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# Negotiations on Inclusive Citizenship in a Post-secular School: Perspectives of “Cultural Broker” Muslim Parents and Teachers in Finland and Sweden

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines negotiations on Muslims’ inclusive citizenship in Finnish and Swedish comprehensive schools. The data include interviews with Muslim parents and Muslim teachers ( $n=8$  in both countries), who serve as cultural brokers in public schools and mediate negotiations on the terms of inclusion. The study utilizes the notion of post-secularity and pays particular attention to how intersections of religion and citizenship emerge in the everyday life of the schools. The results reveal how the culture-bound interpretations of religious freedom engender solidarity gaps between the advocates of secular normativity and those who oppose to this discourse. The impact of country-specific factors (Islamic religious education in Finnish schools, the existence of Islamic schools in Sweden) on Muslims’ experiences of inclusive citizenship are discussed.

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Muslims; inclusive citizenship; cultural broker; post-secular; school; Finland; Sweden

## Introduction

This study examines negotiations on Muslims’ inclusive citizenship in Finnish and Swedish mainstream (meaning non-religious) comprehensive schools from the perspective of “cultural broker” Muslim parents and teachers and pays particular attention to negotiations on the points of intersection between religion and citizenship. Citizenship is a “momentum concept” that needs to be continuously reworked to ensure its power to promote social justice. Developing the inclusionary potential of citizenship and challenging its exclusionary tendencies is a pervasive theme in the contemporary citizenship literature (Hoffman, 2004; Lister, 2007). Theorization around the concept of citizenship has become increasingly concerned with diversity and issues of how the recognition of individual and group identities influences people’s abilities to participate in the public sphere (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011). In the narratives of cultural and lived citizenship, identity, social positioning, a sense of belonging and recognition are emphasized over legal rules (Lister, 2007). In multicultural Europe, where a sense of the failure of national models to promote inclusion is common and minority rights are exceedingly tied to demands for loyalty to nation states and their core values (Himanen, 2012), empirical examinations of lived citizenship are needed. Citizenship can be understood as a set of critical practices giving people the tools to “work for social change within and across the boundaries of nation states” (Abu El-Haj, 2009, p. 275). Multicultural citizenship is based on the idea that different groups in a society not only will be recognized, but will also be entitled to

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participate in the negotiations on the terms of citizenship (Modood, 2014). Despite the increasing prominence of these critical understandings of citizenship at the academic level, beyond academia the more enlightenment-inspired assimilative notions of citizenship prevail. Many scholars call for more research on schools as arenas for the negotiation and regulation of nation formation and the reconceptualization of citizenship in schools towards more critical perspectives (Abu El-Haj & Bonet, 2011; Osler & Lybaek, 2014).

This study utilizes the notion of “inclusive citizenship”, which relates to lived experiences and contextual practices, and is concerned with both formal rights and recognition (Kabeer, 2005; Lister, 2007). According to Kabeer (2005), inclusive citizenship is about how marginalized people understand and claim citizenship – about their vision of what a more inclusive society might imply. Kabeer identifies four key values of inclusive citizenship, which are commonly expressed in these examinations of citizenship “from below”. These values are: justice (“when it is fair for people to be treated the same and when it is fair that they should be treated differently” [p. 3]), recognition (“of the intrinsic worth of all human beings, but also recognition of and respect for their differences” [p. 4]), self-determination (“people’s ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives” [p. 5]) and solidarity (“the capacity to identify with others and to act in unity with them in their claims for justice and recognition” [p.7]). These values construct a stance in the contemporary debates around citizenship – e.g., the universality versus particularity of rights, individual versus collective rights, hierarchy versus indivisibility of rights, and rights versus duties (Kabeer, 2005). The scholarly literature has used inclusive citizenship as both a normative and an analytical concept (Lister, 2007). This study does not rely on inclusive citizenship as a comprehensive normative notion of “ideal citizenship”, nor does it endeavour to confirm the legitimacy of the claims of its informants, but it concurs with the view that the bottom-up negotiations on citizenship merit attention, and uses the four key values defined by Kabeer (2005) as an analytical tool in making sense of Muslims’ negotiations on inclusion and rights in Finnish and Swedish schools. The research questions are: 1. How are the values of inclusive citizenship (justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity) negotiated? 2. What is the role of religion in these negotiations? 3. How are country-specific factors reflected in these negotiations? In what follows, I will discuss questions related to the development of Muslim identities in Europe, present the particular contexts of Finland and Sweden as well as the data and methods of this study. The results section is structured in such a way that it presents the observed negotiations on inclusive citizenship under the four key values. Answers to research questions 2 and 3 emerge as a pervasive theme in the results section and will be discussed more thoroughly and reflected in light of the Habermasian notion of post-secularity at the end of the article.

## **Developing Muslim Identities in a European Context**

The study explores the development of inclusive citizenship in the context of Finnish and Swedish comprehensive mainstream schools – spaces where identity and belonging are continuously shaped through everyday discourses and practices. Schools are perceived as “intermediate subjects of recognition” (Laegaard, 2010) that mediate the legal recognition of minority rights by the state and where sometimes competing rights – such as the rights of parents to nurture their children according to their family values, and the state’s right to educate democratic citizens – are negotiated. The focus of the study is specifically on the experiences of Muslims in these school communities. In Europe, Muslim identities are commonly assumed to be in competition or irreconcilable with national identities and democratic citizenship, although evidence countering these perceptions has emerged (Grundel & Maliepaard, 2012). The discrimination and Islamophobia experienced by Muslims in the West has been much studied (see, e.g., Bleich, 2011; Welply, 2018); Members of Muslim minorities commonly highlight a lack of knowledge about Islam and its internal diversity as a prominent reason for the existing tensions between them and the majority (Juntunen, Creutz-Sundblom, & Saarinen, 2016).

