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How to cite this publication

Please cite the final published version:

Gilliam, L. (2019). Secularities-in-Practice: Accommodating Muslim Pupils and Preserving Danish Identity in Multi-ethnic Danish Schools, *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 12(1), 1-26. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-01201001>

Publication metadata

Title:	Secularities-in-Practice: Accommodating Muslim Pupils and Preserving Danish Identity in Multi-ethnic Danish Schools
Author(s):	Laura Gilliam
Journal:	Journal of Religion in Europe
DOI/Link:	https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-01201001
Document version:	Accepted manuscript (post-print)

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Secularities-in-practice: Accommodating Muslim Pupils and Preserving Danish Identity in Multi-ethnic Danish Schools

Abstract:

This article explores the ideals and practices of moderate secularism characteristic of Danish schools' approach to Muslim pupils, Islam, and religion in general. It argues that while these reflect the Danish 'culture of secularity' (Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt 2012), differences in 'secularities-in-practice' between schools necessitate a look at the interactional level and institutional context. Drawing on Norbert Elias' figural sociology, the article shows how an increase in Muslim pupils changes the webs of interdependencies in the social figuration of teachers, children, and parents in Danish schools and how the schools attempt to maintain institutional practices, civilised interaction, and a Danish identity.

Keywords: moderate secularism; Muslim pupils; Danish schools; social figurations; civilising projects

1. Introduction

When Danish teachers discuss how to teach and integrate ethnic minority pupils, they often dwell on the various complications that managing and accommodating the religion of Muslim children and parents create in the everyday life of school. While a range of studies of Muslim pupils in European public schools focus on the pupils' experiences of marginalisation and stigmatisation, they also reveal that these schools face similar challenges in dealing with the Muslim pupils and Islam.¹ The studies

¹ E.g., Louise Archer, *Race, Masculinity and Schooling* (London: Open University Press, 2003); Werner Schiffauer et al (eds.), *Civil Enculturation: Nation-state, Schools, and Ethnic Difference in Four European Countries* (New York: Berghahn, 2004); Trica Keaton, "Arrogant Assimilationism: National Identity Politics and African-origin Muslim Girls in the Other France," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 36/4 (2005), 405–423; Farzana Shain, *The New Folk*

indicate that these often self-proclaimed secular schools' relationship to Christianity, to religion and religiosity, and, thus, how they practise secularity is significant for how they approach the perceived challenges. In this article, I will explore these practices of secularity in Danish schools. This can illuminate the underlying logics and ideals that guide how 'secular' schools with ties to Christianity handle the presence of Muslim pupils and Islam. Furthermore, I will argue, that it can also offer a more general understanding of the social foundation of practices of secularity. Arguing this, I hope to bridge research of everyday practices and experiences in multi-ethnic schools as the studies mentioned above and the more political and philosophical studies on religion, Islam, and secularism that discuss how secular states deal with the growing number of Muslim immigrants through different forms of secularism.² Sabine Mannitz, Emer Smyth, both in collaboration with others, as well as Sidsel Vive Jensen, have taken the latter discussions to schools, highlighting differences between

Devils: Muslim Boys and Education in England (London: Trentham, 2011); Reva Jaffe-Walter, *Coercive Concern: Nationalism, Liberalism, and the Schooling of Muslim Youth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Saeeda Shah, "I Am a Muslim First...': Challenges of Muslimness and the UK State Schools," *Leadership and Policy in Schools* (2018), 1–16 (accessed 04.03.2019).

² E.g., Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism," in: Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and Its Critics* (Oxford & New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31–53; idem, "What Is Secularism?" in: Geoffrey B. Levey & Tariq Modood (eds.), *Secularism, Religion, and Multicultural Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xi–xxii; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); José Casanova, "Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A European Union-United States Comparison," in: Geoffrey B. Levey & Tariq Modood (eds.), *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 139–163; Monica Wohlrab-Sahr & Marian Burchardt, "Multiple Secularities: Toward a Cultural Sociology of Secular Modernities," *Comparative Sociology* 11/7 (2012), 875–909.

how European schools practise secularism.³ Other studies, such as that of Mette Buchardt and myself have discussed how ‘Muslimness’ and, in Buchardt’s case, ‘religion’ are constructed in everyday teaching and social relations in the presumably secular schools.⁴ In this article, I will suggest another perspective as to why schools are important to the study of secularism, by examining teachers’ everyday choices and practices related to the presence of Muslim pupils in a Danish school. I will argue that while these choices and practices are influenced by the ideology of secularism and the cultural form of moderate secularity that characterises contemporary Danish society, they are also shaped by micro-politics of interaction in schools and what Eva Gulløv and I term ‘the civilising project’ of Danish children’s institutions.⁵ This may show us how institutional aims and logics and social interdependencies in local contexts may create practices that diverge from broader norms. Inspired by Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt’s work on ‘multiple secularities,’ I understand the dominant form of secularity in Danish society as a culturally distinctive and

³ Sabine Mannitz, “The Place of Religion in Four Civil Cultures,” in: Werner Schiffauer et al (eds.), *Civil Enculturation: Nation-state, Schools, and Ethnic Difference in Four European Countries* (New York: Berghahn, 2004), 88–118; Emer Smyth, Maureen Lyons, & Merike Darmody, *Religious Education in a Multicultural Europe: Children, Parents, and Schools* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Sidsel V. Jensen, “Institutional Governance of Minority Religious Practices: Insights from a Study of Muslim Practices in Danish Schools,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42/3 (2015), 418–436.

⁴ Mette Buchardt, *Pedagogized Muslimness: Religion and Culture as Identity Politics in the Classroom* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2014); Laura Gilliam, *De Umulige Børn og det Ordentlige Menneske: Identitet, Ballade og Muslimske Fællesskaber blandt Etniske Minoritetsbørn* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009); Laura Gilliam, “Being a Good, Relaxed or Exaggerated Muslim: Religiosity and Masculinity in the Social Worlds of Danish Schools,” in: Mark Sedgwick (ed.), *Making European Muslims: Religious Socialization among Young Muslims in Scandinavia and Western Europe* (Oxfordshire & New York: Routledge, 2015), 165–186.

