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CHAPTER 3

Connecting Home and School: on the Second Generation Muslim Children's Agency in Belgian Schools

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This chapter focuses on how second generation Muslim children of Turkish descent in Belgium (Flanders) move between their home and school culture and how they deal with competing expectations from both worlds. The chapter is based on qualitative empirical case-study work on three groups of ten-year-old children attending two different Catholic schools. In general, the children as social actors adopt creative strategies to connect the two worlds. However, specific school and home contexts may interfere with children's agency. The chapter argues that the way adults at school and at home deploy their power status and introduce ethnic/religious symbols of difference is crucial in understanding this process.

Introduction

Central to much literature on migrant children is the assumption that, in an intercultural context, migrant children are likely to be confronted with a mismatch between home and outside orientations and values (Eriksen 2003). As the previous chapter has shown for Muslim youths in Germany, this experience of mismatch also has consequences for the way migrant children are shaping their identity. Devine (2009: 523) notes that migrant children are “positioned between contrasting social and cultural worlds – juxtaposing often competing definitions of appropriate forms of identity formation and presentation.” School is the primary venue in which migrant children come into contact with outside

orientations and values. This chapter explores how Turkish migrant children, who are attending Catholic schools in Belgium (Flanders), move between their home and school cultures and how they handle competing expectations from the two worlds.

In this chapter, I focus on the possible mismatches due to differences in religious education between home and school. Turkish migrants arrived as 'guest workers' in Belgium (Flanders) during the 1960s to meet the employment needs of the Belgian state. While the majority of these Turkish migrants were Muslims, the Belgian educational landscape had been dominated by Catholic and secular movements since its inception. How are Turkish second and third generation children in Belgium dealing with these differences in religious education or with possible tensions between these domains? How do they use their religion in that process?

In the educational domain, Muslims in Belgium can rely on a legal framework of opportunities to practise their religion. Since 1978, Muslims have been allowed to choose Islam as the religious instruction option in public schools and have been able to create their own educational network. Interestingly however, the Muslim community has not as yet made use of this legal opportunity to develop an educational network of Islamic schools. Muslim parents therefore have to opt for schools within the existing educational networks. This situation increases the risk that for Muslim children religious education at school does not fit with their religious upbringing at home. Furthermore, Islam is often presented as essentially 'other' by the media and politicians, as a threat to the secular state and its institutions, as fundamentalist and as an example of the oppression of women (Salvatore 2007; Spruyt and Elchardus 2012; Van Acker and Vanbeselaere 2011). This depiction often leads to stereotyping, politicization and oversimplification of Islam, in which Muslims are treated as a homogeneous group. At the same time, a trend is being seen among Muslims in Europe towards a transnational Islam, a more visible and outspoken involvement in the public debate and a growing demand for opportunities for Muslims to practise their religion in the public domain.

The complexity of children's agency

Until the 1970s, the European research literature on children was dominated by developmental psychology which broadly depicts children's life span as a

universally stage-like developing process wherein individual children gradually accumulate cognitive knowledge (Piaget), moral reasoning (Kohlberg) or psychosocial behaviour (Eriksen). In reaction to these studies, childhood studies came into being in the 1970s and 1980s as a field of study with a concern “for the socially constructed character of childhood that involves the twin research foci of childhood as a socio-structural space and children’s own perspectives as social actors” (James 2007: 263). Since then, a large body of mostly qualitative empirical research, that takes the voices of children as its point of departure, has emerged. This body also includes studies on (migrant) children and religion (for a review: Hemming and Madge 2012).

By considering children as social actors, researchers within childhood studies have acknowledged children’s competences to co-create their lives and to establish agency. This means that in moving between home and school “children are in a position to influence the outcome of the negotiation process in directions, which they perceive to be favourable” (Solberg 1997: 126). Or, as Mayall (2002: 6) has put it, children are “moral interpreters of the world they engage with, capable of participating in decisions on important topics.” With respect to religion, Hemming and Madge (2012) observe in the body of childhood studies four manifestations of children’s agency. Firstly, children are capable of discerning the religious concepts, ideas and practices that they value more. Secondly, children “may reconfigure and renegotiate formal religious meanings and practices” (Hemming and Madge 2012: 44). Thirdly, research has shown how children make use of different sources (religious stories, media, imagination...) to make sense of their lives or to renegotiate formal religious meanings and practices. Fourthly and finally, researchers conclude that children may develop complex religious identities that differ from their parents’ or dominant representations and discourses.