The problems of the essentialization of Muslim identities are well known. However, new universalist forms of Islamic identification also have stemmed from the diaspora experiences and many young Western Muslims' desire to fulfil some standards of "authenticity" and appeal to Islamic faith as a source of coherence and collective pride (Gest, 2015). The construction of a collective Muslim identity surpassing existing differences is also powered by shared experiences of exclusion (Tinker & Smart, 2012). There is global turbulence around the identity category of "Muslim", and multiple parallel trends such as the emergence of neo-fundamentalist Muslim identities detached from cultural traditions (Roy, 2010), as well as the emergence of urban, commercialized and integration-seeking Muslim identities (Boubekeur, 2005). Kinnval and Nesbitt-Larking (2011) identify three identity strategies of western Muslims that have evolved as responses to the current securitization trends. Retreating into a private world is a common coping strategy for first-generation immigrants, while essentialism, which includes the development of fundamentalist religiosities, confrontational politics and may even lead to radicalization, is more often a reaction among the second generation. The third strategy, engagement, denotes engaging in the public sphere actively and constructively while cultivating religious identities. It is important to note that this study acknowledges the existence of these different stances and is also aware of the fact that essentialist views have sometimes been promoted in Muslim communities where the official picture emphasizes engagement (see e.g., Elander, Fridolfsson, & Gustavsson, 2015). The choice of informants in this study is not regarded as representative of the diverse Muslim identities in Finland and Sweden. The Muslim parents and Muslim teachers interviewed, who have taken the roles of cultural brokers in schools (this is explained in more detail under the section on data and methods), can be regarded as advocates of the engaged identity strategy. The study is interested in what kind of space and agency these Muslims, who cultivate their religious identities and aim at constructive engagement with society, have in negotiating the terms of inclusive citizenship in Finnish and Swedish schools.

All in all, this study takes the view that inclusive citizenship in a multicultural context is about continuous negotiations on what identities can be recognized without imperilling the core values of a society, and who will have the agency to determine the terms of this recognition (Modood, 2014). Identities are not, however, regarded as fixed but constantly formed through these negotiations. Self-categorization is always multiple and misrecognition can be avoided only by orientating to people's own identity definitions – both group and individual identities. Misrecognition may increase the likelihood of the formation of religious identities as oppositional and essentialist identities (Gest, 2015). The "over-visibility" of Muslim identity sometimes violates Muslims' feelings of belonging and ability to participate but offence is also caused by the invisibility of Muslim identity in situations where it is relevant and could be positively recognized. In contexts experienced as islamophobic, some Muslims struggle with the experienced need to promote positive recognition of Islam and exhaustion over taking the task of being the "positive example" Muslim, and for these reasons, sometimes prefer religious anonymity (e.g., Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011). Moreover, multicultural recognition of group identities is sometimes felt to be threatening by those minority members who do not identify strongly with their group (Verkuyten, 2009).

This study is particularly interested in the points of intersection between religion and citizenship. The idea of post-secularity has emerged as a new paradigm in academic discourses on religion. A variety of meanings is attributed to the term; most commonly it refers to a resurgence of public religion and states that the secularization thesis is wrong (Beckford, 2012). Studies conducted under this paradigm focus, for instance, on faith-based citizenship engagement and the role of faith-based organizations in providing social services in European countries at a time of weakening welfare regimes (see Beaumont & Cloke, 2012). The paradigm of post-secularity has also been criticized for overstating the continuing or rising public presence and impact of religion in Western Europe, and more empirical research on the matter is called for (Köhrsen, 2012). In the field of education, criticism of the secular normativity of schools and the liberal-secular foundation of multicultural education have emerged against the backdrop of the notion of post-secularity. The banning of headscarves in French public schools, in particular, has raised intense debates (see e.g., Fernando, 2010),

but in the Nordic context, too, scholars have criticized the othering of non-secular and non-Western worldviews in educational thinking and practices (see e.g., Berglund, 2017; Poulter, Riitaoja, & Kuusisto, 2016). In this study, post-secularity is understood in terms of the emergence of a pluralistic public sphere. It encourages the researcher to pay attention to religion as a factor in the negotiations on inclusive citizenship in the school communities. The post-secular context also invites an analysis of religious literacy as a citizenship skill. Religious literacy is understood as the ability to “discern and analyse the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses” (Moore, 2016, p. 30). Misrecognition of the modern religious subjectivities and the diversity of religious identities as well as experiences of exclusion created by both religifying and religion-blind policies, for instance, have been observed as manifestations of religious illiteracy (Asani, 2011; Dinham & Francis, 2016).

