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Transnational Families in Letterkenny, Co Donegal, Ireland: Negotiating Religious Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract: This paper provides one of the first inquiries into how Arab-Muslim transnational families negotiate their religious beliefs and practices and whether they create the Third Space in Letterkenny County Donegal, Ireland. This study addresses the religious and educational experiences and perspectives of culturally diverse children and their families, with the premise that such findings will help teachers be more culturally responsive and competent in teaching these children. Almost no research on identity and culture regarding the educational experiences of Muslim-Arab transnational students and their families has been done in Ireland. There are no studies on how Arab-Muslim immigrant families negotiate their bilingual and bicultural identities and create the so-called Third Space. This research is motivated by the idea that new approaches toward migration, family, and social policy are likely to emerge when the experiences of emigration and immigration are put into dialogue.

Keywords: Arab-Muslim transnational families, third space, identity, cultural experiences.

爱尔兰多尼戈尔郡莱特肯尼的跨国家庭：协商宗教信仰和实践

摘要：本文提供了对阿拉伯穆斯林跨国家庭如何协商他们的宗教信仰和实践以及他们是否在爱尔兰莱特肯尼郡多尼戈尔创建第三空间的首批调查之一。本研究探讨了多元文化儿童及其家庭的宗教和教育经历和观点，前提是这些发现将有助于教师在教育这些儿童时更具文化敏感性和能力。在爱尔兰，几乎没有关于穆斯林-阿拉伯跨国学生及其家庭教育经历的身份和文化研究。没有关于阿拉伯穆斯林移民家庭如何协商他们的双语和双文化身份并创建所谓的第三空间的研究。这项研究的动机是，当移民和移民的经历进行对话时，可能会出现针对移民、家庭和社会政策的新方法。

关键词：阿拉伯穆斯林跨国家庭，第三空间，身份，文化体验。

1. Introduction

The world has moved from the one country-one nation-scenario to a complex population structure. Lately, research on the immigrant communities' experiences has appeared in the literature [1]. Researchers working in Asian and Latino communities contribute to the work on the experiences of these immigrants [2]. Also, the religious diversity in its new forms is of interest for scholars who start to explore new educational implications. As argued in [3], the common approach in immigration studies is viewing migration as an 'event' and comparing migrant

families' children to those families who are non-migrants in the sending communities. While several studies on the role of migration focused on schooling [4]-[5], there is still a need to study the migration process and how it may be connected with the negotiation and formation of identity.

Research on immigrants' students reveals that immigrants' youth master various cultural repertoires that they can select and adopt, if and when they want to, regarding the opportunities and challenges that face them [6].

Still, not many publications focus on the experiences of statistically minor communities [7].

Namely, Muslim students and their families became the center of notice [4], [8]-[11]. Following September 11, curiosity and reservations about Muslim communities were revealed in the United States. The negative representation of the media related to Middle Eastern and Asian politics has marked out Muslim communities and led to a wave of negative stereotypes of them [10]. The absence of enough understanding of Muslims and Islam put an extra challenge to schools and the teachers who work for these students. There is a lack of research studies about such issues in Europe, especially in Ireland, despite the growing number of Muslim immigrant families who have come to settle down in Ireland or who aim to study and work in professional jobs as doctors, academics, and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) students. The experience of Muslim immigrants in Ireland is unique and exceptional. Islam is still negligible and represents only 1.7% of the total population [12]. According to [12], Muslims are a significant element of the growing ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity in Ireland; this minority is growing rapidly and may be “the only religious minority” that can challenge the Irish society research work background. If one wants to answer many questions, one can only take a brief explanation. Usually, one problem can be explained in one or two sentences (2) Theoretical basis, experimental basis, and research methods. If researchers follow the known theory, principles, and methods, they may just mention a paragraph or note the relevant literature. If a new concept or term is to be introduced, it should be defined or clarified. (3) The expected results and their status, role, and significance should be written in a natural, general, concise, and precise manner. Diagrams, tables, and formulas are generally not allowed in the introduction.

