capitalism is an equally apt description of neo-liberal reforms, the notion of ambiguous meaning, and what Fraser calls "dangerous liaisons" with neo-liberalism, are salient ideas in relation to school choice.

White, middle-class parents and students are often identified as the main beneficiaries and strategic users of school choice policies (Ball, 2003). However, the possibility of parent and community driven establishment of schools is shifting the parameters of opportunity, access and equity; they "help redefine educational opportunities as

the creation of separate spaces” (Wells, Lopez, Scott & Holme, 1999: 175). Education policy supporting school choice of existing schools now permits parents and other stakeholders to *establish new public schools*. Rather than merely advocating choice as the opportunity to attend different types of schools, policy *conflates both the provision and choosing of education*. What is being enabled, therefore, are new forms of what might be termed government-funded “ethno-centric” (Wells et al., 1999) schools that are developing in the Asia-Pacific, North America and Europe through a variety of different school choice mechanisms. These schools – charter schools in the United States, publicly funded ‘private’ schools in Australia, ‘free schools’ in the United Kingdom, for example – are often affiliated with ethnic or cultural groups. This includes religious denominations that are ‘minority’ and/or racialised populations in nation-states, such as Afro-Caribbean in Canada, Muslim in Australia, and Latino/a in the United States. We use the example of the AAS as one such type of school, the first established in Toronto since the 1980s, to look at the links between ethnicity, race and education policy. We locate this problem within an understanding of ethnicity taken as both “increasingly the stuff of existential passion, of the self-conscious fashioning of meaningful, morally anchored selfhood” and as “*also* becoming more corporate, more commodified, more implicated than ever before in the economics of everyday life” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009: 1, original emphasis).

In this paper we first provide our theoretical and methodological premises relating to critical policy studies, including detail about the broader project from which this paper is drawn. Second, we outline the policy environment pertaining to school choice in Toronto and the establishment of alternative schools. This includes discussing broader shifts towards ethno-centric schools, and how school choice provides a form of self-fashioning and empowerment for different groups. We then link ideas of empowerment with notions of racialised commodification and ethnicity in Toronto. In this section, we argue that one of the registers within which education and ethnicity in Toronto operates relates to the conflation of racialised commodification and geography, and that this conflation indicates one of the limits of school choice as an equity project.

We conclude by suggesting school choice policy operates on the premise that the provision of schooling choices is a neutral market. Thus, a ‘neutral market’ effectively depoliticises education through the commodification of ethnic identities while providing the opportunity for the creation of separate ethno-centric schools. While choice opens up agency as an option in social justice projects, it also complicates other forms of collective action as part of anti-racist projects. Further to these claims, we illustrate that any differentiation in quasi-school markets occurs in the practices of choice undertaken by students and parents. We aim to show that, counter to the notion of neutral markets, education policy that enables the establishment of ethno-centric schools such as the AAS enters into, and constitutes, the realm of other debates about equity, race and difference, including the practices of marketing and branding.

## **Methodology**

This paper is drawn from a three-year (2010–2013) qualitative project on education policy, curriculum, identity and globalisation in relation to the establishment of the Africentric Alternative School in Toronto, Canada.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, we take an approach located in critical policy studies, which is attendant to how issues of power affect the production and subsequent enunciations of different discourses (e.g., equality, recognition, identity, commodification) (Simons, Olssen & Peters, 2009). Our understanding is that while policy is often idealised and crude (Ball, 1994), the policy process and policy itself is messy, inchoate and unpredictable. That is policy “is designed to steer understanding and action without ever being sure of the practices it might produce” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010: 5). The outcomes are contingent on prevailing *historical and geographical* factors that shape and are shaped by different actors and different truths about what is significant in any particular policy issue (Bacchi, 2000; Ball, 1994).

Our analysis in this paper “not only recognizes the historical formation of policy but also its constitution as discourse” (Olssen, Codd & O’Neill, 2004: 58). We draw on notions of governmentality and its links to policy “to analyse the governing regime and the conditions of possibility for policy texts, policy problems and solutions, and actors and their self-understanding to emerge” (Simons et al., 2009: 67). In this, we attempt to look at the conditions of possibility for equity, provided in and through education policy enabling and supporting markets and choice.

We are concerned with both the histories and geographies of policy problems. As such, we are attendant to the geographical aspects of policy – that markets play out in spatial ways, and that policy is a form of spatial ordering (see Gulson, 2005; 2007; 2011). We want to identify the difference geography makes in constituting power relations, including those of race and ethnicity (Allen, 2003, 2004; Delaney, 2002). Our goal in this paper is to use the example of the AAS in Toronto to illustrate the ways that education policy frames the discourses of recognition and equality are tangled with discourses of ethnic commodification and neo-liberal policies of school choice.

## **Data generation**

The data were generated from over 1000 school, district, and community documents (e.g., Provincial and school board policy texts, meeting minutes, newspaper editorials) and other media (such as video footage from school board meetings, documentary films) from the 1992–2012 period, and we explored how these texts signified and conceptualised the links between policy and identity. In 2012, we supplemented this archival work with eight semi-structured interviews with stakeholders including community representatives and School Board Trustees. The latter are elected officials of the school board with a mix of those who voted for and against the school proposal. For reasons of anonymity, in this paper we do not indicate how trustees voted and we name all as ‘trustees,’ even if they are ex-members. If participants identified with a

particular ethnicity, racialised position or culture we have noted this in the excerpts (e.g. Black Canadian, Jewish). We undertook semi-structured interviews that attempted and at times succeeded in developing rich and challenging conversations about the development of the ASS. As part of this, we were reflexive about our racialised positioning in this project as white, middle-class, male researchers.

Eight interviews were conducted with current and past TDSB Trustees. Formal interviews averaged 1.5 hours, with some lasting 2 plus hours and one that lasted 12 minutes. All the interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Data were organised by themes that served as analytic constructs among many examples of participants' actions (Flyvberg, 2006). In addition, member checks were conducted with key participants, asking if the data were accurate and interpretations plausible. Interestingly, participants developed an enthusiasm during the interviews when we involved them in analysing, not merely reporting, events and issues surrounding the establishment of AAS. We note that the participants discussed these issues to help themselves understand policy and power issues in their work. In fact, several participants responded at some point during the interview that the discussion had been cathartic, needed and important.

## **Education policy, school choice and 'Alternative schools' in Toronto**

[The school] was a raw emotional thing. There was...a hurly burly man, we were all in there punching and kicking and fighting and yelling, there was no structure, no process, no framework, no nothing.

(Black Canadian, Trustee A, TDSB)

The provision of 'alternative' schools in Toronto emerged as part of a broader movement in the 1960s and 1970s around 'free schools', co-operative parent teacher elementary schools, and community, conservative elementary schools (M. Levin, 1979). In the 1980s and 1990s, alternative schools – many of which had culture or language bases and were underpinned by different groups' desires to have control over, and make more culturally relevant, their children's schooling – were part of contests about schooling in Ontario, and challenges to "an Anglocentric, Protestant and bourgeois regime" (Dehli, 1996b: 78). As one TDSB trustee notes:

[T]he old Toronto board, established what it called alternative schools which essentially were sort of grassroots, a bunch of parents want a school of a certain kind of methodology or a focus and ...[the board would] say 'OK' and then they would turn their neighbourhood school into that, that was the basis for a lot of the so-called alternative schools

(Trustee B, TDSB).

A parallel to this counter-political form of alternative schools were those established by white, middle-class parents who were intervening in school debates and articulating

participation as consumers: “These are the groups who have adopted a cultural script of consumer democracy in education” (Dehli, 1996b: 83).

The alternative school programme continued through an amalgamation of the Toronto school board. In 1998, as part of the Harris Conservative provincial government’s (1995–2003) push to reduce the number of municipal organisations, the current Toronto District School Board was created by combining the old central Toronto Public Board of Education, and the school boards of the surrounding cities, York, East York, North York, Scarborough and Etobicoke. At amalgamation the TDSB became a 600-school and 280,000-student board, the largest in Canada and one of the largest in North America (B. Levin, Gaskell & Pollock, 2007). The old Toronto Board of Education was notable and distinct from the other boards in the broader Toronto city and Ontario for its attempts to address issues of equality and equity, including anti-racism, alongside a focus on parental involvement in education and schooling (McGaskell, 2005). With amalgamation, like other boards in Ontario, many of these programmes disappeared or were moved from the purview of the board to the remit of parents or the ‘community’ (Dehli, 1996a). All of the previous boards had some form of school choice that remained in the new amalgamated board. The alternative schools programme was one that was retained, albeit with a hiatus until a flurry of activity in 2007 when new proposals were put forward.

In 2007, the TDSB attempted to formalise its definition of an ‘alternative school’ as:

Sites that are unique in pedagogy, forms of governance and staff involvement, and have strong parental and/or student involvement; environments vary and provide an educational experience suited to individual learning styles/preferences and/or needs (Quan, 2007: Appendix A-1).

The new iteration of ‘alternative schools’ reinforces school choice as both parents choosing to send their children to existing schools, and *actually establishing a school*. Individuals or groups are able to propose a school and, if they meet the requirement of the board, the trustees vote on the proposal. Schools that were created by parents or other educational stakeholders, post-2007, and have been listed on the TDSB website as alternative schools, included the AAS and the following: the Da Vinci Alternative School, a school based on Waldorf and Steiner education; The Grove Community School, with a social justice and environmental focus; and the Equinox Alternative School that has a holistic learning and teaching approach (Toronto District School Board, 2012). All of these new schools are located within the bounds of the old Toronto board, with the AAS being the only alternative school located outside of the boundaries of the old board.