A decision to observe the intersections between religion and citizenship from the perspective of Muslims in particular has to do with the acute issues of Muslim inclusion in European schools. According to earlier research some Muslims’ experiences of exclusion in public schools have increased the willingness to found Islamic schools in many European countries, including the Nordic countries (Larsson, 2009; Leirvik, 2009). Muslim parents’ reasons for prioritizing faith schooling usually relate to concerns about the general well-being of their children – developing a positive sense of identity and belonging – and fears and experiences of discrimination in public schools (McCreery, Jones, & Holmes, 2007). In Finland and Sweden, for example, Somali parents feel that teachers reinforce their feelings of estrangement from their children – they are assumed to be unaware of what is in the best interests of their children (Haga, 2015). Furthermore, the suspicions of some Muslim parents towards public schools are difficult to allay because Muslims are rarely represented on the school staff or in parents’ associations. Nevertheless, as Tinker (2009) illustrates, those on opposing sides in the debates concerning Muslim schooling often share similar concerns, such as rights, social cohesion and identity, and realizing this common ground could open up space for dialogue. However, previous research on the inclusion of immigrant Muslims in education is rather polemic and one-sided. Muslims are either posited as a social problem or incapable of integration, or teachers are accused of racism and Islamophobia (Niyozov, 2010). The vast majority of European Muslim students are educated in public schools, and seeking solutions to the existing tensions is of acute importance.

### ***Finnish and Swedish Contexts***

Both Finland and Sweden have been ranked as countries of fairly strong multiculturalism policies (Multiculturalism policy index, 2010); however, Sweden in particular has experienced a backlash of multiculturalism policies with the state taking less responsibility for immigrants’ cultures and focusing its integration policies on individuals (Byström & Frohnert, 2017, p.vii). Finland and Sweden are highly secularized countries; the majority of their populations belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. They are countries with traditionally strong levels of social trust, but currently experiencing polarization through increasing social, economic, ethnic and cultural divides (see Delhey & Newton, 2005). Despite the many similarities between Finland and Sweden, their differences – the existence of Islamic schools and an inter-faith approach to religious education in Sweden contrasted with Islamic religious education (IRE) offered in public schools and the absence of Islamic schools in Finland – make them interesting objects for comparison. Sweden has a longer history of immigration and a significantly greater immigrant population: Muslims in Sweden account for approximately 5% of the population, while the same figure is 1% in Finland (Larsson, 2015; Pauha, 2015). In both countries, the Muslim population is heterogeneous.

The present combination of Protestantism and secularism in the Nordic context could be called “secular Lutheranism” (Poulter et al., 2016). In both countries strong ideals of ideological neutrality in education exist, while the mediation of fundamental national values based on liberal Protestant secularism often emerges as a central educational aim. (Berglund, 2013; Rissanen, Kuusisto, &

Tirri, 2015). It has been argued that, particularly in Sweden, positions and principles that are claimed to be secular are often in reality atheistic – non-religious views tend to be regarded as “normal” or “neutral”, while religious positions are seen to be in contradiction to modern, rational and independent thinking. On the other hand, sometimes the hegemony of a “secular Christian” position also becomes othering towards purely secular views (Kittelmann-Flensner, 2015, pp. 115–120; Poulter et al., 2016). According to a recent comparative analysis of the current national curricula in Finland and Sweden, the Finnish curriculum employs a strong non-essentialist discourse of cultural identities by articulating diversity as a feature of all students, while the Swedish curriculum is surprisingly silent about diversity, and makes a distinction between the students’ “own origins” and the “common heritage” (the latter including “basic values of Swedish society”) in a relatively essentializing manner. Furthermore, the Swedish curriculum posits the students’ cultural background as a potential hindrance to the students’ education, and advises school personnel to resist, for instance, restrictions on the student’s choice of study or vocation that may be based on his/her cultural background (Zilliacus, Paulsrud, & Holm, 2017); this reflects Sweden’s intensified focus on reinforcing the “basic values” of Swedish society (Elander et al., 2015). It seems that multicultural education in both Finland and Sweden is mainly understood in terms of increasing language participation, and no other barriers to achievement are recognized, which is a common trend in the Nordic context (Osler & Lybaek, 2014). The trend towards referring to students through their language identities (see, e.g., Zilliacus et al., 2017) can also be interpreted as an attempt at political correctness. The Finnish curriculum demands the recognition of religious and cultural identities, but in practice the ideals of concentrating on commonality and restricting religion to the private sphere prevail in educational contexts (Rissanen, Kuusisto, & Kuusisto, 2016).

## Data and Methods

The study is part of a larger project in which interviews were conducted with Muslim parents and teachers, who are positioned as “cultural brokers” in their school communities ( $n = 8$  in both countries; S1–S8 in Sweden, F1–F8 in Finland), as well as principals of Finnish and Swedish multicultural comprehensive schools ( $n = 10$  in both countries). This article focuses on the perspectives on the former group and makes only some references to the principal data. The criteria for being a suitable informant for the study were a) self-identifying as Muslim, b) being the parent of a child or children who have attended a public comprehensive school in Finland/Sweden, and c) being employed in the Finnish/Swedish school system or an active member of the school community. Serving as a cultural broker, which is here understood in terms of mediating between Muslim parents, pupils and the school staff in order to improve understanding and communication (see e.g., Cooper, 2014), was not an official role for any of the informants, but they were continuously assigned or voluntarily took these tasks of mediation in their school communities. Among the Muslim interviewees there were 13 teachers (of religious education, languages, social sciences), two special needs assistants, and one chair of a parents’ association. Nine of the interviewees were female and seven male; apart from two native Finns and one second-generation immigrant in Sweden, they were first-generation immigrants (from Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Turkey, Malaysia, Morocco and Senegal). Two of them were Shi’as, two identified as Sufis and the rest were Sunnis. The saliency of informants’ religious identities varied. To protect the anonymity of the informants, their individual profiles will not be presented. They were fluent in Finnish, Swedish or English, and the interviews were conducted in these languages. The quotes from interviews conducted in Finnish or Swedish were translated into English by the researcher. The interviewees were sought with multiple methods – through relevant social media channels, by asking those who were interviewed to recommend other informants, and in Finland, three teachers of Islamic religious education were approached directly. This kind of sample, consisting of informants who were positioned and self-identifying as cultural brokers, resulted in data that is rich in perspective. Conducting research in the school context also enables the inclusion in the study of non-organized Muslims and Muslim identities differing

from those of “official representatives”, which has not always been the case in earlier studies (Bectovic, 2011).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data was analysed by means of abductive qualitative content analysis (see, e.g., Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). First, condensed meaning units were formed and coded, then these codes were linked to the theory-driven main categories (the four values of inclusive citizenship) and grouped into subcategories. After that the negotiations under these categories were analysed from the perspective of research questions 2 and 3.

