

THE VIOLENCE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE: ACCOMMODATION AND OPPOSITIONAL PRACTICES OF MUSLIM PUPILS IN A PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL IN METRO MANILA

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Abstract

Primary schools are supposed to provide a haven for young people to learn respect for individual differences and cultural diversity. However, schools often do not acknowledge cultural differences among their pupils or do not consciously consider the dynamics of these cultural differences in the school, which may lead to a simmering violence. This paper is an attempt to document the ways in which minority Muslim pupils in a primary public school develop different strategies of accommodation, assimilation, and resistance to the mainstream culture of the school.

Key Words: *Muslims, Symbolic violence, Cultural differences, Education*

Introduction

Many teachers and schools, in an attempt to be fair in dealing with their pupils, do not want to acknowledge cultural, ethnic, or religious differences among pupils. "I can't see Muslim or Christian," a teacher will say, "I see only pupils." To see differences, in this line of reasoning, is to see defects and inferiority. Although this sounds fair, honest, and ethical, the opposite may also be true. Insensitivity to cultural and religious backgrounds of the students may result in refusing to acknowledge differences and therefore accepting the dominant culture as the norm and the minority culture as an aberration. It may result in denying the very identity of most of the pupils, thereby making them resentful, thus affecting their academic performance (Nieto, 1992). At worst, teachers unwittingly may accept the cultural stigmas ascribed to minority students by mainstream culture (Cicourel & Kituse, 1978; Rist, 1970). The importance of addressing cultural differences in schools is that an awareness of what distinct groups of people have developed in terms of symbolic codes and material objects can be utilized to optimize the learning process.

Culture in this sense refers to the “system of understanding” characteristic of an individual’s society or some subgroup within that society. This includes “values, beliefs, notions about acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and other socially constructed ideas that members of the culture are taught are true” (Garcia, 1999, p. 67). Society constantly acculturates its members to its cultural resources (Schwartz, 1997). From a cultural system people derive their *habitus* or durable complex system of dispositions that allows them to deal with the world (Bourdieu, 1977b). When the *doxa* of the dominant cultural system is imposed on other subgroups, thereby making this cultural system universal and natural, symbolic violence ensues (Bourdieu, 1991).

Studies focused on how minority students accommodate to or resist schooling have consistently shown that minorities do not just accept the mainstream culture, they do actively integrate, as well as resist assimilation (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Holland & Eisenhart, 1988; Ortiz, 1988). Furthermore, these studies had also shown how ethnic, cultural, gender, and racial discriminations have hampered learning, much less the desired smooth process of cultural integration via schooling.

Muslim children, at least based on their religious creed, believe Islam pervades all aspects of life; therefore, they cannot accept that it is inferior to Christianity (Batara, 1983; Bauzon, 1991; Majul, 1974; Tamano, 1973). Historically, Muslim Filipinos have been indifferent to Filipino citizenship (Gowing & McAmis, 1974), and have resisted national integration (Angeles, 1987; Bauzon, 1991; Mastura, 1984) and mainstream education (Madale, 1980; Majul, 1986; Matli, 1987). Filipino Muslims are generally suspicious of the efforts of society to assimilate them to the mainstream culture. They perceive such attempts as a prelude to their Christianization and the erasure of their ethnic identity (Tan, 1987) or “psychological genocide” (Gowing & McAmis, 1974). Muslim parents have avoided sending their children to the public schools. This has resulted in a high rate of illiteracy and marginalization of Muslim Filipinos (Isidro, 1968). Today, however, Muslims’ resistance to mainstream education has waned (Isidro, 1968; Majul, 1986).

But when Muslims enter non-Muslim schools, they have to contend with the persistent cultural prejudices against them. These cultural differences have been a source of conflict among Muslim and non-Muslim students. Boransing, Magdalena, and Lacar (1987) supply a terse description of this stigma:

The jaundiced view—at least in a historic sense—that the Muslims are lacking in civility, that they are piratical, revengeful, or worse, can be attributed to this lack of [cultural] understanding.

Stated another way, it could be that the prejudices have been institutionalized themselves, thereby creating an image of a cultural community, which has no other recourse but to live up to the expectations of the community (p. 1).

Cultural prejudice is just one among the many obstacles that Muslim students have to confront and overcome in schools. There is also irrelevant curriculum, neglect of specifically Muslims' needs, and cultural insensitivity of schools (Macawaris, 1987; Madale, 1987; Nunag, 1970; Rabarra, 1968). In turn, non-Muslim students will also have to deal with their cultural differences with the Muslims.

In any educational setting, schools cannot function in a democratic way if there is no mutual respect between educators, students, and parents. A "culturally non-assaultive classroom", or one where children learn not to denigrate cultures different from the mainstream culture (Clark, DeWolf, & Clark, 1992), must be established in recognition of cultural pluralism and diversity with regard to the backgrounds of the students.