However, the way children’s agency has come to be portrayed in childhood research, namely as an innate capability of children, has recently been criticized as overly stressing the agency and autonomy of children in this process (Christensen and Mikkelsen 2011; Eldén 2013; James 2007; Komoulainen 2007). Therefore, it risks “simplifying and reducing the complexity of children as social actors” (Eldén, 2013). To overcome this problem an approach is needed that fully accounts for this complexity without returning to the previous images of children as passive, incompetent or vulnerable.

A first pathway to this approach has been offered by Christensen and Mikkelsen (2011), who suggest that children’s agency is located, as we always find ourselves in

place. Drawing on Casey's theory of space, they claim that places which children inhabit and traverse are not neutral, but have already become a place of particular meaning and value by means of corporeal presence and activities. By entering and inhabiting these places (f.e. school), children may influence the particular meaning and value of these places, but are also influenced by the dominant meanings and values that these places already have for other people and in society (James 2007). Furthermore, children's position and agency in Western society are historically and structurally bounded by adults (parents) and by institutions made for children (school). Put differently, the relationships between children and adults at home and at school are not equal in power. Adults, as members of the dominant group and those responsible for children's education, have more power and more opportunities to shape who the children, as members of a non-dominant group, should be and the way in which they should behave (Piontkowski and al. 2002). Moreover, in the field of intercultural interactions at school, migrant children are exposed to this non-dominant position in a two-fold way, because of their double-minority status (Devine 2009). To sum up, when researching migrant children's agency at home and at school we need to take account of this double uneven distribution of power by assessing when, where and how adults use their power to control and coerce and how children's agency and moving between home and school are affected by this.

A second consideration elaborates further on the locatedness of children's agency by emphasizing how each individual child enters different places and belongs to different overlapping groups with different conceptions of life and values. So, children's social space and agency strategies may vary not only between children, but also within children, as each place and even concrete situation may require other strategies. According to James (2007: 265), this means for childhood studies that "the children's voices that appear in our texts do not necessarily speak about 'children' or 'the child' in abstract". Acknowledgement of the cultural contexts in which children's agency occurs and is produced is thus needed. In this chapter, we therefore carefully examine the cultural context of home (or community) and school regarding religious education in order to discover the changing and different positions that children take in these contexts.

A third and last consideration relates to the abovementioned mismatch that migrant children may experience between their religious upbringing at home and religious education at school. If children are confronted with this mismatch, they get to know the society in which they grow up, as religiously divided. This experience may have different consequences. Firstly, children may

understand the home and school domains as highly separated fields with strict boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Leonard, McKnight and Spyrou 2011). This understanding can affect their place-making and choice-making at school or at home. Secondly, growing up in a divided society where, for example, teachers and peers challenge taken for granted religious beliefs and practices may lead to heightened feelings of uncertainty and indeterminacy. Our interest is in how migrant children actively manage such situations and to what extent they expose themselves to risks or avoid those risks in managing religious uncertainty (Christensen and Mikkelsen 2008).

To conclude, this chapter aims to show how, departing from the perspective of children’s agency, children of Turkish migrants in Belgium (Flanders) actively move between their Muslim homes and their Catholic schools and handle religious differences between the two worlds. Drawing on recent childhood literature, we expect that the concrete outlook of their movements and difference management will be complex as a result of power imbalances between children and adults on the one hand and migrants and non-migrants on the other (double-minority position), to individual and contextual differences, and to heightened feelings of (religious) uncertainty in situations of home-school mismatches.

Method

Like most childhood studies which take children’s agency as their point of departure this chapter uses a qualitative empirical design that was developed for a recent European FP7-project (REMC). In five European countries, Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Ireland, Malta and Scotland, in-depth qualitative interviews with groups of teachers, parents and children of different religious backgrounds in case-study schools were conducted (2008-2009).