## Results

### *Negotiations on Justice*

In the post-secular European context, religion has come to be increasingly recognized as an equality strand and the inclusion of religious identities into the realm of multicultural citizenship is argued for (Modood, 2014). The cultural brokers of this study, many of whom had experience of living in several European countries, appreciated the level of religious freedom in Finland or Sweden. There were in general no experiences of major violations of religious rights in the school communities, but they were subject to constant negotiation. Whether equality of status was experienced during these negotiations, or whether the informants were positioned as “difficult” due to their claim-making, had a major influence on their experiences of inclusion. In this regard, there were great differences between the individual schools in both countries, and awareness of these differences led the informants to conclude that policies concerning religion in the school communities are mainly dependent on the principals’ and teachers’ personal preferences. This unpredictability and known variation in school policies occasionally created feelings of injustice. Here is how one Swedish-Malaysian Muslim mother discussed a sudden change in practices after the school appointed a new principal:

S3: So, they got a new principal, who is less understanding of the requirements of the students. Ninety percent of the students are Muslim students, and yet, they are not allowed to celebrate Eid, they are not allowed to fast, they are not allowed to pray, and they are brought to every single Christian celebration there is, Lucia, Christmas, end of term celebrations, Easter ... it’s obligatory, and once I spoke out to the teacher that I wish that my son does not attend church because the end of term is so close to Christmas, and they sing hymns, Christmas carols, where they ... the words are worshipping Jesus and things like that, and she said that this is a school activity, it’s part of the school, and if you wish to miss it, you need to get permission from the municipality. Because school is obligatory.

Researcher: So what would you have to do if you don’t want to send your kids to these?

S3: I would have to apply. [...] a child can request for ... to be out of school, if it’s less than ten days, then the power to give the permission is the principal’s, if it’s more than 10 days you have to apply to the municipality. So basically the power to approve whether my sons get the holiday or not rests with her, but she just said, municipality ... but just to, like, intimidate us. [...] when we encouraged like other faith-related activities, they use the excuse that no, it’s unfair to have just one religion or something, you know, then we have to invite all the religions, then ... ok, then you take my son to church and that’s ok?

Infringements of both positive and negative religious rights sometimes go unnoticed due to a lack of perspective on the intersections of religion and culture (Moore, 2016). In both Finnish and Swedish schools, the principals argued for granting visibility to Protestant Christianity due to its status “only as cultural heritage”, while Islam or other religions were commonly perceived as essentially more religious, and not having pedagogical relevance as a part of cultural heritage – even in schools where fewer than ten percent of the pupils were Christian. This clearly indicates the continuing perceived linkage between the Protestant tradition and citizenship and the continuing hegemonic position of “secular Lutheranism” (Poulter et al., 2016). As one of the Swedish principals put it, “Islam is not a tradition here”. In addition to the culture-bound interpretations of the distinctions between

religion and culture, Protestant biases in the interpretation of religion and religious freedom were seen in how principals, whose conceptions of religion are based on Protestant tradition and its canonized doctrines seemed to have an inadequate understanding of the different logics of Islam and experiences of newcomers from Muslim majority countries when they have to truly decide for themselves for the first time what religious norms and rules to try to follow in a secular society. A poor understanding of the diversity of Islam as well as framing religious freedom as a group-based right led the principals to assume they could implement uniform policies on accommodating the needs of Muslim families by consulting e.g., one single imam. These practices were sometimes experienced as insults to religious freedom, or at least resulted in feelings of failure to respect Muslim families' rights to self-determination, as will be discussed below.

In the framework of inclusive citizenship, the value of justice demands striking a balance between differential and similar treatment on a situational basis in order to achieve fairness and equality (Lyster, 2007). The Muslim cultural brokers' claims to positive religious rights varied: some of them had more retreatist aspirations (Kinnval & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011) and supported the restriction of religion mostly to the private sphere and not being a too visible a part of the school culture. This was generally a reaction in situations where their claims had met with resistance, and they had become exhausted over being regarded as difficult members of the school community. None of them, however, demanded the removal of Christian elements from the schools; they mostly hoped that minority religions could be granted a more equal status with Christianity in terms of freedom to practise religion. Muslims in Europe, in general, are sometimes posited as exceptional in not following the path-dependent opportunities of minority integration and are deemed "difficult" for demanding differential treatment (Meer, 2012). The way in which the Finnish and Swedish Muslim parents and teachers posited themselves as spokespersons for all religious minorities and framed Islam as a value system and life choice comparable with other (religious and non-religious) values and practices, which are legitimized in the school communities, created a perception that they were seeking to challenge the view of Muslims as demanding special treatment by explicitly formulating their claims for justice as claims for equal treatment. They proposed ways in which adjustments are easily made for other practices or identities (e.g., vegetarianism vs. the halal diet), but choices based on religion are interpreted as opposing Swedish/Finnish values. One clear difference between Finnish and Swedish schools emerged: due to the existence of religious schools, Swedish principals seemed to be more confident in defending the legitimacy of the secular normativity in their schools. A common statement by Swedish principals was that if the parents felt that the school policies were unjust and if they could not commit to the school norms, they could always choose to send their children to an Islamic school. This indicated less space for negotiation due to the opportunity to "outsource" religious rights to religious schools.