The present study addresses the issues of Muslim pupils as a minority group in a public primary school. We studied the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim (predominantly Catholic Christian) intermediate pupils (Grades IV to VI) in a public elementary school in Quezon City to investigate the dynamics of the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslim pupils in the school setting. We hope the study can contribute to the cultivation of cultural pluralism in primary schools, for we strongly believe that eventually such recognition can lessen cultural conflicts in the schools; and thereby, contribute in making the school a haven for optimized and democratic learning premised on respect for different cultural backgrounds of the students.

This school was selected because it is one among the elementary schools in Quezon City with a relatively high number of Muslim pupils. In addition, one of us is personally connected with the school.¹ Our research is descriptive in nature and relied mostly on qualitative methods of data gathering. We conducted interviews with all the 53 Muslim pupils from Grades IV to VI (20 from Grade IV, 21 from Grade V, and 12 from Grade VI). Also, we included 10 non-Muslim pupils, four teachers, and 10 parents. The interviews were conducted either in the school during vacant periods or in the houses of the respondents. Permissions to interview the children were secured from the parents through letters and the homeroom advisers. All interviews were recorded through mini-tape recorder. Focused group discussions with 14 Muslim pupils were also conducted. We also interviewed two of four *Madrassa* teachers. (The

Madrasa classes are conducted every Saturday morning at the school. However, it is not compulsory so a sizeable number of Muslim pupils do not enroll in the classes.) We also administered a mini-survey to 46 Muslim parents and 20 teachers.

There was a total of 142 Muslim children out of 6,340 students enrolled in the school (from all year levels) at the time of our study (SY 2005-2006). Based on the interviews with the school principal and two Madrasa teachers, most of the Muslim students are Maranaos whose parents came mostly from Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. Most of the children were born in the said provinces during our study. Their parents were forced to migrate to Manila for economic reasons and on account of the deterioration of peace and order conditions in their places of origin. The ages of the children we interviewed ranged from 9 to 15, of which the biggest group are age 11 (mostly Grade V pupils). Fifty-eight percent or 31 respondents were females and 22% or 42 respondents were males. This reflects the fact that the enrollment rate for female Muslims is higher than the males.

We include as well our observations of classroom discussion, recess, extracurricular activities, programs, and playground activities. Our fieldwork took place over four months. The qualitative data gathered from the fieldwork observations were organized by logging them in the field notebooks. Interviews were transcribed and were organized according to themes, issues, and concepts. The main goal of the study is to provide a “thick description” of the subculture of the Muslim pupils in the school, a textured narrative of the everyday life of Muslim pupils in the school in relation to the mainstream Christian culture in the school, in order to highlight the ways in which *ethnic-religious capital* may be used by the Muslim students in the school.

Our study was guided by Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977a) theory of cultural reproduction and schooling. We followed Bourdieu in conceiving of the school as a *field* where struggles to acquire and control various forms of capital² are played out among students possessing different habitus. The *habitus* is an individually operationalized set of expectations and understandings based on the collection of experiences a given individual encounters that shape his or her sense of the “rules of the game.” The habitus is the “system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as being the organizing principles of action” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 34). It is what regulates interactions within a field (the space of struggle for scarce capital) in an observable, “objective” manner, affecting not only the individual but all those who interact with that individual; the “habitus of a group or class defines a symbolic order within which it

conducts its practices—in everyday life” (Sulkunen, 1982, p. 108). In short, the habitus contributes to “constituting the field as a meaningful world [of education]” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 44). Since Bourdieu does not clearly address the issue of resistance in schooling, we referred to the post-Marxist theory of resistance sketched by Henry Giroux (1983) and others (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; McCarthy & Apple, 1988; McLaren, 1989; Morrow & Torres, 1995; Willis, 1977). In this scheme, pupils are seen as active agents who use their different capitals and habitus either to conform or to challenge the school system and its culture.

Being “*Muslim*” is both a religious category and an ethnic identity. The habitus of a Muslim pupil is embedded in the Muslim subculture. In turn, this subculture is constituted by the family, religion, the neighborhood, the wider Muslim community, the Madrasa Saturday school, and the school culture. The cultural background of Muslim children (i.e., their ethnic-religious capital³) serves as a resource that shapes the Muslim children’s practices in the educational field (see also Connolly, 1997). The Muslim pupils enter the school with an ethnic-religious capital that serves as a resource from which Muslim pupils draw their social scripts. Insofar as some aspects of their ethnic-religious capital are at variance with school culture and the mainstream non-Muslim culture, conflicts and violence inevitably arise.