This chapter uses the Belgian data for a multiple case-study work. According to Hemming and Madge (2012: 46), this method may “engage with the logic of comparison between different cases, situations and social and spatial units” and offers “one of the best ways of adequately reflecting context.” The focus is on the home-school interface of three groups of ten-year-old Turkish children (nine children altogether), attending two different Catholic schools and living in a different community context (ranging from ethnically dense to ethnically mixed). In one school boys and girls are interviewed separately. Although both Catholic, the schools vary with regard to the religious instruction option

(Islam lessons or not) and the proportions of Muslim children, mostly with an Islamic background (from 25 per cent to 100 per cent).

Muslims and the religious instruction option in Flemish Catholic schools

The educational landscape in Flanders is marked by pillarization (Tielemans 2006), or the existence of different, separate educational networks that can be publicly or privately run. Catholic schools are privately run, but are publicly recognized and funded by the Flemish Community. The educational network, the umbrella organization of all Catholic schools, attracts the majority of pupils, with 60 per cent of all primary school pupils attending Catholic schools. A longitudinal research study (SIBO survey) indicates that over five per cent of them have Muslim parents. Catholic schools in urban contexts, where most Turkish (and Moroccan) families are settled, have a higher percentage of Muslims. A recent survey found that in three large Flemish cities (Genk, Ghent and Antwerp) nearly 15 per cent of the pupils attending Catholic schools identify themselves as Muslim (Agirdag and al. 2011).

Given the lack of Islamic schools, Muslim parents have to opt for publicly run schools (organized by the Flemish Community or by cities, municipalities and provinces) if they want their children to attend Islamic religious education (RE). Opting for a Catholic school implies that their children will attend the compulsory Catholic RE instruction. However, a small number of Catholic schools with a high concentration of Muslim pupils have been allowed by the bishops to offer Islamic religious education as an alternative to Catholic education. In the diocese of Limburg, for example, the bishop agreed to the introduction of Islamic RE in Catholic primary schools, aimed at dealing with the inflow of Muslim children into Catholic primary schools during the 1990s. Fifteen Catholic primary schools participated in the project. In 2000, a new Church policy note reduced the former autonomy of schools and bishops on this matter by demanding that Catholic primary schools with a large number of Muslim children in principle offer Catholic RE only. However, even now some schools still offer the choice between catholic religion and Islam, most of them being situated in cities in the former mining region.

Differences in school context

The school with 100 per cent Turkish children (The Gember School), situated in such a former mining region, belongs to the small group of schools that offer the choice between Catholic RE and Islamic RE. In the other Catholic school with 25 per cent Turkish children (De Tijm School), attending Catholic RE is compulsory for all children. At first sight, the reason for this difference in the religious instruction option seems solely related to the very different proportion of Turkish children. A further analysis of the school context, however, reveals another reason referring to the schools' different 'logics of practice' (Devine 2012). These logics are, for example, apparent in the way educational values and the schools' Catholic identity are worked out in their relations with Muslim parents and children. In that respect, De Tijm School and De Gember School use very different logics of practice.

In De Tijm School, the principal and teachers considered the Turkish language and the Muslim heritage of the pupils to be subordinate to the school rules. For example, clothing that made children stand out was forbidden. This could range from *'beachwear to clothing that is explicitly vulgar and, ultimately, the principal decides what is permitted and what is not.'* The rationale for this approach, as explained by the principal, shows, however, that the rule was actually directed at Muslims:

"We have included this in our school rules in order to prevent young girls wearing headscarves to school. That is not allowed within the school grounds."

In the Gember School, by contrast, the home environment of the Muslim pupils or individual orientation of the Muslim parent or child was regarded as positive and brought into dialogue with the school through parental involvement and a general orientation towards community involvement. This attitude towards communication as the norm explains not only why the principal of De Gember School supports Islam lessons at school. For him, this attitude is also a way of being Christian:

"As a Christian, the key point is 'Whatever you do for the least, you do it for me'. A lot of Turks, living in this neighbourhood, are underprivileged and outcasts. Once, they came here to survive, but they never got very far. Surely, as a Catholic school, you cannot close the door on them? That they are Muslims

becomes unimportant, then. For me, it is about being able to live with dignity and, for that, they have the right to a good education.”