2. Significance of the Study

Schooling and education of Arab-Muslim communities and their children in a chosen place in Ireland, a naturally new location to the immigration phenomenon, is challenging. Therefore, this research topic is new within predominantly Catholic states in Europe, with a newly established Muslim immigrant experience like Ireland. Recently, some research studies have focused on Muslim communities and families from different points of view and various social science disciplines. For example, the political accommodation of Islam in Portugal and Ireland since the end of the 1950s was examined in [13]. It is argued that Islam varies in terms of social and demographical stance in Ireland, and its connection with refugee and asylum seeker arrivals correlates with this characteristic. Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland holds historically inherited arrangements and diverse society, and wider societal responses to migrants shape the way Ireland deals with religion.

Other studies related to Muslim immigrant students who attend public schools in Ireland explore the graduate or undergraduate students’ experiences from a cognitive science perspective. Other studies provide a different narrative of Ireland’s new Islamic presence, Islam, and education in Ireland, and highlight the challenges met by Muslims in the Irish education system, providing solutions that promote equality and integration in the Irish society [14]-[15]. However, these studies provide an understanding of the lives and perspectives of the Muslim community in Ireland by focusing on the cultural assimilation, identity, and adaptation of Muslims in Ireland. Almost no research has been done about Arab-Muslim transnational families and their children’s educational experiences. Also, no research has studied those families and their children who live in remote or rural areas in Ireland.

3. Research Background

The findings discussed here were obtained from a larger ethnographic data file collected for the author’s doctoral research (thesis defense held in March 2017, University of Luxembourg). This project seeks to explore the experiences of Arab-Muslim families and their children’s education experiences: investigating issues of language, identity, and schooling in Letterkenny, Ireland.

In social research studies, anonymity and confidentiality of participants are considered fundamental to ethical research practice. The participants were assured that every effort would be made to ensure that the data they provided could not be traced back to them in reports, presentations, and other forms of dissemination. Each participant’s identity remained confidential, and names were changed.

Ten Arab-Muslim families and their children narrate their lives as part of transnational families. Profiles of the families’ information are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Families’ profile

Family	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4
Dr Sadiq and Mrs. Sadiq	<i>Rana</i>	<i>Rema</i>	<i>Luma</i>	<i>Aya</i>
Dr. Mohammad and Mrs. Mohammad	<i>Mustafa</i>			
Dr Madani and Mrs. Madani	<i>Ahmad</i>			
Mr. Safi and Mrs. Safi	<i>Maria</i>			
Mr. Saeed and Mrs. Saeed	<i>Karima</i>			
Mr. Samir and Mrs. Samir	<i>Omar</i>			
Dr. Mustafa	<i>Anwar</i>	<i>Aws</i>		
Mrs. Ahmad	<i>Osama</i>			
Mrs. Emad	<i>Amin</i>			
Mr. Farooq and Mrs. Farooq	<i>Amina</i>			

The participants’ parents were married couples and/or single parents with children. The mothers’ ages ranged from 28 to 48, and the fathers’ ages ranged from 33 to 50. All the families were nuclear families with

one to four children, at least one of whom was school age. All the parents were interviewed through the data collection, including nine mothers and eight fathers. The ages of participant children range from 7 to 16. The children in this study were either born in Ireland or came to the country later. The participant children were allocated to classrooms with some or much cultural diversity.

The qualitative methods employed to collect data for this study were semi-structured interviews, observations, and researcher journals. The observation occurred in children's schools, their houses (when possible), cultural gatherings, and the Mosque (Qura'an school). Unstructured observation is employed [16], where the prior knowledge, experiences, and theories inform the researchers' detailed observations. Researcher Journals include all observation notes, written records of the meetings, emails, memos, and any cultural artifacts, school assignments, letters, or children's drawings that they shared with the author.

4. School Context

The Department of Education and Skills categorizes schools that offer education regarding the medium of English or Irish as denominational, inter-denominational, and multid denominational. Donegal-Letterkenny has both multid denominational schools and denominational schools. In the Donegal context, there are two types of primary schools considered multid denominational: First, the schools do not deliver religious education as formation, but they provide education about religions and beliefs. The other type is the schools that provide religious education and faith formation for different denominations. Also, there is the other type of school called denominational schools, which are under the patronage of a single religious community. These schools provide religious education according to the specified religious community's traditions, practices, and beliefs. For the purpose of this study, participants are from both multid denominational schools and denominational schools.