The Habitus of the Muslim Pupils

The Value of Education. One of the most significant aspects of the subculture of Muslim pupils is their attitude towards schooling. Studies on Muslim education show that Muslims value education highly (Batara, 1983; Isidro, 1968; Matli, 1987). This is also true for our study. All respondents considered education as very important in their life. Moreover, Muslims value strong family ties (Dindang, 1982). The majority of our respondents believe that education is important as they can use it to help their families emerge from poverty. This is exemplified in the following answers in response to the question of why they value education: ‘In order to help with the education of my siblings’ [*Para po makatulong ako sa pag-aaral ng mga kapatid ko*]. ‘In order that I may provide for my future family and take them out of poverty’. (*Para po pag nagka-pamilya na ako maibahaon ko sila sa kabirapan*) [male Grade IV pupil].

There is a perception that education is preparation for future jobs and employment. For instance, in the focus group discussion, a female Grade VI pupil said that she valued education so that she could easily get a job and help her parents [*Para po madali ako makapasok sa trabaho...Para po makaahon po sa*

hirap yung mga magulang ko pag ano po ako nag-katrabaho na po ako.”]. A female Grade IV pupil said, ‘If we don’t study we will end up poor. Because we will not be able to find a job...no one will hire us.’ [“Pag ‘di po kami nag-aral magiging mahirap kami. Kasi wala kaming mapapasukan...wala pong kukuba sa amin.”] There are also several children who were quite apprehensive about not being able to finish their schooling for financial reasons. ‘I don’t know whether I will finish my schooling, because my mother is not saying’ [“Hindi ko po alam kung tatapusin ko ang aking pag-aaral, kasi hindi po sinasabi ng mama ko”], said a male Grade VI pupil. The Muslim children have a very pragmatic view of the benefits they get from school. When asked whether the school meets their needs, many of the children we interviewed simply said that the school is able to provide them with textbooks. ‘The school gives me books to study’ [“Nagbibigay po sila ng libro para pag-aralan”— female Grade IV pupil]. This is consistent with the fact that their parents rarely visit the school to check on their academic performance. Very few Muslim pupils reported they got help from their parents in their school work. This trend is partly due to the low educational attainment of most Muslim respondents’ parents. In fact, the Muslim students said that they usually ask their older brothers and sisters for help with their assignments.

Peer Group-Related Practices. Once Muslim children enter the school they must associate with non-Muslim children; the school therefore ideally acts a venue for egalitarian inter-ethnic socialization. But our study found that the contrary usually takes place. Most of the Muslim pupils interviewed said that they associated themselves more with other Muslim kids than with non-Muslims. From what we observed, ethnic identification is still strongly maintained among the Muslim pupils from all grade levels. The social solidarity among the Muslim pupils is strongly reinforced inside and outside the school. This strong social solidarity is rooted historically in the subculture of Muslims in general (see Tan, 1987). This is encouraged in the Muslim families and in the community where the respondents live.⁴

We found that the Muslim pupils still generally identify themselves more with Muslim pupils than with the non-Muslim population. Thirty-eight percent of the Muslim children said they preferred fellow Muslims when asked about their preference for friends, Muslim or non-Muslim. ‘I prefer my fellow Muslim as a friend’, a male Grade IV pupil said, ‘We do not fight. He helps me,’ [“Muslim po kasi sila po ang kapwa ko Muslim. Hindi po kami nag-aaway...Tinutulungan nya ko”]. This strong group identification is reflected in the way the Muslim pupils say that wrong or right, they are always ready to side with and come to the aid of their Muslim fellows. During the focus group discussion, a male Grade VI pupil provided a very good description of this value:

We only help Christians if they are right. If they are wrong we don't care. When fellow Muslims get involved in a fight we all side with them whether they are right or not. Even if only one of us is wronged we will all fight. [*Kapag Kristiyano napapaaway kapag tama sila tinutulungan namin sila. Pero kapag mali babala sila. Kapag kapwa naman namin Muslim ang napaaway tama man siya o mali ay kinakampihan naming labat (Muslim). Kapag isa lang sa amin ang inaway labat kami ay pupunta para tumulong.*"]

In general all of the Muslim students we interviewed believed that they relate with their non-Muslim classmates in the way the latter relates with them, *quid pro quo*. Moreover, contrary to the assertion that Muslims perceive that Christians are always out there to convert them⁵, these Muslim pupils were quite welcoming in their attitudes. This means that the school could work as a place for habituating the Muslims into responsible citizenship. Yet many of the Muslim pupils we interviewed admitted that they often get into fights with non-Muslim pupils. The fights were usually provoked when the religious practices of Muslim pupils came up as a point of teasing between Muslim and non-Muslim pupils.