⁵ Laura Gilliam & Eva Gulløv, *Children of the Welfare State: Civilising Practices in Schools, Childcare and Families* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

continuously contested secularity, which does not merely mirror the ideological secularism of the state.⁶ Yet, as my own and other studies show manifest differences between Danish schools in terms of how they approach Muslim pupils, I suggest that we have to include another layer of analysis to understand actual practices of secularity in specific schools.⁷ Drawing on Norbert Elias' figurational sociology and insights from educational anthropology, I will argue that we need to look at the interactional level, the institutional logics, and the social interdependencies within the specific schools. Practices of secularity and religion take shape within the everyday encounters and social figurations between people of different backgrounds and in different positions of power, and they depend on the interests, interactional forms, majority/minority relations, and power-balances within these social contexts. My co-researcher, Sidsel Vive Jensen, uses the term 'school secularism' to describe forms of secularism within schools.⁸ Inspired by Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt's distinction between secularism and secularities, I suggest that what we see are different 'school secularities'—that is, 'secularities-in-practice' that share cultural traits but also differ from school to school depending on the social figurations of these schools, which might diverge from political ideology and dominant cultural forms. In line with the increasing interest in everyday religion and everyday Islam, I will argue that we need to consider these everyday practices of secularity as the “moment where

⁶ Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt, “Multiple.”

⁷ Gilliam, *De Umulige*; idem, “Når Religion i Skolen er 'Uproblematisk': Moderat Sekularisme, Civiliseringsidealer og 'Afslappede Muslimer,’” *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* 8/2 (2014), 35–56; idem, “Being”; Sally Anderson, “Likable Children, Uneasy Children: Growing Up Muslim in Small-Town Danish Schools,” in: Mark Sedgwick (ed.), *Making European Muslims: Religious Socialization among Young Muslims in Scandinavia and Western Europe* (Oxfordshire & New York: Routledge, 2015), 205–225; Sidsel V. Jensen, “It Has Nothing to Do with Religion! Governance of Muslim Practices in Danish Public Schools,” PhD diss. (Aarhus: Aarhus University, 2013).

⁸ Jensen, “Nothing.”

daily practices and grand schemes come together” in often contradictory ways.⁹ This will help us understand the complex reality and adaptiveness of multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. However, it might also show us something about the social foundation of practices and norms—acknowledging that, as stressed by Elias, it is through millions of small acts, everyday accommodations, and changes in power-balances that larger historical changes are made.¹⁰

The analysis is based on ethnographic fieldwork within a multi-ethnic school, which I call by the pseudonym ‘Yderbyskolen,’ situated in a poor area of Copenhagen.¹¹ The fieldwork included four months of participant observation in an eighth grade class [8K], twenty interviews with the fourteen- to fifteen-year-old pupils, their teachers, and the head teacher, as well as participant observation in four other classes, in the staff room, and at teachers’ and parents’ meetings. The article furthermore draws on previous fieldworks in three other Danish schools—totalling another fourteen months of fieldwork—and on the insights from the larger research project which the project on Yderbyskolen was part of: *Islam, Muslim Families and Danish Schools*. This project was led by Mark Sedgwick and also included subprojects by Lene Kühle, Iram Khawaja, Sally Anderson, Marianne Holm Pedersen, and Sidsel Vive Jensen.

2. Multiple Secularities and Secularities-in-practice

⁹ Samuli Schielke & Liza Debevec (eds.), *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2012), 2; Nathal M. Dessing, et al, *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁰ Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939/1994), 366.

¹¹ All names of children, teachers, and schools are pseudonyms.

Scholars of secularisation and secularism have long established that secularism is not merely a modern political project of separating state and church and diminishing the role of religion. Secularism rather describes a political doctrine that identifies something as ‘religion’ and ‘secular’ and separates a religious sphere from a non-religious secular one.¹² This is done in a myriad of ways across the world, producing many forms of ‘secularisms.’ While secularism is often associated with an antagonism towards religion as pre-modern and irrational, in many societies it actually affords a way to maintain religious beliefs, deal with religious diversity, and govern multi-religious societies or societies with a dominant religion and a number of minority religions.¹³

Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt point out that discussions about secularisation and secularism have focussed on secularistic political ideologies and conflated these ideologies with the social practices and institutional forms of separating religion from secular spaces.¹⁴ Advocating for a cultural sociological perspective, they argue that we should use the term ‘secularisms’ to describe ideologies and ‘secularity’ for describing “the culturally and symbolically as well as institutionally anchored forms and arrangements of differentiation between religion and other social spheres.”¹⁵ This includes other domains of society than the relation between the state and religion, such as law, education, science, and business and the public sphere. It highlights the everyday perspectives and cultural imaginaries of social groups and what Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt term ‘cultures of secularities.’ According to Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, these cultures have developed through historical processes and especially through conflicts over secularisations and cannot merely be

¹² Asad, *Formations*.

¹³ Taylor, “What Is Secularism?”; Modood, *Multiculturalism*.

¹⁴ Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt, “Multiple.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 881.

understood as effects of secularistic state politics.¹⁶ They use the term ‘multiple secularities’ to stress that a range of different forms of distinctions between religious and social domains have developed and become institutionalised in different countries and regions. These different forms are linked to historical conflicts about this distinction and are subject to power struggles, while simultaneously responding and offering solutions to current social problems. Identifying four reference problems that secularity responds to, they outline four forms of secularities: secularity for the sake of (1) individual liberties, (2) balancing/accommodating diversity, (3) social integration/national development, and (4) the independent development of institutional domains.¹⁷ Though continuously contested and subject to power struggles, these cultural understandings of secularity are often legitimised through guiding ideas, that at least for certain settled periods can establish a social thrust.¹⁸

Whereas this framework helps us to grasp the handling of minority religions in apparently secular school institutions, I will argue that it needs another layer to illuminate the ‘secularities-in-practice’ that unfold here. Taking the Danish schools as an example, we need to explain that the practises of secularity differ from one school to another and have changed over a short period of time within individual schools. This suggests that the ‘school secularities’ are not only related to the state’s ideology of secularism or the national culture of secularity, but are much more local, adaptive, and bound up with contextual and intra-institutional factors. As described above, the term ‘school secularities’ derives from the term ‘school secularism’ coined by my co-researcher Sidsel Vive Jensen to explain the approach to religion and secularism, which she finds among head teachers of Danish public schools.¹⁹ Through a questionnaire survey among 27% of all Danish head teachers and

¹⁶ Ibid, 884.

¹⁷ Ibid, 890.

¹⁸ Ibid, 886–887.