While the latter three schools were not challenged publicly<sup>2</sup>, or at the very least there was little reported contestation, the AAS was created through numerous public meetings, and entered the maelstrom of the complicated politics of race and equity in the Toronto school district (McGaskell, 2005). Two Black Canadian female ‘commu-

nity activists', Donna Harrow and Angela Wilson, for example, drove the AAS. These two activists were variously lauded or vilified throughout the process of establishing the school (Weiss, 2010). In an interview for a documentary on the AAS called "Our School" (Weiss, 2010), Donna Harrow noted:

And yeah, there are other alternative schools but those same people who were against all of this [the AAS] had no idea how many alternative schools, what kind of alternative schools, but because this one came up, and there was the big hullabulloo about the Black focused school, of course, 'they're going to say, well no I don't agree with this' (Weiss, 2010: Film time 14.03-14.36).

This recounting of uninformed, yet vehement opposition to the idea of a Black-focused school indicates how choice policy and its ostensive neutrality enters the realm of differentiation and racialisation of provision; that some forms of choice are seen as discomfiting, unsettling and dangerous and others as normal or natural (Gulson & Webb, 2012). In Toronto, this differentiation depends on how the AAS is positioned in relation to the historical disadvantage of Black students. In the Toronto school district in 2006, 12% or 31,800 students identified as Black (Yau, O'Reilly, Rosolen & Archer, 2011). Over 40% of Black students are underachieving in relation to the district standards (Toronto District School Board, 2009). In the 1990s, the extent of Black student disadvantage and racism in Toronto was well known, with the 1992 "Royal Commission on Learning" making extensive recommendations about Black-focused education (Ontario Government/African Canadian Community Working Group, 1992). Between 1992 and 2007 there were myriad moves to include a Black-focused curriculum in Toronto schooling, as well as proposals to develop separate Afrocentric schools. These schools were posited as counters to a Eurocentric focus in the curriculum, sites for Black role models, and as ways of engaging Black students who were not completing school (Dei, 1995, 1996). Despite this extensive focus on Black education, progress on systemic equity initiatives was complicated by the amalgamation of the school boards (McCaskell, 2005).

The AAS as a 'choice' initiative therefore took place against this backdrop of 20–30 years of attempts to rectify Black student disadvantage, and repudiations of those attempts. In June 2007 a feasibility report was prepared for an Africentric Alternative School, after being requested by Black Canadian community members. In November and December 2007 community meetings were held under the aegis of the TDSB, about the school in conjunction with meetings on the education of Black students more generally in Toronto. The trustees approved the school, 11 votes to 9, in a fiery and controversial school board meeting in 2008, televised live. As one trustee noted:

This was one of the biggest debates in TDSB history, perhaps of ... school history in the country (Trustee E, TDSB).

Representing different parts of the city, the trustees were celebrated or pilloried for voting for or opposing the school<sup>3</sup>. Some trustees were physically assaulted and received death threats in response to how they voted (both ‘for’ and ‘against’). For, within a normalised policy environment that has long supported the establishment of parent- and stakeholder-led schooling initiatives under the alternative school programme, the AAS, as distinct from the environment school, or the holistic learning school, became the touchstone for all sorts of debates about the future of Toronto – Black student achievement, the management of diversity in Toronto, equity and equality. Therefore, even before it was established the AAS stalked the landscape of Torontonion education like a policy apparition (Webb & Gulson, 2012); even the threat of its existence evoked uncertainty, doubt and fear as part of the policy process. The primary opposition, for example, to the establishment of the AAS was framed in the media as a particular form of re-segregation within the TDSB public school system. The spectre of segregation was raised repeatedly in local media regarding the general ideas of Black-focused schools in Ontario (James, 2011), and specifically in relation to the AAS. For some opponents, the spectre of segregation that was to be manifest in the AAS was both an historical and a-historical reference; historical when the opposition made links to segregated schooling in North America, a-historical when the opposition ignored low student achievement and historical exclusion within public schooling – that is racism within public schools (James, 2011). The school was caught in a maelstrom of concern over race, ethnicity and equity not only in Toronto, but Canada more broadly. As a Black Canadian trustee noted:

...there were weeks and weeks of public consultations and people coming into the boardroom. And you know, those kinds of public consultations really attract the lunatic fringe, right? Like people who couldn’t string a coherent sentence together, but were having this deeply emotional response because again they couldn’t come to grips with whatever it is they were feeling, you know, and get up and kind of rant and rave, and sometimes not even talk about issues related to Black focus school. It really because a locus for people’s discomfort. You name it, public education, the Black community, with poverty, with geography, with the city, like it became this thing (Black Canadian, Trustee A, TDSB, our emphasis).

In the rest of the paper we discuss this differentiated treatment within the realm of choice policy, in two ways. The first emphasise the empowerment in the market – closely related to new forms of recognition and agency, the capacity and permission to act, and self-fashioning around ethnicity in education afforded by ethno-cultural schools like the AAS. The second looks at how the school is, we contend, enmeshed with and constitutive of the racialised cultural politics of the city. This latter section is intended to complicate the notion of empowerment in relation to ethnicity and commodification.



## **Afrocentricity Inc.?: Ethnicity, choice and empowerment**

Education policy is, of course somewhat axiomatically, about change: “it offers an imagined future state of affairs, but in articulating desired change always offers an account somewhat more simplified than the actual realities of practice” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010: 5). School choice policy in the form of alternative schools offered the possibility for parents to take control of parts of Black education in Toronto. This is related to a politics of recognition that has, for the past 20 years or so, been played out through and enabled by marketised educational policy in various iterations in different countries and cities – such as open enrolment, changing school establishment regulations, vouchers and charters (Wells et al., 1999). That is, the individualised form of neo-liberal participation as based on parental freedom to choose has also been part of “a demand for recognition in a plural democracy and a critique of the cultural assumptions that underpin current versions of the common school” (Gaskell, 2001: 32-33).

School choice policies can enable the development and establishment of ethno-centric schools and curricula based on ideas of identity and recognition (Rofes & Stulberg, 2004). This includes opportunities to develop ethnic-specific curricula for Native Hawaiians (Buchanan & Fox, 2004), Native Americans (Belgarde, 2004), African Americans (Shujaa, 1988, 1992; Yancey, 2004), Black Canadians (Dei, 2005), and Aboriginal Canadians (Archibald, Rayner, & Big Head, 2011). Afrocentric schools in particular have a lineage tracing back to community-based or ‘free school movements’, and the notion of ‘independent Black institutions’ in the United States (Shujaa, 1992), with contemporary iterations continuing across many states of the United States including Ohio, Missouri, Washington and California, and Afrocentric curricula initiatives in Nova Scotia, Canada (Dei, 1995; Ginwright, 2000). In the case of the Canadian AAS, the school website states: “A unique feature of the AAS will be the integration of the diverse perspectives, experiences and histories of people of African descent into the provincial mandated curriculum” (Africentric Alternative School, 2011).

School choice policies and the emergence of ethno-centric schools within this policy frame can thus enunciate ideas of choice, freedom and equality. The politics surrounding this, however, are complex and at times contradictory. We might see the opportunities afforded by the establishment of ethno-centric schools as part of providing members of an enterprising cultural group with opportunities to speak for themselves and to take responsibility for themselves against persistent and historical educational inequalities. And we might read the AAS as enmeshed in a similar kind of politics – that is in the absence over 20 years of any substantive addressing of Black disadvantage at a systemic level, and with the reduction of equity focus in the new school board, the market becomes the modality for equality. As Donna Harrow identified, a school like the AAS can be borne out of endemic procrastination and obfuscation, of systemic rejection or belittling of the issue of Black student disadvantage, except during moments of crisis. In talking about why the AAS took so long to be established,

remembering that Black-focused schools had been recommended as legitimate and important initiatives in Toronto since the 1990s, Donna Harrow suggests:

I think it took long because we're all very comfortable, and we've become very complacent in how we treat students in our schools, and more specifically, how we treat students of colour within our schools. It has been suggested time and time and time again, and we will have a shooting in a school, we will have a death in a school, and somebody else will recommend ... [a Black focused school], and everybody says, 'yeeah, great idea! We really should deal with this because students, Black students self esteem is down a hole and we need to do something about it'. And we talk and we nod and we smile, and then we forget about it (Weiss, 2010: Film time 11.00-11.56).

We might see, furthermore, that the market requires certain types of compromises. Lipman (2011) posits the idea of TINA – *There Is No Alternative* – to discuss how Black and Latina/o parents and community members in the United States have become involved in the setting up of charter schools, including highly corporatised models. If we apply this more broadly to choice options like alternative schools in Toronto, what is enabled by neo-liberal education policy is complex for “people are recruited into neo-liberal forms of governmentality, even if they also, simultaneously, seek to resist some of its effects” (Bondi, 2005: 499). In a sociological sense, TINA may be a politics of belonging, a kind of politics that seeks practices of inclusion and empowerment. However, because TINA is marketised and racialised it is a politics that certainly produces a “politics of self-separation” (Dei, 2005) that pivots on determining who has the authority to place themselves and their children within particular schools to practice discrete forms of care, and how ethno-centric schools are constituted in an education market (Gulson & Webb, 2012). This has led some scholars to argue that education and economic policies that promote the choice and creation of schools with an ethno-centric identity are a new force in educational politics that is simultaneously “progressive” and “conservative” (Pedroni, 2007). This complicated nature is represented by accusations that ethno-centric schools are merely tokenistic. As one TDSB trustee argues:

I also think one of the things that can be problematic about some of these [ethnic and cultural focused] schools is you say ‘well we’ll set up a school for ...[these groups]’ and that might be beneficial for couple hundred kids, but that doesn’t mean that anybody else in the system is getting an opportunity to have that kind of programming... . But what about the 249,905 [other students in the TDSB], I mean those kids are still, if we’re not making an effort to teach them that knowledge as well then I don’t think we’re doing the right thing (Trustee B, TDSB).