'I often get into fights with Catholics because they tease me that I don't eat pork' [*Madalas po akong makipag-away sa mga Katoliko kasi sinasabihan nila ako na di kumakain ng baboy*"], a male Grade IV pupil narrated. Another one stated, 'I often have fights with Catholics because they tease me. They say that Muslims are fearsome' [*Madalas ko pong nakakaaway ang Katoliko po kasi inaasar nila ako. Sabi nila Muslim nakakatakot daw*"]. The following sentiment of a male Grade VI female Muslim pupil about her non-Muslim classmate reflects the general feeling among the respondents '...because when I go to school I start thinking about my roguish classmates. Even if I avoid them, they really harass me. So I can't help but fight them...Even if I tell my teacher they won't stop' [*...kasi po pag pumapasok na ako sa school iniisip ko na naman yong pangungulit ng kaklase ko [non-Muslim]. Kabit inasan ko po, talagang iniaasar ako. E, napaaway na nga po ako...sinumbong ko na kay teacher pero makulit pa rin.*"]

Muslim pupils' responses to being teased or picked on are often aggressive. Muslim boys often gang up against their foes. A Grade IV boy said, 'I would tell my friends outside, then after classes they would mug my enemies'. [*Sinumbong ko po sila sa mga kaibigan ko sa labas [Muslims], tapos po pag uwian inaabangan na nila yung kaaaway ko tapos ginugulpi na nila.*"] A male Grade V Muslim pupil disclosed: 'At first I don't mind but later if he does not stop I grab a weapon or a club then I wait for him outside'. [*Hindi ko po muna pinapansin pero maya-maya pag hindi pa siya tumigil kumukuba na ako ng armas o pamalo tapos po*

inaabangan ko na po siya sa labasan”]. A Muslim girl, Grade V, responded that in response to being teased, ‘Sometimes I return the banter and sometimes I pull their hair,’ [“*Minsan po nakikipag-asaran din po, minsan po nakikipagsabunutan*”]. This response is typical of the Muslim girls we interviewed. Meanwhile, some non-Muslims girls, especially those from the lower sections, also show aggressive behavior.

Based on our observations the aggressive character of some young Muslim girls has to do with the dynamics in the classroom (the teacher’s supervision and overcrowding), the class habitus of the students, and the socio-cultural background of the personality of the Muslim pupils. The non-Muslim pupils are more restrained in their responses to aggressive Muslim girls than to non-Muslim girls. The fear of retaliation makes their response very restrained.

Many Muslim pupils said they were having hard times in their studies because of these troubles. More than half of our respondents indicated that they were much affected. The Muslim pupils responded to school troubles in different ways. Many said they engaged in fighting with others⁶. Some of them brought their parents to school to confront their classmates. The rest brought the matter to their teachers.

As a result of these fights and for other reasons (gambling, beating up a non-Muslim girl, and extortion activities) some of the students were brought to the Guidance Office. A male Grade IV Muslim pupil told us the reason why he was brought to the Guidance Office. This is an extreme case. The boy retaliated against her female classmate after the latter snatched his pencil during an examination.

‘Sir brought me to the Office because I hit my female classmate; she had a contusion and had a fever the following day...My mom was asked to go to the school.’ [“...*dinala ako ni Sir sa office kasi sinuntok ko yung kaklase kong babae, eh nagkapasa tapos kinaumagahan nilagnat siya...pinatawag po ang nanay ko.*”]

Five Muslim pupils, however, said that they preferred to associate themselves with Christians. These five Muslim pupils are all girls. In general non-Muslim pupils are seen by Muslim pupils as kind and friendly. This trend is especially true for female Muslim pupils. In response to a question on why they would like Christians as friends, a female Grade IV pupil said: ‘because they teach me new things when I go to their place’. [“...*mga Kristiyano po kasi kapag pumpunta po ako sa kanila tinuturuan po nila ako ng mga hindi ko alam*”]. ‘Because they are nice’, another Grade IV female pupil said [“...*mga Kristiyano po! Kasi po*

may ugali silang mabait”]. A female Grade V Muslim pupil said, ‘...I befriend them even if they are not Muslim. I have no reason to quarrel with them.’ [“...*kakaibiganin ko po sila kabit hindi sila Muslim. Wala naman pong dahilan para awayin ko sila.*”]. Hence, Muslim pupils, especially girls, did also befriend their non-Muslim classmates. They accommodate to the classroom culture. This may suggest that female and male Muslim students have conflicting perceptions of non-Muslims as potential friends. Gender therefore mediates the religious and ethnic identity of the Muslim pupils.