¹⁹ Jensen, “Nothing.”

interviews with selected head teachers, Jensen explores how different schools handle various Muslim practices identified through a pilot study—such as praying, fasting, halal dietary requirements, wearing headscarves, etc.²⁰ She finds two different sorts of ‘governing’ of Muslim practices: an inclusive form in which various practices are included in everyday school life and an exclusive form in which various practices are discouraged or excluded. These two forms can overlap at the individual school, with certain practices included while others are excluded.²¹ Taking into account the share of Muslim pupils at the schools, Jensen finds that whereas the level of exclusive governance is unaffected by a higher number of Muslim pupils, the inclusive form increases with the number of Muslim pupils.²²

Jensen’s study suggests that while some Muslim practices are not considered acceptable at Danish schools, there is a range of negotiable practices or rather a space for the negotiation of school secularities—that is, how schools deal with religion, differentiate the religious from the non-religious, but also identify the ‘acceptable religious forms’ that can be included in the secular domain. It also indicates that the social and ethnic constellation of the school—and how it affects what Elias would call its ‘social figuration’—plays an important role for the actual practices of secularity in the individual school. Elias conceives of society as a large web of social figurations, each consisting of individuals tied to each other through webs of interdependence. The figurations are in constant flux due to changes in internal power balances or in longer chains of interdependencies.²³ People’s habitus, behaviour, and norms are formed within these figurations and adapted to the webs of interdependence and power balances, altering conduct over time when power balances of interdependencies change

²⁰ Jensen, “Institutional,” 424.

²¹ Ibid., 426–428.

²² Ibid., 428.

²³ Elias, *Civilising*; Norbert Elias, *What Is Sociology?* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1970).

within figurations and make new interactional forms appropriate. Without any predetermined purpose or teleology, changes are made through a myriad of these small acts that have the same direction.²⁴ According to Elias, specific ideals of ‘civilised’ behaviour are developed within these social figurations over time, at the same time as people have internalised a high degree of self-control and shame of ‘uncivilised’ conduct in their interaction.²⁵ Based on an extensive study of Danish children’s institutions, made in collaboration with Karen Fog Olwig, Dil Bach, and Sally Anderson, Gulløv and I discuss how schools—as state institutions with a civilising aim and certain institutional logics that are at the same time comprised of these social figurations—reflect, disseminate, produce, and change social and cultural norms and practices as models of and for society.²⁶ This includes norms of how to deal with differences, conflicts, hierarchies, and power, as well as norms of secularity, inter-religious relations, and religiosity. In the following analysis, I will argue that these norms are simultaneously part of the general civilising project of the school influenced by the broader culture of secularity and shaped by the micro-politics of the social figuration of the school—that is, the negotiation and efforts to ensure institutional practices and social harmony in the context of interdependencies between children, parents, and teachers.

3. The Moderate Secularity of the Danish School and Society

It is a commonly referred to and widely held belief among parents and teachers that the Danish state school is today a ‘secular’ institution. This partly refers to the fact that, while the school was initially

²⁴ Elias, *Civilising*, 366.

²⁵ Ibid, 365-369.

²⁶ Gilliam & Gulløv, *Children*.

a Christian institution, religious beliefs have not been preached within schools since 1975. Moreover, it is often stressed that religion and religious meanings are not part of everyday life at Danish schools and that most teachers are either not religious or do not outwardly express their beliefs. However, this secular identity is not consistent with the role afforded Christianity in Danish schools. Most schools celebrate Christian holidays, allocate time for confirmation classes for the thirteen- to fourteen-year-olds, and the curriculum reserves one hour a week to “Knowledge of Christianity” (referred to as “Christianity”). While these lessons are taught in a non-confessional way, introducing Christianity, its history, and content, they include the singing of psalms and reading of Bible passages in the classes with younger children, while other religions do not have to be introduced until seventh grade. It is thus more appropriate to define the Danish school as a ‘moderate secular’ institution, to use Tariq Modood’s term.²⁷ Variations of moderate secular schools, that is schools in which practices and ideals of secularity and religious freedom are combined with a privileging of Christianity, can be seen throughout Europe.²⁸ While the schooling of ethnic minority children with Muslim backgrounds is given much political focus, there is, however, no overall state or municipal school policy regarding how to deal with pupils practising minority religions. Combined with extensive decentralisation of governance, this leaves it to the local school to develop guidelines and practices regarding issues of religion.

The moderate secularity of the Danish school reflects both the political secularism and the culture of secularity of Danish society. While religious freedom was written into the Danish constitution in 1849, it also states that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the people’s church and supported by the state. This political underpinning of a close relationship between the church, the nation, the state, and the Danish people remains to the present day. Meanwhile, Christianity has slowly and through many

²⁷ Modood, *Multiculturalism*, 73–76.

²⁸ Mannitz, “The Place.”

conflicts lost its position as the overarching meaning system in the Danish society. This secularisation was intensified by a liberal cultural movement in the 1930s and an anti-authoritarian wave in the 1960–70s, which led to significant cultural changes, including an abandonment of many religious dogmas. In spite of this, in 2019, 75% of Danish citizens are registered members of the Lutheran church.²⁹ While a large survey from 2011 show less than 10% are regular church-goers, the vast majority of Danes baptise their children, get married, and have funerals in the church.³⁰ According to Tim Jensen, the empty church pews are thus not a sign that the Danes are not religious, but a characteristic part of the Lutheran religiosity (and, one might add, the form of secularism that developed in its wake). It is the individual's relationship to God, not everyday religious practices, that are in focus. As Jensen contends, the “non-religious” Danes are religious, but in an individualised and ‘relaxed’ form, in which Christianity first and foremost affords identity and community through ritual traditions.³¹ This ‘religious individualisation’ and identification with a Christian cultural identity is seen across European countries.³² In a similar vein, studies of religion in Denmark accentuate that Christianity is regarded as a central marker of Danishness and of a common Danish

²⁹ Statistics Denmark, 2017. <http://www.km.dk/folkekirken/kirkestatistik/folkekirkens-medlemstal> (accessed 04.03.2019).

³⁰ Peter B. Andersen & Peter Luchau, “Individualisering og aftraditionisering af danskernes religiøse værdier,” in: P. Gundelach (ed.), *Små og store forandringer. Danskernes værdier siden 1981* (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels forlag, 2011), 76–96.

³¹ Tim Jensen, “Religion og religionspluralisme. Udviklinger og udfordringer,” *Pædagogisk Psykologisk Rådgivning* 6 (2001), 461–482.