In the following sections, we explore how the schools’ different logics of practice affect the way Turkish children design their agency and the way they handle differences and contrasting expectations between school and home. To this end, we focus on the children’s positions, actions and meanings *vis-à-vis* two topics: school celebrations and the organization of the religious instruction option at school.

School celebrations

Both schools chose a similar ritual repertoire for annual rites, which, from both a secular and a Christian perspective, form part of the socio-cultural Flemish heritage and have found a permanent place in many families (such as Christmas, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, carnival). While both schools had a substantial number of Muslim pupils, Islamic celebrations did not feature on the annual school calendar, except a visit to the mosque after the Christmas celebration in De Gember School.

Both schools also expected Muslim children to be present at these rituals. This obligation was not seen by the Muslim children as a mere duty. On the contrary, the children, in general, liked to participate in these school rituals (and in similar celebrations in the sport clubs or neighbourhood), even if this implied having to participate in, for example, a Christmas Mass.

“Each Christmas time, we go to the church with school. Then, we sing a Christmas song or perform the birth of Jesus. This year, we sang Christmas carols for the elderly in the church. The elderly sang and danced with us. That was nice! (girl, De Gember School)”

This positive attitude indicates that the Muslim children may have perceived the Christian school celebrations as not ‘threatening’ their Muslim identity, and therefore not as a mismatch with their religious upbringing at home, even if this may ‘objectively’ appear so. Two explanations for the children’s perception are possible. Firstly, participating in a ritual at school require no more than passive involvement: to be present can be sufficient. Secondly, we remarked that Muslim children were especially positive *vis-à-vis* celebrations that drew on

their non-cognitive skills and bodily expressions (singing, playing and dancing). Performing the birth of Jesus, for example, had, therefore, not been experienced as an identity issue, but as a means to open up space for non-cognitive skills. Put differently, playing rather than being was, according to the children's perceptions, at the core of these school celebrations.

In both schools, the school celebrations are organized and designed by adults, leaving little space for initiatives and agency on the part of the children. Even in and beyond this bounded space, however, children succeeded in becoming active agents:

“I have once printed photographs of the Christmas tree. Then, I have coloured one and hung it on the wall. But at that time, I was just a little child. (girl, De Gember School).”

In this example, the girl is actively adopting an unknown cultural element from the school culture at home. This adoption process is driven by her spontaneous desire to repeat at home what she enjoys at school. Bash and Zezlina-Phillips (2006) refer to a similar attitude in school contexts, identifying it as a mimetic strategy, used by migrant children to declare their membership of the group and to ‘blend’ in. However, in our case, the moment of adoption is put in the past and is connected with being a little child, unaware of doing something ‘wrong’ or ‘unusual’. This means that their mimetic strategy had become problematized only after the imitation attempt at home and after realizing that this imitation was not congruent with the home context. The children indicated that parents or community members had played a crucial role in this problematization process by stressing the differences between school and home and by suggesting the home as the outstanding and the sole place to ensure the Islamic upbringing of children. In the same vein, a mother (De Tijm School) explained why she agreed to her children's participation in school celebrations: “[t]hey join in at school, but in their minds and hearts and at home they always remain Muslim.” In contrast to their parents, however, children did not consider school and home as separate domains, but were instead trying to connect these fields and keep moving between them. To that end, less obvious strategies than mimetic ones were considered useful. For example, one girl told of how her aunt had put up a Christmas tree at home, but had called it a New Year tree. This creative solution made it possible to adopt a ritual element from the school culture without risking problems, as a New Year tree does not refer to the Christian Christmas.

However, not all ritual elements or practices within school celebrations were welcomed or could be creatively adopted. In that respect, a Muslim boy from De Tijn School pointed to ‘the sign of the cross’, a Christian practice that he felt to be highly controversial:

“[b]efore class prayers and during celebrations, they always make the sign of the cross. But we don’t. My father says we are Muslims. Therefore, we are not allowed to make the sign of the cross and are thus forbidden to participate.”