However, a regrettable trend is expressed in this narrative of a female Grade VI Muslim pupil: ‘Christians do help us in our school works. But once they learn we are Muslims some of them do not lend us books anymore’ [“...*tinutulongan naman po kami ng mga Kristiyano sa mga aralin namin. Pero kapag nalaman na nila na Muslim kami yung iba po hindi na kami pinapabiram ng mga libro*”]. This trend is confirmed in the interviews we had with several non-Muslim pupils. A female Grade VI non-Muslim pupil recounted that she used to accompany her classmate without knowing she was a Muslim. Upon learning of her identity, she started avoiding her because she was afraid her friend’s mother might blame her in case her friend got into a fight with anybody; she cut her relationship with her friend with regret:

‘She told our teacher she was a Muslim. She wanted the class to know she is a Muslim. She’s nice, and I always accompanied her everywhere she went. But when I learned she’s a Muslim, I avoided her because I was afraid, if she gets into a fight her mother might look for me and confront me...so I prefer to have Christian companions.’ [“*Sinabi po niya sa teacher namin na Muslim siya. Gusto po niya malaman na Muslim siya.. Mabait po siya, lagi ko po siyang sinasamahan kung saan siya pumpunta. Nung nalaman ko po na Muslim siya, iniimasan ko na po siya kasi natatakot na po ako sa kanya kasi baka po pag may nakaaway siya ako ang puntaban at awayin ng nanay....kaya po mga Kristiyano po ang gusto kong kasama.*”]

A non-Muslim boy recounted that they tend to distance themselves from Muslim boys because of the general feeling of fear. A Grade V non-Muslim boy whom we interviewed best describes this feeling, ‘I don’t want to hang out with Muslims. If you quarrel with them they will gang up against you outside the school. Even if you’re doing nothing they will gang up against you’. [“*Ayaw ko pong magbarkada sa mga Muslim. Kasi pag nakaaway mo po sila inaabangan ka nila sa labas. Marami po sila. Kabit nga po wala kang ginagawa pinagtutulongan ka nila*”]. A female Grade V pupil shared how her non-Muslim classmates perceived her identity as a Muslim: ‘Muslims are supposed to be fierce. Thus they are afraid

of me'. ["*Matapang daw kasi ang mga Muslim. Kaya natatakot sila sa akin.*"] The same respondent vividly remembered another remark by one of her non-Muslim classmates: 'Don't fight with her because she's a Muslim'. ["*Humag ninyong labanan yan kasi Muslim yan.*"] A male Grade VI pupil divulged the following when asked whether his classmates are afraid of him being a Muslim: 'Yes! Because when they still did not know I'm a Muslim, they kept picking fights with me. But when they heard from others that I'm a Muslim they were frightened and no longer quarreled with me.' "*Opo!. Kasi po nung hindi pa niya alam na ako'y Muslim parati nila akong inaaway. Pero po nung narinig nila sa iba na Muslim ako natakot na po sila at hindi na ako inaaway.*"] Another male Grade V Muslim pupil observed, '...once they learned I'm a Muslim they avoided me, because they are frightened even if I am not doing anything wrong' ["*...kapag po nalaman nila na ako ay isang Muslim iniwasan na po nila ako, kasi po natatakot sila sa akin kabit po wala naman akong ginagawang mali.*"].

The Muslim pupils we interviewed knew the common cultural stereotypes associated with Muslims in the wider culture outside the school: "traydor" (treacherous), 'bully', 'fearless', 'fierce' and 'bloodthirsty', and 'they gang up against their common enemies'. In their interactions with non-Muslim students, the stereotypes could work to their benefit, but it could also separate Muslim students further from their non-Muslim classmates. According to many Muslim respondents, once they are discovered to be Muslims non-Muslims become nice to them. A male Grade VI pupil said: If Catholics know I'm a Muslim, they become generous towards me. "*Kapag alam po ng mga Katoliko na ako ay Muslim, nagiging mapagbigay po sila sa akin.*" A male Grade IV Muslim pupil said: 'I don't frighten them so I can befriend them. Then they also are nice to me'. ["*...hindi ko po sila tinatakot para maging kaibigan ko. Tapos nagiging mabait naman po sila sa akin.*"] A female Grade VI pupil admonished a classmate to 'be polite' to someone 'because she's a Muslim'. ["*Hoy, igalang ninyo si N kasi Muslim yan!*"]

There are cases in which the identity Muslim leads to unexpressed antagonism. A female Grade IV Muslim said: '...it seems like they don't like me. They don't tell me but I know they don't like me' ["*...parang kinakaaway po nila ako. Din naman nila sinasabi pero parang ayaw nila sa akin*"]. In most instances, it results to a détente concealing the seeming unacknowledged hostility among the pupils for the interim.