³² Casanova, “Immigration.”

culture.³³ As Per Mouritzen describes, the role of this “secularised Christianity-as-culture” is stressed in political debates in which it is invoked as the cultural foundation of the welfare state, democracy, solidarity, and the liberal spirit of Danish society.³⁴ It is this culture of moderate secularity that characterises Danish society. Religion is at once a private matter and a strong symbol of national coherence and cultural identity. In accordance with this, the Danish form of secularity is primarily a “secularity for the sake of individual liberties.”³⁵ While contested by secularists and multiculturalists, the role of Christianity-as-culture overrules these arguments and underlines that while the Danish state and society is liberal and non-confessional, it is, as noted by Sune Lægaard, not religiously neutral and only tolerates other religions.³⁶ This comes to the fore in the way Danish schools handle both Christianity and the minority religion of Islam.

4. Unproblematic Religion at Yderbyskolen

Yderbyskolen is located on the outskirts of inner Copenhagen in a somewhat isolated part of town comprised of housing estates and old apartment blocks. The school is a comprehensive state school with around 500 pupils aged five to sixteen years old. During the last forty years, the share of minority

³³ Jensen, “Religion”; Per Mouritsen, “The Particular Universalism of a Nordic Civic Nation: Common Values, State Religion, and Islam in Danish Political Culture,” in: Tariq Modood (ed.), *Multiculturalism, Muslims, and Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 2006), 70–93; Andersen & Lützau, “Individualisering.”

³⁴ Mouritsen, “Particular.”

³⁵ Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt, “Multiple,” 890.

³⁶ Sune Lægaard, “Religious Neutrality, Toleration, and Recognition in Moderate Secular States: The Case of Denmark,” *The Ethics Forum* 6/2 (2011), 85–106.

pupils has risen from a few handfuls of children of Turkish migrant workers in the 1970s to approximately 70% children of immigrants or refugees from Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, Morocco, Iran, Iraq, former Yugoslavia, and Somalia, most of whom have a Muslim background. This development is partly a result of immigration and partly of ethnic majority families abandoning the school. Explaining this, the head teacher states that the school suffers unfairly from a poor reputation due to the high proportion of what he calls “bilingual pupils.” Meanwhile both he and the teachers agree that the school is characterised by a “successful integration of the bilingual pupils,” a “positive atmosphere,” and an “unproblematic relationship between the pupils and teachers.”

When asked about the school’s approach to religion and pupils with Muslim backgrounds, the head and the teachers’ primary message is that religion “is not a problem.” As I will argue below, this expression is emblematic of the school’s dominant perception of religion and interreligious interactions as something potentially problematic. Accounting for this ‘unproblematic’ relationship, they generally refer to two dimensions of how they deal with religion: (1) that the school shows respect for the children’s religion and (2) that religion is not important at school. Regarding the school’s respect for religion, the teachers stress that they take into consideration that some of their pupils are Muslim and try to find ways to ensure that they are able to participate in lessons and other school activities on an equal footing with their non-Muslim peers. As examples they mention that the children are given time off to celebrate Eid, that there is an option for halal meat in the school canteen, that children are allowed to get changed behind a curtain for PE, and that parents can elect for their children to opt out of lessons of ‘Christianity,’ school camps, and class visits to churches. The teacher Claus describes it as an ideal of accommodating differences: “I do think that we have a way of doing things at this school, which is not verbalised and which has not been [formally] agreed upon, where

you show consideration for all parties. So, there's kind of an overall regard for our differences.”³⁷

The teachers exemplify their belief that religion is not important at school by mentioning that they do not preach Christianity, do not emphasise religion and children's religious background during everyday lessons and activities, and ensure that their religion does not prevent pupils from taking part in the school activities. As evidence, they point to the facts that the vast majority of Muslim children do not ask for exemption but take part in school camps, PE, and in 'Christianity' lessons, that their parents seldom complain about how the school deals with religion, and that the children rarely pay heed to who is and who is not 'Muslim.'

As this shows, the teachers express a perception and ideal of the school as a tolerant place, where respectful consideration is shown for religious matters and differences. This does not mean that the school is a place for religious expression. Rather there is a clearly articulated wish to tone down the importance of religion and for children not to be overly invested in their own or other people's religious affiliations. Showing how religious and ethnic categories are often conflated in the teachers' perception of the children, the head states: “[We] are on the kids' backs because some of them have a tendency to say that ‘there's the Muslims and then there's the Danes’ [...]. So, [the teachers] try to make them aware.” He expresses the same ideal when he proudly states that especially the young children do not care about each other's religion or ethnicity: “They're just classmates. They don't talk about it at all.” Similarly, the teacher Christine stresses that religion “is of no concern” among the young pupils. Meanwhile, all the teachers find it problematic when some Muslim pupils raise religious topics, employ religious categories, demand particular rights, or challenge the way the school deals with religion. While they can all mention individual or groups of children who are highly invested in Islam, they underline in a consoling tone that “many of the Muslim children” are “like

³⁷ All quotes from the school's children, teachers, and the head teacher are taken from the aforementioned interviews.

Danish children—it's just traditions, and there's not a lot of knowledge behind [them].” The teachers talk about these examples as exceptions to the main and ideal picture of the school as characterised by an ‘unproblematic’ relation to religion and of the pupils as not being strongly religious. This accentuates that the ideal of secularity does not only entail religious freedom and tolerance of religious diversity among the teachers. It also implies that the children avoid indications of religious difference, play down the importance of religion at school, and participate in school as unmarked ‘children,’ rather than as ‘Muslims’ or ‘Christian Danes.’

That this ideal of secularity is not merely a characteristic of Yderbyskolen but of other Danish schools as well is apparent from Jensen’s large study of Danish head teachers mentioned above. Here the majority of the participating head teachers agree that consideration should be shown for the Muslim children’s religious practices and that the school should be neutral with regard to religion, but also that religion should be irrelevant at school.³⁸ These ideals of respecting religion and stressing it as irrelevant could be seen as contradictory, but their coexistence pinpoints the Danish culture of secularity very well. As we have seen, most Danes regard religion as a private and family matter, commonly displayed in relation to rituals and traditions, apart from which most people do not engage in religious practices or draw upon religious meanings in everyday interaction. That this is a moderate kind of secularity is also apparent in the way it, in contradictory and subtle ways, includes a strong role for Christianity. This is expressed in the way teachers applaud the Muslim pupils partaking in Christian traditions. It is thus telling that it is often these situations that are presented as examples of the ideal ‘unproblematic’ role of religion at school. When asked to give an example of religion not being “a problem,” the teacher Marlene says that she “does not have any [pupils] who have been exempt”—that is, they have not opted out from ‘Christianity’ lessons in her class. She also mentions the Danish Christmas tradition of the Procession of Saint Lucy: “Well, we have Saint Lucy brides

³⁸ Jensen, “Nothing,” 139 & 146.