The appearance of the sign of the cross changes the initial positive attitude of the Muslim boy to a problematic one. Barth’s (1969) theory can possibly explain why the sign of the cross functions here as a trigger in this change. According to his theory, intercultural interactions consist by definition of interactional processes of boundary maintenance and boundary definition. Following Barth, this boundary refers not to objective differences between groups, but to characteristics used by the actors as overt ‘signals and emblems of differences’ and as ‘diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity’ (Barth 1969: 14). In other words, for this boy the sign of the cross functions as such a ‘symbolic boundary’ or ‘overt signal of difference’ and was, therefore, negatively emotionally loaded. Therefore, the boy refused to make the sign of the cross, and started thinking in ‘we’ and ‘they’-terms.

Why is the sign of the cross a negatively emotionally charged symbol for Muslim children? The Muslim boy gives a clue, when he says that they are not allowed to make the sign of the cross because they are Muslims. Thus, it becomes clear that the sign of the cross is perceived as belonging to the core set of prohibitions for Muslims (as, for example, not to eat pork). Making this sign anyway is then felt to be crossing a border, as an act of blasphemy, which contradicts being a good Muslim. In her book, *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood (2005) states that being a good Muslim is not so much a question of believing in a set of dogmas as a ‘way of being’ (see also Jansen 2011). Following Mahmood (2005), refusing to make the sign of the cross does not therefore express disbelief in Jesus Christ, as this interpretation would stress the Western idea of religious practice as an outward representation of an interior mental state or belief. Instead, Mahmood claims that for Muslims religious practices or prohibitions have another aim or *telos* and must be primarily interpreted as fulfilling a religious duty. By fulfilling these religious duties, a Muslim becomes what he/she wants to be: a good Muslim (Jansen 2011). Or it is by actually refusing to make the sign of the cross that one

becomes a good Muslim. This insight also sheds an interesting new light on this case, because it then reveals how the refusal offers the boy the basis and potential actually to achieve what he intends to be: a good Muslim. Intentions rather than a prescribed set of beliefs are thus crucial. While in the previous cases this intention was never felt to be threatened, the ‘sign of the cross’ here did threaten, resulting in a mismatch which was felt to be irreconcilable between the religious norms at home and at school.

Provision of the RE option: Islam lessons or not?

1. Islam lessons in the Gember School: how to deal with community influence? The Islam lessons in the Gember School were given by a teacher belonging to the same ethno-religiously community as the children. Consequentially, the community entered the school domain and obtained space and power to influence the children’s religious education. Originally, however, the neighborhood and also the school was built for a diverse ethnic population of Turks, Greeks, Italians and Flemish subterranean mine workers and their children. After the collapse of the mining industry, this picture underwent major changes. Greek, Italian and Flemish families and even a lot of Turkish families moved away. Hitherto, only the Turkish families with the lowest socio-economic status have stayed.

Comparing the boy and girl groups interviewed, we found that religion was very important for both and that they liked the Islam lessons or discussing the best way of performing a ritual or the meaning of religious practices:

“Islamic RE is something different: it is something about us. Mathematics, on the other hand, is something we have to use when we are grown-up, for our job.”

However, boys and girls differed in the way they evaluated the rules and bans of their own community, revealing the girls’ attitude to their Islam teacher or to their community as more complex.

“A: I don’t like it if the hocha (=Islam teacher) is bad tempered. He always shouts at us, then.

B: But he isn’t like that.

A: Sometimes he is very nice. At the play yard, you can already see if he is moody or not. If moody, he shouts and tells us how naughty we are. If he is good tempered, we get very nice lessons.”