### **Recognition**

Recognition can be evaluated in terms of whether a person's or a group's sense of identity is affirmed or if they feel compelled to act in ways that compromise these identities (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011). As a value of inclusive citizenship, recognition includes the acknowledgement of equal worth, but also of distinctiveness (Kabeer, 2005). The current national core curricula in both Finland and Sweden mentions supporting students' cultural identities as the task of basic education. In the Swedish curriculum, this aim is mainly present in the curriculum for language instruction in pupils' mother tongues other than Swedish, and a distinction is made between pupils' cultural identity and "common heritage". According to the Finnish curriculum, cultural identities should be supported in different forms of language instruction as well as in religious education according to pupils' own religion. Furthermore, identities are presented as multifaceted and appreciation and celebration of cultural diversity in the school community is demanded (Zilliacus et al., 2017).

According to the observations of this study, despite the differences in the curricula, the differences between individual schools were observed to be greater than those between the countries studied.

One Finnish-Iraqi female IRE and Arabic teacher, who taught in several schools, described this issue as follows:

- F7: In one of the schools I taught in last year, over 70% of the students were Muslims. There, these kids were taken into account so well and you could see it when they were asked what they believed in or what religion they belonged to, so very honestly and openly they said they were Muslims and spoke Arabic and like on Mondays they study Arabic and so on ... Whereas in other schools, which are not so considerate, students even ceased studying Arabic because it was not regarded as something they could be proud of.

However, in both Finland and Sweden, the aims of cultivating pride in language identities and making these visible were fairly well-adopted and sometimes contrasted with the assumptions of shame being attached to religious identities. In both countries a certain sacredness was associated with the ideal of restricting religion to the private sphere, which sometimes results in efforts “not to see” religions. The Finnish school system provides an official positive recognition of religious identities in the form of religious education according to students’ own traditions (Rissanen, 2012). Eight of the ten Finnish principals, however, were opposed to this organizational model of religious education as it made the students’ religious backgrounds too visible, a view that seems to reflect the tendencies of not articulating diversity in an attempt to avoid labelling any groups (Zilliacus et al., 2017). However, the Muslim cultural brokers’ in this study rather unanimously deemed it important to counter shame and stigma attached to Islamic identity by increasing the visibility of positive or “everyday” Islamic cultural practices, and in some schools had been able to promote this. The salience of Muslim identity for the informants varied, but they all gladly identified as Muslims in their school communities. Here is how one Swedish-Somali Muslim father discussed the issue:

- S2: You have been working there for 25 years, everyone is asking, Ramadan, what is it about ... it’s like ... we have been in this country for so long and nobody knows what’s it about ... So to just to give them the small things, you know, there’s Ramadan, there are two big festivities like the Eid after Ramadan the big Eid after we go to Mecca ... you know, the..small details [...]You know, even ... invite the parents and have like a Ramadan table or whatever, to just see what the people in the school can bring.

This kind of “food-and-festival approach” to multicultural education has been accused of exotification based on stereotypical views (Kromidas, 2011), but low-threshold opportunities to get to know the cultural backgrounds of others were generally perceived by the Muslim parents in this study as facilitators of recognition.

However, these informants’ struggles for recognition in the school communities related to the need to resist both religion-blind *and* religifying discourses. Some of them claimed a need to be seen “only as a human”, without their choices and opinions being “religified”. Their experiences accorded with those reported in other studies (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011): sometimes being seen “as a Muslim” leads to their not being taken seriously or even silenced, which results in feelings of a need to defend their choices as not being based on religion. On the other hand, wishes were expressed that positive pupil or parent behaviour would be associated with religion and recognized as “Muslim behaviour”. The low level of knowledge about Islam in the school communities and society at large was the most extensively discussed issue in the data. All informants regarded correcting the common misconceptions as their (often exhausting) duty, and the majority also presented it as the duty of their children and pupils. In general the Muslim parents defended the visibility of Islam in school communities mainly in terms of increasing the levels of religious literacy in the school community.

Interestingly, claims regarding recognizing Muslims as Finnish/Swedish were very rare in the data. In contrast to findings reporting how American Muslim youth successfully reconcile American and Muslim identities (Collet, 2007; Isik-Ercan, 2015), a Muslim identifying as a Finn/Swede was regarded as too distant an aim, and identification with the local community was considered more realistic. The informants considered it a problem that Muslim immigrants are not very keen to identify as Finnish/Swedish; this relates to a lack of knowledge and stereotypical attitudes to native

Finnish and Swedish people. These attitudes may arise due to the children being familiar mainly with the low socio-economic class, members of which may suffer from many social problems. The IRE teachers in particular regarded it as their job to question these stereotypes and deconstruct the link between Protestant Christianity and Finnish citizenship; earlier research has also described how the Finnish IRE classroom often becomes a space for the negotiation of citizenship and social cohesion (Rissanen, 2012; Rissanen & Sai, 2018).