(children, usually girls clad in white dresses and carrying candles), and there are at least as many Muslim girls [who take part] as Danish girls, if not more. Yes, it's...I see that as being pretty unproblematic."

It might appear contradictory that the school wants Muslim children to play down their religious identities and faith while at the same time applauding their taking part in 'Christianity' lessons and practices related to Christianity. As I have argued elsewhere, one may claim that the school itself posits religion as a marker of difference and identities by maintaining these practices as part of everyday school life.³⁹ However, in line with the perception of Christianity-as-culture, most teachers in Danish schools do not consider these practices religious, but as school traditions and part of the Danish culture taught at school.⁴⁰ They thereby place them within the secular domain. The teachers' main argument for the Muslim pupils' participation is, thus, that they should take part in the school traditions to learn about Danish culture. Yet, as I will outline below, the school simultaneously adjusts its Christian traditions, thereby reducing their religious dimensions. Whether one argues that this reflects a further secularisation, or rather a way to preserve Christianity in school, it is apparent that this secularity-in-practice does not entail any clear-cut and externally defined differentiation between religion and the secular, but rather a locally negotiated distinction between the two.

5. Accommodating Religious Diversity: Differences Between Schools

On the face of it, the way religion and the presence of Muslim pupils is handled in Yderbyskolen thus reflects the Danish culture of moderate secularity. However, a closer look at the school's secularity-

³⁹ Gilliam, *De Umulige*.

⁴⁰ Ibid; Gilliam, "Når Religion."; Jensen, "Nothing"; Anderson, "Likeable."

in-practice, and a comparison to other Danish schools, reveals considerable differences between schools. At other schools with significantly fewer Muslim children, the same accommodation of religious differences is not in evidence, there is often a greater degree of unproblematised integration of Christianity in the everyday life of school and less inclusion of various practices and requirements identified as 'Muslim.' Jensen's survey of 27% of the Danish head teachers shows that in schools with fewer Muslim pupils, fewer 'Muslim' practices are included.⁴¹ This pattern is also illustrated in Sally Anderson's study of two schools in two small rural towns in Jutland, which both house a very small group of refugee children with Muslim backgrounds. These schools organise morning assemblies that include the singing of Christian hymns and work closely with local churches, which pupils visit regularly to take part in services and in annual 'vicar weeks.'⁴² The Muslim pupils are expected to take part in this, and the teachers do not express the same concern that this might be problematic as they do in Yderbyskolen. In the upper-middleclass Nordlund school in affluent North Zealand, where I have conducted fieldwork, there is also only a very small minority of Muslim pupils and, again, little awareness of the Christian content of many school traditions and much of the teaching material. Here, many teachers tend to teach Christianity with a more religious approach and, in some cases, take an explicit critical stance to Islam.⁴³ Meanwhile, in two other multi-ethnic schools in which I have conducted fieldwork, Soenderskolen and Vesterlyskolen, the teachers have made efforts to reduce the Christian dimensions of teaching and traditions over the years. Likewise, they have changed practices that were incompatible with the Islamic faith to accommodate their Muslim

⁴¹ Jensen, "Nothing," 428.

⁴² Anderson, "Likeable."

⁴³ Laura Gilliam, "The Decent Citizens: Lessons on Moral Superiority and the Immorality of Wealth in a Class of Privileged Youth," in: Laura Gilliam & Eva Gulløv, *Children of the Welfare State: Civilising Practices in Schools, Childcare and Families* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 165–193.

pupils. Soenderskolen is situated in an urban area and Vesterlyskolen in a western suburb of Copenhagen, and the schools had, at the time, 40% and 70% ethnic minority, mostly Muslim pupils, respectively. In Soenderskolen, they originally had a Christmas tradition of cooking Christmas dinner with “pork roast and all” in the home economic classes. The teachers tell, that when they only had a small minority of Muslim pupils, they solved the problem of pork avoidance by sending home the few Muslim pupils in each class. But, as the group of Muslim pupils grew, they abandoned this tradition and the use of pork altogether and are now only using halal meat in the school kitchen.⁴⁴ At the same time, while wearing a headscarf is allowed, as it is in all Danish schools, the school does not accept any explicit religious communication or rituals in school, such as praying. In this way, the schools have adopted some religious practices as acceptable—eating halal meat and fasting—while abolishing and excluding other practices, including Christian, Muslim, and non-religious ones that could be problematic for a specific group of children to participate in or would challenge the moderate secular Danish identity of the school. The same pattern is seen in Jensen’s data, in which the exclusion of some Muslim practices is unaffected by the numbers of Muslim pupils, whereas the simultaneous inclusion of—presumably more acceptable—Muslim practices increases in schools with more Muslim pupils.⁴⁵ In addition to this and in resemblance to the two schools described above, the head of school and the teachers at Yderbyskolen state that the presence of a high proportion of Muslim pupils has also made them conscious of and play down activities with a Christian aspect. Tellingly, this is mostly evident in relation to the older children, as they are seen as more reactive. In the youngest classes, lessons on Christianity still focus on Bible stories but, in contrast to most other schools with a majority of ethnic majority pupils, here the young children are also taught about other

⁴⁴ Gilliam, *De Umulige*.

⁴⁵ Jensen, “Nothing,” 426–428.

religions. It is, however, particularly in the older classes, that other religions receive as much attention as the Christian faith.

6. Practicalities, Institutional Logics, and Interdependencies in School

Taking a closer look at the way the head and the teachers explain how they handle questions of religion, they most often refer to the interactional order and institutional practices of the school. As such, the main concern seems to be how to ensure that the Muslim children can participate in the school's lessons, activities, and traditions. Moreover, the highlighted success stories are when the children do not ask to be exempted from activities, participate in the normal practices and traditions, and do not make any fuss.