5. Results

5.1. Negotiating Religious Beliefs and Practices

Regarding the negotiation process for Arab-Muslim children associated with religious beliefs and practices, the participants' narratives show that Arab-Muslim children respond to different school contexts in different ways: unity, minimizing the differences, and looking for similarities in religion in the school curriculum, and religion through religious practices.

5.1.1. Unity

Muslims all over the world are united in several key beliefs and practices.

However, the most important is the virtue of belonging to the Ummah, the worldwide Islamic

community. Most of the interviewees feel that the unity of Islam exceeds the sense of being Arab and overcomes the divergences among the Arab countries. Razan put it like this:

"I do not feel that I am Sudanese ... and my friends are Pakistani or Egyptian; I just feel that I am related to them in some way. I think because we are all Muslims."

The unity and togetherness are also apparent in the Qura'an school and the social and cultural gatherings. The Qura'an teacher always stresses that the Mosque is open for all Muslims regardless of the country of origin. Also, children played together during the Eid celebration held in the community center. Most children from particular Arab countries were asked directly, "Where are you from?" Although a small number of interviewees insisted of origin. The concept of Ummah is powerful. It unifies all believers into a single community regardless of background, culture, color, or economic status. The children listened carefully when their Qura'an teacher taught them Hadith about Unity in Islam:

"The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever." Source: Sahih al-Bukhaarii 5665

Maria, one of the students in the Qur'an school, told the author after the lesson that:

"I feel Dalia is my aunt, and I like her very much".

Dalia is Maria's family friend, and she is Egyptian.

The majority of the participants were practicing Muslims. However, the sense of belonging to Ummah varied among all the participants. Farooq, when asked about how he would define himself, answered:

"I am Palestinian, from Akka (Acre), where you can smell the orange blossoms and taste the real olive oil."

The same was for his daughter, Amina. She defined herself as Palestinian from Akka (Acre). Moreover, she did not mention Islam. Farooq is a non-practicing Muslim, but he is a strong nationalist with a strong sense of belonging to Palestine. He does not send his daughter to the Qur'an school, but he is aware of the importance of religion in one's life. Amina, Farooq's daughter, is aware that she is a Muslim. She is proud of sharing the love of Jesus with her grandparents as she knows that.

The concept of unity is noticed at schools, where Muslim students are identified by their religion, not their home country.

"We are all Muslims; it does not matter where we come from.... we eat Halal food, share the same beliefs, and everybody in school knows that we are Muslims," Rana said.

The concept of Ummah has practical implications that are presented in several ways. Apart from the young children aged between seven and eleven, most

participants showed an awareness of what was happening in the world regarding Islamic countries and Islamophobia. They also share a sense of solidarity with Muslims facing difficulties worldwide. They have a strong sense of responsibility towards people in Muslim countries, and they try to help by raising funds or raising awareness about what is happening there. They are trying hard to fight Islamophobia and show the real image of Islam. Sadiq tries to participate in school assemblies and talk about Islam. Sarah always shares food and talks about the Islamic dress code in the school assemblies. Hussein said that he would like to go and work in an Arab country and help the people there, and it does not matter if it is Iraq or any other Arab Muslim country.

5.1.2. Minimizing the Differences and Looking for the Similarities

This study confirms that Arab-Muslim religious identity is not noticeable at first sight. Children's religious identity is determined by their sociocultural family context and the nature of the school context. While this identity is not always consciously referenced, it exists as an indirect element of everyday life and shapes the nature of daily interactions.

Findings demonstrate that students do not speak up about their religion in multid denominational schools except if somebody asks them directly. On the other hand, in denominational schools, Arab-Muslim students tend to show their religious identity more often as a way to avoid participating in Christian Religious classes and celebrations. Their Muslim identity is represented and expressed directly to secure their own existence.

Multidenominational schools are designed to be, or thought of, as secular, as a major dimension of white European identity. However, Christianity appears within the cultural organization of schools and their calendar. Therefore, findings show that even in multid denominational school settings, Arab-Muslim children are fragile and sometimes hesitant to show their identity at the beginning because of the lack of recognition and validation of their religion by their teachers and their school. Moreover, an emphasis on monocultural celebrations in schools enhances the feeling of othering, and students tend to be silent about expressing their religious needs at school.