In this case, the girls criticize the teacher’s behaviour while at the same time toning down this criticism by insisting that the behaviour is dependent on the teacher’s mood and not on his character. This complex position can be explained from two angles: firstly, as a way of handling a mismatch between the teaching methods of the class teacher and those of the Islam teacher and, secondly, as a way to avoid heightened feelings of insecurity vis-à-vis their community and parents. The first explanation should be placed in the context of other statements by the children, who did not want more Islam lessons and preferred the more interactive teaching approach of their class teacher, an approach they did not always find in the Islam lessons at school or at Koran school. In that context, their critical attitude may reveal their wish to integrate the class teacher’s methods into the Islam lessons. The second explanation looks at the citation from its community context. Living in an ethno-religiously dense school context and neighbourhood implies being exposed to tightening implicit social control mechanisms, especially for girls. Identifying yourself as Muslim and respecting the Islam teacher are not only taken for granted, but are also considered as strict community rules on which members are regularly informally supervised and checked by others.

“Sometimes in class a fellow pupil shouts: “Who believes in Allah?” Then, you have to hold up your finger. Everybody does. You have to believe strongly in our community.”

“My mother says: If you decide to stop being a Muslim, you are no longer my child.”

“In our community everybody knows everything. If someone gets a car accident, the whole community will know the news immediately.”

It is interesting that, in this community context, the girls choose not to adopt a consistently critical attitude, nor an uncritical stance regarding the teacher’s behaviour (as the boys did). This strategy had two advantages. Firstly, it avoids a problematic identification with their religious identity and their community. Furthermore, it makes it possible safely to express their feelings and wishes regarding their Islam lessons and the preferred teaching style.

Girls are also confronted with a range of prohibitions around their bodies, which go against Flemish habits for girls.

A: Nearly everything is forbidden. You are not allowed to do this or that: no rings, no nail polish, no earrings.

B: I have nail polish anyway. They don't see it, because it is transparent.

In this example, we see how a girl tries creatively to find her way in a context that is experienced as limiting and restricted. By using transparent nail polish, the girl succeeds in opening space for what she wants without confronting the frontiers of the prohibition and without risking punishment. Despite the prohibition, the girl is thus attempting to bridge the two worlds. In that sense, she acts as a mediator (Withol 1998), who seeks to bridge conflicts between the values of both worlds. Acting as a mediator also implies that the girl does not reject her Muslim upbringing. This attitude would be ineffective because, for all of these girls, it is precisely Muslim prayers and reading the Koran that provide considerable comfort and a buffer against insecurity and indeterminacy.

"A: If you have problems, Allah is there. You don't see him, but even then he helps you when reading a piece from the Koran or when praying.

B: I'm afraid of the dark. Then, I can't sleep. At such moments, I ask my mother to read the Koran. So I'm able to fall asleep and to be without creepy dreams."

In that way, the case of the transparent nail polish is not an example of losing Muslim religion. Rather, we interpreted this case as a resistance to ethno-religious practices that restrict the girls' agency or, as Abbas (2004, in Ipgrave, 2010) has suggested:

"Is it possible that these girls, who identify themselves explicitly as Muslims, are searching for a 'proper' and 'beautiful' Islam rather than the apparently outmoded religious practices of their parents?"

Following Dinç's typology (see chapter 2), the girls thus seem to prefer the Neo-Muslim identity position.

2. How to deal with Catholic RE at De Tijm School?

De Tijm school is an ethnically mixed school with two dominant groups: Turkish pupils with an Islamic background and Flemish children with mostly a catholic background. As a Catholic school and in line with its school policy, De Tijm School insists on Catholic RE. In general, the Muslim children did not problematize attending Catholic RE. However, the way in which their teacher dealt with this subject was discussed:

“When we learned in biology that we come from monkeys, a classmate asked the teacher: ‘But, in religion, you said that we came from dust, and now you’re telling us that we come from monkeys?’ Our teacher answered that what is written in the Bible isn’t to be taken literally.”

In this case, the children point to an underlying tension between scientific/secular and religious world views on the creation of the world. The teacher, who teaches religion as well as biology, resolved this tension by presenting these different world views separately. Religious topics or questions were reserved for the religion lessons, the scientific knowledge on this theme for the biology lessons. During the interview, the Muslim children criticized this separation and especially the silence about their religious views in the biology lessons.

In that context, Ipgrave (2010: 18-19) pleads for an epistemology-based inclusion of Muslim pupils’ religious capital and theological thinking:

“Religious students should be able to feel confident that, for example, their ideas about the existence of a guiding transcendent power behind the creation of the universe or the movement of human history will be taken seriously and not dismissed as relics of a bygone age ... A truly inclusive approach requires a degree of reflexivity on the part of those (teachers and students) who do not share the religious views of some of the class members.”