In this sense, the trustee makes a claim that indicates how school choice policies – and alternative schools that educate small numbers of students – are poor mechanisms to address historic inequalities. This presumes, as we noted above, that there has not been advocacy for collective change in Black student educational provision in Toronto over the past 30 years. The AAS will not, obviously, address the educational needs

of all Black students in Toronto; nonetheless, what this school does achieve, within a choice framework, is an intervention into the discourses of educational inequality. As we have noted previously: “In the end, school choice policy is also a politics of *no longer waiting*” (Webb, Gulson & Pitton, 2012). Spider Jones, a Black Canadian radio host, suggests a similar thing when he proposes that opposition to the AAS tended to be skewed.

First of all you get a perspective from basically, with all due respect white guys, that have never grown up in the projects or understand the problems. I think many of them mean well, but there’s a difference between meaning well and understanding that we live in desperate times. And in desperate times, you take desperate measures, nothing else is working (Weiss, 2010: Film time 16.16-16.44).

And as a Black Canadian trustee suggested:

It was all about how do you meet the needs of the students and their families? And it wasn’t that an Africentric school was the answer. It was that there wasn’t one answer (Black Canadian, Trustee A, TDSB).

The AAS transmutes across and through different discourses of difference, pain, poverty and privilege; discourses that delineate the possibilities of culture, identity and recognition in arguments for equity. For instance, Ginwright (2000) wonders, in relation to the possibilities of social justice through Afrocentric schooling, “what are the limits and possibilities for using racial and cultural identity as a solution to reforming urban schools?” (p. 88). For our purposes, we also wonder what limits and possibilities are afforded by racial and cultural identities in urban school reform initiatives within quasi-school markets. Ethnicity, racialisation and culture do not stand apart from the market, but form and are produced as integral features of urban school reform predicated on neo-liberal choice factors. As a Black Canadian TDSB trustee contends:

I think there’s no doubt that because we live in a society that’s geared toward individualism this is where choice becomes kind of a double-edged sword, right, because on the one hand choice is about empowerment and being able to make decisions for your family, for yourself, and for whatever, your children, and on the other hand it becomes about entitlement. ... I think as a culture [in Toronto], we’re not set up to have these conversations about how systemic oppression or barriers work, your fallback is to frame it on that individual level which is about choice (Black Canadian, Trustee A, TDSB).

School choice policy is both the opportunity and responsibility to be entrepreneurial – as care of the self in neo-liberal policy frames (Brown, 2003; Dean, 1999; Foucault, 2005). We might also see this within what Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) identify as “empowerment”.

Mark this term: *empowerment*. In the post-colony it connotes privileged access to markets, money, and material enrichment. In the case of ethnic groups, it is frankly associated with finding something essentially their own and theirs alone, something of their essence, to sell. In other words, a brand (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009: 15).

To be clear, we are not suggesting that having something to sell – that is a Black-focused school – is the impetus for the Black activists and supporters who established the school, nor what underpinned trustee support at the board level. Nonetheless, it is a precondition for a new TDSB alternative school to differentiate itself from other schools – and these schools are seen as part of claiming a ‘market share’ of students. We are, therefore, interested in how a black-focussed school becomes both subject to, and can take advantage of, the education market. An ethno-centric school is therefore dangerous in Foucault’s sense: “My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do” (Foucault, 1983: 231-232). Cultural and ethnic identity – strategically and opportunistically essentialised – is mobilised and enabled within neo-liberal education policy regimes that are racialised (Gulson, 2011; Goldberg, 2009). Nevertheless, as we discuss and conceptualise in the next section, empowerment is a fraught and fragile concept for policy and the unintended consequences of policy are played out in multicultural cities like Toronto.

### **Recognition in the city: Racialised geographies of ethnicity, identity and education**

We posit there are at least two ways to understand the relationships between the discourses of recognition and identity and the discourse of school choice. First, Toronto’s geography and its history provide registers that recognise and identify different racial and ethnic identities. Second, school choice policy mechanisms that emphasise empowerment and neo-liberal ideas of equality provide different registers that enunciate ethnic recognition and identity. We discuss these ideas next.

The ASS raises a series of key questions concerning identity and ethno-centric schools or, in this particular case, what is ‘Black’ in Black-focused education, and does it differ from Afrocentricity? In other words, what are the aims of ethno-centric schools in relation to particular forms of identity, curriculum and pedagogy (Dumas, 2009)? Further, how does defining Afrocentricity points to its possible role as a powerful assertion in marketised forms?. These issues had relevance in the framing of the ASS – that is, what it would mean to have a Black-focused or Afrocentric school in Toronto? The trustees were not shy about addressing this question, nor its contested and complex nature (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Problems of recognition – Trustee views on Afrocentricity

The constituting of Afrocentricity is, of course, not only the purview of those who proposed the AAS – it also enters the market of schooling where potential clients and opponents are given opportunities to provide input into its existence and development. It similarly allows the TDSB to demonstrate it is doing ‘something’ about Black schooling:

I think it’s probably more true now because now [the AAS is] a selling point and ... how diverse their Toronto school board is and you could send your child here and here and here and ... (Black Canadian, Trustee A, TDSB).

For our purposes, the problems of recognition pivot on the extent to which recognition and the concomitant ideas of ethnic identity are used in developing choice schools. That is, as Fraser notes, we are concerned with how markets tame politics (Fraser, 2009). Likewise, Shujaa (1992), in study of parental choice of independent Afrocentric schools, pointedly states:

...I am concerned about the uses to which Afrocentricity has been put. Too often it has come to be regarded as a quantity rather than a quality, and, in some instances, even as a commodity that can be bought and sold (Shujaa, 1992: 158).

We want to take this point and look at how this idea of commodity and ethnicity has some salience to understanding how the AAS was posited differentially from other alternative schools in Toronto. Cities and education systems, through policy, have long constituted and classified what is possible and prevented; especially governing the ways that difference is produced and reconfigured through and due to race (Gulson, 2011; also see Lipman, 2011). Cities have also been sites in which ethnicity has operated as different forms of capital. We suggest that one way to understand how ethnicity functions as capital in Toronto is to understand that, prior to World War II, Toronto was primarily a WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) city. After the war, the city’s migrant make-up changed, to the point that it is now the most ethnically and culturally diverse city in Canada (Buzzelli, 2001), as noted by some trustees.

...for all intents and purposes Toronto’s a black city (Black Canadian, Trustee A, TDSB).

...we live in a more identity conscious city than anyone else... (Jewish Canadian, Trustee D, TDSB).

The spatial politics of the AAS were rooted within this geographical history in which the resistance to the school is constituted and constitutive of race and ethnic relations established within the city of Toronto. For instance, Trustee F noted how resistance to the AAS was also rooted in concessions about the school’s location in the city.

Local councillors basically pushed back, I was surrounded by councillors that voted against it and if you're gonna vote against it the political will on the ground is not gonna see it happen. So they want it up in the northwest corner of the city where we have the highest concentrations of communities of African extraction. They wanted it up there (Trustee F, TDSB).

When asked to explain how the city of Toronto was racially stratified, the trustee noted that:

ethnic communities tend to congregate [in Toronto] around religious institutions, churches, mosques, synagogues, community centres, shops so you do have people of national extractions living in a community (Trustee F, TDSB).

The spatial politics of Toronto were not created by the AAS; rather, the AAS was located on a highly contentious grid of racialisations already mapped onto the city in particular ways. For instance, the politics of segregation regarding the AAS were intertwined with the spatial politics of the city. Trustee F noted that his support of the AAS was partially due to calling out the inherent racialised segregation of Toronto already. He stated that in a meeting he said to other trustees:

“If you wanna talk about segregation you go look at your Claude Watson [TDSB school, primarily black population] over there, your North Toronto Secondary [TDSB school, primarily black population].” It was like whoa, so they backed off of [their critique of the AAS] (Trustee F, TDSB).

The establishment of the AAS was in part due to how it fitted on Toronto's grid of race, ethnicity and class. More importantly, for our purposes, the racialised commodification of ethnicity occurred – in part – through the movements through the city. In other words, alternative choice schools in TDSB are ‘open boundaries’ that destabilise the historical practices of catchment and provide consumers of race-based education with a market in which to participate. Through these movements, a market for choice schools was developed and the commodification of race followed through the selection and consumption of the AAS. Trustee F noted:

I also messaged on school boundaries and the reality was ... if you wanna talk about so-called segregation you go look at these school boundaries, don't lecture my Afrocentric parents, let's start removing these school boundaries and make sure there's more integration (Trustee F, TDSB).

Here, the term “integration” is used in relation to a city already marketised in relation to difference. Toronto is a city that has identified its neighbourhoods through explicit conflation of place with the ethnicity of the ‘original’ migrants: Little Italy, Greektown, Koreatown and India Bazaar. As multiple generations of migrants have left these parts of the city, like other multicultural cities around the world such as

Sydney and London, these names have remained as part of emerging ‘cultural to quarters’ that are connected both to an historical remnant of migrant collectivism and to commodification (Keith, 2005; Pugliese, 2007).