Anwar explains how he negotiates his religious beliefs with his friends in school:

"My friends always ask me, what are you doing at Christmas? I say:

We do not celebrate Christmas because we are Muslims."

Mrs. Emad points out that her son Amin, who studies in a denominational school, does not feel comfortable when his friends talk about religion or ask questions.

"His friends ask him: why don't you pray to God? He said 'I do my Muslim pray at home."

"He feels uncomfortable when they ask him such questions because they are friends."

She reported that she always tries to look for similarities and talk about them with her son, "we do have many things in common, so we do not have that problem". The only problem, according to her, is with the other side accepting her with the similarities that she has.

When "Educate Together" National School organized a card painting day, it was devoted to Christmas, and every student could draw something about Christmas. The school made arrangements with a print shop to print out these cards professionally. Anwar's teacher is aware of the diversity of her class, so she told them to draw whatever they liked, and they could use these cards like Christmas cards, birthday cards, or for any occasion they liked. Anwar drew a nice Irish house with sun and trees around it. He wanted to send it to his grandmother in Jordan. His brother, Aws, drew a Christmas tree with gifts around it. He said that:

"I wanted to make the card for Eid so that I could send it to my friend in France. But the teacher did not tell us that we could draw anything; she only said draw a card for Christmas. Anwar is lucky. I was shy to tell my teacher I am Muslim, and I want to draw about Eid."

Aws's teacher is not aware of her class's diversity, and Aws was reluctant to show his own desire to draw something about his culture. His identity becomes invisible and silent as he does not feel the power to negotiate it in the class. Amina's father, who is a non-practicing Muslim, reported that he is sometimes worried about his daughter's identity:

"She stays in the classroom in the religion class and listens to everything. When she comes home, she asks me, and I tell her the differences, and she starts comparing; she likes to show that she is Muslim sometimes, but other times she keeps silent, and she wishes she is similar to other children in her class."

Amina does not feel this paradox at home or with her mother's family. She is confident of herself as a Muslim at home and celebrates the other culture that she shares with her grandparents. However, in school, she sometimes feels the difference. This is not the case with Karima and Omar, whose mothers are Irish. They do not feel this dilemma, as they study in a multid denominational school, but their school does not do the morning prayers and does not talk directly about faith.

5.1.3. The Religious Dimension of the Curriculum

The findings show that some school contexts make the children in the study experience invisibility

regarding their beliefs. Sometimes children's beliefs are made visible, for example, during multicultural social activities in multid denominational schools. The findings demonstrate that introducing such contexts can affirm the children's religious identity. Children report that Islam is not discussed or studied in the school curriculum.

Maria explains that:

"NO, we do not have anything in school books."

"We used to do, like last year, did about Eid... every year ... everybody.

About Islam. Like sometimes they ask me and ... about Muslims... about r... and what we do in Ramadan..."

"And do you like to talk about Islam and Eid? Yes, I do... I feel like I... I am a famous person, and everybody listens... it is interesting. Yeah... I feel happy about this."

Mrs. Emad, Ahmad's mother, points out that:

"Students do not have the opportunity to know about other religions and cultures."

"This is applied to my mind, why they do not ask him about his religion and culture... Maybe it is the fear of showing other religions."

Learning about one's religion positively impacts children's religious identity. Mrs. Sadiq points out that children need to see the representation of their own faith and culture. She argues that this is very important for their confidence and identity development without feeling different or ashamed.

5.2. Religion through Religious Practices

The findings illustrate that the religious identity of Arab-Muslim children is visible through religious practices. The most visible practices are the Halal food and the Islamic dress code, whether wearing a scarf or modest dress. The Arab-Muslim children need to negotiate the reactions of their friends and teachers about their identities.

5.2.1. Halal Food

Findings show that all the participants in this study have dietary preferences and concerns. Arab-Muslim children eat Halal meat, and they cannot eat pork or any sweets containing gelatin made from animal products. Children have some concerns when they go on a trip or when the school provides some food. They always have to ask about the ingredients, making them feel nervous.