While the case reveals that the Muslim children interviewed were also in favour of such an approach, their position changes when asked if they would like to have Islam lessons at school:

“If I could choose Islam, I wouldn’t say: No, I don’t want it, but if I couldn’t choose Islam, I wouldn’t insist on getting it.”

One possible explanation for this avoidance strategy relates to the educational approach of the school that placed emphasis on discipline and good moral attitudes, and obedience to the school rules. Given this approach, the Muslim children's reaction may be the result of a (perceived) assimilation pressure. Without such pressure, they would perhaps adopt a different position. In short, what children do in concrete situations does not always coincide with what they think or what they would really like to do. Whether this is the case largely depends in practice on the way in which the school handles its position of power in its interactions with children.

Conclusion

In this chapter we investigated the different movements of three groups of Muslim children between two significant domains: home and school. In this concluding section, we will try to understand the complexity and changeability of Muslim children's movements.

In general, the question 'how can I become a good Muslim?' emerges as crucial, since the children's attitudes were mainly based on the way they answered and handled this question. Put differently, beneath their attitudes a foundational intention to become a good Muslim can be distinguished. For children with a Muslim education at home who are attending a Flemish school, this question needed, however, to be changed into the following, more complex one: 'how can I become a good Muslim in a non-Muslim school context?', because attending Flemish schools will affect the way in which children try to become good Muslims. Practices from home which are taken for granted and which are guiding them to this end are mostly 'absent' in Flemish schools. Moreover, Muslim children become familiarized with a set of host practices. The positive basic attitude to these practices indicates that Muslim children believe that it is possible to participate in school activities and in some cases even to adopt ritual elements of the host culture without becoming 'bad' Muslims or without contradicting their intention to become good Muslims. This is an interesting pattern, which merits more attention. As Mahmood (2005) stressed in her analysis of pious women, for these women religious practices are not experienced as mechanical acts. Religious intentions are important: the rituals are carried out with the intention of 'living modestly' (Jansen 2011). Within this intentional framework, reflexivity thus becomes possible, albeit within conservative frameworks, because every

(new) practice can be valuable as long as it is experienced as an effective way of 'living modestly'. The Muslim children's attitudes can be interpreted in a similar way. Here, the intentional framework is, however, guided by the desire to become a good Muslim. This intention is therefore at the root of their agency. In the previous sections, we offered examples of Muslim children using this intentional framework as a space not only for reflexivity, but also for exploration, flexibility and creativity, and as a means of connecting and moving between home and school or of risk management.

However, on the basis of specific interactions with significant others at school (the case of the sign of the cross, the case of the moody Islam teacher) or at home (the case of the transparent nail polish), the way in which children move between different fields and manage differences becomes problematized, leading to a shift from positive basic attitudes to other, more complex ones. We have found that this shift is always preceded by a (perceived or experienced) restriction in agency and space to explore for the children, with avoiding or resistance strategies on the children's part as a result. In this process, (stories about) the school or parents' actions played a crucial role; as in most of the cases, the shifts were effected by school staff or parents who had pointed to irreconcilable differences between home and school culture or had devalued or silenced their religious capital. As recent childhood studies suggest (Eldén 2013), a lack of power balance between children and their parents on the one hand, and between pupils and the school on the other, is at the root of this process, as their double non-dominant position hampered the children in keeping moving between home and school.

How can schools help Muslim children in their desire to connect and mediate both worlds? We agree with Iprgrave (2010) when she focuses on developing a degree of reflexivity on the part of those (teachers and students) who do not share religious views, along with an inclusive approach in which children's religious (or secular) heritage is effectively valued as religious/secular capital. This reflexivity and valorization of each other's richness, however, require not only the act of self-critical thinking regarding one's own views and the use of power. Also needed is the capability of together – staff, parents and pupils – imagining ways of connecting different, sometimes conflicting, fields, views and practices without avoiding or problematizing the change that this connecting will bring for each group.

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