As demonstrated, even though teachers stress their consideration for religious differences, it is a source of great satisfaction when children and their parents are willing to accept the school's premises and do not demand special consideration. In this way, the phrase that "religion is not a problem" also refers to a quite practical dimension of school secularities. One of the main institutional logics of the school is that it has to ensure the smooth running of its institutional practices—the everyday teaching and the traditions upon which the school builds its identity.⁴⁶

And in schools where a considerable number of pupils have a minority religious background, religious diversity is not merely an ideological problem, but also a practical one. As we have seen above, the quandary is how the school can continue its regular practices and get the children to participate in these. Both the head and the teachers emphasise the pragmatism this problem necessitates, stressing that since there is not an official policy regarding religion, solutions are found

⁴⁶ Gilliam & Gulløv, *Children*.

on a case-by-case basis. In this way, Yderbyskolen resembles other multi-ethnic Danish schools, in which religious matters are dealt with on an ad hoc basis, drawing on implicit appraisals and shared understandings as to what the school is able to accommodate and include or must exclude.⁴⁷

One can expect a similar practical dimension to secularities-in-practice in most state institutions where people of different faiths interact. To understand secularities-in-practice it is, therefore, important to look at the interactional level and the institutional or organisational context in which people interact. Elias' concept of social figurations can help us grasp this.

Applying this to school, the school consists of a local social figuration of teachers, children, and parents and is, at the same time, part of a larger figuration of social actors such as that of the municipality and the state. The school is, thus, both an integrated part of wider society and its cultural norms, as well as its own distinct social world.⁴⁸ The significance of the webs of interdependence within the school figuration is apparent in the way the head and teachers talk about their considerations of different children, parents, and municipal authorities and in the solutions they find in order to ensure the institutional practices and an 'unproblematic' school day. This requires a lot of adaption from all parties, yet, as representatives of a state institution and the power this installs in their positions, the norms and interests of the head and teachers are the most influential.

The figural approach offers us a way to see that, even within a state institution, conduct and practices are partly shaped in a process of mutual adaptation between individuals and groups, the character of which depends on the web of interdependencies of the specific social figuration and its internal power-balances. In schools, the leadership and teachers decide most activities and rules, but they have to adapt to policies and curriculum requirements as well as observe public opinions of the school and its practices. Moreover, despite their dominant position, they are also dependent on pupils

⁴⁷ Gilliam, *De Umulige*; Jensen, "Nothing"; Anderson, "Likeable"; Buchardt, *Pedagogized*.

⁴⁸ Willard Waller, *The Sociology of Teaching* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1932/1961).

and parents to adapt to these activities and rules in order to run the school successfully and effectively, and this affects what they choose to do. And, in these micro-politics of the school figuration, quantities matter. The teachers in the rural and upper-middleclass schools described above do not depend on the tiny minority of Muslim pupils and parents and therefore do not initiate changes in school practices in order to ensure their participation. Individual teachers might find individual solutions for the individual pupils, but the teaching and traditions proceed as usual.

Yet, as illustrated above by how the eating of pork during Christmas changed in Soenderskolen, a growing number of Muslim children alter the webs of dependencies of the social figuration of the school. In this and the two other schools, including Yderbyskolen, the large number of children and parents with Muslim background requires a lot more consideration. As noted by Elias, mutual adaptation is needed in close relations of interdependencies in order to ensure stability and functionality. The changes can, thus, be seen as reflecting a subtle change in power-balances, in the Eliasian sense in which power is a relationship and where both parties are dependent on each other, but the party who is less dependent has a larger ratio of power.⁴⁹ Without any wish to perform power, changes in interdependencies between different actors, thus, change ratios of influence and adaptation.⁵⁰ In order to function as a school, there is, thus, another urgency in the schools with higher numbers of Muslim pupils to find social and practical solutions to any obstacles to the interaction. The parents and children with Muslim backgrounds are a very diverse group, with different approaches to Islam, religiosity, and Christianity at school. Some may agree with or adapt to the demand of leaving religious practices and beliefs at home and accept or even like the Christian traditions of the school, and some may find the moderate secularity of the school reasonable or indeed applaudable. Others might be critical, but adapt nevertheless, due to their dependence on the school.

⁴⁹ Elias, Norbert, "Power and Civilisation," *Journal of Power* 1/2 (2008), 135–142.

⁵⁰ Elias, *Civilising*.

The Muslim pupils in the 8K class explained to me that although they form the majority in the school and being Muslim is a mark of status among them, they do not use the category of ‘Muslim’ during everyday school life, they play down the importance of religion at school, and only talk about religion during Christianity lessons.⁵¹ This suits some, but not all of the pupils—a point I will return to. As I have seen Muslim pupils being much more interested in religious expressions and themes in other schools, this might reflect that the high level of mutual adaptation does not merely extend to teachers and parents, but also to many Muslim pupils at Yderbyskolen.⁵²

How to handle Islam and the school’s relation to Christianity apparently become more pressing issues in schools with a higher or growing percentage of Muslim pupils. At Soenderskolen, presented above, the head refers to Muslim parents, who withdraw their girls from swimming lessons, older Muslim pupils that want to pray in school, and ethnic majority parents that criticise the school and threaten to leave it because it abandons its ‘Danish Christian culture.’ Besides this, there are differences between teachers, as some want the school to become more multicultural, including celebrating various religious holidays, and others resist any changes in order to maintain the Danish and Christian culture of the school. The head and the teachers’ solution to these different requests and opinions is to take “reasonable considerations” and to find solutions case by case. As the head puts it: “It is about navigating again [...]. Taking considerations on the one hand, but on the other hand, carry through with the teaching, right?”

7. “It Is Still a Danish School?” Preserving Form and Changing Content

⁵¹ Gilliam, “Being.”

⁵² Ibid.

As we see here, accommodating religious diversity and excluding or toning down religion are all part of the school's micro-politics, responding to the interdependencies within the school and safeguarding its institutional practices. In spite of their practical dimensions, these efforts should not be mistaken for pure pragmatism. Generally, most heads of schools and teachers find that while they can allow a range of change to accommodate Muslim pupils, they oppose changes they see as threatening the school's moderate secularity and its Danish identity, including its ties to Christianity. The result is often a double manoeuvre of preserving an institutional form and certain essential values while adapting content that is considered explicitly Christian, thereby also weakening the Christian aspects of the school.