This concern in regards to food makes children's religious identity visible. This is often the first visibility the children have experienced concerning their religion.

Aws told me that:

"When I was coming home by school bus, one of the kids' mothers gave us some lollies. I had

to keep it in my pocket until I arrived home and asked Mum if I could eat it. In the next time, I asked my friend's mother, and she told me that I could eat it."

The parents in this study always make sure that the teachers know about dietary preferences for their children. Some parents, like Mrs. Sadiq with her daughters, negotiate their children's religious practices in a way that makes them satisfied and happy about their dietary choice. Rana's mother explains how she helped Rana and her sisters negotiate their dietary preferences at school:

"My girls understand that we are Muslims, and we cannot eat everything. They are very flexible, and when they go out, they know that there are always other options. They can eat fish, chicken, or vegetables."

Karima's mother, who is Irish Muslim, reports that:

"Karima always asks about food if it is Halal or not when we visit my family. Once on her friend's birthday, although her friend is Muslim, she insists on asking about the Salami in the sandwiches, whether it is ham or chicken."

Anwar also shares his experience with Halal food:

"My mother always tells me that we are all different in some way, and God created us different for a reason, but we all share things as well. It does not mean that only Muslims do not eat pork and drink. I should not be shy of that. Many people do not eat pork like the Jewish, and they have something like Halal food called Kosher."

"My father's friend is Spanish, and he does not drink, and also we know Irish friend who does not have a boyfriend before marriage. She told me that when we were talking about issues together."

Another example of making religion visible is when children negotiate the holy month of Ramadan. Some older children can start fasting, and even the younger ones start fasting for two hours or try a half-day of fasting without any obligations. Maria tries to fast for Ramadan. She said that her friend asked her about fasting, and she is always happy to tell them about fasting. She points out that she learned a lot about Ramadan from Qura'an school.

Mrs. Mohammad points out:

"her children fast Ramadan, and their Irish friends do not eat in front of them. This is very kind of them."

Children negotiate their religious identity positively with their Irish friends. They fast and talk about Ramadan, and some of their friends respect them and do not eat in front of them. This could be a positive cross-cultural communication.

Aya explains her and her sister's experience in fasting during Ramadan:

"We decided to start fasting the whole day this year. Our friends and classmates started asking about Ramadan and how we could survive not eating for the whole month. We explained that we just stop eating during the day and we can eat anything from evening until morning. My sister explained that all religions have fasting. My Ethiopian Muslim friends joined the conversation and pointed out that Christians also fast before Easter. I explained that we fast to feel with poor people and those in need, and I believe it is a kind of detox."

When children are engaged in religious or cultural practices, they create an opportunity for cross-cultural dialogue. This dialogue results in children feeling respected and valued. They are open to sharing the similarities without making any prior decisions or plans. They can navigate mainstream culture and their own culture, find support from other friends who share the same religious space and negotiate their religious beliefs and practices.

5.2.2. Dress Code

Findings reveal that being dressed modestly could increase the visibility of Arab Muslim religious identity. It also may create more challenges for these children to negotiate. However, the Arab-Muslim clothing style more or less follows the western style. Therefore, Arab-Muslim boys and girls wear similar clothing to that of their peers in Ireland. The only difference is that some Arab-Muslim girls wear a scarf and tend to wear more modest clothes than other girls like to wear.

Rana wears a headscarf and chooses to wear the scarf herself. She insists that nobody forced her to wear it, and she has the freedom of wearing it or not. She thinks that most of her friends and cousins in Sudan wear the scarf for traditional reasons, as it is a symbol of the Sudanese culture. However, in her case, she wears it for religious reasons.

"I wear the headscarf for the sake of God. All nuns in our school cover their hair, so why don't I? I am proud of it. Many friends asked me about my decision, and I explained my feelings as a Muslim girl. This is my choice."

Rana and her sister Rema are the only girls in the study who wear the headscarf. They both study in a denominational Catholic school. Rema, who sings rap and likes music, explains her decision to wear the headscarf as a must-do step to show her identity as a Muslim girl who is religious, an "A" student, modern, and able to sing rap.

"I need to show people that Muslim girls are like other girls in the world, headscarf does not prevent us from being successful in life and work."