Ethnicity and identity in contemporary Toronto therefore operates within an already presumed sense of collective commercialisation. It is in the gentrified inner areas of the city, and now the most affluent part of the city (Hulchanski, 2010) and the site of the old Toronto board, and where most alternative schools are located that ethnicity and commodification are most clearly in tandem. Hackworth and Rekers (2005) suggest that as inner city areas like Little Italy or India Bazaar have changed demographically their function as commodity has intensified – in combinations of “commodified culture and traditional landscapes” (p. 216) – as part of the consumptive practices of the new (white) middle classes of inner-city gentrification. Different neighbourhoods are identified as business improvement areas, and then reference ethnicity in the title such as Greektown; local ethnic identity is ‘managed’ by these improvement associations to varying degrees. Difference becomes tied to a commodity – e.g., restaurants – that communicate these differences in essentialised forms to the ‘outside’ world. In this way, the governance of the city is tied not just to incorporating the multicultural, but to the *creation* of racialisations and ethnicity. As Osborne and Rose (1999) suggest, from the 19th century onwards, “the government of the city becomes *inseparable from the continuous activity of generating truths about the city*” (p. 739, original emphasis).

In Toronto, the policy frames that link business improvement with ethnicity also provide an indication as to the possibilities and limits of empowerment in relation to cultural identity. Some forms of ethnic difference are more palatable when constituted as an area that is to be consumed. When consumption is tied to education – such as the AAS in an education market – notions such as Black and Africentric move onto more fraught terrain than a neighbourhood with ‘authentic’ cuisine or ‘A Thousand Villages’ ethnic free-trade wares. The AAS was a form of ethnicity that was intelligible in the racialised geography of the city – the school invoked the threat of race, rather than benign difference and diversity (see Gulson, 2011; Goldberg, 2009). If a city like Toronto has one set of discourses that considers ethnicity as a marketable and essentialised form, then this reduces the nuances and complexities of how other discourses of ethnicity in the education market may be mobilised by Black Canadian parents and students towards equitable purposes. As such, the AAS, while able to be established through policy, is cast loose by the ostensive neutrality of choice policy and enters the registers of commodification and ethnicity that are racialised and (re) articulated in Toronto.



## Conclusion

I was really driven to say there is a hierarchy of racism in our city and Black people are at the bottom of it and First Nations people are at the bottom of it. But they're just less obvious, you know. And again those were the race conversations that nobody wants to have (Black Canadian female, Trustee A, TDSB).

As Rizvi and Lingard (2011) note, “a commitment to market values in education does not entirely involve a rejection of a concern for social equity, but it does suggest that the meaning of equity is re-articulated” (p. 9). This is choice as part of neo-liberal governmentality and new forms of affinity and community within marketised forms (Miller & Rose, 2008), which reshapes policy “not by entirely eliminating equity concerns but rather by embedding them within choice and accountability frameworks” (Forsey, Davies, & Walford, 2008: 15). Education policy seems to now demand the entrepreneurial self and the self as, paradoxically, the collective production of educational equity. As we have noted: “In a re-articulation of equality, education policy now develops markets of care for entrepreneurial, innovative, and particular selves” (Webb, Gulson & Pitton, 2012, p.6).

Neo-liberal policy also depends on the racialised and marketised reconfiguring of space – about which parts of the city are deemed acceptable for the consumption of ethnicity. For the creation of separate spaces such as the AAS is, of course, not uncoupled from the histories and geographies of schooling systems and cities. When an Africentric school is proposed in Toronto, it is enabled within a choice framework but enters the domain not just of education but of how ideas of ethnicity may be constituted and marketed/branded within the city. That is, the AAS is *not* treated in the same way as other proposed alternative schools – rather there is extensive racialised contestation over who has the right to define the parameters of the market, that is, which alternative schools are acceptable – and also a debate over who controls culture. This is both an opportunity and problem, for the commodification of culture then runs the risk of being reduced to property (Gilroy, 2006).

The cultural politics of policy are thus incredibly complex in relation to ethno-centric schools like the AAS, for these politics repudiate the notion, endemic in school choice research, that agency in education markets is the purview of the white, middle class and a concomitant lack of agency for people of colour (for critiques, see Lipman, 2011; Pedroni, 2007). What we are seeing in a policy sense is that policy normalisation of the creation of separate spaces of educational opportunity, in which school choice policies in the form of establishing separate spaces, is now the complicated and contradictory new forms of cultural recognition, survival and agency (Webb, Gulson & Pitton, 2012; Lipman, 2011). And we might ask whether, simultaneously, neo-liberal education policy is limiting our capacity to imagine new forms of cultural transformation in schools and the city.

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## Notes

- 1 This research was supported by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.
- 2 The Grove School has been the subject of tabloid journalism (see <http://www.torontosun.com/2012/05/07/what-are-they-teaching-our-kids>).
- 3 The spatial politics of the TDSB, and the identification of place with trustees, is noteworthy yet beyond the remit of this paper.

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*Kalervo N. Gulson* is Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, University of New South Wales, Australia. His primary areas of scholarship are educational policy, race and ethnicity studies, and social and cultural geography.

*P. Taylor Webb* is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia, Canada. His primary areas of scholarship are critical policy studies and social theory.

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# Challenges and complexity in human rights education

## Teachers' understandings of democratic participation and gender equity in post-conflict Kurdistan-Iraq

*Audrey Osler\* & Chalank Yahya\*\**

### Abstract

This paper examines tensions in implementing human rights education (HRE) in schools in Kurdistan-Iraq, both for teachers and for policy-makers, juggling nation-building and its application through schooling and child rights. We draw on documentary sources and fieldwork in two governorates, including classroom observations and interviews with education professionals. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child confirms the right to HRE, including learning to live together, stressing gender equity. In practice, rights operate in tension and may be denied in societal contexts where conservative, patriarchal values prevail. We report on teachers' attempts to reconcile tensions while facing limited resources. HRE is often perceived as low-status and taught without adequate consideration of everyday rights denials. Nevertheless, HRE is fundamental to democratic development and social justice and can equip citizens with skills and attitudes for a cosmopolitan worldview and peaceful development. Potentially, HRE can contribute to learners' self-empowerment and gender equity.

*Keywords:* human rights education, democratic participation, gender equity, education policy, post-conflict

### Introduction

This paper examines the tensions and challenges facing schools in implementing human rights education (HRE) in the autonomous region of Kurdistan, Iraq. Across the globe, both international organisations and governments recognise the potential of education to contribute to the processes of democratisation and development. In post-conflict societies, programmes of citizenship education and HRE are often introduced with the express aim of developing skills for learning to live together and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The current unified Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) administration was established following the 2005 Constitution of Iraq which established Iraqi Kurdistan

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\*Institute of Human Rights, ethics and diversity, Buskerud University College, Norway. E-mail: A.H.Osler@leeds.ac.uk

\*\*Institute of Human Rights, ethics and diversity, Buskerud University College, Norway. E-mail: chalank@hotmail.com

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as a federal entity. After 2006 the KRG focused on developing Kurdistan's economy and infrastructure, and in 2009 turned its attention to educational reform. This reform extends the number of years of compulsory education from six to nine, introduces new learning objectives, and places greater emphasis on human rights and democratic citizenship, making a specific commitment to gender equity. In implementing the reform, we suggest the KRG is not merely recognising the potential of education to contribute to immediate and longer term economic and social development, but is also acknowledging the critical role of education in creating a just and sustainable democracy in which the rights of traditionally disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and individuals, including women, children and minorities, are protected.

We understand education policy as a dynamic process in which teachers, administrators and students are actors. These various actors can support, subvert, or undermine the original goals of policy-makers, both unintentionally and/or deliberately. Our programme of research therefore not only focuses on policy documents and text books, but extends to an examination of the perspectives of teachers, school administrators and school inspectors. In this paper, we focus on professionals' perspectives and on their understandings of democracy, development and human rights, specifically human rights education and gender equity. We argue these perspectives are critical to a proper understanding of the impact of education reform and its impact on young people, schools, families and communities. If the KRG is to be effective in realising democracy, development and equity through education, professionals' experiences, needs and understandings need to be taken seriously. Their insights enable us to identify appropriate strategies and plans to strengthen democratic dispositions among the young.

### **Education policy reforms in a post-conflict context**

Kurdistan-Iraq experienced considerable conflict and instability in the later 20th century and early years of the 21st, resulting in a severely damaged infrastructure at home and a notable Kurdish diaspora across the globe. The conflicts which have impacted on Kurdistan include: a long history of border disputes with Iran; the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988); and the Anfal genocidal campaign against the Kurds (1986–1989) led by the Iraqi military under Saddam Hussein. The year 1991 saw the Gulf War, followed by the Kurdish uprising, resulting in mass displacement and a subsequent humanitarian crisis. The uprising was followed by a brutal crackdown on the Kurdish population, the later withdrawal of the Iraqi administration and military, and an Iraqi internal economic blockade. At the same time, between 1990 and 2003 the region suffered the consequences of UN sanctions and an international embargo against Iraq (McDowall 2003; Yildiz 2004).

From 1991, the region gained *ad hoc* autonomy (Stansfield 2003) and in 1992 a regional government was established, following a closely contested and inconclusive general election. But the Kurdish leadership was responsible for further difficulties.



The rivalry between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) resulted in a *de facto* partition of the region (McDowall 2003). By 1994, power-sharing agreements between the parties had broken down, leading to civil war, referred to in Kurdish as 'brother killing brother' (*brakuzhi*). Open conflict between the KDP and the PUK was brought to an end under the 1998 Washington Agreement. Nevertheless, the civil war and conflict between the two dominant parties have shaped contemporary Iraqi-Kurdish politics (Stansfield 2003).

Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and subsequent political changes, it is the 2005 Constitution of Iraq which defines the internal political, socio-economic and judicial autonomous governance of Kurdistan. The current unified Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) operates a power-sharing agreement that was introduced in 2009. The federal region, comprising three governorates, Erbil, Sulaimaniyah and Duhok, borders Iran to the east, Turkey to the north, Syria to the west and the rest of Iraq to the south. The region continues to feel the impact of instability in neighbouring jurisdictions as well as on-going tensions with the Baghdad government, fuelled by concerns over disputed areas, including Kirkuk. An opposition movement *Gorran* (Change) challenges the power-sharing arrangements, placing substantive democracy on the political agenda.

It is within this complex post-conflict context that education reforms are being implemented. In the immediate pre-conflict era, Iraq had a leading regional position in school enrolment and completion rates (UNESCO 2010). But Kurdistan-Iraq's infrastructure, including educational infrastructure, was adversely affected by the conflicts. Some 14 years after the civil war, there remains considerable pressure on the system, with insufficient school buildings and continuing and notable disparities in basic facilities between urban and rural areas. There are still huge challenges in providing appropriate facilities to meet students' needs in a fast-changing socio-economic and political context.

The challenge for education policy-makers is not only to make good the damaged educational infrastructure and ensure that schools are staffed with effectively trained teachers. It is also to ensure appropriate educational measures to support other societal priorities, such as anti-corruption measures and guarantees for the rights of women and minorities. Education needs not only to prepare young people for successful economic integration but also to play a full and active part in shaping society in accordance with democratic ideals that embody equity and social justice. In other words, the education system, and schools in particular, have a key role to play in strengthening democratic development and human rights.

The conflict had a disproportionate impact on women and children and on educational opportunities and facilities in Kurdistan-Iraq. Before the conflict, girls across Iraq already had lower school enrolment and attendance rates than boys (UNESCO 2003). Following the conflict, the majority of internally displaced persons were women and children, with some 50 percent of the most vulnerable children unable to access

schooling according to UN reports (UN-HABITAT 2001; UNDG/World Bank 2005). In this respect, Iraq, including the autonomous region of Kurdistan, reflects a wider regional and global picture of discrimination and disadvantage faced by women and girls. Security problems may place girls at a greater risk of gender-based violence (Harber 2004), for example, in travelling to school, further impacting on school attendance.

In 2000 the world's nations made a promise to free people from extreme poverty and multiple deprivations. This pledge was formulated into eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Two goals aim specifically to address gender equity in education, recognising that challenges remain at different points throughout the system. MDG 2 is to promote universal primary education and MDG 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women (MDG 2000). Girls from the poorest households face the highest barriers to education with subsequent impacts on their ability to access the labour market.

The UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) is a specific project to operationalise MDGs 2 and 3.<sup>1</sup> Effectively, education is recognised as a prerequisite for sustainable human development (UNGEI 2000; WEF 2000). These initiatives are concerned with enacting international human rights standards on gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Article 10) (UN 1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Articles 2 and 28) (UN 1989), which confirm the equal rights of girls and women in education.

The MDGs seek to realise both gender parity in education through *formal equality* (parity in access and participation rates) and *substantive equality* (equal opportunity *in* and *through* education) (Subrahmanian 2005). In Kurdistan-Iraq, some steps have been taken to guarantee formal equality in access and participation rates. Since 2006, the KRG has put arrangements in place to enable young women who were not enrolled at the standard age, or who had their education disrupted, to continue or restart schooling. The education reform states:

schools or classes will be opened for accelerated learning programmes. Students should not be younger than 9 for boys starting at grade 1 and not older than 20 whilst the girls should not be younger than 9 starting at grade 1 and not older than 24 (KRG 2009, 13, Article 15).

This provision recognises the traditional disadvantage that girls experience in Kurdistan-Iraq (Griffiths 2010; UNICEF 2010, UNESCO 2011) and thus creates some flexibility by extending the age range within which women can complete schooling.

We are interested in exploring the contribution that HRE might play in realising *substantive equality*, in education and through education, by examining professionals' understandings of human rights and HRE. The right *to* education is insufficient in realising gender equality since here we are concerned largely with equivalence in enrolment and completion rates between girls and boys. By focusing on rights *in* education (guaranteeing achievement and learning outcomes) and rights *through* education (the ability to utilise knowledge and skills to claim rights within and be-

yond the school) we can focus on girls' empowerment (Wilson 2003). This means recognising and overcoming inequalities and instances of discrimination via an examination of learning content, teaching methods, assessment modes, management of peer relationships, and learning outcomes (Chan and Cheung 2007). The realisation of substantive equality requires us to re-think how both girls and boys are educated.

### **Diversity and gender in Iraq Kurdistan**

It is widely recognised that schools both produce and reflect broader social norms and inequalities, related, for example, to poverty, structural inequalities, historical disadvantage, institutional discrimination of women and minorities, gender-based violence and traditional practices which harm or impact unjustly on women and girls (Tomaševski 2005). We present here a brief outline of Kurdistan-Iraq's demographic features, contextualising the struggle for human rights for both women and minorities. This struggle is taking place within a multicultural setting and within communities characterised by gender inequalities and growing economic disparities.

One significant challenge is the successful accommodation of diversity. Although the majority of the region's population is Kurdish, it is also characterised by long-standing religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity. The Kurdish majority has lived for many centuries alongside smaller numbers of Assyrians, Chaldeans, Turkmenians, Armenians, and Arabs. According to the KRG, the region has a population of around 5 million, of whom more than 50 percent are younger than 20. There has been no census so we do not know what proportion of the KRG-administered population considers themselves to be Kurdish, but estimates suggest Iraqi Kurds may comprise as much as 25 percent of the total Iraqi population (Yildiz 2004). A carefully crafted set of policies is needed to ensure all groups can claim their rights within the democratic framework.

There is also considerable religious and linguistic diversity in Kurdistan-Iraq. The majority of inhabitants, including Kurds, Iraqi Turkmenians, and Arabs, are from the Sunni Muslim tradition. Within this grouping, there is further diversity with some individuals being observant and others adopting more sceptical or secular positions. The region also has populations of Assyrian Christian, Shiite Muslim, Yezidi, Yarsan, Mandaean and Sahbak faiths (Begilkhani, Gill and Hague 2010). Official KRG languages are Kurdish and Arabic. The two most widely spoken Kurdish dialects are Sorani and Kurmanji.<sup>2</sup>

Diversity is a highly politicised issue since territorial disputes between the federal Baghdad and Erbil regional governments, including Kirkuk, require political solutions which guarantee the protection of minority rights and interests. This diversity demands pragmatic solutions in the public sphere, including schools, where learners' rights and societal outcomes may be weighed against each other. For example, choices made to guarantee linguistic rights through separate schooling for specific language communities impact on the ways in which young people of the next generation are prepared (or not) for living together in a multicultural society.

The region's diversity has also increased as a consequence of inward migration, with the protection of migrant rights adding to the complexity of the picture. Many are new populations drawn to Kurdistan because of instability elsewhere in Iraq, while others are former inhabitants who fled past conflicts. They include internally displaced persons (IDPs) drawn from other parts of Iraq, refugees and migrants from neighbouring countries, and returnees, including highly educated elites, from the wider diaspora. In 2012 the KRG appealed to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for more help in dealing with the needs of refugees fleeing war in Syria.<sup>3</sup> While some Syrian refugees are accommodated in a camp near Duhok, others are spread across the region, supported by families and communities (IOM 2012). Child refugees may lack appropriate papers to access schooling. Kurdistan-Iraq's rapid economic development also attracts labour migrants from around the globe and irregular migrants (including victims of trafficking) whose undocumented status leaves them vulnerable (IOM 2010).

In a society characterised both by patriarchy and post-conflict dislocation, one pressing issue is gender equity (al-Ali and Pratt 2011). Three inter-related challenges to realising gender equity and the human rights of women and girls are: violence against women; traditional inheritance laws (Sharia law and traditional inheritance practices across faith communities which favour men); and low female school attendance rates.

Efforts to tackle violence against women, an issue highlighted both by local women's organisations and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have resulted in the establishment of women's shelters to support victims of domestic violence (Begilkhani, Gill and Hague 2010). Since 2003 there has been some discussion in local media of a societal failure to support such women who, although protected by law, remain vulnerable.<sup>4</sup>

Traditionally, married women are expected to receive support from their husbands. For this reason, many families, particularly in rural areas, consider it shameful to allow daughters to inherit property. While courts may rule in their favour, it is still difficult for women to claim their inheritance. Under Islamic (Sharia) law women are entitled to one-third, while their brothers receive two-thirds. But, in practice, even this unbalanced division is unlikely to occur.

Female school attendance is rising, with the Duhok governorate recording one of the highest levels of attendance and lowest differentials between boys and girls, both in Kurdistan and across Iraq (Griffiths 2010, UNICEF 2010). Local women's rights NGO Harikar (2011) reports that rural parents are more prepared to send their daughters to school where there is a woman teacher. Harikar quotes an education supervisor as confirming that the number of female teachers now exceeds the number of males in the Duhok governorate.

In Kurdistan, where deeply-rooted inequalities persist between children, it is critical that the type of human rights education (HRE) offered at school is appropriate to their needs and supports them in claiming their rights. Acknowledging and addressing the

roots of inequalities, within and beyond school is essential, whether they arise from gender-based discrimination or that related to ethnicity, religion or other differences. Thus, equalities in education require more than merely translating international instruments into national policies or implementing educational reforms. They imply a holistic approach that includes policies and practices inside schools to empower students. In addition, they imply opportunities to transform knowledge into the application of rights both in and beyond the school (Stromquist 2006). Such a holistic approach to quality education requires a sincere commitment from policy-makers and civil society (Wilson 2003).