One example is the way in which Yderbyskolen celebrates Christmas. Years ago when it had fewer Muslim pupils, the school would send all classes to attend a Christmas service at the local church; however, now it is only the youngest classes that traipse around the block to visit the church, as it is considered problematic to expect the older Muslim children to attend. During the service that I participated in, the vicar presented the Nativity of Jesus as a fairy tale without religious messages, clearly intended to entertain the children rather than preach the Christian faith. As is tradition in Danish schools, most of the classes also organise a craft day, adorning corridors, doors, and classrooms with Christmas decorations. However, according to the teachers, they stick to non-Christian symbols, such as Christmas trees, in order to be inclusive and to tone down the Christian aspects. The same preservation of form and change of content is evident during the traditional morning assemblies during the three weeks before Christmas. Here Christmas carols and hymns have been replaced by songs about Christmas elves, American pop songs, or songs from Christmas television shows, celebrating friendship, love, or childlike fun, such as "All I Want for Christmas" and "Winter Wonderland."

While a couple of the teachers regret this change, most teachers are pleased that it is possible to bring the school together in a celebration of a Danish tradition without any problems arising and see it as reflecting the school's successful integration of Muslim pupils. The head highlights the assemblies as evidence that the school, "despite the many bilingual students," is still a "Danish school" and particularly likes the fact that, even though they are not Christian in content, they still focus on the Christian value of "loving one's neighbour." This illustrates the school's effort to be inclusive by changing religious content, without changing the institutional form or Danish identity of the school. On the surface, the Christmas celebrations, thus, look like those seen in other schools, while many of the explicit Christian elements are more or less absent. Instead, Christmas functions as a ritual celebration of the community and of the Danish identity of the school. In this way, the manoeuvre of preserving the form and changing the content is a way that the school adjusts to all parties in the social figuration of the school—both the ethnic majority and the Muslim parents and pupils, as well as school policies and public opinion—and ensures institutional stability and functionality.

8. Islam, Religious Differences, and the Potential of Conflict

These efforts highlight another strong tendency in the school secularity and the way it deals with religion and especially Islam. It is evident from the way teachers talk that their appreciation of religion being 'unproblematic' includes it not causing conflict. This is most clearly apparent in the teachers' descriptions of previous eras, most noticeably the period in which the Muslim pupils became the majority of the school. Some of the teachers who have been at the school for fifteen to seventeen years explain that there used to be "a lot more discussion." Should the school switch to halal meat?

Should it have multicultural evenings? Should classes still go to church at Christmas? Should the children go on school camp trips? And what should be done with regard to bathing after PE lessons? As the teacher Tanja puts it, these discussions have not gone away, but they crop up less often as ‘things have settled down more.’

While this is partly due to teachers finding various solutions, Claus, who is a seventeen-year veteran teacher at the school, feels that a change has also occurred among the children and their parents:

When I think about it, then, particularly at the beginning, we had a lot more of that stuff where people cited religion in various subjects, regarding PE and bathing and those kinds of things [...], where our Muslim kids believed that there were some specific rules preventing them from taking part in certain things.

While reflecting the process of mutual adaptation at the school, what Claus also expresses here and what seems to lurk behind the teachers’ worry about religion is a trepidation towards Islamic fundamentalism and a perception of the relationship between Islam and Christianity as particularly fragile in the present political climate.

Alongside the potential divisiveness of religious differences, this can be seen in a dictum that many teachers repeat in Christianity lessons; namely that “Islam and Christianity are not actually all that different.” Similarly, teachers repeatedly underline points of similarity between the two religions during these lessons. The teacher Tanja, thus, emphasises that in her teaching of ‘Christianity’ to the youngest classes, she has “tried to focus a bit more on what is shared than what is different.” To explain why, she points to the fact that, since 11 September 2001, the children have begun to pay attention to who does and does not eat pork and that focussing on that which is “shared” means “that it’s no longer so frightening.” Other teachers indicate that a focus on religious differences can lead to xenophobia, unrest, and conflict. When I ask Tanja why she does not want religion to play a role at

school, she explains: “The nightmare scenario is that a war more or less breaks out,” and mentions examples of conflicts among children in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 and during the Danish Muhammed cartoon controversy in 2005. Another example mentioned by teachers is how some of the Muslim pupils started acting as “religious police” towards their classmates or claimed a conflict between ‘Muslims’ and ‘Danes.’ Although this is not part of everyday life at Yderbyskolen, these episodes feature in the teachers’ narratives as examples of what they want to avoid by playing down religion and religious categories.

These accounts of past and settled discussions highlight the processual and adaptive character of school secularities and how they might change considerably over relatively short periods of time—that is, five to ten years in the schools I have studied. They show that political events in broader society are important influences, but they also stress how the ideology of secularism or the culture of secularity dominant in Danish society do not provide readymade solutions to the secularities-in-practice in institutions with a presence of Muslims. Instead, a local accommodation has developed over time, related to the interdependencies and changing constellation of the school’s social figuration of pupils, parents, teachers, and other more remote but powerful actors.

9. Civilised Interaction and Avoidance of Conflict

What also comes across in these descriptions of a more problematic past is that a central tenet of this accommodation has been to avoid discussions and conflict. While this partly reflects the tension surrounding Islam in Danish schools, the concern regarding potential conflict is of a more general character. Assumedly, the avoidance of conflict is a fundamental objective of most social figurations, as conflict challenges their internal interdependencies and equilibrium. As Wohlrab-Sahr and

Burchardt contend, secularities are generally directed towards solving certain social problems. One could argue that while the Danish culture of secularity was originally “for the sake of individual liberties,” local secularities have developed at many schools that are also “for the sake of balancing/accommodating diversity” and “for social integration/national development” and thus focus on maintaining social harmony.⁵³ That this is a central function of secularism is stressed by Charles Taylor, among others, arguing that secularism emerged in reaction to the European wars of religion during the Reformation in an attempt to establish a shared foundation for peaceful coexistence between Christian sects.⁵⁴

Additionally, one of the main aims of a state school institution is its ‘civilising project’ of ensuring what is regarded as a civilised society. Gulløv and I claim that this project takes a specific form in Danish schools, as ideas about civilised interaction is connected to a fundamental ideal of equality characteristic of Danish society.⁵⁵ The Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad highlights how a perception of equality as similarity, particularly characteristic of Scandinavian societies, have made people there struggle with difference.⁵⁶ This egalitarian ethos is evident in Danish teachers’ focus on points of similarity between religions and their playing down of the differences, which are considered divisive and potentially conflictual. While the tolerance of difference is treasured, social, ethnic, and religious differences are played down and similarities are celebrated. As such, “we are really not so different” and “you actually have a lot in common” are mantras repeated by many teachers and children to demonstrate or appeal to camaraderie and harmony. While intended to support inclusion,

⁵³ Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt, “Multiple,” 890.