### **Self-determination**

Theories of recognition also link the concept to experiences of being recognized as being a capable, rational and equal partner in the realization of common projects (e.g., Honneth, 1995, pp. 133–134). In the framework of inclusive citizenship, these aspects are discussed under the value of self-determination (Kabeer, 2005). In the analysis of intersections between religion and inclusive citizenship, negotiations related to self-determination are particularly intriguing. In a predominantly secular narrative, personal autonomy is commonly regarded as being in opposition to religious authority, and religious position in contradiction to rational independent thinking. This has led religious citizens in a post-secular context to defend their religious convictions and practices as autonomous choices and to rely on a discourse of emancipation through religion (see e.g., Fernando, 2010). The cultural brokers of this study also reported instances where they felt Muslim parents' rationality and autonomy were questioned. A very typical issue related to the principals' efforts to build relations with local imams in order to negotiate with them how Muslim pupils' needs in school communities should be met; principals of both countries commonly did this. They had asked the imams, for instance, to explain to the families that praying during the school day is not absolutely necessary. The Muslim parents had quite strong negative reactions to these practices. Below is a quotation from a Swedish-Somali Muslim mother:

- S4: That's stupid. How come the imam is closer to God than I am? And they're still my kids, not the imam's kids. So if we can have an interpreter, if I don't speak good Swedish, you can have someone to interpret, translate, and ... the imam can go and hmm himself or herself. I don't do that. God created ME. To have my kids. He didn't create the imam to have my kids. So I want straightforward, face-to-face speech or talk. [...] And I think I am well equipped, intelligent enough to make my own decisions, I don't need an imam or a MAN or something doing that for me.

While the principals offered institutional Islam recognition, their practices also reveal a belief in the existence of an "official Islam" represented by local imams and an uncritical acceptance of authority among Muslims (see also Bectovic, 2011). Sometimes the cultural brokers themselves were expected to act as religious authorities in the school communities, and, for example, make statements regarding what is proper clothing for Muslim girls in gymnastics lessons. Even though in general they gladly served as mediators in the negotiations between Muslim families and the school, they considered it important to respect the autonomy and capability of parents in order to develop a well-functioning home-school partnership, and did not want to serve as "fatwa-banks". Despite this, Muslim teachers also regarded the principals' endeavours as understandable, since the religious literacy of many immigrant Muslim parents is low and they do not have the ability to rationalize and explain their needs and have a tendency to react defensively because of insecurities over how to practise Islam in the new societal context. Therefore, religiously literate Muslim parents and teachers who understand both Islam and the Finnish/Swedish contexts have an important role as cultural brokers at the grassroots level negotiations concerning the compatibility of religious values and citizenship, and the concrete interpersonal negotiations between Muslim families and school (see Rissanen, 2012).

The Muslim parents also claimed that the way in which religion is seen as opposed to the self-determination and autonomy of the pupils is reflected in endeavours to liberate the pupils from their parents' wishes regarding religion. According to their experiences, the idea that pupils could

exercise their autonomy and rationality through religion is rarely grasped. Below, one Swedish-Malaysian Muslim mother discusses how her son's decision to try fasting had been interpreted as a parental demand:

- S3: Even though it was very much my son's choice, that is something that is never believed. Because it has to do with Islam. But if he made a choice to go to school or to go to badminton, that is a very plausible choice. But a choice to not to eat because of religion is not an acceptable or plausible choice.

However, there were also examples of how Muslim parents and pupils had been able to cultivate self-determination through negotiation. This example was reported by another Swedish-Malaysian Muslim mother:

- S1: I was being judged once, it was because of the song, it was a worship song, and it ... my daughter was affected by it, 'cause ... she didn't tell me, but she refused to sing it. She made a choice herself. And then I noticed she was quiet at dinner ... for a few days ... and then we asked her, she said I refused to sing this but the music teacher is making a big deal of it, so ... she said all her friends were like you're being unfair, you're being ... you know ... why do you want a special treatment. And things like that. We asked if she wanted us to talk to the teachers, no she said, she can handle it. After a week it was getting really bad for her, she was really getting quieter and things like that, so I decided to write an email to the teacher, but it went all the way up to the principal. So we had a meeting with the principal, we explained and he understood completely. Because that gave our daughter a chance to stand up and say, why should I sacrifice my values, I don't want to sing that, it does make me feel bad, I'm still standing there, but I don't want to say these words, because the words are not what I believe in, I shouldn't sing what I don't believe. So he understood that and he respected that immediately. So then ... brought her to the classroom, and used her as a positive example, that you *should* stand up for your belief, because this is what you believe in, this is what you are. And since then, the teacher has been more sensitive regarding religious songs, if they give offence. There are some other parents who don't ... confront the issues, so they just call in sick, so a lot of people have ... against religious activities, they may be seen as culture but are actually religion ... so in school they just call in sick. And do not come to school.

This demonstrates how young Muslims, in order to receive respect, in school contexts emphasize their religious identities as individual choices, build up a discourse of exercising self-determination through religion, and frame religious freedom as individual not a group right.

### **Solidarity**

Kabeer defines solidarity as “the capacity to identify with others and to act in unity with them in their claims for justice and recognition” (Kabeer, 2005, p. 7). This value reflects a horizontal view of citizenship, developed most strongly in the Nordic countries, which accords as much significance to the relations between citizens as to the vertical relationship between the state and the individual. According to Honneth (1995), solidarity arises from experiences of recognition, and it demands for everybody the opportunity to build and maintain self-esteem by contributing to shared projects on the basis of their distinctive traits and abilities. Thus, respect for self-determination can be regarded as a prerequisite for the emergence of solidarity. This explains why the secular teachers' ways, reported by the informants of this study, of “being offended on behalf of Muslims”, and, for example, demanding Christian elements to be cut from school celebrations in order to respect the negative religious rights of Muslims, did not induce solidarity, but were experienced as being patronizing and undermining the agency of minorities to negotiate the terms of inclusion themselves.