Above we have identified some pressing human rights concerns which impact on schooling and to which schools might be expected to respond. It is not difficult to make the case for human rights education (HRE). But, in this paper, we argue that there is not just a pressing *need* for HRE, there is also a *right* to HRE. We turn now to this right, focusing specifically on its meanings within a multicultural context.

### **The right to human rights education**

While the right to education is commonly understood, the concept of the right to HRE (Osler and Starkey 1996) tends to be less familiar, even among education professionals and policy-makers. The right to HRE is set out in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which underlines “the dignity and worth of the human person” and “the equal rights of men and women”. Article 26 of the UDHR specifies the aims of education, which include “the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”; the promotion of “understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations, racial or religious groups”; and “the maintenance of peace”. This is the first international official articulation of the right to HRE. It is confirmed and explicated in subsequent human rights instruments, including the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Article 29) (Osler 2012). The right to HRE was reiterated and further strengthened by the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, adopted in December 2011 (UN 2011).

Article 29 of the CRC confirms the right to an education which promotes human rights, intercultural understanding and learning to live together, an education which promotes gender equity, and conditions which guarantee certain cultural and linguistic rights of parents and children. It stresses the obligation of the nation-state, as the ratifying authority,<sup>5</sup> to promote education for peaceful co-existence in their communities, the nation and the wider world:

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to ... The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms ...[and] preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin (UN 1989).

This implies children have some level of engagement with learners from different backgrounds to their own and educational structures which enable a degree of integration for children from different ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. It recognises, albeit indirectly, that all children have the right to an intercultural education which recognises difference at the level of the community and the nation (Osler 2010). Yet education cannot focus exclusively on children's immediate communities or home nations since it also needs to address global identifications and our common humanity. This type of learning, where young people are enabled to learn to live together with difference at different scales, is what has been termed "education for cosmopolitan citizenship" (Osler and Vincent 2002; Osler and Starkey, 2003, 2005).

As Article 29 also notes, each child also has the right to an education that promotes:

respect for ... his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own (UN 1989, Article 29).

Thus, all children in Iraq-Kurdistan not only have the right to be educated for tolerance and diversity, but also the right to an education that supports their own cultural heritage and that of their families, as well as Kurdish cultural heritage and values. This education must be consistent with human rights principles. This is not a culturally relativist position where anything goes, but a critical examination of cultural norms within a broad human rights framework. So, for example, harmful cultural practices which impact on girls and women would be challenged as failing to conform to human rights standards, as would cultural norms which give another cultural group enemy or inferior status.

Education for tolerance and social justice, in line with the provisions of the CRC, cannot be fostered where there is complete educational segregation: "educating for peace will require states to mandate some kind of educational integration of school-children from diverse ethnic, religious, cultural and language groups" (Grover 2007, 60). Currently, the child's right to education is frequently interpreted, legislatively and judicially, as a parental liberty right (to have a child educated according to parental wishes). Grover (2007, 61) argues that this tends to work against children's rights and that "the notion of minority education is frequently erroneously translated into *completely segregated school systems*" (our emphasis). She suggests (2007, 61) that "the minority and non-minority child's legal right to free association (each with the other) in the educational context is frequently disregarded both by the legislature and the courts" in nation-states across the globe. The international community has agreed a definition of HRE in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training. This suggests that:

Human rights education and training comprises all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and

observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus contributing, inter alia, to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviours, to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights (UN 2011: Article 2:2).

The Declaration specifies that this should include education *about* rights; education *through* rights and education *for* rights. Education about rights includes knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, implying that this education is both founded on and makes reference to international standards. Education through human rights includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners and within schools, operating within education policy frameworks which guarantee rights. It addresses educational structures (as discussed above) and young people's experiences of schooling. It has methodological implications related to the teaching and learning processes in which young people's participation rights are respected. Finally, education for human rights includes empowering learners to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others. This implies a transformatory education in which learners' own contexts and struggles for justice are considered and addressed and in which learners are empowered (Osler and Zhu 2011).

Clearly, realising social justice in education, including gender equity and the rights of minorities, means more than simply translating international instruments into national policies or implementing educational reforms. It means designing a curriculum in which learners are provided with knowledge about their rights, and equipped with the skills to claim them.

## **Our methods and fieldwork**

In assessing the potential of HRE to contribute to social justice, democracy and development in the multicultural context of post-conflict Kurdistan-Iraq, we draw principally on fieldwork visits to two Kurdistan-Iraq governorates – Erbil and Duhok – between 2010 and 2012. In Duhok we engaged in classroom observations in two schools and later conducted interviews with teachers whose classes we observed.<sup>6</sup> In Erbil we interviewed a range of education professionals, including teachers, a school principal and education inspectors. We also participated in a focus group discussion (Yahya 2012).<sup>7</sup>

In total, 15 professionals agreed to act as research respondents, with interviews taking place in July 2011 and January and February 2012.<sup>8</sup> Of the 15 respondents (seven female and eight male), five elected to answer the questions in writing rather than through a face-to-face interview. Although we stressed we wanted professionals' own opinions, and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, feedback from three of these five suggests they were, to a greater or lesser extent, ill-at-ease with an interview format, preferring to give considered answers. Interviews were conducted in either Arabic or Kurdish, transcribed and then translated into English.

The Duhok teachers were working in two schools as part of a two-year study and contact was established through a mix of official channels and personal contacts (Ahmad et al. 2012). The Erbil respondents were a convenience sample, identified through personal contacts and snowballing methods, with interviewees suggesting colleagues or friends to interview. This method proved appropriate since it was difficult to make personal contact until in Kurdistan.<sup>9</sup> We do not claim the small sample represents all teachers or all school inspectors, but our analysis identifies some common emergent themes from a range of individuals and across two different geographical locations. This, we suggest, gives authenticity to the perspectives presented here.

All interviews were conducted by a researcher familiar with local cultural norms and practices. In Duhok our respondents were approached by colleagues from the University of Duhok with whom they had been working for some months and whom we characterise as having insider positions. In the Erbil district interviewees were interviewed by one of the authors (Chalank) who is familiar with local cultural norms having grown up in the city, but whose secondary and higher education has been in Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Our fieldwork is informed by our study of documentary sources, notably the reform of the basic and secondary schools (KRG, 2009) and the human rights text books (Rauof 2007), for which we had professional (non-official) translations made.

### **Professionals' perspectives**

Here we report on respondents' understandings of HRE and specifically their observations on diversity and gender equality. Since teaching for gender equality and diversity are taking place within a context of education reform, we also invited our respondents to reflect on this, with some focusing on broader social issues, and some on the relationship between active student-centred teaching methods and education for human rights, citizenship and democracy. Table 1 lists the professionals interviewed. All names are pseudonyms to protect the respondents' anonymity.

#### ***Understandings of human rights education***

A number of individuals link the need for HRE to the Kurdish struggle for human rights and political recognition. They focus on the need for children to know Kurdish history and to understand the fragility of society when the rights of minorities are overlooked:

Of course, human rights and HRE are very important to know about and be aware of. Especially in our society and due to past experiences of conflicts and violations, we need to be educated about our rights. ...Each of us needs rights and also to understand our rights and how to claim them. However, HRE as a subject in our education system does not have as much emphasis as it should. We lack expertise in this discipline and we do not have specialised teachers ... For the time being, social studies teachers are required to teach this subject. (Payman)



**Table 1:** Research respondents: Professional roles and characteristics

No.	Participant	Professional role	Gender	Religious tradition/ethnic background
1 July	Kamaran	General school inspector	M	Muslim/Kurd
2 July	Kawthar	School inspector: student counselling	F	Muslim/Turkmenian
3 July	Foad	Principal – urban model school – and school inspector	M	Christian
4 July	Asem	Teacher: Arabic, grades 7-12	M	Muslim/ Kurd
5 July	Hassan	Principal rural school*	M	Muslim/ Kurd
6 July	Sarkawt	Acting principal rural school	M	Muslim/ Kurd
7 Feb	Payman	School inspector: social studies and HRE, grades 1–6	F	Muslim/ Kurd
8 Feb	Fawzi	Teacher: social studies and HRE, grades 7–10	M	Muslim/ Kurd
9 Feb	Sawsan	Teacher: social studies and HRE	F	Christian
10 Feb	Azad	School inspector: social studies and HRE	M	Muslim/ Kurd
11 Feb	Sherko	Teacher: social studies and HRE (grade 5)	M	Muslim/ Kurd
12 Feb	Ahlam	Teacher: social studies and HRE, grades 7–9	F	Muslim/ Kurd
13 Duhok	Halat	Teacher : social studies and HRE, grades 7–9	F	Muslim/ Kurd
14 Duhok	Tara	Teacher: English, up to grade 6	F	Muslim/ Kurd
15 Duhok	Loreen	Teacher: civic education and HRE (grade 5)	F	Muslim/ Kurd

\* This is the only school in which our teacher respondents worked where boys and girls are taught separately, attending different shifts.

Thus, despite the new emphasis on HRE in the 2009 curriculum reform, the subject lacks trained teachers. The respondents confirmed our impression that the textbooks (particularly for older students) are dry and uninteresting, containing long extracts from international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but with little or no guidance as to what they mean or how they might be made accessible to teachers and relevant to students. The respondents suggest the emphasis is on knowledge not on developing human rights dispositions or values:

The content is very dry and very limited. It would have been better if HRE was not simply regarded as just another curriculum subject, examined to test students' knowledge. (Ahlam)

This subject should be designed and taught in all grades, according to the students' age and needs. For example, as a child in grades 1–6, you have specific rights/needs that need to be provided by school and society. If they don't learn about human rights and entitlements at a specific age, then they will not understand or be aware they have these rights. ... It's important for them to be ... able to demand them. (Kawthar)

Generally speaking, the respondents place considerable emphasis on the place of human rights in creating a just and sustainable society. They recognise the importance of human rights but express concerns both about a general understanding of human rights in contemporary Kurdish society and about teachers' lack of training in human rights education.