The headscarf in this study is a concept. It is a symbol of devotion. Children and their mothers report that it makes them know that they are Muslims. Maria

wears a headscarf when she goes to the Mosque, and so does Karima. Maria explains that wearing the headscarf reminds her to lead her life with religion first. Rana describes the moment she wears the headscarf as:

"That day I felt that I now retrieved my identity... I was just a person... an outsider person without any identity... at least now I am a Muslim girl in my class. I am still Irish... still have the same passion to be a medical doctor... still have the Irish principles in my heart."

Mrs. Safi says that:

"When Maria goes to Morocco, she is more modest in her clothes than her relatives. She does not wear a bikini, she wears a swimsuit, and I feel proud that I successfully raised her with modesty, even though we are not living in Morocco. Even when she goes swimming here in Ireland, she wears swimsuit shorts and a T-shirt. I do not feel she is different; I see many girls wearing this, and all the swimming instructors in the swimming school wear T-shirts and shorts."

Findings also show that Arab-Muslim children never feel that their mothers' headscarves are an issue, and they never feel ashamed or shy because of this.

5.3. Negative Responses towards Islamic Identity

It is hard for children to negotiate their religious identity, especially in monocultural schools. Although students have many positive experiences with their Islamic identity, the negative public opinion about Muslims after 9/11 affects the children on many occasions. Rema was so annoyed when she reported her feelings about how one of the media news readers talked about Muslims and how people around her at school responded to it.

"Who would have thought that in this present time, there would still be this level of ignorance. It is not called being old-fashioned or traditional... it is RACISM that is not cool! I thought as civilized human beings, we would be over this type of hatred. It is disappointing knowing that is not the case. Somehow, we were all created equal ... we should all be treated equally."

Rana explained that when some girls or teachers said something negative about Islam, she corrected them and explained this is a stereotype. They just say, "Oh... that is fine, sorry". She expresses her feelings about this, saying:

"The heart does not have ears to listen to reasons and apologies; you already hurt my feelings... there should be more information about Islam. I say to myself. Stay sharp."

There is some kind of reservation from the teachers' side regarding the Islamic identity of the children. This makes children feel insecure and shy about their

Islamic identity as Muslim students because they feel that it is not honored.

Some children (Rema and Rana) show positive responses towards Islamic identity and concepts attached to it, such as wearing a headscarf. Rema showed a picture she shared on her Facebook account with her friends. The photo is for the Head and Shoulders shampoo brand, with a man wearing a headscarf on the bottle and a quote under it:

“Non-Muslim: Do you wear your Hijab in the shower?”

Me (Muslim): Yeah... I use Hijab & shoulders to keep it shiny and clean.”

Findings show children’s ability to overcome negative responses using a sense of humor and cover up their feelings. However, they also report feeling upset and sad.

5.4. Muslim Identity

As the school systems aim to get students ready to be socially responsible social and participate in civic life by encouraging respect for diversity, educators often try to understand whether Muslims’ beliefs conflict with Western values. The invisible narrative has a presumption that Muslims and Muslim values are deserved to be mistrusted and feared. Muslim children make an effort to defend themselves and their faith and explain their understanding to be the principles of Islam to their teachers and peers. Therefore, the children in this study try hard to balance their life trajectories following their beliefs and mainstream cultural values. The third space they create helps them accommodate their religious needs and identity and communicate with the outsider community.

Hybrid identity constructs require consideration outside the limitation of static understandings of national or religious identities given that the perspectives of Third Spaces, identities, ironies, and complexities which cannot be established are clearly observed. Research studies have considered how Muslim immigrants’ children and youths’ identities conflict with mainstream culture or the host country’s own culture [10], [17]-[18].

The Arab-Muslim parents and children had no clash or conflict between their Muslim identity and their idea of being Irish. Surprisingly, most of the students who could not decide if they felt more Irish (Sudanese, Iraqi, or Moroccan) expressed that they feel more confident about their Muslim identity in Ireland than they do in their home countries.