Instead, in some Finnish and Swedish schools, a sphere of solidarity seemed to form between members of different religious minorities due to their common interests and collaboration in the post-secular school community. In the Swedish context, an interesting example of this emerging sphere of solidarity between minority religious groups was in an international school, where the parents representing different faiths had organized a “festival of light” where elements from festivals of different religious traditions were made visible and included in the school's festival culture. This school mainly had families with a high socio-economic status – in general, the solidarity between

representatives of different religious minorities mainly emerged as a phenomenon among the well-educated parents. Through the cultural capital and religious literacy they brought to the school they were able to demand and participate in developing inclusive school cultures. The increasingly segregated Swedish school system also has schools where the clear majority of students come from immigrant families with low socio-economic status; in this study no similar kind of parental involvement was observed in these types of schools. In Finnish schools with little parental input, the inter-religious sphere of solidarity and inclusive, pluralistic school culture sometimes emerged through the collaboration of teachers of different minority religions.

In contemporary Europe, where Muslims especially have been posited as “the critical case of multiculturalism”, a threat to democracy and as a policy problem that has to be “managed”, (Koenig, 2007; Modood, 2014), and minority rights are increasingly tied to demands for loyalty to the nation-states and their core values (Himanen, 2012), it is no wonder that feelings of exclusion and lack of solidarity sometimes emerge among Muslim citizens. However, in the data of this study, expressions of vertical solidarity – in this context, solidarity towards school and society as institutions – were fairly strong. Religious freedom and well established minority rights were commonly mentioned as reasons for the informants’ appreciation of society and the school system both in Finland and in Sweden – these societies were even described as “more Islamic” than most Muslim majority countries. Horizontal solidarity towards fellow citizens was regarded as more ambiguous, but the rights-based system was considered to protect minorities from prejudice or fellow citizens:

Finnish Muslim father F2: I mean the system works. Even though you’re prejudiced, you’ll follow the Finnish norms and legislation, and this is what works, this makes the society good for an immigrant.

The informants also framed solidarity as a religious norm and religion as a resource for citizenship. In particular, the Finnish teachers of IRE deemed it important to teach their pupils – by appealing to the example of the Prophet Muhammad – that even though Muslims experience exclusion, they should not become resentful but remain loyal to society and take responsibility themselves for building grounds for solidarity. The teachers acknowledged the risk of experiences of misrecognition increasing the risk of religious identities being turned into oppositional or protest identities that draw their power from collective experiences of exclusion (see Gest, 2015). To prevent this, the teachers emphasized that teaching about solidarity and responsible citizenship as religious norms should not push children into being silent and thankful; rather, the children should demand active citizenship, show courage in challenging practices that are considered unjust, and participate themselves in developing a more inclusive school community and society. Thus, it is important to note that the informants’ discourses on solidarity and inclusive citizenship were not only about rights, but they emphasized the minorities’ duties of active citizenship.

## Discussion

In this study, the four key values of inclusive citizenship, as defined by Kabeer (2005), were used as an analytical tool for exploring negotiations on Muslim inclusion in Finnish and Swedish schools. It can be argued that if the work around citizenship strays too far away from rights as the core of citizenship, the risk is that the concept of citizenship will lose its analytical value and distinctive meaning (Lister, 2007). The central values in Kabeer’s framework could serve as a descriptive framework for mapping minorities’ experiences of inclusion, belonging and identities without necessarily making connections to the concept of citizenship. Nevertheless, the results of this study depict how Muslims’ negotiations on these values in educational settings revolve around questions of religious freedom, a crucial civil liberty, which strengthens the view of these values as essential to citizenship. The core values of inclusive citizenship are intertwined and sometimes blurry, but in this study they all produced distinctive perspectives on the analysis of the points of intersection of religion and citizenship in a culturally and religiously diverse school.

Negotiations on *justice* included the informants' efforts to challenge Protestant and secular biases in the interpretations of religious freedom, as well as their manner of challenging the discourse of Muslims as "difficult citizens" by formulating their claims for justice as claims for equal treatment, not differential treatment. Their perspectives show how the delicate balance between freedom *from* and freedom *for* religion needs to be negotiated contextually, and how the basic rights of minority religious groups are unknowingly violated when interpretations of religious freedom are made on the basis of culture-bound conceptualizations of religion (see also Fernando, 2010). Negotiations on *recognition* were more about the actualization of cultural rights in the school. The common view of the Muslim cultural brokers was that secular normativity in schools narrows down the scope for the positive recognition of religious identities and makes it difficult to counter stigma attached to Muslim identities. In addition to the negative implications for identity development, restricting religion strictly to the private sphere lowers the general level of religious literacy in schools; this lack of understanding of religious sensibilities upholds the risk of religious rights being ignored in the everyday life of the school, and also increases the likelihood of Muslims opting for a retreatist coping strategy due to the exhaustion caused by the constant need to defend and explain their needs.