⁵⁴ Taylor, “Modes.”

⁵⁵ Gilliam & Gulløv, *Children*.

⁵⁶ Marianne Gullestad, *The Art of Social Relations: Essays in Culture, Social Actions, and Everyday Life in Modern Norway* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1992).

these priorities reflect and communicate the perception that differences are potential sources of division and conflict and that positive relations and a civilised environment necessitate similarity.⁵⁷ In this way, the playing down of religious differences in Yderbyskolen and other Danish schools can be seen as part of the school's broader civilising project to emphasise equality and sameness, which reflects and reproduces prevalent cultural ideals of the Danish society.

10. Consequences for Muslim Pupils

As described above, the Muslim pupils of class 8K at Yderbyskolen tell me that they do not use the Muslim category in the school context and that religion is not important in school. As I have discussed elsewhere, this seems related to social demands of a tough youth style within their peer group, but it also seems connected to their relations to teachers, who they like and are dependent upon for good marks and acknowledgment.⁵⁸ Moreover, many Muslim pupils may enjoy toning down their religion at school. In 8K, three of the eleven pupils with Muslim backgrounds express that religion is not important to them and that they do not think much about Islam. Fourteen-year-old Sana, for example, has stopped wearing a headscarf a year previous and says of herself that she is probably the “least religious” person in the class.

Yet, the remaining eight Muslim pupils tell me that they do not express their real religiosity at school. One of them, Karim, stresses that both teachers and students think that one should not be an “exaggerated Muslim” but rather a “relaxed Muslim” at school—that is, one should not talk about or

⁵⁷ Gilliam & Gulløv, *Children*.

⁵⁸ Gilliam, “Being.”

zealously follow the religious tenets of Islam.⁵⁹ This seeming accommodation to the school's downplaying of religion can be perfectly acceptable for many Muslim children, but it may result in a number of evasive practices and taboos regarding what they can talk about, discuss, use to legitimise and assess behaviour, show devotion to, express interest in, and build relationships around at school. This might mean that Muslim children learn that deep-felt religiosity, religious differences in general, and differences between Muslims and Christians/the ethnic majority constitute a challenge to civilised coexistence. Likewise, it can entail that the elements of the self that can be shared, expressed, or revealed in the school context are limited to what the pupils have 'in common.'⁶⁰ Or it might mean, as Buchardt has shown in her studies, that the legitimate way to be Muslim, is to be a "flexible Muslim" who shares his or her individual experiences with Islam in class and comes across as well-reflected and independent in their religiousness. In both ways, schools become co-producers of the pupils' Muslimness.⁶¹

While this may not be the school's intention, one can argue that it ensures a space of not only civilised interaction but also of governance. Both Taylor and Talal Asad point out that the secular doctrine of restricting religion to specific domains enables the modern state to transcend people's gender, class, and religious identities and to depict them as citizens united around an autonomous ethics and rationality.⁶² In the same way, the school's insistence on viewing its pupils as unmarked children and its toning down of religion and negotiation of the religious/secular divide—in which Christian traditions are reinterpreted as school culture—gives the school more direct access and authority in relation to the children. The school, hereby, comes to define what constitutes 'religion'

⁵⁹ Gilliam, "Når Religion."

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Buchardt, *Pedagogized*. See also Gilliam, *De Umulige*.

⁶² Taylor, "Modes," 44; Asad, *Formations*, 5.

and ‘secular culture,’ the ‘common’ or the ‘universal,’ and ‘faith’ and ‘knowledge’ and what should remain within the private sphere versus what kind of participation is required at school and, ultimately, within Danish society in order for an individual to be unproblematic and included.

11. In Conclusion

I hope to have shown that the secularities-in-practice in institutions such as schools do not merely mirror a specific state ideology of secularism or even the dominant culture of secularity of the specific society. Ideology and cultural norms are reflected in the curriculum and in the ideals of what role religion should play in school. In the Danish case, the culture of moderate secularity is central to the identity and practices that schools strive to uphold. Meanwhile, individual schools find different ways to accommodate the presence of Muslim children. In many schools, this involves a negotiation of acceptable religious practices and of the differentiation of religion and the secular as well as the inclusion of certain Muslim practices. Moreover, it entails a playing down of both Islam and Christianity, the latter often achieved by preserving the form and changing the content of the traditions whereby Christianity is institutionalised as school culture.

Seemingly decisive in determining the scope of this accommodation is the proportion of Muslim pupils at a given school and how this has influenced webs of interdependencies in the social figuration of school over time. This highlights the social foundation and the adaptive and processual character of secularities-in-practice. But, it also underlines the significance of the school’s institutional project and its powerful actors. Secularities-in-practice are not merely bound up with political ideologies or cultural norms, but with everyday practicalities, social interdependencies, power-balances, and institutional logics and civilising aims in the local context. In the Danish school,

school secularity is tied to institutional logics of ensuring pupils' and parents' participation in the institutional practices and to the school's civilising project of non-conflictual relationships of equality. Both practicalities and ideals are thus at play, making religious differences, practices, and beliefs a problematic and potentially conflictual matter that has to be accommodated in the name of tolerance and personal freedom yet toned down in ever-changing ways.

As argued, the secular ideal of minimising and differentiating religion can be seen as more generally tied to an ideal of civilised interaction. Secularism is often regarded as a worldview, which establishes a shared foundation for ethical and peaceful coexistence among religious groups.⁶³ Regardless of how we understand its origin, the secular doctrine is frequently used to argue in favour of a common humanity and an independent ethics and rationality; as such, it is a worldview that seeks to establish a neutral ground where people can set aside their religious beliefs and act as citizens across religious boundaries.⁶⁴ Yderbyskolen serves as an example of a context in which severe efforts are made to create such a common neutral ground for interaction. Yet, it also exemplifies that in institutions and other contexts in which people of different religious or secular observations have to interact in close and daily contact, the differentiation between religion and the secular are frequently blurred, inconsistent, and a matter of negotiation. It also stresses how 'common practices' are most often defined by the majority. Yet, while the ethnic majority are the majority in terms of institutional power in all state schools, the high number of Muslim pupils in some schools alter majority/minority relations. Due to webs of interdependencies, changing majority/minority ratios and power-balances in these social figurations impact what is seen as 'religion' or as 'secular' culture, which religious practices are acceptable, how minority groups can express their religious identities, and how everyday secularity is practised.

⁶³ Taylor, "Modes."

⁶⁴ Ibid.

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