Regarding wearing a headscarf, some people refer to the Hijab (scarf) as a sexist tool used to suppress women’s autonomy [19]. Our findings do not agree with [19] and some Muslim commentators who disagree with veiling. They try to overturn the sacralization of the veil when associating the headscarf with oppressive social hierarchies and male-dominant societies. She claims that the veiled model a tradition

of “mediocrity and servility” in favor of a sacred standard against which to judge Muslim women’s devotion to God. The participants of this study insist on protecting their rights, the girls’ rights to religious freedom, and that they have the right to get some freedom of choice.

This study confirms ideas of [20] when Muslim girls ask to wear the headscarf in Irish schools, this is a sign of autonomy, stating that when a girl wears a headscarf to school, she is to be expected to think about it and be clear about what it means to her. Moreover, what she is doing is brave and counter-cultural. At this point, the concept of protection is based on the rights and freedom of the individual. In this respect, the headscarf is seen and viewed as empowering, as enabling girls to take the reins of their bodies, allowing them to have a distinctive identity and the feeling that they belong to a larger Muslim community, as the results demonstrate. The authors argue that these girls who wear the headscarf try to get some distance from their assimilating. The girls and their families were considered relatively well-integrated into non-Muslim communities. When it comes to establishing their own identities, these girls resist assimilationist pressures from their families. They wear a headscarf as an example of a Muslim identity-in-formation, on their way to what is called a “declared identity” [21], in addition to their efforts to fit in with the Irish society. These girls create their own identities that are completely different from their other Irish friends.

In deciding to wear a headscarf, the girls are creating a cultural space, the Third Space, in this case, to develop autonomous selves using this religious symbol. This reveals and tells us their Muslim identity and offers them some measure of autonomy. Regarding the schools’ context themselves, the emphasis was also on ‘integration or assimilation’ along with considering moderating differences and on ‘treating everybody the same’ and in accord with most schools are hesitant to have and create a formal policy on cultural diversity [1]. In fact, these girls use the headscarf as cultural support to give some significant meaning to their cases and positions that being different does not necessarily mean inequality. It is also affirmed in [22] that those girls can be considered active agents who are able, to a certain degree, to create their own lives. The head supports them doing so; at the same time, it also keeps them anchored in a traditional identity and avoids potential alienation. This discussion defends the unveiling of Muslim commentators [23], who asserted that wearing the headscarf is a merely cultural practice brought into Islam.

Another important point is the Arab-Muslim children’s emphasis on individual choice and conscious decision in their understanding of religion, and how they separate what is “religious” and thus a true aspect of Islam - from what is “cultural” and to be examined, evaluated, and perhaps discarded. For example,

concerning the girls who chose to wear the headscarf, their mother began covering about the same time they did. However, they present this (their mothers' decision to wear the headscarf at that time) as a trend that traveled from the second generation to their parents' generation, but the case is not the other way around. These young girls are becoming Irish in their approach to choosing voluntaristic religiosity, and still preserving a distinctly Muslim identity, visibly proclaimed with the headscarf. It is the same case with Hussien, who spends a few hours in the Mosque on the weekends. He sees the Mosque as the place where he can find peace and mind tranquility and do some volunteer work; this is in contrast to what his father thinks about the Mosque, which is a place to pray Friday's midday prayer only.

Findings confirm the point of view about newcomers [24] in that they can redefine their group attributes to explain the negative stigma or at least change the view by making others accept it. These newcomers can engage in social action to encourage desirable changes inside and outside the society. This is exactly what Rana and Rema did when they responded to the negative stereotypes about Islam and about wearing the headscarf. Children in this study can justify negative perceptions and respond positively to negative opinions in a clever way, using their sense of humor and/or using their ability to sing or dance to make a change in their limited surroundings.

5.5. Racism, Islamophobia, and Peer Relationships

The Arab-Muslim Muslim students who participated in this study show that they do not possess any characteristics of marginalization or difficulties in integration. All of them love attending school, and they make many friends.

In this study, Racism and Islamophobia have been apparent to a very limited extent. As the children have been living in Ireland for a while, they have established friendship networks and relations. The students referred to some bad experiences. However, the general feeling they have is that the Irish society accepts and welcomes them. Most of their references about some racist experiences are related to peers making meaningless remarks and suggestions regarding their accent or the headscarf.