Negotiations on *self-determination* had a clear connection to the issue of whether religious freedom is interpreted in the school communities as an individual or group right. Many Finnish and Swedish principals govern religion by negotiating with individuals they deem competent to act as "group leaders" – in this case, local imams or the cultural brokers in the schools. The informants themselves experienced these practices as denial of the self-determination of Muslim families, and also talked about the way in which Muslim pupils frame religious freedom as their individual right, and counter the school staff's discourse on liberating pupils from their parents' religion-based demands. However, the informants also understood how it may be impossible to govern religious diversity in school without the help of spokespersons from religious groups – framing religious freedom as a group or individual right also demanded continuous balancing on the part of the cultural brokers themselves. With respect to the fourth value of inclusive citizenship, *solidarity*, the results of this study reveal a gap between experiences of vertical and horizontal citizenship. The informants appreciated the official status of freedom of religion in Finland and Sweden. However, according to them, horizontal citizenship – which relates to solidarity felt towards fellow citizens, and has traditionally been strong in the Nordic countries (Lister, 2007), is hampered by the lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims in schools and experiences of Muslim students and families of being regarded as second class citizens. For the cultural brokers themselves, a sphere of solidarity was forming with other religious minorities who also wanted to challenge the secular-protestant interpretations of religious freedom.

The Finnish and Swedish multicultural schools studied in this research can be regarded as post-secular in the sense that negotiations on the accommodation of the increasing worldview diversity have become a part of their everyday lives. The academic criticism of the secular normativity in European schools has pointed out how the hegemonic secular narrative includes false claims of neutrality, does not recognize its own Christian roots and misrecognizes religious identities in a way that sometimes leads to discrimination (Berglund, 2017; Fernando, 2010; Poulter et al., 2016). This lack of religious literacy also emerged in this study. It manifested as a lack of understanding of the multi-faceted intersections of religion and culture; for instance, granting only the Protestant Christian tradition status as a cultural heritage and religifying Islam. The observations of this study indicate that the most acute problems of solidarity are not between members of different religions but between advocates of secular normativity and those who feel their identities are being misrecognized in this discourse. According to the much-discussed claims of Habermas (2006, 2008), the post-secular context creates a need for a complementary learning process between secular and religious citizens, whereby the secular citizens have to accept the multi-dimensional concept of reason and enter into dialogue with religious citizens, while religious citizens must develop "reflexive religious consciousness" and be willing to "translate" their language into secular discourse. The observations of this

study show how in Finnish and Swedish schools the responsibility for promoting these learning and translation processes fall quite heavily on the shoulders of those Muslim parents and Muslim teachers who openly advocate an “engagement strategy” (Kinnval & Nesbitt-Larking, 2011) and are positioned as cultural brokers in the school communities.

There are differences between the Finnish and Swedish education systems with respect to what kind of spaces they offer the (Habermasian) complementary learning processes or the bottom-up negotiation of key values of inclusive citizenship (Kabeer, 2005). The results of this study suggest that in Finnish schools there is, in some respects, more space to renegotiate the intersection of religion and citizenship. In Finland the approach to religious education, “religious education according to the pupil’s own religion” can be seen as state induced recognition for the legitimacy of religious epistemology in public education (in this model, the development of religious literacy is developed through both theology and religious studies -based scrutiny of religion). The rationale for this approach to religious education follows the logic that recognizing those aspects of religion that have societal value can alleviate the identity threats and psychological harm caused by the misrecognition of religious minority identities as oppositional or protest identities and is needed to prevent these perceptions from turning into self-fulfilling prophecies (e.g., Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011). Islamic religious education is emerging as a space where the compatibility of Muslim identity with Finnish citizenship is negotiated “bottom up” (Rissanen, 2012). The Finnish IRE teachers of this study also framed religion as a resource and not a hindrance in the development of citizenship; they endeavoured to harness religion-based values as a resource for supporting solidarity and commitment to society and modelled a strategy of engagement for their students. However, it is important to understand the powerful position of religious education teachers in this model. They are agents of religious and multicultural policies who influence students’ personal negotiations and at the same time contribute to an understanding of whose voices are allowed to be heard in societal and political discussions. Another important difference between the two countries is the absence of faith-based schools in Finland. In the Swedish context the availability of Islamic schools sometimes offers the principals “easy” solutions and an option to outsource catering for religion-based needs to these schools. Religious schools can be regarded as one good way to realize religious freedom, and many European Islamic schools have been found to have high aims for supporting integration and citizenship in education (see e.g., Rissanen & Sai, 2018). However, as observed in this study, the grassroots level negotiations that necessarily emerge in the culturally and religiously diverse school communities may be conducive to complementary learning.

In general, the Habermasian (Habermas, 2006, 2008) idea of developing post-secular citizenship through complementary learning as well as Kabeer’s vision of the examination and development of citizenship “from below” (Kabeer, 2005) put an emphasis on horizontal citizenship, and on solidarity and recognition as its constituents. The results of this study show how negotiations on these values are intertwined with negotiations on rights in the everyday life of the schools. Grassroots level actors often dictate the realization of religious rights; this study found big differences between (public mainstream) schools, where school principals’ have the power to decide on what kind of balance is sought between freedom *from* and freedom *for* religion. In both countries there are schools where strict policies of secular normativity are promoted in the name of neutrality and freedom “from”; however, when no space for the recognition of religious minority identities is granted, the Protestant biases tend to go unnoticed and assimilation into secular-Protestant culture is promoted in a manner that is experienced as an infringement of religious freedom. In other words, recognition, self-determination and solidarity, which indicate the agency of religious minorities to participate in the cultural production of citizenship, raise the level of religious literacy in the school community and bring to light the culture-bound interpretations of religious freedom. The solidarity gaps between advocates of secular normativity and those who oppose this discourse emerge as a key issue in the citizenship negotiations in post-secular schools: dialogue between these groups can be regarded as an essential part of the bottom-up development of inclusive citizenship.

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