Practices Related to Teachers. Majority of the Muslim pupils we interviewed liked a teacher who is *mabait* or kind. Others wanted teachers who are "*masipag*" or diligent in teaching. Still others wanted a teacher who delivers the lessons effectively. The pupils also liked a teacher who is very supportive. Muslim children expect their teachers to act as surrogate mothers in the school. Some of them

had unpleasant experiences of being scolded by their teachers; however, most of these unpleasant experiences are not related to their being Muslims.⁷ However, there are also cases when being scolded by one's teacher might arise due to incidents related to being Muslim. A Grade IV Muslim girl narrated to us how one of her teachers scolded her because her seatmate was teasing her about her religion, 'Because he kept on teasing me I'm a Muslim. I told him to mind his own business. Then he teased me that I don't eat pork. So I argued with him even while our teacher was discussing. So our teacher scolded us. [*...minsan po napagalitan ni Mam kasi palagi ko po inaaway yung katabi ko po. Kasi tinutukso niya ako parati na Muslim daw ako...Sabi ko, "E, ano pakialam mo?" Tapos po sinasabihan niya ako na di raw ako kumakain ng baboy. Ayon po, sinasagot ko siya kabit nagtuturo si Mam. Kaya pinagalitan kami ni Mam.*]

On the other hand, some Muslim pupils revealed that the attitudes of some of their teachers changed once the latter found out they were Muslims. The following incident is narrated by a male Grade VI pupil: 'At first, Sir did not know that I am a Muslim so he kept scolding and beating me up. Then when he saw me together with only Muslim friends, the next day he stopped scolding and beating me up.' [*"Nung una po kasi hindi pa alam ni Sir na Muslim ako parati niya ako pinapagalitan at binubugbog. Pero nung isang araw nakita niya ako na puro Muslim kasama ko, kinabukasan di na niya ako pinapagalitan at binubugbog.*]

Practices and interactions in the school between classmates, teachers, and parents.

During our fieldwork, we observed that most of the children, in one way or another, did participate in class activities and discussions. However, a few of them did not. Asked for the reason for not participating in class discussion, the main reason given was that they were afraid of being embarrassed and laughed at by their classmates [*"Hindi po (does not participate) – baka po mapahiya ako!...Kasi pinagtatayanan po nila yong mga mali ang sagot..."*]. This was very common, not only among Muslim pupils but also non-Muslim pupils.

In extracurricular activities of the children, however, we noted that cultural differences set in. While a majority of the Muslim children we interviewed did involve themselves in such activities, some of them, however, did not specifically because they had been made aware that their ethnic-religious identification could get them into trouble, either inside or outside the school. 'My mother does not allow me because I might get into fights' [*"...ayaw po kasi pasalihin ng nanay ko kasi baka daw po may makaaway ako"*], said a male Muslim Grade VI pupil.

To confirm the findings, we also interviewed some parents and teachers. We found out that the perceptions about Muslims are also shared by some non-Muslim parents and several teachers. A mother of a non-Muslim male

Grade VI pupil said, 'If you ask me I don't want my son to befriend the Muslims because Muslims are treacherous people. So I told my son to stay away if any Muslim gets near him' [*"Kung ako ang tatanungin ayokong may makikipagkaibigan sa aking anak na mga Muslim kasi yang mga Muslim, mga traidor sila."* Kaya sabi ko sa anak ko umiwas siya kapag may lumalapit sa kanyang Muslim"]. Some non-Muslim parents are more cautious, 'Ah...for me it's alright for my kid to have Muslim friends here in the school. But I discourage him from associating with them outside to avoid any trouble'. [*"Ah . . . kung sa akin ay okay lang na dito sa loob ng paaralan makikipag kaibigan anak ko sa mga Muslim. Pero pag dating sa labas ay medyo pinaiiwas ko na siya kasi mapasali siya sa gulo"*] (mother of Grade V pupil).

On the other hand, the Muslim parents we interviewed indicated no preference for either Muslim or non-Muslim as friends of their children. They preferred a mixed group. The following is typical of the Muslim parents' response: 'Anyone that is well-disciplined and respectful of elders because my son is easily influenced' [*"Kabiti sino po basta may disiplinang at marunong gumalang sa matatanda sapagkat madaling mainpluwensiyahan ang aking anak"*] (mother of a Grade V pupil).

Our study also found cases of Muslim parents and the Muslim community intervening in school situations. The apprehensions of some Muslim parents are rooted in a perception that their children are being unreasonably harassed in the school. During this study two grave incidents occurred in the school involving Muslim pupils. One involved a male Muslim pupil whose mother barged into the school and slapped her son's adversary. The incident escalated to the point that it had to be brought to the level of the Barangay. A female Grade V teacher narrated what happened in the incident and demonstrates this attitude of Muslim parents:

'One day, while I was teaching, suddenly the mother of a Muslim pupil entered the room to scold the Christian pupil who was alleged to be the foe of her daughter. She even asked me that she would just talk to the pupil. But when she confronted the pupil, she quickly spanked the pupil and uttered rude words. When I saw the pupil was already crying I quickly stopped her and warned her that she didn't have the right to do such thing.'