Some aspects of families' experiences show cultural preservation with Irish culture. Food is one of the main concerns following their religious values. The participants were positive about granting a formal value to the characteristics of their ethnic identity as part of the general process of cultural or capital accumulation by all children in the class, rather than an 'extra' for celebration and display. This was obvious when they talked about project work; at the time, the teacher asked all students to show knowledge and understanding about different countries in completing group-based learning goals. The findings confirm the

need for a more formal acknowledgment of culture in schools.

The children's positioning with peers is very much influenced by ethnic status and social class. Arab-Muslim children, in most cases, reduced personified aspects of difference such as dress, diet, and language and looked for commonalities with Irish peers, seeking recognition through their skills in sports, music, and dance. For those children who could also access community activities outside of school [25]-[26], their self-perception was obvious in the confident manner they spoke of their present and future well-being.

The experience of Muslims living in Ireland has been mostly positive, which is confirmed by [27], written by the spokesperson for the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland (ICCI), stating that Muslims have integrated very well into Irish society. They succeed in avoiding the assimilation model to preserve their faith and way of life. The presence of a religious ethos in Ireland and the luxury of having many single-sex schools is very appealing to Muslims. However, students can face a few issues concerning food, prayer, and religious dress, especially the headscarf. This study strongly agrees and aligns with [28]. Although a range of risks during acculturation are experienced by Muslim students, especially regarding prejudice and discrimination, they sometimes succeed in achieving positive adaptation. Thus, scholars stress that the former ways of conceptualizing the acculturation process for this group do not depict why these young Muslims are successful in managing the acculturation process. Indeed, the reason can be that the young Muslim religious identification is not increasingly lessened or diluted because of their living in a Western context.

On the contrary, this identification engaged and developed new meanings and functions. This study shows that Arab-Muslim students and their parents challenge otherness in educational institutions, sometimes through the challenges they face because of being immigrants. Other times, they must confront the fact that there are much negative stereotyping and negative perceptions of Muslims in the public arena. This situation creates challenges for teachers and schools. Teachers and schools may only overcome this challenge amid genuine dialogue and communication with students and their parents.

As argued in [29], ordinary people's role as active agents to negotiate religious and global discourses and form their local identities in daily lives is largely neglected. Religion is usually not included in thinking of national and cultural identities. However, the results of this study show that religion plays an essential role in defining the Arab-Muslim families' cultural identities as they shape their Third Spaces. Therefore, although this study gives some glimpses into how religious identities interact with schooling, more

research is needed to explore the impact of religious diversity on schooling.

According to [30], for new immigrants, “religious narratives and tropes provide resources for ‘route learning’ and ‘way finding’, offering migrant moral and ritual landmarks to situate themselves amid dislocation”.

6. Conclusion

Although previous studies provide an understanding of the lives and perspectives of the Muslim community in Ireland by focusing on cultural assimilation, identity, and adaptation of Muslims in Ireland, almost no research considered Arab-Muslim transnational families and their children’s educational experiences. Also, no studies referred to those families and their children who live in remote or rural areas in Ireland. This study suggests that modernist theories on culture, immigration, and identity cannot answer the questions posed about immigrant families hailing from a very different sociocultural context. For instance, traditional immigrant identity theories still focus heavily on assimilationist ideas. However, they fail to consider the experiences of families and children who have the social, educational, and cultural tools to bring them academic success in the host countries despite the challenges in negotiating their culture. Some describe these families as “elite immigrants” because of their academic success.

Being one of the first studies done with Arab-Muslim families and their children and focusing on educational experiences in one of the remote areas in Ireland, this study has some limitations. Concerning the first limitation, interviews with the children’s teachers could have been conducted to understand children’s experiences with schooling from a teacher’s perspective. However, this research mainly focused on the perspective of the parents and the children to understand the phenomenon of being Arab-Muslim in primary and high school. Studies focusing on classroom settings and teachers’ attitudes toward Arab-Muslim transnational children are future research agendas. Also, the number of families (ten) involved in this study has been a limitation. The author had access to the research participants mainly through community nominations, snowball sampling, and email. Although it would be preferable to work with a larger number of participants, the qualitative nature and the depth of this study were not achievable with a large number of participants.

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