When it comes to the subjects of human rights education and democracy, I do not have very close knowledge of them. Only that my daughter has taken these subjects and, from my perspective, it's important to teach these subjects to school students. (Kamaran)

In general, not only in Kurdistan, but across the Middle East, we're not aware of our rights. We don't really understand what is meant by human rights. So a good awareness campaign is needed. (Kawthar)

I don't think the subject [HRE] is given the attention and development it deserves. ... It should be included in all grades ... as it's very important for our teachers and students to behave according to human rights standards. ...Most importantly, it's insufficient to learn about human rights as a paper exercise, there should be genuine opportunities to practise them. (Asem)

Although Kamaran is a general school inspector, responsible for nine schools, he admits he knows relatively little about HRE and citizenship as taught in those schools, even though he acknowledges their importance. This viewpoint is echoed by others who criticise the minimal coverage of human rights in the curriculum and stress the limited societal knowledge of human rights.

A number of respondents suggest that for HRE to seem relevant both children and adults in Kurdistan need to be in a position to *claim* their rights. Among several respondents, there is an implied criticism of the Kurdish administration for not fully securing the rights of citizens and enabling them to practise these rights. There is a general impression that human rights are important but that both human rights and HRE are ill-understood.

Children learn about authority, but the obligations of authority figures (parents, teachers, government officials) to uphold children's rights are not addressed. Kawthar observes:

It is not enough just to teach our children about rights in books, as individuals, we also need to be able to practice these rights outside schools. However, in reality, there are many rights that we know of and yet cannot claim. It would be better that these subjects are taken up to the political level and enacted through laws.

In some institutions HRE was so low-status that schools might adopt corrupt practices to hide the fact they were neglecting the subject.

Some HRE teachers ... make the lesson available for other subjects, such as English or mathematics ... In such cases, HRE topics will be limited to a few classes before the exams and all students will be graded as if they have mastered their rights very well! (Fawzi)

### ***Practising HRE***

In order to bring the subject alive, a number of respondents suggested more active learning methods, including group work, the use of stories and the involvement of NGOs to bring the subject to life for the students:

[With active methods] ... the student will understand the topic and s/he will never forget it because s/he takes part in explaining, presenting and discussing. (Tara)  
When I use role play, the student takes over the role of the teacher and explains the topic. This makes them feel responsible and will improve performance. (Loreen)

Foad, who works as a school principal and school inspector, observed how some teachers feel HRE should not be examined because a student should not fail in something as fundamental as human rights. He strongly opposed this argument, pointing out the importance of the subject matter in learning about responsibilities and rights.

### ***Teaching rights where rights are denied***

One specific challenge raised by a number of respondents was that of teaching rights in contexts in which rights are denied, both in society and in school. Efforts to reform the education system have occurred rapidly, and in many places school building programmes and the provision of basic facilities have not kept pace with demand.

Right now, the [education reform] process is being implemented with many shortages, which has caused chaos and confusion amongst professionals, students and their families. ... You hear now of the current student demonstrations that are going on in various towns/regions in Kurdistan. This is because lack of understanding and [failings in] the system. ... As a consequence we have been witnessing school children demonstrating on the streets for some years. (Payman)

One school principal spoke of being instructed by his superiors to drop an investigation into a teacher's professional behaviour, and to turn a blind eye to equality and justice:

Human rights norms should apply to staff as well as students. Very often, you are forced to drop taking it to the next level because someone on a higher level instructs you to do so. This contradicts genuine implementation of human rights rules and equality. (Sarkawt)

Equally, professionals felt it important that HRE was not restricted to children but extended into communities. One suggested that HRE has been introduced merely to conform to international standards, rather than with commitment and clearly articulated educational and social justice aims:

I don't think HRE fits with our reality. Our society is still based on a tribal/ agricultural system, which is not ready to digest the message behind human rights norms ... including in the curriculum. I think it has more of a political benefit than a genuine social one. It's more to show to the West that we adhere to human rights norms and have included that in our schooling, without first focusing and addressing real societal problems and injustices. (Sawsan)

In order to make HRE content more meaningful, we need to add more practical activities. For instance, bring pupils to universities, visit different NGOs, and show documentary films ... and stories about human rights. ... It's important to make a link between HRE and the existence of [human rights] organisations so students are aware of the need to address human rights issues in our region. (Fawzi)

HRE teachers need to be continuously trained ... It would be good to have HRE professionals from local universities and even abroad to provide teacher training. (Azad)

While the examples discussed above relate largely to broader societal denials of rights, another challenge is responding to children who have personal experience of human rights abuses. The example below illustrates how making HRE relevant to children's everyday lives may empower teachers to address sensitive questions of child abuse. It also illustrates how giving the child the right of expression in class (participation rights) may serve to guarantee children's protection rights:

Sometimes, students give examples of human rights violations they themselves are ... experiencing at home, such as parents beating them or verbally undermining their personality. ... I give my students freedom to participate, including time to reflect upon the topic and discuss examples. ... Sometimes, a student will come to say they have understood the content, but this is not practised at home. In such situations, we inform the principal and school board, investigating the home situation and inviting parents to school to talk ... HRE can contribute in building up the student's personality. Many young learners are not taken seriously at home. Their rights may be neglected, denied or even violated. Some may grow up in fear, not daring to speak up. (Sherko)

### ***HRE, gender and diversity***

Among our respondents we observe a preference for talking about gender issues rather than ethnic or religious diversity when considering the potential of HRE to contribute to social justice and learning to live together. Although a number of respondents made direct reference to past conflict, few elaborated on it. One teacher adopted what we have termed a "paradise narrative" (Ahmad et al. 2012) whereby she denied past conflict within Kurdistan:

In our society co-existence stretches from time immemorial. There's no discrimination between nations, races and religions and history testifies to this... We have always been brothers who love and tolerate each other, in class, in the neighbourhood, in the village and in the city. (Tara)

Such claims form part of a wide political discourse in Kurdistan-Iraq in which the recent conflict among Kurds is denied. We would argue that this discourse, while

undoubtedly part of the rhetoric of Kurdish nationalism and shared political destiny, remains deeply problematic within the context of schooling since it denies the realities to which children will be exposed, namely past conflict and ongoing inequalities.

By contrast, other teachers responded pragmatically to diversity. Halat proposed asking children questions to find out what they knew about their multicultural, multi-faith society and about different religions and cultures “because the more information a person has the stronger their personality and ability to express themselves”.

Kamaram spoke at length about his understandings of schooling and gender equity and teachers’ responsibilities within this:

There is no doubt that our society is a closed society, strongly based on customs and traditions, where religion also plays a vital role. The only way, in my view, to bring these two sexes closer to each other and enhance gender equality is via school. Our society is a male-dominated society. Men have the power and women are looked down on to a certain degree. ... Schools play an important role in enhancing general knowledge about gender equality and its advantages in society. ... I try to encourage a sense of responsibility in every teacher and stress each individual’s role in changing cultural norms to incorporate gender equality awareness.

Nevertheless, like a number of other professionals, he did not underestimate the scale of the challenge or the conservative forces undermining equality initiatives, recognising that schooling needs to be complemented by a comprehensive awareness raising strategy and legal reform:

We need to acknowledge the fact that tribalism plays a big role in our Kurdish society, in combination with traditions and religion, which all work against the idea of gender equality. Women are viewed as second-class citizens and sometimes used as a commodity to be exchanged in marriage.

Most respondents felt that schools had a key part to play in realising gender equity, although few were able to articulate the precise contribution of HRE. However, many were aware of how the move towards mixed-sex schools had led to a loss of community confidence, and some themselves had reservations about girls and boys being educated together:

School has a major role in establishing positive gender relationships because if from very early stage children get used to studying and playing together ... it will become normal for girls and boys to interact, communicate and study together. (Kawthar)

Sherko suggested:

Gender equality has to start at home. Parents need to treat their boys and girls equally without any differences. ... But parents interfere in school business. ... Very often we hear parents’ complain about the fact that their daughter is placed next to a boy in class.

Our culture isn’t ready yet to mixing the two sexes at this sensitive age [teenage]. I can bring you to a mixed-sex school and just look at the classroom walls! There’re filled up with love messages

between boys and girls. ... They do not understand yet how to treat each other respectfully as a sister-brother or as friends. Consequently, the number of mixed-sex schools is decreasing day-by-day. Teachers are sometimes unable to control the situation and many parents are against the idea of sending their daughters to a mixed school, even if's close to home. (Azad)

Mixed-sex schooling should begin in pre-school. In the secondary school or college, it is already too late. ... Ours, the only mixed-sex school in this district, will close next year and boys and girls will be separated. ... There are no big differences in gender relationships between rural and urban areas. On the contrary, in some rural areas, girls and boys are freer to interact. For example, in the Spring, it's normal for a group of girls and boys to have a picnic together. Agricultural work has made interaction a regular habit. Although we find more educated people in urban areas, gender relations there are not as free as one might imagine. (Hassan)

Hassan was not alone in noting anomalies in gender relations, whereby in certain contexts, boys and girls are free to mix:

We still have many families that are against the idea of sending their children to a mixed-sex school. ... this is a matter of getting used to the idea. In our Kurdish culture, it is not acceptable for a girl to look at a boy ... yet it's normal at a wedding to dance hand-in-hand with a strange boy. The latter practice is common and culturally acceptable. (Fawzi)

Yet it appears that adult professionals were in some cases perpetuating problems by their own reluctance to engage on the basis of equality with their opposite-sex colleagues, preferring the familiarity of same-sex social relationships:

There are many schools, where the female and male teaching staff have two separate teachers' rooms. If this is still the dominant mode of thinking amongst teachers, how can they address gender equality with their students or support interaction between the sexes? (Payman)

### ***Religion, values and gender***

Fawzi told a shocking story of a student who committed suicide after her brother prevented her from joining her classmates on a school visit. He suggested that the case raised fundamental questions about societal recognition of girls' capabilities, as well as questions about home-school communications:

Yesterday, a young female student, aged between 16–17 years, committed suicide by burning 65 percent of her body. She did it because her brother didn't allow her to join her class in an out-of-school visit. ... This is ... a classic example of a lack of communication and cooperation between schools and families in grasping curricula activities. ... Gender equality is tied to cultural understandings of girls' and boys' roles, and this is not based either on religion or science. ... It's an example of false perceptions of girls' potential and behaviour.