Unfortunately, the confrontation did not end there. On the following day, the Muslim mother together with other Muslims trooped to the school and threatened the teacher. The Barangay officials had to intervene together with some Muslim elders from the Muslim neighborhood. This incident horrified

the entire afternoon sessions, especially the section involved. While it dissipated the following day, the incident became a discussion topic among teachers and parents. Barangay enforcers were stationed outside the school. After several days all things were back to normal. But it was unfortunate that there were no attempts on the part of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) to address the matter. The incident left a lasting impression on non-Muslim parents never to mess with Muslims. According to the school, there were no incidents of Christian parents doing the same thing. Christian parents usually confront the teacher(s) and the principal on matters related to their child's discipline.

The second case involved a male Muslim pupil stabbing a non-Muslim pupil with a *balisong* (knife). Luckily, the dispute was settled immediately because the non-Muslim parents were terrified of Muslim retaliation. The Muslim parents had a dialogue with the aggrieved pupil and his family. These incidents involving Muslim pupils are the extreme cases, usually only brawls and teasing ensue.

But these incidents did not rattle the teachers handling the case; in our observation, they were able to maintain their authority inside the classroom. In addition, the Muslim parents as well as the Muslim community respected this authority –following some negotiating and bargaining.

Accommodation and Oppositional Practices in the Field. The culture of the school is predominantly Christian. From non-Muslim children's point of view, Muslim kids are "different" individuals. They have radically different beliefs, customs, and religion. The most obvious of these cultural differences are the wearing of veils by female Muslim children during Saturday Madrasa classes and the practice of not eating pork. However, in the public school these differences are not visible since female Muslim children do not wear the veil on ordinary class days. When Muslim children come into the school, their individual habitus acts as a screen that orients their actions. However, the habitus is also modified through contact with the existing mainstream culture in the educational field. This mainstream culture contains unstated pejorative prejudices against Muslims. As 'others' they are feared. This 'other-ing' process serves as a stereotype-threat that envelops Muslim children's identity. The Muslim pupils tend to use this fear together with their social capital (strong kinship solidarity) to preempt the non-Muslim pupils from harassing them. Moreover, the presence of a Muslim enclave or community a few blocks away from the school, where Muslim pupils reside, serves as deterrence for the untoward behavior of non-Muslims against Muslim children. Despite these, however, interpersonal frictions arising from social interactions of the children are normal occurrences in the school. A peaceful atmosphere therefore is necessary to prevent such petty occurrences from escalating into a violent confrontation.

Inside the classroom and the school, there occurs a process of negotiation. The classroom and the school are transformed into a field where both teachers and pupils (Muslims and non-Muslims) vie for cultural and social capital accumulation. The Muslim pupils rely on their ethnic-religious capital and personal networks of relatives and Muslim community to assert their identity, and they exercise their agency either through accommodation or through oppositional practices⁸. They can make use of their ethnic-religious capital to intimidate their classmates and teachers. In this strategy, they use their strong social solidarity and social network to have a better bargaining position in the educational field. They employ this strategy when they feel threatened or provoked by non-Muslim pupils, or when their teachers in their perception seem to be picking on them.

Muslim pupils make the most of the cultural stigma (which may also be nourished and learned by children in the mass media as well as in the schools [see Tan, 1993]), by turning the pejorative cultural labels into a potent weapon to keep non-Muslims at bay. For instance, by assuming the role of bullies and being treacherous, the pupils instill fear if not respect. The authors therefore concur with the suggestion of Lareau and Horvat (1999) that there is an important difference between the possession and the activation of capital or resources (in our case, the strategic utilization of ethnic-religious capital). That is, people who have social and cultural capital may choose to activate capital or not, and they vary in the skill with which they activate it. And that “these two points come together to suggest that rather than being an overly deterministic continual process, reproduction is jagged and uneven and is continually negotiated by social actors” (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 43).

In most situations, Muslim pupils learn to accommodate themselves to the mainstream culture of the school. An effective method of accommodation may include befriending the non-Muslims, being nice to others, treating them during recess, and lending books and other materials. In most cases, they are successful. In this way, the accommodation process is used by minority Muslim pupils to win over approval of the majority of non-Muslim pupils. Alongside accommodation, Muslim pupils shape their habitus and the field through oppositional practices. As a result, there is an outward appearance of peaceful integration inside the classroom. Through the acts of accommodation the hostility in the classroom is at least temporarily lessened. The classroom atmosphere for the time being becomes conducive for optimizing the learning environment. However, although there may also be real friendships between Muslim and non-Muslim pupils, in many instances, accommodation is inadequate because the *détente* created in the classroom is mere simulacrum based on fear and

exclusion. Hostility and simmering cultural antagonism also create barriers between Muslim and non-Muslim children, and between the teachers and Muslim pupils. This condition encroaches on the selection of reference group, participation in school activities, and other group interactions. Such oppositional practices in turn provoke inhospitable reactions from non-Muslim actors.