Fawzi also expressed concerns both about the power of tribalism and the influence of mullahs in preventing the realisation of gender equity:

The biggest limitation is the tribal mind-set controlling society. Society isn't open to the modernisation we so strongly need. ... Another important concern is the lack of well-educated religious personalities ... We have many mullahs that play an important role in society, but

very few that are sufficiently well-educated to understand the real meaning of the Qur'an. Our religion allows equal rights for women and men, but this isn't properly understood. To be honest, we need a mind-set ready for religious reformation, according to societal needs. This is allowed in Islam. I'm not talking about reducing prayer from five times a day to three, but we need to understand that time when our Prophet was living is very different from today's age.

Sawsan, herself a Christian, agreed:

[We need to] link gender equality to our religious ideals, which stress equal treatment. Even Islam highlights the need for gender equality. I was just now teaching history and our topic is the history of Islam, where the Prophet Mohammad highlights gender equality.

Finally, we observe that few, if any, of our respondents appeared familiar with the CRC and that child rights were absent from the text books reviewed. Although it appears that the respondents were more comfortable discussing gender than ethnic diversity, a number insisted that any class discussion that might be construed as political, religious or gender-related remained problematic:

Misunderstandings happen very easily in our community ... if we talk about political, religious or gender-related issues. Class discussion may be counterproductive. For example, if we talked about Valentine's day in class, it may lead to misunderstanding ... even their families might interfere. ... So you consciously avoid opening any gender-related topic in the classroom. (Ahlam)

### **Ways forward: Principles and strategies**

We have sought to illuminate the practices of HRE in Iraq-Kurdistan by drawing on the perspectives of teachers and school inspectors responsible for enabling and monitoring quality education. Claiming rights implies knowledge about rights yet, as we have noted, teachers appear to be ill-equipped to address this subject matter, lacking specific training and operating in a prevailing social climate where considerable inequalities remain between women and men and in which fast-changing economic development is widening the gap between rich and poor.

Teachers' professional education needs to incorporate child rights as an essential feature of the curriculum. The focus within the current school curriculum is knowledge *about* rights, yet there is a gap between the ideals expressed in international instruments and reiterated in the political rhetoric of KRG leaders, and the everyday realities of both teachers and children. Teaching about human rights in school (including efforts to teach students about gender equity) takes place in contexts where children's rights (and particularly those of the girl child) are denied, and in family and societal contexts where powerful conservative and patriarchal values prevail. Urgent attention needs to be given to textbook development and to the assessment of human rights learning so that books, pedagogy and assessment procedures support, rather than undermine, stated policy goals relating to human rights and gender equity.

The limitations of the current HRE approaches are not a reason to abandon HRE but to ensure that teachers have appropriate support, including training in active methods, and opportunities to discuss how to support children in claiming their rights and the tensions between rights and cultural norms. There also needs to be awareness-raising and opportunities for learning for parents and other members of the local community, focusing particularly on child rights and basic human rights standards relating to children's daily lives.

Students are likely to feel disempowered if, despite the human rights they learn about, societal conditions undermine these rights. HRE is a right and part of quality education. Students not only need knowledge about rights but also education *in* human rights. Such education, as characterised by the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011: Article 2.2) as: "Education through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners" implies a consideration of educational structures and young people's experiences of schooling (Osler 2010), as well as the more student-centred methodological approaches which a number of our respondents noted. In other words, learners need to be given opportunities to experience rights within the community of the school. These issues are not yet addressed within the HRE framework for Kurdistan.

Finally, HRE within a post-conflict society such as Kurdistan-Iraq needs a particular focus on "Education *for* human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others" (UN 2011: Article 2:2). This implies skills training and creating a sense of solidarity between the genders and across ethnic and religious groups so that learners are encouraged to show responsibility towards and defend the rights of others, particularly those who are different from themselves or with whom they may disagree. This is what Osler and Starkey (2005) characterised as "education for cosmopolitan citizenship". Learners will only realise their rights if they are equipped and ready to struggle for them.

Powerful conservative forces, including religious leaders and tribal authority, combine to undermine efforts to promote gender equity. While gender is a sensitive area for discussion, religious and ethnic diversity is often off-limits. Thus, HRE requires much more than merely translating international instruments into national policies or implementing educational reforms. It implies an approach that includes school policies and practices which empower students and provide them with a language to discuss sensitive issues.

It is the responsibility of government to uphold human rights, but this can best be done in cooperation with civil society. Programmes of teacher education and training are best implemented in cooperation with local and international NGOs and specialist trainers. This should support Kurdistan's development and enable the best use of human resources, especially the contribution women and girls can make to strengthening democracy and development.



One critique of the current approaches taken by professionals is that HRE in school is taking place in a vacuum, without sufficient attention to measures beyond the school to raise awareness about the rights of girls (and minorities). Such a multidimensional approach might make fuller use of TV and other media to influence families and invite them to work in partnership with schools. It might also indirectly counter conservative religious forces who suggest that women's human rights are counter to religious teaching.

We conclude, from the complex and occasionally divergent perspectives of the educational professionals in Kurdistan who took part in our study that education *about, in and for* human rights has the potential to strengthen education quality and gender equity, challenging patriarchal values and tribalism from the grassroots. It is only one tool and will not be effective, as a number of education professionals noted, without effective political leadership and legal provisions across a range of policy areas. In a society which is multi-faith but which also includes secular perspectives, and particularly in a post-conflict context, recognition of the universal nature of rights and the obligations which this places not only on governments but also on all actors within civil society has the potential to promote solidarity and cohesion across cultural and religious boundaries. It is this solidarity which is critical for a just and peaceful future.

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*Audrey Osler* is Professor of Education at Buskerud University College, Norway and Emeritus Professor at the University of Leeds, UK, where she was founding director of the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights Education. She teaches on the interdisciplinary MSc programme Human Rights and Multiculturalism. Her research and publications address socio-political aspects of education, focusing on young people's human rights, participation and citizenship and teachers' work and careers, specifically addressing multicultural and post-conflict settings.

*Chalank Yahya* holds an MSc Human Rights and Multiculturalism from Buskerud University College, Norway. She received a scholarship from Norway's Falstad Centre to do research for her Master's thesis in Kurdistan, Iraq. In 2009 the Ministry of Human Rights from the Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq published her study of Kurdish women's self-immolation cases and women's human rights. She is currently the Reintegration Coordinator of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Norway.

## Notes

- 1 Launched in Dakar in 2000, UNGEI aims to support the realisation of girls' fundamental human right to education, emphasising its role in realising other human rights such as labour market access, health care and freedom from gender-based violence.
- 2 Kurmanji is spoken in Duhok, while Sorani is used in Erbil.
- 3 While some Syrian refugees are accommodated in a camp near Duhok, others are spread across the region, supported by families and communities (IOM, 2012).
- 4 Women may lack access to shelters, which in any case may close for lack of support. Some claim that shelters have allowed women at risk to be returned to their families.
- 5 In the case of Kurdistan-Iraq, responsibility for guaranteeing children's rights in education lies with the KRG since education is a devolved responsibility within the autonomous region.
- 6 The data were collected as part of a small-scale research and development initiative funded by the British Council's Del-PHE programme (British Council, 2010). A paper from this project, INTERDEMOCRATE (intercultural and democratic learning in teacher education), is published as Ahmad et al. (2012). The project builds on a long-standing partnership between Buskerud University College, Norway and Duhok University, Iraq. We are grateful for the support of the principal investigator, Dr Lena Lybaek, and project members Niroj Ahmad, Adnam Ismail and Nadia Zako for the data collection.
- 7 Chalank Yahya would like to thank the Falstad Centre, Norway, for the award of a scholarship which enabled her to complete a second round of data collection for her MSc thesis in February 2012.
- 8 Of the 15 respondents (seven female and eight male), five elected to answer the questions in writing, rather than through a face-to-face interview. Although we stressed we wanted professionals' own opinions, and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, it appeared that these five were, to a greater or lesser extent, ill-at-ease with an interview format, preferring to give considered answers. In Duhok all three teacher respondents gave us written answers. In the Erbil governorate two of our 12 respondents, both education inspectors, chose to respond in writing. This was the case for the Duhok teachers who had each been experimenting with introducing student-centred methods in their own classrooms as a central feature of the INTERDEMOCRATE project.
- 9 Most schools lack modern communication tools, such as websites and public e-mail.
- 10 This gave Chalank both insider and outsider status, with research participants frequently making reference to shared cultural reference points, but also accorded her, as a young woman educated abroad, particular respect and courtesies which cut across commonly observed standards between the generations, where such courtesies are generally shown to those older than oneself.

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