By oppositional practice is meant the process by which Muslim pupils oppose, covertly or overtly, the prejudices against their subculture and identities (see McCarthy & Apple, 1988). It may range from counter-teasing or bantering to more aggressive behaviors and physical violence like a brawl, threats, or mugging. Oppositional practices can be overt as in the case when a Muslim pupil refuses to cooperate with the teacher and the rest of the class. Oppositional practices, individual or collective, yield other drawbacks. Oppositional practices confirm further the cultural stigmas ascribed to Muslims. Once teachers encounter a Muslim pupil involved in a trouble at school, the trouble serves as a kind of “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Rist, 1970) that confirms the teacher’s suspicion – that Muslims are indeed troublemakers.

In “getting into trouble,” Muslim pupils may be conditioned by their habitus in the Muslim community and perceive this as a double-bind: if they do not fight, their identity and culture are held in low esteem; if, on the other hand, they choose to fight, they merely confirm the labels ascribed to them. This zero-sum formulation of the game is debilitating for the Muslim pupils. It is an unfortunate obstacle, not only to their scholastic achievement, but more significantly, to their development as active and responsible citizens.

The school is supposed to provide a democratizing effect by socializing children from different social backgrounds into a hospitable cultural environment as a microcosm of society (Dewey, 1953); however, it only reflects the (in)equality and (dis)harmony that exists in society. Latent hostility inhibits the children from associating with other children of different cultural backgrounds; the integration inside and outside the classroom becomes onerous. If learning is to be pursued along cooperative lines, such unstated hostility must be addressed (August & Hakuta, 1997, p. 171). Of course, a supportive environment does not automatically guarantee authentic learning. But it is a necessary, albeit not sufficient factor.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the social and cultural fields that situate the education of Muslim children harbor, covertly or not, negative prejudices against the latter. The *habitus* of Muslim pupils plays a very significant role in their

participation in formal education. Inasmuch as some teachers to a lesser extent, and many pupils to a greater degree, hold these beliefs, Muslim pupils are treated differently. As the 'other' in this field, Muslims are seen as people who are treacherous, fearless, fearsome, and who gang up against a common enemy. The Muslims, on the other hand, look at non-Muslims as people they have to temporarily deal with in the school. Muslims' social solidarity is primarily with fellow Muslims.

Bourdieu sees *symbolic violence* as violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity. What this means is that pupils come to experience systems of meaning (culture) as legitimate: there is a process of misunderstanding or misrecognition of what is really going on. Within the educational field, Muslim pupils either accommodate their habitus to the existing cultural field or they engage in oppositional practices. Both these practices, in turn, mold the educational field and the habitus in various ways. Teachers, because they are in authority, possess more advantage in deflecting and controlling Muslim pupils' behavior. Non-Muslim pupils and their parents, because they have to live with the Muslim community and Muslim children, show a more condescending attitude. In many instances these practices tend to reinforce symbolic violence in the social space.

To break this impasse, the children, the teachers, and the community must be made aware of this "gentle violence." By recognizing this problem and confronting it, the school can begin to transform its pedagogical practices, its curricular thrusts, and its culture of learning towards a more just, humane, and non-culturally assaultive environment. We strongly believe that accommodation must be transformed into genuine cultural dialogue whereby pupils relate to each other with respect – not out of fear or exclusion.

Endnotes

¹One of the authors has been teaching in the school for 10 years.

²*Capital* is defined by Bourdieu as referring to resources that an individual has that enable her to control goods and exchanges in the market. Bourdieu enumerates four forms of capital: economic, social, symbolic, and cultural. For the present study, we focused on cultural capital.

³While Bourdieu does not include this category into his typology of cultural capital, we deem that it is a part of capital. See also the works of Modood (2004) and Dreissen (2001).

⁴Another important venue for strengthening group solidarity among Muslim children is through the *Madrassa* education. The Saturday-based *Madrassa* school teaches Islamic values and Arabic language and further reinforces the social bonding of Muslim children. However, only few Muslim children attend the *Madrassa* classes, the main reason being that they often help their parents in house chores during weekends.

⁵“Citizenship is an alien term among members of the Muslim grassroots community . . . they are Muslims with their respective ethnic groups and at the same time Moros before being Filipinos . . . Just as Moro is identical to Muslim, the term Filipino as well is often viewed by Muslims as synonymous to Christianity” (Guialal, 1977, pp.161,164, 172; and see Tan, 1993).

⁶A cultural explanation for the aggressive character of some Muslim tribes, especially the Tausugs, is found in Kiefer (1972).

⁷For example, a Grade V boy told us how he was scolded once for gambling and taking money from his classmates at the back of the school; the teacher reported him to his homeroom adviser.

⁸Following Giroux (1983), we employ the term “oppositional practices” rather than resistance.

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